

The Rise and Fall of the Schenectady City Manager: 1934-78

By Martin A. Strosberg

In 1934 the voters of Schenectady overwhelmingly approved a measure to change their municipal government from a strong mayor-council system to a council-manager system. Forty-four years later in a 1978 referendum, Schenectadians voted by a slim margin to bring back a strong mayor-council system, the current form of government and the most common form among New York cities.

Advocates for the council-manager form of government claimed that Schenectady would be better served by a professional manager, appointed by the city council, who administered the city's business in an efficient and non-partisan way as opposed to a system that concentrated all executive power

in an elected, partisan, and boss-beholden mayor. During that 44-year period, Schenectady employed 14 different city managers. Why did Schenectadians first come to embrace and then reject this system?



Continued on pages 10 and 11.

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Letter from the President



April 2016 starts the 112th year for the Schenectady County Historical Society. We received our charter from New York State on July 12, 1905, and have been operating as a membership organization ever since. Today we have 824 members, who live in Schenectady County, other areas of New York and in 31 other states! With membership come the “perks.” Among them are visiting any one of our sites free of charge, with the exception of a few days when we hold special events, often in conjunction with other non-profit organizations - the Ancient Order of Hibernians for Schenectady Celtic Heritage Day, June 11, or the Burning of the Valleys Military Association for Revolutionary War Living History Weekend, June 25 & 26.

Perks also include the use of the Grems-Doolittle Library, containing over 7,000 books, hundreds of thousands of original documents and maps, and over 20,000 photographs; viewing the latest exhibits at the Schenectady History Museum or the George E. Franchere Center; and exploring the Mabee Farm’s exhibits and collection of eighteenth century buildings. With the help of our members and supporters, we continue to serve the community and the world beyond.

In return for your membership, we ask only that you return your proxy for our annual meeting if you have not done so as yet. Better yet, join us on Saturday, April 9th for our 112th annual meeting and enjoy Walter Wheeler’s lecture on vernacular architecture in Schenectady County.

Originally the Society’s objectives were “to promote and encourage historical research, to disseminate a greater knowledge of the early history of ... Schenectady County, to gather books, manuscripts, papers and relics relating to the early history of Schenectady County and contiguous territory, to suitably mark places of historical interest, and to acquire custody and control of historic spots and places.” One hundred and twelve years later, we are proud to say that we continue to expand our collections by including twentieth century artifacts and memorabilia surrounding Schenectady County and its history. After all, we have to keep up with the flow of time!

Marianne



Thank you for your continued support of the Society

Thank you for your support of The Schenectady County Historical Society. As you know, your gifts enable us to tell the story of Schenectady through preservation and development of our historic sites and to educate the next generation about our history and its place in growing America.

We want to make sure you know about our relatively new monthly giving program. This option provides our friends with a convenient and meaningful way to give. Making automated monthly gifts by credit card or PayPal allows your dollars go farther by helping to reduce administrative costs, which means more of your contribution goes directly to supporting our mission.

The Society is a careful steward of its assets and the generous donations it receives. A regular monthly stream of income can provide some flexibility when the inevitable unexpected need occurs and avoid having to make unwanted budgetary adjustments.

Our focus now is on increasing the number of supporters who participate in this program. Will you consider joining in, at whatever level you are comfortable with?

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Schenectady County Historical Society, 32 Washington Avenue, Schenectady, NY 12305**

STEM and History: Changing Education Trends

The swish of heavy cream swirling around a butter churn; the hiss of sparks flying off hot iron bending into the shape of a nail. These are not sounds you usually associate with a STEM-focused education. A recent trend in education, STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. These subjects are important. With strong skills in STEM, students are ready for whatever life throws at them. But for those of us who focus on arts and the humanities, STEM has left us wondering how our organizations fit in.

Here in Schenectady County, we are lucky. Our area has a long history of innovation. Our county provides us with a plethora of topics to study. The first documented snowman did a terrible job of protecting the Stockade in 1690. The Erie Canal's locks and aqueducts run through our county. That does not even touch on the contributions of ALCO and General Electric. We love teaching students about our local history, but we also want to support the STEM model.

At professional gatherings and conferences, we hear that museums can provide the missing art. Art is vital to any education, and we include it in our programs and exhibits. However, art is not our organization's focus. So what do we have to offer that other organizations or classroom teachers miss?

We teach about necessity. You have heard the phrase "necessity is the mother of invention." Without history museums, inventions are just interesting things people make. Our programs put those inventions in context and explain the problems that they solve. Not only that, but we also add the human element to the study of otherwise cold and dry topics. If we tell the story behind a problem, the solution becomes less about finding the right formula and more about changing the world.

This year, we are adding a host of new programs that will continue supplementing STEM education, including three spring break workshops and monthly Homeschool Days.

The first, "Climbing Your Family Tree" on April 26, will teach the basics of genealogy. Students will develop tools to preserve their photographs, documents, and family stories. During "Curator for a Day" on April 28, students will learn about how we develop an exhibit. The result of the program will be a small exhibit on display in the Franchere Center. The third, "A Day on the Farm," will give students a chance to get behind the scenes at the Mabee Farm. They will do farm chores around the farmstead and learn about the lives of 18th Century children.

Homeschool Days make our program available to local students who learn in non-traditional environments. Each month we will focus on one subject, often relating to an exhibit or upcoming event. In April, we will start with "The Blacksmith's Apprentice." Students will see just how many tools around the farm and home came from the local blacksmith's shop. Know any students? We hope you will sign them up! (see pages 7 & 8 for program dates.)

Jenna Peterson Riley



Enigmatic Shapes Exhibit by Todd Greive at the Franchere Center.

New Materials in the Library

BOOKS:

Baptism, Marriage, and Death Records published by The American-Canadian Genealogical Society for churches in the area. **Gift of David Bonitabus**

DOCUMENTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS:

Family History and Genealogical materials for various families related to Schenectady. **Gift of James Spencer**

Family Bible of former Schenectady Mayor Peter Rowe. **Gift of Roxanne Babcock**

Photographs of Nicholaus German Restaurant from Maurice's Deli. **Gift of Mike Sciocchetti**

BLOG POSTS YOU MAY HAVE MISSED:

The Grems-Doolittle Library Collections Blog (<http://www.gremsdoolittlelibrary.blogspot.com/>) is a great resource for learning more about Schenectady County's rich history. Here are some of the posts from the past couple months that you might have missed. All posts are by librarian Mike Maloney unless otherwise noted.

- ***The Brothers Glen.***
This post follows the story of brothers John Jr. and Henry Glen. The Glens were well-known throughout the region (Glens Falls was named after John Glen Jr.) and were acquainted with the likes of George Washington, William Johnson, and Governor George Clinton.
- ***Newspapers of Schenectady's Immigrants.***
Learn about the German, Italian, and Polish newspapers that were published in Schenectady.
- ***The Journey of Jared Jackson, Civil War Soldier by Diane Leone.***
Within Schenectady's Vale Cemetery lies the African-American Ancestral Burial Ground. Among the interred is Jared Jackson, a Civil War soldier from Schenectady.
- ***Plucked from the Fire, the story of Julia A.J. Foote.***
Born in Schenectady to former slaves, Julia A.J. Foote fought against discrimination towards both her skin color and gender to become the first ordained deacon in the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

If you have any ideas for future blog posts, contact our librarian, Mike Maloney at librarian@schenectadyhistorical.org.

Edison's Decision

Library volunteer George Wise has been researching the industrialization of Schenectady for quite a while. His research has recently culminated in a short book on the growth of Schenectady during the 1800s titled *Edison's Decision*. George used a variety of resources to research his book including city directories, censuses, newspapers, and the resources of the Grems-Doolittle Library at SCHS. The book focuses on the people who lived in Schenectady during the century of Edison's decision to move his business to Schenectady. Each chapter of his book follows a Schenectady resident and connects their personal story to the greater events that were going on in Schenectady at the time.

George would like others who are interested or have researched the topic to help out with anything he may have missed. Any input can be sent to Mike Maloney who can be reached at librarian@schenectady.org. *Edison's Decision* can be found on the Schenectady County Historical Society's website at www.schenectadyhistorical.org/library/collections under the Research Guides and Bibliographies section. A physical copy will also be available at the Grems-Doolittle Library.

Mike Maloney

Corrections from last issue:

Last issue's cover story *Schenectady's Fraternal Societies* mentioned that the Abruzzese Society had recently disbanded. We have since learned that the Abruzzese Society is still active and holding meetings. We apologize for the mistake.

The manuscripts of Thura Colby Truax Hires listed in our last newsletter were donated by the Association of Phillipe Du Trieux Descendents, not Paul Truax. The Phillipe Du Trieux Descendents will also be having a family reunion for all Trieux, Truax, and other variations on August 5-7, 2016 at The Desmond Hotel in Albany. Go to <http://www.philippedutrieux.com/> for more information.

Exhibits and Programs

For more information or to learn more about other upcoming exhibits and programs, please check our website, www.schenectadyhistorical.org or call us at **(518) 374-0263** and listen for the option describing Programs. Please call **(518) 887-5073** regarding programs at the Mabee Farm. **EXHIBITS** and **PROGRAMS** are free for Society members; a \$5.00 charge for non-members applies unless otherwise noted.

On Exhibit at 32 Washington Avenue

***NEW* Vote Here! Vote Now!**

Opening March 12, 2016

Left or right? Conservative, liberal, or independent? Hopefully not apathetic! "Vote Here! Vote Now!" explores democracy in Schenectady, and encourages visitors to consider and discuss political issues - historical and current. Discover Schenectady's political legacy by talking, touching, listening, feeling -- and above all, learn how vital your voice is in the 2016 elections!

The Schenectady Municipal Golf Course 1935-2015: 80 Years and Counting

Boomtown: Immigration, Technology, and Urban Schenectady

Hops & Hogsheads: Beer from Colonial to Craft Brew

On Exhibit at Franchere Education Center

***NEW* Fire on Jay Street: A Photography Exhibition**

Opening March 19, 2016

Last year's devastating fire on Jay Street claimed lives and changed the way we think about safety in our community. Photographer Allison Ferraro's works explore the fire's destruction and devastation.

Local Eats: What Does Your Food Say About You?

Through September 2016

Program Calendar

Saturday, April 2 – 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Food Insecurities in our Hometown: City Mission & the Weekend Backpack Program

Location: Mabee Farm Historic Site

Did you know that nearly 100% of the students in Schenectady City Schools are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch programs? Schenectady's City Mission and their partners with the Weekend Backpack Program are working to ensure that no child goes hungry. Learn more about their work and how you can help. This program is part of the "Local Eats" lecture series.

Wednesday, April 6 – 11:00 a.m. 32 Washington Ave.

Secret Stockade: A Historic Tour and Lunch

Cost: \$20.00 (lunch included)

A walking tour of the Stockade, a peek inside a private 1820s house, a visit to our History Museum, and lunch at Arthur's Market. Pre-registration required.

Saturday, April 9 – 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

New World Dutch Vernacular Architecture in Schenectady County

Presenter: Walter Wheeler

Location: Mabee Farm Historic Site

Cost: \$5.00; Free for SCHS Members

Join us at our annual membership meeting as Walter R. Wheeler, Senior Architectural Historian at Hartgen Archeological Associates, presents a talk on vernacular architecture in Schenectady County. His Powerpoint presentation will be illustrated with many rarely seen images of early buildings, many of which are no longer standing.

Thursday, April 14– 6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Color Outside the Lines

Location: Mabee Farm Historic Site

Cost: \$5.00; Free for SCHS Members

Hop aboard the adult coloring craze and get the chance to explore Mabee Farm after hours. Paper, colored pencils, crayons, and light refreshments will be provided, as well as some of our staff's favorite artifacts from the collection to serve as inspiration.

Saturday, April 16 – 8:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Workshop: Make a Bicycle Basket

Instructor: Beverly Cornelius

Location: Mabee Farm Historic Site

Cost: \$85, plus \$30 material fee due to instructor at time of workshop

Spruce up your bike! Students will use a simple row-on-row technique & learn how to drop spokes to create space for strapping that will attach the basket to your bike. You'll also weave strapping in for carrying your basket to picnics or shopping. Pre-registration required.

Wednesday, April 20 - 1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Homeschool Days: The Blacksmith's Apprentice

Location: Mabee Farm Historic Site

Cost: \$5.00 per student, pre-registration is required

The first in our new series of monthly Homeschool Days, students will see firsthand how important a blacksmith was to a colonial community, learn about apprenticeships, and explore the tools of the trade.

Friday, April 22 – 7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Howlin' at the Moon Concert

Performers: Patrick Sharrow and Dyer Switch

Location: Mabee Farm Historic Site

Cost: \$5.00

Help us welcome springtime with a great evening of live music. Patrick Sharrow will kick the night off before turning the stage over to Dyer Switch.

Saturday, April 23 – 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Gender at Play in

"The Political Gymnasium:"

Caricatures of Political Leadership and

Participation in 19th-Century Cartoons and Prints

Presenter: Andrea Foroughi

Location: 32 Washington Avenue

Union professor Andrea Foroughi will present on the depiction of male and female political leaders in political cartoons.

Tuesday, April 26 – 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Spring Break Program: Climbing Your Family Tree

Location: 32 Washington Avenue

Cost: \$8.00 per student, pre-registration required

Jumpstart your young genealogist with this spring break workshop, where they will learn the basics of exploring and preserving their family history.

Thursday, April 28 – 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Spring Break Program: Curator for a Day

Location: Mabee Farm Historic Site

Cost: \$8.00 per student, pre-registration required

What is a curator and what exactly does he/she do? This spring break workshop will give students the opportunity to find out first hand, and to help create an exhibit of their very own!

Friday, April 29 – 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Spring Break Program: Day on the Farm

Location: Mabee Farm Historic Site

Cost: \$8.00 per student, pre-registration required

Life for the children on the Mabee Farm in the 1800's was very different from the lives of most kids today. This

workshop will give them the chance to experience those differences first hand!

Sunday, May 1 – 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

May Day Migration Celebration

We're celebrating migration and movement as we move into May! Join us for a spring festival featuring activities exploring the migration of animals and humans and how it all ties together.

Wednesday, May 4 – 11 a.m.

Location: 32 Washington Avenue

Secret Stockade: A Historic Tour and Lunch

Cost: \$20.00 (lunch included)

A walking tour of the Stockade, a peek inside a private 1820s house, a visit to our History Museum, and lunch at Arthur's Market. Pre-registration required.

Saturday, May 7 10 a.m. – 11 a.m.

Colonial Walking Tour

Location: 32 Washington Avenue

Cost: \$5.00

Join us as we take a walking tour of the Stockade District and go back in time to the founding of the colony up through the American Revolution and learn about the characters and events that formed this historic community. Pre-registration is required.

Saturday, May 14 – 8:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Workshop: Adirondack Berry Picker

Instructor: Beverly Cornelius

Location: Mabee Farm Historic Site

Cost: \$85, plus \$40 material fee due to instructor at time of workshop.

An original twist on the iconic ADK packbasket. Students will learn a Shaker technique to weave the solid base and a continuous weave combined with hand shaping techniques to create the basket's body. We'll weave in Shaker tape to mimic pack basket straps, leaving hands free for berry picking or gathering!

Pre-registration required.

Wednesday, May 18 - 1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Homeschool Days: Elements of Art

Location: 32 Washington Ave

Cost: \$5.00 per student; Free for SCHS members with a family membership

Open to homeschool families, students will tour the artwork of our collection while discussing the elements of art, then head to Riverside Park for the chance to create their own Plein Air watercolor.

Thursday, May 22 – 7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Howlin' at the Moon Concert

Performers: MR Pouloupoulos & Washington County Line

Location: Mabee Farm Historic Site

Cost: \$5.00

Join us for a night of live music as part of the ninth year of our Howlin' at the Moon Concert Series. Kicking off the night will be MR Pouloupoulos, who will turn the stage over to Washington County Line Bluegrass. It is going to be a great evening!

Wednesday, June 1 – 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. 32

Washington Ave.

Secret Stockade: A Historic Tour and Lunch

Cost: \$20.00 (lunch included)

A walking tour of the Stockade, a peek inside a private 1820s house, a visit to our History Museum, and lunch at Arthur's Market. Pre-registration required.

Saturday, June 11 – 12 p.m. – 6 p.m.

6th Schenectady Celtic Heritage Day

Location: Mabee Farm Historic Site

Join us for a day celebrating Schenectady County's Celtic heritage! Enjoy two stages of live music, traditional Irish stepdancing and Celtic pipe bands, food and drink, historic demonstrations and exhibitions, including sheepshearing, blacksmithing, woodworking, Mohawk River bateaux, craft vendors, kids' activities, tours of the 1705 Mabee farmhouse, 50/50 raffle, and much, much more!

Saturday, June 18 - 12 p.m - 2 p.m.

Stockade Scavenger Hunt

Location: 32 Washington Ave.

Cost: Free!

Join us this Path Through History Weekend as we search for clues through the streets of the Stockade on a historical scavenger hunt for adults and kids!

Monday, June 20 – 7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Howlin' at the Moon Concert

Performers: Cosby Gibson & Running the River

Location: Mabee Farm Historic Site

Cost: \$5.00

Head on over to our beautiful 1760's Dutch Barn for a night of great music in a great venue. Singer/songwriter Cosby Gibson will start things off before we hear from Howlin' perennials Running the River!

Wednesday, June 22 - 1:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Homeschool Days: Give Me Liberty - Schenectady in the American Revolution

Location: Schenectady County Historical Society

Cost: \$5.00 per student

Open to homeschool families, students will take a guided tour through the Stockade and learn about our local history during the Revolution and examining relevant artifacts like the famous Liberty Flag!

Saturday. June 25 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. &

Sunday. June 26 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Revolution! – Living History Weekend

Location: Mabee Farm Historic Site

Cost: \$5.00 for adults, free for children and students

In 1776, we declared our independence from Great Britain and changed the course of history forever. Step back in time and be a part of the action for our two-day living history event. Explore our local role in the conflict and decide for yourself: would you have supported the Crown or would you have been a part of the Revolution?

Tuesday, June 28 – 2:00 p.m.

American Girl Doll Tea

Location: Mabee Farm Historic Site

Cost: \$8.00 each for adults and children

Join us for a Summer American Girl Doll Tea with Molly McIntire in the Dutch Barn at Mabee Farm where we'll discuss life on the homefront during WWII. We will enjoy iced tea and goodies and make a craft. All dolls are welcome!

Advance purchase required; buy tickets at schenectadyhistorical.org/American-girl-tea

Wednesday, July 6 – 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.

32 Washington Ave.

Secret Stockade: A Historic Tour and Lunch

Cost: \$20.00 (lunch included)

A walking tour of the Stockade, a peek inside a private 1820s house, a visit to our History Museum, and lunch at Arthur's Market. Pre-registration required.

Saturday, July 16 – 11 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Mabee Farm CanalFest

Cost: FREE!

Join us at Mabee Farm Historic Site for a day of family activities and fun as we celebrate the Erie Canalway! The CanalFest will include storytelling, canal-themed crafts, blacksmithing, and cooking demonstrations inspired by the Erie Canal. Take a tour of the historic Mabee house. Our Mohawk River bateaux will also be on site! Discover the tremendous impact the Erie Canal has had on our region's culture and heritage.

Volunteer Spotlight – Ann Eignor

Projects in the Grems-Doolittle Library have been known to take a while. Volunteer Ann Eignor has been involved in two massive projects that have greatly improved access to the library's collections. The first was organizing and indexing thousands of documents in our archival collections. The second was cataloging our map collection. Ann worked on this project over a five year period and just finished in February.



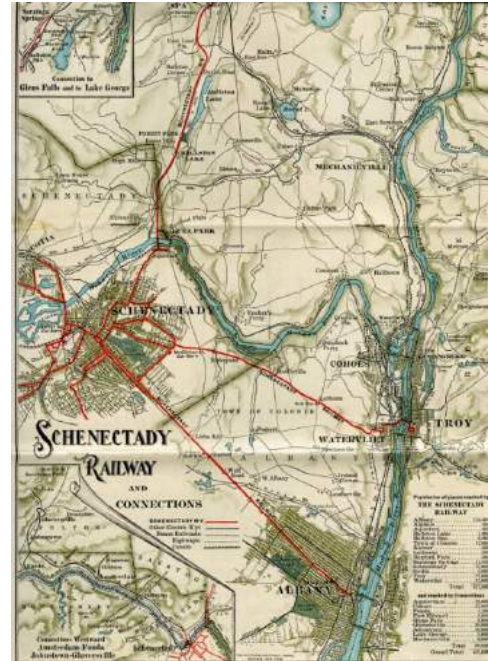
Ann wishing a fond farewell to working on the map collection.

Ann started volunteering at SCHS shortly after she retired in 2002. After 31 years as a school librarian for the Albany City School District, she found that the SCHS was a good combination of two of her passions, libraries and history. Shortly after volunteering, Ann began working on rehousing and cataloging the documents collection in the Library's archives which were totally unorganized before she started. This collection has primary source documents concerning many different aspects of Schenectady. Ann helped organize the collection and enter them into our catalog. Since doing so, accessing and retrieving the documents has been a breeze.

After that project was finished, Ann set out on another lengthy project, cataloging our map collection. Most of our maps are oversize items, making them a bit awkward to deal with, but Ann measured each map, described what was on it, and entered it into our catalog. With Ann's hard work we can now type a few keywords into our catalog to pull up just the map we're looking for, instead of digging through our map files.

Ann's interest in maps stems from her childhood. Originally from Grand Gorge in Delaware County, Ann grew up in a house that only had one bathroom to accommodate eight people, so it wasn't uncommon to have to wait a little while. Right outside of the bathroom hung a large map of Delaware County from the 1800s. Ann was intrigued by the tiny towns, rivers, and other features of the

map, so she was happy to work on the library's map collection when asked.



One of the many maps that Ann has worked on.

In addition to her work in the library, Ann has also been helpful in recruiting previous SCHS volunteer spotlight nominee Nancy Wasmund with the lure of gardening at the Mabee Farm. Ann enjoys her work in the library, but also likes the social aspect of volunteering at SCHS.

It can be daunting to face a project that seems like it will never end and Ann is able to break larger projects into pieces and find satisfaction in finishing the project one folder at a time. Ann is always a pleasure to be around and our collections wouldn't be as accessible as they are now without her hard work.

Mike Maloney

Gender at Play in "The Political Gymnasium:" Caricatures of Political Leadership and Participation in 19th-Century Cartoons and Prints



Presented by Andrea Foroughi
Saturday, April 23 2016 at 2 p.m.
Schenectady County Historical Society
32 Washington Ave, Schenectady, NY
12305

The Roots of the Council-Manager System: The National Scene

The story of Schenectady's council-manager form of government starts with the municipal reform movement that began in the late 19th century and swept across the country in the first half of the 20th century. The reform agenda was advanced in reaction to the image of city government as a boss-led political machine dispensing patronage to ethnic groups whose votes sustained and reinforced the machine's power. New York's Tammany Hall, was considered the archetype.

Throughout the country, municipal reformers argued that city governments were ill-structured to address major problems stemming from rapid urbanization, industrialization, and immigration, trends certainly in evidence in Schenectady during that time.

These reformers had a solution. Simply, run the city like a business with a competent CEO. Take the politics out of administering basic city services - roads, water, sewers, sanitation, police, fire, parks, schools, social services, public health. Hire workers based on merit, not party affiliation or cronyism. Consider questions of administration as technical questions best answered by experts such as professional engineers and managers.

In 1916 the National Municipal League, co-founded by Theodore Roosevelt in 1894, published the Model City Charter recommending the structure of the council-manager form of government. Accordingly, a city council elected at large would appoint a city manager responsible for carrying out all executive functions, e.g., hiring and supervising city employees and budget preparation. The city manager would serve at the pleasure of the council, ideally selected in a non-partisan manner. The council, analogous to a corporate board of directors, would collectively make policy to be faithfully executed by the city manager. The mayor would be elected from the council or be elected at large but would serve mainly as ceremonial leader and preside at council meetings, thus the term "weak mayor."

Strategies for municipal reform have generally involved research bureaus, civic associations, candidate appraisal committees, and independent local political parties. As will be described, all of these methods were used or considered in Schenectady. And the strategists typically were the business and civic leaders. Some critics have argued that the municipal reform agenda, embracing the rhetoric of efficiency, morality, and "good government," masked a desire by the business, civic, and social elites to take back "their city" from the ethnic groups and ward bosses.

Schenectady: Reform Strategies

In 1927, the Schenectady Bureau of Municipal Research was established as a non-partisan organization supported by dues-paying corporate and individual members. The Schenectady Bureau, similar to many other research bureaus throughout the US, was inspired by the New York City Bureau of Municipal Research, which was established in 1905.

The Schenectady Bureau's purpose was to conduct research into the functioning of city government, identify administrative inefficiencies and irregularities, make recommendations for improvement, issue and publicize reports, and in general promote sound management practices. The Bureau was run by a director with a small staff and was governed by a board of directors. Typical of board membership were Mills Ten Eyck, treasurer of the Schenectady Savings Bank, and William W. Trench, secretary of General Electric. Bureau leaders, including Bureau director Abbett Pulliam, were instrumental in building the foundation of support for the council-manager system and serving as a watchdog after it was put into place. The extensive archives of the Bureau are housed in the Union College library.

In May 1934, the Schenectady Charter League was established to campaign for the adoption of a council-manager system by referendum. The League was spearheaded by prominent G.E. scientists, engineers, and managers, including Philip Alger, first president of the



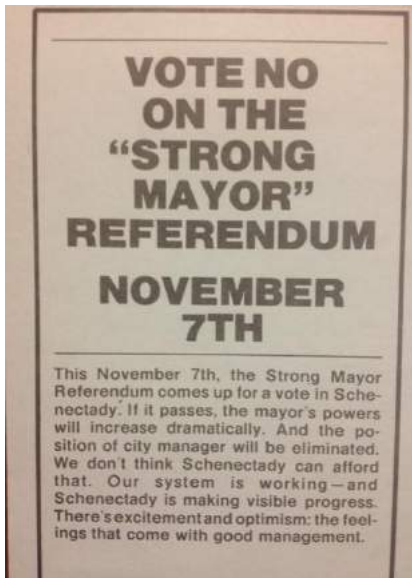
Philip Alger

League, Nobel laureate Irving Langmuir, Spencer Kniskern, and T. R. Rhea. Other members of the League came from organizations as diverse as the League of Women Voters, the Polish American Society, and various Italian societies of Schenectady.

The campaign had its bizarre moments, not unlike current times where candidates are quick to perceive conspiracies. In a meeting of the Schenectady County Republican Club, Assessor Dennis Mahar accused the Charter League of conspiring to appoint Abbett Pulliam as city manager who in turn would be likely to lower G.E. taxes and otherwise place control of the city in G.E. hands. Ironically, he also accused Philip Alger of being a Communist. Pulliam, responding in the newspaper (*Schenectady Gazette*, Oct. 5, 1934), denied that he was slated to be city manager or G.E.'s agent and countered by attacking the rampant patronage in Schenectady's government and the total lack of independence of city officials. As for "Comrade Alger," it was reported that the Communism charge provoked broad smiles among his friends and acquaintances.

In November of 1934, voters adopted by a 2-to-1 margin the council-manager form of government as established under Part C of Optional City Government of the Laws of New York 1914. The next step was to prepare for the 1935 at large election of six new council members and one mayor also serving on the council (i.e., weak mayor). The job of the council, as legislative and policymaking body, then was to appoint the manager. Henry Fagal was fated to be the last strong mayor.

The League feared that the same boss-controlled politicians as before would come back into power as council members and appoint a partisan city manager resulting in a “boss-manager system,” certainly not what the reformers had in mind. The question confronting the League was whether to nominate its own candidates to run in the Republican and Democratic



primaries, endorse the best of either party's candidates, or run its own slate of candidates. The last option was chosen but the league's seven candidates were all defeated, including Irving Langmuir. The new council, reflecting politics as usual, voted 4 to 3 to appoint the first city manager using traditional patronage criteria. However, public dissatisfaction with the council members and their appointee who all took office in 1936, pressure

from the Bureau of Municipal Research, and concern about voter reaction in the upcoming election of 1937, led the Republican-dominated council to appoint a new city manager. This time it was someone who was professionally qualified. C.A. Harrell, city manager of Binghamton, was appointed as Schenectady's second city manager.

The Charter League again ran a slate of candidates in 1937 that was also defeated. Its influence declined after that point. C. A. Harrell served for eight years from 1937-45. Other long-serving managers were Arthur Blessing, 1954-1962, and Peter Roan, 1962-1967. The remaining 11 managers served for four years or less and, in some cases, much less.

Forty-Four Years Later: Mayor Duci

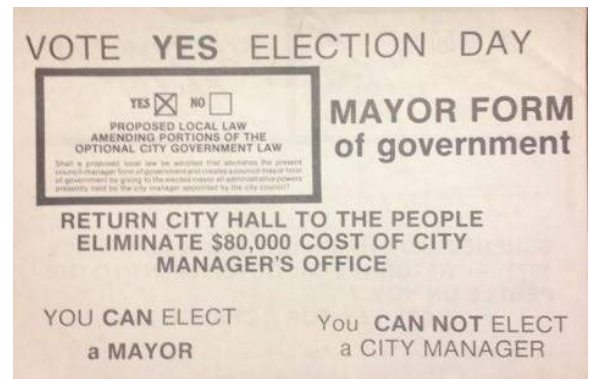
Frank Duci Republican weak mayor from 1972-79, was the driving force behind the return to a strong mayor-council form of government. Duci argued that an elected chief executive mayor would be more visible and accountable to the voters and taxpayers. The frequent turnover in majority party control of the council led to turnover of the city manager who was often appointed by a strictly partisan 4-3 vote, hardly a popular mandate. It would be better to accept the fact that the non-elected city manager is necessarily an important policy maker and cannot be, and arguably should not be, insulated from politics. Therefore, construct a government that fits with the reality of Schenectady's political culture and let the voters directly elect their policy maker-in-chief.

In fact, council-manager systems did tend to work more effectively in cities where council members were elected on a non-partisan basis, typical of the smaller cities of the plains and west coast states. The cities of the northeast were different.

Duci garnered enough petition signatures to put the matter on the November 7th, 1978 ballot, specifically, “Shall a proposed law be adopted that abolishes the present council-manager form of government and creates a council-mayor form of government by giving the elected mayor all administrative power presently held by the city manager?”

Opposed were the same forces that supported the council-manager system decades earlier. The Citizens for a Managed Government led an effort supported by such organizations as the League of Women Voters, Central Labor Council, Schenectady County Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Schenectady Association, Upper Union Street Area Merchants Group. An 84-year old Philip Alger expressed confidence in the council-manager system. The four-member Democratic majority of the council opposed the Duci plan.

This time there was no Charter League to provide leadership or Bureau of Municipal Research to provide ammunition to the anti-strong mayor coalition. The Duci forces prevailed, but just barely, 8,938-8,594. The coalition tried unsuccessfully to reverse this outcome in a second referendum. Chamber of Commerce President Mary Bee claimed that a return to a strong



mayor system could create a “Tammany Hall North,” a remark that brought a rebuke from a *Schenectady Gazette* editorial (January 8, 1979) criticizing its polarizing effect on the community. In the end, a strong mayoral election was held in 1979. Frank Duci became the last weak mayor and the first strong mayor in 44 years.

It is not unusual for cities to modify their charters in response to pressures exerted by those who feel disadvantaged or frustrated by the structure of government. In Schenectady's case, pressures were channeled into supporting one side or the other in the debate between administrative efficiency and politically accountable executive leadership. No doubt behind the rhetoric other motivations were at play. Inevitably, over time there is bound to be frustration and discontent with any governmental system as pressure builds once again for change.

For Further Reading

Philip L. Alger, “The Charter League of the Electric City,” *National Municipal Review*, Vol. 26, Issue 5, May 1937, pp. 234-240.

Edward C. Banfield and James Q. Wilson, *City Politics*, New York, Vintage Books, 1966.

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