

Centennial Reflections

Essays from the Oakwood Historical Society

City manager style of government thrives since 1931

By Harry G. Ebeling

Oakwood has thrived on the City Manager form of government since its incorporation in 1931. From 1908 until 1931, we were a village with a mayor/council form of government established by state statute. The option to use the manager form in 1931 was embraced because we could observe our neighbor Dayton prosper under it since 1914 when the leading citizen of the community, John H. Patterson, literally rammed it down Dayton's throat.

In 1924, the village hired Lawrence M. Dissinger as Village Engineer for his abilities in supervising projects the village faced. When the statutory charter was adopted in 1931, he was appointed manager. After graduating from the University of Oregon in 1907, he was placed in charge of construction of Lake Como Dam at Hamilton, Montana. He enlisted in the Army for World War I and served in battles in France and in the Army of Occupation for a year as chief engineer of the 3rd Army in Germany.

This no-nonsense military background was a mark of his career as City Manager. The final tribute in The Oakwood Press referred to him as a "blunt outspoken man..." who "made no pretense of being a diplomat"... and who got down to hard facts...with absolutely no soft soap". But the citizens knew him as "honest, hard working, and conscientious". A letter to The Oakwood Press signed "Civator" in 1940 suggested that a reporter be assigned to city hall. Dissinger responded to this by denying that he was not accessible and that his records were open but there just was not any news.

When Dissinger died in 1947, after sixteen years of service, there was only a month's consideration given to appointing A.C. "Al" Bergman as his successor over 16 applicants. Bergman had been Clerk of Council since 1925. A native Daytonian and graduate of St. Mary's College (now University of Dayton), he attended night school at the Y.M.C.A. and was first employed by the Barney & Smith Car Works. He later joined Adam Schantz in the brewery until enlisting in the Army for WW I. He returned to the Schantz Estate's employ until taking the position with Oakwood where he worked as Auditor then Clerk of Council when city status was achieved in 1931.



Lawrence M. Dissinger



A.C. "Al" Bergman

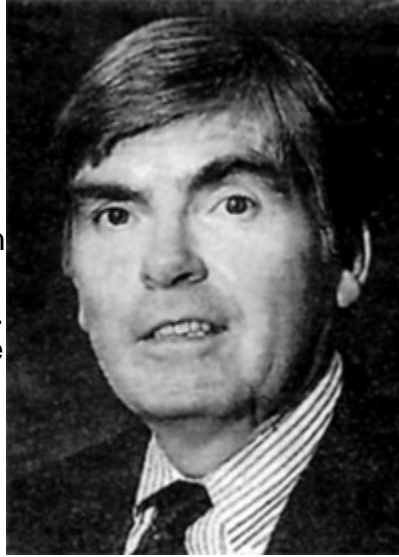
There are many stories about the affable leadership of Al Bergman. Always active in the American Legion, he was honored with their Lifetime of Service award in 1948. Recognized by his peers, he was elected President of the Ohio City Managers Association in 1953. At one time he turned down a \$1,500 raise in salary because he thought the city couldn't afford it. Hard working, with a reputation for integrity, he was remembered by Calvin Mayne for an



incident where someone wrote to the paper accusing Dorothy Lane Market of not properly weighing meat. Bergman was at the store by 7 a.m. the same day where they weighed every package of meat in the department and found them to be perfect. He ordered that the store not give any city employee so much as a pack of cigarettes which might suggest favoritism. Having been injured while inspecting some street work, he died in 1962. He saw the city through the post WW II era of growth to the adoption of its new Charter in 1960.

In 1963, a 31-year-old administrator with five years experience in Washington Court House was hired to succeed Bergman. A graduate of Stivers High School and Capital University with a Master's Degree from Syracuse University, J. David Foell returned to Dayton. He had served in the Army in Germany. Known as a thorough administrator, Foell often told you more than you wanted to know about a subject, but using his professional background, he brought the city up to date with many of its services. Mayor Judy Cook described him as single minded about the city. She commented at his death, "I've always thought of Dave Foell as

J. David Foell



Michael J. "Mike" Kelly



Norbert Klopsch

having finished our city.”
He worked in the planning of the new traffic corridor in the Far Hills Business District and pioneered a pre-sale housing program which became a model. He spearheaded the formation of the Miami Valley Cable Council for which he received national recognition.

On Foell's retirement in 1991, the City Safety Director and Assistant City Manager, Michael J. “Mike” Kelly, was hired after an extensive search. Trained in public administration with a Master's Degree from the University of Michigan, he had served in Detroit during the 1967 riots before coming to Oakwood in 1968. As Public Safety Director, he supervised the upgrading of equipment and the adoption of the para-medical program. During his tenure as manager, he oversaw the Beth Ann Mote and Dr. William Craig and his wife's murders, the Betty Hendron robbery, a police theft in office case and allegations of racial discrimination against the police. He kept the lid on sensitive matters such as the use of Sugar Camp, the rezoning and use of Far Hills and Schantz Avenues corner, the St. Paul's parking lot, the adoption of a latchkey program and the decision to rebuild

the City Building.

When Mike retired in 2002, the job was awarded to Norbert Klopsch, who had served as City Engineer since 1992 and supervised the public works department for over a year. The expanded duties of this department included water and sewer utilities, roadway system and refuse operations. "Norb" is a 1984 graduate of West Point with a Bachelor's Degree in Civil Engineering. After five years of military service, he worked for a local civil engineering firm before being hired by the city to fill the post of Engineer after twelve years without having someone in the job. He has kept an even hand on the city's difficult decisions regarding Sugar Camp and completion of the rebuilding of the City Building. He has been active in the planning for the Centennial in 2008.

In 2007, City Council recognized Deputy City Manager Jay Weiskircher for 25 year of service to the community. Jay is a University of Pittsburgh graduate with a Master's Degree in Public Administration from the University of Cincinnati. His duties include personnel, zoning, maintenance and special projects such as Sugar Camp, completion of the city building rebuilding and business district planning. His first challenge when coming to the city was the rehabilitation of the Y.M.C.A. for use as the community center. Jay has a special place in the day-to-day operations of the city and is counted on to keep a steady hand on operations.