

Fifty years ago this January 7, 1968, but on a Monday, Auburn's first Council-Manager government held its inauguration meeting.

The forenoon affair was not outwardly auspicious. A snowstorm swirled outside. Few spectators attended. The meeting held in the old Council Chamber of Auburn Hall, was brief but businesslike, and carried a tone of resolve. The Lewiston Evening Journal observed "it was more significant than impressive."

Earlier in the morning the old city government had met in the same rooms, transacted a little routine business and adjourned for all time.

The new city government consisted of Mayor Ralph F. Burnham, Councilman George T. Woodman, Ward 1, Ira W. Fitz, Ward 2; E. Farrington Abbott, Ward 3; George F. Lane Jr., Ward 4 and Emile Freve, Ward 5.

Councilman Fitz was chosen temporary chairman, Councilmen Abbott and Woodman a committee on credentials. City Clerk George W. Bumpus read the official returns of the December 12 election. Councilmen Lane and Freve were appointed to notify the Mayor of his election and escort him to his chair.

Rev. T.J. Farmer of the Elm Street Universalist Church offered prayer. Municipal Court Judge Harry Manser swore in the Mayor and the Councilmen.

Mayor Burnham's inaugural address was brief also. In the perspective of time since he spoke the words, they take on a tone of prophecy probably exceeding his expectations at the time. He said:

"We have met here today as the elected members of the city government under a new charter radically different from our old form of government. We enter public service to serve the people. This is very clear, I assume, in the minds of us all.

"The system under which we are to administer the city's affairs is a real business plan, and it is for us to honestly and conscientiously act as a directorate of this great corporation to the end that the stockholders

the citizens of Auburn, receive good dividends. Our duties are to be arduous and trying for as yet, our new charter is a theory, the practical side of which is to be put to the test; so we as businessmen, chosen to direct the policies, enact ordinances and orders must so conduct the business that the new plan of government will be a success and receive the approval of our citizens.

"The eyes of local people will be upon us as well as those in other towns, for I firmly believe there are many cities struggling to get away from the old political system of waste and extravagance and looking about for a way out; and if we are successful here, I'll venture to say that many other cities will adopt the manager plan."

This prophecy in the inaugural address of Auburn's first Council-Manager Mayor is well borne out by the fact that in the 50 years since he made it, 17 of Maine's 22 other cities and 135 of its 413 towns have adopted the manager system.

This is Ralph Skinner...historically speaking.