

And so we come near the end of "the day of the Mayors" in Auburn, an era of two-party politics when a part-time mayor, five aldermen and 15 councilmen all newly-elected each year, were expected to keep an industrial city, with far-spread land area and some 16,000 inhabitants, going on a businesslike basis. an administrative feat few had been able to accomplish.

For a dozen years past, mayors, at the ends of their terms, had been citing the futility of trying to keep city services up to modern requirements by the means and methods allowable under the existing system. Three had suggested an entire change in the form of government under which Auburn was operating.

For two years the Auburn Board of Trade had been studying into a new form of non-partisan, council-manager government, advocated by authorities on modern municipal administration, and in January of that year 1917, instructed a committee to draft a legislative bill providing that kind of a city government for Auburn. The bill asking a Council-Manager charter was presented to the Maine Legislature before the regular March election took place, but it was not an open issue in the election campaign. The only commitment of Ralph F. Burnham the Republican candidate who won out that year, was that he wanted to see Auburn "grow and prosper."

Even when taking office on the third Monday in March, the only specific recommendation he made was that Auburn build a new city building, "not necessarily an elaborate structure, but a comfortable, pleasant to look at building that we will be proud to call "Our City Hall."

But the inflating cost of labor and materials because of United States involvement in World War I, before the year ended, forbade this undertaking. It likewise hampered much other municipal accomplishment that year. However, Legislature's passage of the bill for a new city charter and its adoption by Auburn voters in a September referendum election were to make Ralph F. Burnham the "swing" Mayor from the old to new form of city government.

An era was heralded when Auburn's mayors would be chief executives for ceremonial and parliamentary, but not for administrative purposes. Hereafter a full-time City manager retained because of his fitness, would administer the affairs of the city in accordance with state laws, the city charter, ordinances and legal orders of the City Council. The Mayor would preside over Council meetings and share in conferences, but he would have no vote except in case of a tie.

This would not, and has not, prevented Auburn's Mayors, elected under the Council-Manager charter, from fathering many proposals for improvement and growth of the city. They have by their advice, recommendations, declared position on public affairs, and especially by the naming of Citizen-participation groups, contributed greatly to Auburn's advances over the past half century.

The day of the Mayors as administrative leaders in Auburn was passing. The day of the City Managers was at hand.

This is Ralph Skinner...historically speaking.