Durango’s Mayors

A brief but comprehensive chronology

~ A quick read; a lasting impact ~
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This history is derived from a City Hall exhibit produced in February of 2011, “130 Years ~ 92 Mayors: Never a Smith.” It is drawn in large part from primary sources created and managed by the City of Durango and available online at [http://durangogov.org/190/](http://durangogov.org/190/). Other sources include the *Durango Democrat* and the *Durango Wage Earner* (early issues are available for searching and viewing online at [www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org](http://www.coloradohistoricnewspapers.org)), the *Durango Herald*, and Duane Smith’s history of Durango, *Rocky Mountain Boom Town*. Thanks to those individuals who offered insights, and to those who will yet offer insights toward the development of this dynamic history.

For further reading at [http://durangogov.org/Records](http://durangogov.org/Records) you will select the Search Type **Histories-INDEXED SEARCH** and enter *historical minutes* [with the asterisks] in the Subject box to retrieve this search result: *Introduction to Historical Minutes and Ordinances of the City of Durango*. There you can read additional interesting historical facts from thousands of City Council minutes and ordinances that are all available for you to see on the City’s website—from the very first meeting on May 16, 1881, to the current City Council meetings.
Preface

One of the most quintessential Durango sights is the solitary self-propelled open motorized car that precedes or follows the narrow gauge train on its treks between Durango and Silverton. There isn’t much room for anyone but the driver, but picture yourself hopping on.

Imagine that the little car is you at the present moment, rapidly passing through time, slicing between past and future and always changing where that slice is occurring. As we move forward, we are observing something of our surroundings, even as we peer into the quickly approaching future and contemplate what we absorbed of the swiftly receding past that is behind our backs. No journey is quite the same, though they all bear many similarities.

The railroad track is a symbol of time, narrowing into less and less of a distinct dimension until it reaches a vanishing point. The track is marked by landmarks as it passes signalized crossings, as it surmounts natural or manmade boundaries thanks to the bridges those before have built, as it traverses steep paths along narrow ledges, and sometimes as it chugs through wide, well-watered sunny valleys. The track has a definite beginning (we know where we started and can picture it quite well, because first things tend to be well remembered) and a definite end—but we don’t know when we will reach our destination and we’re not sure exactly what it will look like when we arrive.

The driver of the car is the historian, who chooses when to slow down and when to speed up, though he cannot veer far off the track, except when there’s a siding. Sometimes the driver is taken by some pretty sight or some curious activity behind the bushes. Occasionally he stops the car to inspect some telltale smoke or some other possible hazard. Upon finding it, if he is a good driver, he will send a warning about something that could cause harm to the passengers on the train or to the people who live near the tracks.

The purpose of this little history is to uncover some of the realities of Durango’s past, so that we can better chart that part of the future that may be subject to our influence. Enjoy the journey; let’s see what we might learn from it!
Did you know?
Durango was one of the very first cities in the U.S. to adopt the "council-manager" form of government (by vote in 1912; not fully implemented until 1915). Instead of having a mayor manage the day-to-day operations of the City (as was the case in Durango from 1881 until 1915), the City council appointed a City Manager to be the chief administrator of the City. The first City Manager, Andrew Hood, served from 1915 to 1919, and was the mayor from 1911-1913 and from 1915 until Council hired him as City Manager (you may read about that on pages 23-28).

Introduction

What does the mayor do?
The mayor is the head of the City government and runs all Council meetings, but has no regular administrative duties and no power of veto. The Council members vote each April to decide who will be the mayor and who will be mayor pro tem. The mayor pro tem runs Council meetings when the mayor is not available, and customarily (but not necessarily) becomes mayor the following Council year.

How is the mayor selected?
The form of government of the City of Durango has changed several times (by charter changes), but the City has always had a mayor. The mayor has always served for a one-year term, starting in April. In the early period of the City’s history, an individual would run for the office of mayor (as noted by the various examples of “tickets” displayed here; in the past, the candidates were definitely identified as Republican or Democrat). At some point in time the Council began voting among itself to select the next mayor. By tradition, this process began a year before, at the first meeting of the new Council each year, when the Council members voted to choose the mayor pro tem, who (traditionally) was one of the two top vote-getters in the Council election, two elections back. The City’s custom is that the mayor pro tem becomes the mayor a year later. Most early appointed officials (including the mayor when selected by Council to fill a vacancy) were administered the oath of office by Judge B. J. Houx, who continuously served the City as police magistrate for 17 years until he retired in 1913.

Generally, mayors’ terms have begun in April (or May) and expired 12 months later. During the 63 years that the City operated under the
commissioner-manager form of government (from July 1915 until November 1978), the presiding council member (usually, but not always, the mayor or the mayor pro tem) was then called the president. The Council members were called commissioners. The City’s charter of 1915 specified that the commissioners would elect from among themselves a mayor, who would be president of the Council. At that time, the term expired in July, and the mayor’s term was for two years (though, by custom, the mayor typically tendered his resignation after a year in office).

**What are the salary and benefits of the mayor?**

These are adopted by City ordinance, by vote of the Council members themselves. Historically, the mayor’s salary has gone up and down:

- **1893-1907:** $300 per year for the Mayor, payable quarterly (i.e., $25 per month), by Ordinance No. 260, passed on March 7, 1893, and reaffirmed by Ordinance No. 311, passed on March 15, 1898.
- **1907-1959:** Reduced to $240 per year, payable quarterly (i.e., $20 per month), by Ordinance No. 436, passed on March 19, 1907—the same salary as for the aldermen who were not serving as mayor. The salary apparently remained $20/month from 1907 until 1959 when it increased fivefold.
- By Ordinance No. 818, Social Security benefits were extended to City employees and officers, effective July 1, 1951.
- By a resolution that Council passed on July 27, 1943, all City employees were exempted from the Public Employees Retirement Act of Colorado (PERA); full-time City employees have retirement plan options.
- **1959-1981:** $100 per month for each commissioner (no mention of any additional pay for the mayor), effective April 1959, per Ordinance No. 914 that Council adopted on September 17, 1957.
- **1981-2005:** The mayor’s salary tripled to $300 per month effective April of 1981, per Ordinance No. 1338, passed on March 17, 1981.
- **2005-2017:** $750 per month effective April of 2005, per Ordinance 2005-0008–plus full medical, dental and vision benefits, use of an I-Pad, and a cell phone stipend.
- **2017-future:** $1,117 per month effective once someone other than the incumbent Councilors (e.g., Brookie and Rinderle) became Mayor, per Ordinance 2015-0021 (plus the full benefits as listed just above).

**Historical overview of Durango mayors:**

97 elected individuals have served as mayor of Durango (including the new mayor in April 2019, but not counting people who were appointed to
Durango’s Mayors

A brief chronological history by the City Clerk’s Office

serve as an interim or acting mayor). A few of the mayors (including J. P. Channell, a Republican, in 1934) have run for higher office, but few have won, and none made a name for themselves at the federal level. Sam Miller and Fred Klatt are the only former mayors who made successful runs for the La Plata County Board of Commissioners. More recently, Ann Brown (a Democrat) and Jasper Welch (a Republican) both lost their bids for a seat in the Colorado legislature. An exception was Tom Kimball, who served as mayor for less than a year before resigning from Council to run and serve as a legislator in the State Senate (he had already served six years in the Colorado House of Representatives).

Most of the mayors in the first half of Durango’s history (through the 1950s) were established Main Avenue businessmen. As you’ll find by reading here, two early mayors were in the funeral business. The early mayors were deeply rooted in the community and had significant vested interests in its prosperity. Mayors in the more recent half of the City’s history have included many who were academics or administrators at Fort Lewis College (which moved into Durango in 1955) and some who managed small businesses and/or non-profit organizations. None of the mayors have been what used to be called blue-collar workers; the trend seems to have been toward persons of wealth. There has not been a black-“smith” among them. The City has had three Mayor Brown’s, two Bells, two Gradens, and two Millers—but no Smiths as of yet.

If there is an underlying reason why a person decided to run for office on Council and then take on the additional duties and pressures of representing the City as its mayor, perhaps it is that the individual saw something that needed correcting in the City—whether it was to repair a dangerous plank in the board sidewalk in front of his property, as in the case of W. C. Chapman in 1886, or to push for the City to provide more affordable housing in the early 21st century. Perhaps the most significant change in the characteristics of Durango’s mayors over time is that in recent decades, business owners have had a greatly reduced presence on Council. One possible theory as to why this change occurred is that business owners have not wanted to risk the economic backlash for any political decisions they would make on Council. One of the possible consequences of this diminishment of the influence of business owners in the City’s governance is that business interests may sometimes have not been well defended in the fray and controversy that are part and parcel of the governance of any city or municipality.
Historical Chronology of Durango’s Mayors

1881/82: John Taylor, Jr.
Pioneer druggist of Durango. Below is the record of the first meeting of City Council, with Taylor presiding on May 16, 1881 as the first mayor.

1882/83: John L. Pennington
The first hand-off of the position of mayor, from John Taylor to John Pennington, was at the Council meeting on April 5, 1882. The new mayor was a coal mine businessman and owner of J.L. Pennington & Co., of Durango and Rockwood, just north of town, along the railroad to Silverton.

1883/84: George W. Brown
After each election, Council received the “canvas of votes cast,” which then became part of the official minutes, such as these for the election of Mayor Brown, as accepted by Council on April 6, 1883.
George Brown was cashier of the First National Bank, which opened for business on April 1, 1882 and merged with the Bank of Durango to form the First National Bank of Durango in 1885. (In those days, the cashier was a high officer of the bank, not the teller of today.)
1884/85: Thomas C. Graden
A Civil War veteran and one of the most popular men in early Durango (according to Duane Smith), at age 38 Graden defeated former Mayor J. L. Pennington in the voting, 337 to 316. He was never married. His initial work in Durango was in the lumber business. He also built a flour mill, promoted and managed the Durango Railway and Realty Company. He and his business partner Robert E. Sloan established the Graden Mercantile Company in 1881—which is still in operation downtown on the southwest corner of Main Avenue and 8th Street as the landlord for 27 businesses there.

1885/86: J. R. Shoemaker
Shoemaker won by a landslide (238 votes, to Jackson’s 100—and 2 votes for T. C. Graden, which perhaps were write-in’s)—as shown by the minutes of the special meeting of City Council on April 11, 1885.

1886/87: Willard S. Hickox
Hickox was the receiver at the U.S. Land Office at Durango from 1882 to 1886, which was an important position when land was being divvied up. He died at age 72 in 1899—as reported in the Durango Wage Earner on June 22, 1899:

Willard S. Hickox, one of Durango’s pioneers, died at Denver last Thursday night of apoplexy. He was receiver of the land office at this place from 1882 to ’86. He also served one term as mayor of this city. He was 72 years old at the time of his death. His wife died two years ago. He only left two children surviving him, Mrs. McMann and Miss Hattie Hickox.
1887/88: W. C. Chapman
On October 19, 1886, Chapman complained to Council about a plank in the board sidewalk in front of his property that the Street Commissioner had refused to repair at City expense for the past two months. Council tabled his request. Perhaps that’s why he ran for mayor the following spring. He defeated F. C. Jackson, 311 to 254, on April 5, 1887.

1888/89 and 1889/90: J. P. “Joe” Airy
On April 3, 1888, Airy defeated W. C. Chapman, 313 votes to 233. Airy later served as La Plata County Clerk (circa 1897), and campaigned for Police Magistrate on the Republican/Anti-Gambling Ticket in 1905.

1890/91: Thomas C. Graden
A second term as mayor for this pioneer Durango businessman.

1891/92: Edward Lambert, Jr., then James H. McHolland
(effective August 21, 1891)
Lambert defeated B. W. Ritter in the election on April 7, 1891, 415 votes to 361. He resigned because “important business calls me” and Council elected James McHolland as interim mayor. McHolland had been the Police Magistrate (predecessor of today's Municipal Court Judge) since 1887, and Town Marshall in 1886. On May 6, 1890, Council agreed to rent a room in the Ricker Building occupied by McHolland and N. W. Chamberlain for Council meetings, at $10 month in cash—as shown here:

McHolland later protested before the city administrators when livestock running at large ruined his lawn. Eight years later, Council accepted an invitation to attend his funeral (as recorded in the minutes of the Council meeting of January 18, 1898).
Some of the Council meetings around this time became stormy. On September 4, 1891, Aldermen J. C. Sanford, Ernest J. H. Amy and Harry Jackson were expelled by their colleagues on Council. These three complained that “a monstrous outrage was being perpetrated by the majority of this Council in its attempted removal of City officers without the slightest cause,” and that “the action of the majority is a high handed unprecedented assumption of power not delegated to them by the voters and taxpayers of the City of Durango, and would result in anarchy and ruin.” Comments related to this incident were ordered expunged from the minutes, and the City safe was drilled open and damaged in the process.

1892/93, 1893/94, and 1894/95: George W. Kephart

Kephart was the owner (at least as early as 1880) of G. W. Kephart & Co., seller of general merchandise in Animas City, Colorado (which is now the northern part of the City of Durango).

Mr. Kephart seems to have had a rocky road as mayor. He refused to sign an Ordinance that Council had passed on October 16, 1894. Mayor Pro Tem J. C. Sanford signed it on April 15, 1895. Sanford was the virtual mayor for four months, as Kephart was absent from every Council meeting held after December 4, 1894 (he was listed as absent for seventeen meet-
ings in a row—all the way through to the meeting of the new Council on April 15, 1895 with A. L. Harris as the new mayor). At the City Council meeting of July 19, 1898, Council changed the name of the City’s fire wagon from the George W. Kephart to the William J. Bryan.

1895/96: J. C. Sanford (acting mayor), then Alexander L. (“A. L.”) Harris (through August 27, 1898)

In 1896 the City’s debt was enormous: over $181,000. In today’s dollars, that was more than 4.7 million dollars. (It pales, however, in comparison with the City’s bonded debt of over $33.8 million as of 1/1/2014.)

The cost of essential services like maintaining City Hall (which housed the Fire Department, the Municipal Court and the City’s jail along with the offices of the Mayor, City Clerk/ Treasurer, and others) was often discussed at Council meetings in those early days.

A. L. Harris, who owned a gold/silver mine in Howardsville in the San Juan Mountains, probably was the oldest person to serve as mayor of Durango. He was sixty when he moved to Durango in 1881, and had already served as mayor of Kansas City (elected there in 1866; he moved to Colorado ten years later). Mayor Harris died in office, at age 78. He presided over the Council meeting on August 16th, 1898, and died on the 27th after a brief illness of only a few days. City Hall was draped in black crepe for thirty days, flags were lowered to half mast, and the City paid for expenses of the funeral, as shown by this itemization, as shown in the minutes of the City Council meeting of September 6, 1898 on the following page.
Businesses were asked to close from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. for the Tuesday of the funeral, which was held at the County courthouse, more seating being available there than in a church. His colleagues issued a statement in memoriam. That statement probably contains more biographical detail than is found in any other of the 8,700 minutes of the City of Durango.

1898/99: John Haggart (effective September 9, 1898)
Dr. Haggart was a medical doctor who, along with another M.D., provided medical examination and testimony in a case involving the City as noted in these minutes of regular meetings of Council on April 12 and June 1, 1897.
Council elected Dr. Haggart as mayor at a special meeting of Council on September 9, 1898, to fill the vacancy created by the death of A. L. Harris. Their colleague Alderman J. C. Bradley, the acting mayor, asked not to be considered as a nominee, "knowing that there were members of the Council opposed to him"). Along with Haggart’s name as mayor, the City/County directory that was published in the Durango Democrat (below right) contains some names that will soon be familiar to you.

**SOME NEW IDEAS.**

**Mayor McConnell Suggests New and Attractive Features for the Fair.**

Mayor McConnell presided at a meeting of the Fair Association last night, and made a number of suggestions which will undoubtedly be carried out, and will add much enthusiasm and pleasure to the festival. The mayor is a tireless worker, a close observer and a quick thinker. It would be wonderful if he didn’t come home filled with zeal for our section’s advancement. He interviewed S. K. Hooper in Denver and was assured an exceedingly low railroad rate over the Rio Grande for fair week. The railroad company will also advertise the fair extensively, and it is possible that Durango will have within her gates upward of 10,000 visitors.

The mayor’s idea is to have one day for San Juan pioneers’ reunion, the next for fraternal orders and business men’s parade, a Democrat day and a Republican day. On the two latter days prominent speakers can be secured by their respective parties. He also suggests the importation of the Streets of Cairo company as an attraction. This aggregation shows under canvas, and the performance is amusing, laughable and catchly.

1899/1900 and 1900/01: Charles E. McConnell

On August 14, 1900 (above) the Durango Democrat reported on Mayor McConnell’s plans for the Fair Association and described him as "a tireless worker, a close observer and a quick thinker."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>DIRECTORY</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>County Officers:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerk, - - - - George Weaver.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer, - - - - S. G. Wall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judge, - - - - C. T. Morgan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheriff, - - - - W. J. Thompson.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Under Sheriff - - - - R. J. Orr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessor, - - - - E. O. Price.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supt. of Schools, - - - - J. K. Darnell.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveyor, - - - - Blair Burwell.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attorney, - - - - W. A. Reese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coroner, - - - - T. E. Paterson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physician, - - - - A. W. Morton.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioners, Thos. Cas. Thos. Mason.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>City Officers:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayor, - - - - Dr. Haggart.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerk, - - - - J. W. Greensfield.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasurer, - - - - F. R. Graham.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attorney, - - - - T. J. Jackson.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supt. Water Works, - - - - James Gorman.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Fire Dept., - - - - Wil. Gilbreath.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Councilmen, 1st ward, Charles Weibe, Austin Hedges.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd ward, W. T. Darlington, H. Schrader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd ward, F. H. Rivers, K. Consey.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4th ward, J. C. Bradley, D. R. Barton.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1901/02 and 1902/03: Sam G. Wall
The *Durango Democrat* was pleased to announce on April 16, 1901 “BODY DEMOCRATIC NOW.” Mr. Wall owned the S.G. Wall Drug Store on Main Avenue, shown on the left side of this postcard from around 1907-1914.

1903/04: William W. McEwen
The 1903 election was a tightly contested one. McEwen (a Republican) defeated McConnell by nine votes, as shown by the Council minutes of April 9, 1903.

McEwen’s platform was one of upholding and enforcing the ordinances of the City and improving the financial condition of the City. As noted in his first speech as mayor (which has been a fairly typical practice) (replicated on the next page), when McEwen outlined his goals for the coming year he recommended more prudent fiscal management for the City.
In the following year (as the Populist Democrats of the Durango Wage Earner were glad to publicize on October 27, 1904), Dr. McEwen put himself on record as opposing a proposed raise for the City firemen and the cemetery sexton.

As shown below, on May 17, 1904 the City hired a William McEwen (Dr. McEwen’s son, apparently; their bodies are in the same family plot at Greenmount Cemetery) as stock herder
at $35/month. The junior McEwen also worked nights as a Minute Man for the Fire Department.

1904/05, 1905/06, & 1906 to Sept. 17, 1907: Charles E. McConnell

The Durango Democrat dramatically recounted the lull that settled over the crowd when McConnell first became mayor and made a statement about how the municipality (not private interests) would control the public utilities.
In the first half of Durango’s history, candidates for Council affiliated themselves by party, as shown here from these excerpts from the Durango Democrat (re: the Republicans, 1905, below; and next page, re: the Democrats in the Durango Wage Earner on March 23, 1905/left and April 1, 1909/right). Miss Helen Rodgers was the first female City Clerk and Recorder and the City’s first female elected official (1894).
In August of 1905, Council passed Ordinance No. 418, prohibiting the delivery of any speech, sermon, lecture or address on any of the public streets, alleys or sidewalks of the City without first obtaining a permit. It is not apparent that Council ever repealed this ordinance. Unlike most ordinances, this one included no "whereas" statements to explain the need for regulating or prohibiting free speech.
1907/08 and 1908/09: Herman Berndt (effective October 1, 1907)

Mayor McConnell resigned on the spot on September 17, 1907, after Council discussed that he had accepted $25 and issued a license for a tent/pony/vaudeville show without authority to do so. The record is reproduced here from the minutes of that evening.

Council elected Herman Berndt as mayor on October 1, 1907, as shown in the following two pages of images from the minutes.
Motion by Alderman Scorton that the regular order of business be dispensed with and this council proceed to the selection of a mayor to fill out the unexpired term, seconded by Alderman McIlain and duly carried by all members present voting "Ays.

Therefore Mayor John Casey appointed Alderman Logan and Scorton as tellers.

Majors Herman Burdett and C. P. Frary were placed in nomination.

The ballot was taken with the following result: Burdett

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Vote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M. Lellan</td>
<td>Ays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nason</td>
<td>Nay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naegelin</td>
<td>Ays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leary</td>
<td>Nay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scorton</td>
<td>Nay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The question being on the original motion the same was duly carried by all members present voting as follows:

Alderman Logan "Ays"
Nason "Ays"
McIlain "Ays"
Naegelin "Ays"
Leary "Ays"
Scorton "Ays"

Resolution

Mayor McComb, in writing tendered his resignation as mayor of the City of Durango to take effect at once.

Motion by Alderman J. Lewis that the resignation of Mayor McComb be accepted, seconded by Alderman Logan.
Motion by Alderman Folsom that the resignation of Mayor McComick be accepted seconded by Alderman Logan and carried by all members present voting "aye." The question being the acceptance the same was carried by roll call vote of those members present voting as follows.

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Alderman Logan:} & \text{Aye} \\
\text{Thomson:} & \text{Aye} \\
\text{Folsom:} & \text{Aye} \\
\text{McKellum:} & \text{Aye} \\
\text{Hannon:} & \text{Aye} \\
\text{Naeglein:} & \text{Aye} \\
\text{Carley:} & \text{Aye} \\
\text{Sewton:} & \text{Aye} \\
\end{array}
\]

The question being on the original motion the same was duly carried by all members present voting as follows in answer to roll call.

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Alderman Logan:} & \text{Aye} \\
\text{Thomson:} & \text{Aye} \\
\text{Folsom:} & \text{Aye} \\
\text{McKellum:} & \text{Aye} \\
\text{Hannon:} & \text{Aye} \\
\text{Naeglein:} & \text{Aye} \\
\text{Carley:} & \text{Aye} \\
\text{Sewton:} & \text{Aye} \\
\end{array}
\]

From 1895 - 1927.

5 votes, 3 votes.

Motion by Alderman Folsom that the joint ballot be declared informal seconded by Alderman Naeglein and carried by all members present voting "aye."

The ballot was again taken, Kauffman receiving 5 votes and Folsom 3 votes. Therefore Mayor pro tem Edgell declared Mr. Herman Kauffman duly elected as mayor of the City of Durango to fill out the unexpired term.

Motion by Alderman McKellum that the Mayor pro tem appointed a residue of 2 members of said committee, Alderman McKellum and Logan.

Executive Mayor pro tem Carley appointed as members of said committee. Alderman McKellum and Logan.

Mayor elect Herman Kauffman presented himself, wore dark maw, Citius Magistrate's coat, administered the oath, and thereafter took his seat, addressing a few appropriate remarks to the council after which the regular order of business was proceeded with.
Berndt was one of the two aldermen (that's what Council members were called until 1913) whom the citizens of the 1st Ward had elected in the municipal election. Council had elected him mayor pro tem on April 13, 1905, and thus it was logical that it elected him to serve as mayor to fill the remainder of McConnell’s term. On January 23, 1909, the Durango Democrat quipped about Mayor Berndt’s upcoming trip to the state capital. The Democrat, like the Durango Herald today, reported some of the action of Council meetings, as shown below. Note its reference to the “City Fathers” on January 14, 1909. The Wage Earner sometimes was rather more acerbic in its reporting, as in its August 27, 1905 article about the aldermen:

**CITY COUNCIL**

The City Fathers met in adjourned session Tuesday evening with all aldermen present except Casey, McLellan, and with Mayor Berndt in the chair.

F. W. Brookie, representing the National Wood Pipe Company of Salt Lake, made a brief talk to the council, regarding the merits of the pipe his firm manufactures. He also furnished figures showing the amount required under certain conditions, and answered all questions asked by the council.

It was moved by Alderman Scouton that the old pipe line be abandoned and the new pipe be laid in the Nelson field, according to the specifications and survey of the city engineer.

**ALDERMANIC MELANGE.**

If all reports be true there will be an aldermanic mix up politically speaking. 'Tis said Mayor Berndt aspires to the county treasurership; Alderman Casey wants to be county commissioner; Alderman Scouton ditto; Alderman McLellan ditto; Alderman Folson ditto; ex-Alderman Sites ditto, while there are more to follow. We are giving street talk, it may be that some of the gentlemen named are not in the mix up.

Mayor Berndt evidently was a fiscal conservative, as shown by this section of the Council minutes of January 7, 1908 that noted his refusal to pay any more light company bills until a disagreement was worked out regarding the cost of street lights.

1909/10 and 1910/11: George Goodman

A Democrat, Goodman was one of the most respected individuals of the
City. As Fire Chief, on February 9, 1895 he refused the raise Council had given him.

Council gave Mayor Goodman a gold watch on April 15, 1895, as a token of its thanks for his service to the City. He owned Goodman’s, a long-time clothing store in Durango, and also was a funeral director, both at 8th Avenue. On January 19, 1909, Council granted his petition for an undertaker’s license, along with a similar request by Hood & Ames, as shown below.

On October 14, 1909, the Durango Wage Earner printed a letter of thanks to Mayor Goodman from the Durango Ministerial Association (next page).
All was not rosy for Mr. Goodman, however: as the first matter of business at the regular Council meeting of November 5, 1909, Mayor Goodman took issue with the reporting by the *Durango Wage Earner* on the City reservoir debate. This was probably not the first, and certainly not the last, time the City disagreed with reporting by one of the local newspapers.
In 1910, another issue that occupied the mayor's attention was to get the planks of the street crossings into safe condition where they met the board sidewalks.

1911/12 and 1912/13: Andrew F. Hood

Hood was a Republican and, like Goodman, an undertaker. He defeated John Morlock by 35 votes on April 4, 1911 (as shown by the minutes of April 17, 1911, on the following page), despite derogatory comments by the Progressive local newspaper, the Durango Wage Earner, on March 30, 1911.

Durango was one of the first municipalities in the U.S. to adopt the Council/Manager form of government—by charter election on September 3, 1912. (Sumter, South Carolina claims the distinction of being first: on June 11.)
Mr. Hood and the candidates for office on his ticket are dancing a hornpipe on a platform declaring for a Republican form of government. Say, if they are really and truly in accord with their platform, aren't they on the wrong ticket?

Say boys fall off the pump handle and bathe your faces in the trough and maybe you will get your eyes opened.

Mayor Hood presided and all members of the council were present at the regular meeting of the city council Tuesday evening. The minutes of the regular session of July 15 were read and declared approved.

The reports, for the month of July, of the different officers were read.

The captain of the Salvation Army asked permission to erect a tent on the vacant lot corner of Main Avenue and Eleventh Street. This is to be used for evangelistic services from Aug. 1 to 18, inclusive. The request was granted.

Chairman Hanno of the finance committee stated that after the bills for July were paid a balance of $1,478.60 only would remain in the treasury.

Hood wrote out his maiden speech as mayor, which was handwritten into the City Council minutes, as reproduced on the next page. He was the City’s second undertaker mayor in a row (as the proprietor of Hood Mortuary, still in business in a mansion at the north end of East Third Avenue today). Council selected Hood as the first City Manager of Durango on July 6, 1915.
Durango’s Mayors

A brief chronological history by the City Clerk’s Office

May 25

Mayor Buck stated that he was not in favor of a newly elected executive office, which was urgent and pressing. He could not make any recommendations. Any recommendations by the Mayor could be made from any recommendation from the City Council. Mayor Buck then stated that he had prepared a short statement which he submitted with the permission of the members. He would read and move a motion, as ordered, to be passed on record on the matter continued herein. The same is as follows:

To commence to a time council custom after leaving a few hours each day through a long period for meditation. As spring comes with new foliage and green vines, because the good people of the great city of Durango where wise, sincere, natural, and sustained in their state of admiration. The few days reduced to a council Commission form of government. The proposed new form of government was referred to the Citizens four municipalities for their consideration. By a unqualified majority, those who favored the method of operating city affairs were victorious. With history in hand, taken in service at the same at the great. This knowledge they committed to our committee. It was understood and necessary. By an honest ballot, and a fair council the commission form of government has issued. While it was not denied as a party measure, our Democrats have in humble submission, as a good Democrat to the will of the people. An individual may be wrong but the free will of the people power. This formally, were not carried away with the argument into the power and how now? May we as to be successful, I stand ready and willing to assist those who are the volunteers to the necessity of my ability. I am free to say and willing to assist that under existing circumstances. I proceed at an execution.

In declaiming this subject, I proceed to pay to the friends of the measure that in behalf of good government, for the benefit of mankind and for the good of those to same office. I sincerely pray your support before will be resumed, and to your memory which be created a monument in the form of a charter for the new form of government. The city drafted councils because the frustrating shadow over.

No further business appearing upon matters of administration, hence accorded by adjournments and duly signed by all members voting "Amended by the Council at government meeting, Monday evening, April 10th, a.m. at engagd a człk.

Attest:

George W. Miller

City Clerk

Mayor.
Hood’s colleagues expressed their thanks to him in their regular Council meeting on May 1, 1913:

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Voted Thanks of Council to Mayor Hood.

Minutes:

[Minutes of the meeting...]
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The inner dynamics of proceedings of Council became rather less interesting in 1913 when it was reduced from 9 men to three when the City adopted the commissioner form of government. There was less discussion; two men could decide a matter, whereas under the previous aldermanic form of government it required four votes (back then, the mayor would only vote if there was a tie). This bare-bones form of government didn’t last long; in the general municipal election on April 6, 1915, voters changed the City Charter to move to a Commissioner-Manager form of government. Council elected the first City Manager on July 6, 1915, and the number of elected Commissioners changed from three to five on July 7, 1915 (though the minutes made no particular mention of that change).
1913/14 and 1914/15: Henry R. Scouton
A Democrat. Mayor Scouton’s wife died on July 8, 1913. Council adjoined until the 15th as a token of respect to Mr. Scouton.

1915/16: Andrew F. Hood, then Cyrus G. “Cy” Graden
Former Mayor Hood defeated incumbent Mayor Scouton by a large margin (521 votes to 367) in the municipal election of April 6, 1915, that also saw the commissioner-manager form of government adopted (557 votes to 336).
Hood stepped down as mayor when Council elected him as the first City Manager on July 6, 1915, as shown in the minutes of the regular meeting:

1916/17: Cyrus G. “Cy” Graden (resigned July 5, 1916), then
George G. Goodman
Graden resigned as mayor after serving a year in that role. He remained a commissioner (the new name for a Council member under the City’s new form of government). Council elected George Goodman as mayor and president of the Council for the year ending July 1, 1917.

1917/18, 1918/19, and 1919: Harry Jackson (resigned November 10, 1919, halfway through his third term as Mayor)
Harry Jackson was a pioneer hardware merchant of Durango. Historian
Duane Smith has observed that Jackson’s “men and others provided the muscle that built the community.” He owned Jackson Hardware, a long-time Durango business that traded with Navajos and popularized the commercial marketing of Navajo weavings.

World War I was affecting life on the streets of Durango. In August of 1918, Council passed an ordinance prohibiting the speaking of the German language in any public building or on any public street or alley (as displayed on the following page). Another wartime measure Council adopted in 1918 was Ordinance 557, requiring all males ages 18 to 55 to engage in some useful occupation.

1919/20 (continued) and 1920/21: J. R. C. Tyler (to December 21, 1920)
Mr. Tyler resigned because he expected to leave Durango in early 1921.

January 4, 1921 - November 15, 1921: Arthur W. Ayres
November 15, 1921 – October 3, 1922: Clayton C. Perkins

One of the issues during this period was the demise of the Main Avenue streetcar. On March 22, 1921, the City Attorney informed Council that the Durango Railway and Realty Company had been notified that unless the
track and car were removed from the streets of Durango, the City would initiate a law suit to compel their removal.

Mayor Perkins resigned on October 3, 1922, explaining that “his private business would not justify his retention of the office longer.”

1922/23 through 1926/27: Charles E. Stilwell
Stilwell had the longest continuous service as mayor: five terms. In those days, Council was just three men: the president, the vice president, and the third commissioner. One of the engrossing issues at this time was the prospect of a joint venture between the City of Durango, the La Plata County commissioners, and the town of Animas City for an emergency hospital (referred to earlier on September 5, 1922, as a detention hospital) at the north end of town near the County Poor Farm, “to be used in case some contagious disease was brought to the City.” This paved the way for the “hospital wars” a few decades later, between Community Hospital and Mercy Hospital.

1927/28, 1928 – April 16, 1929, and April 26, 1929 - May 21, 1929:
Cyrus G. “Cy” Graden
Mr. Graden owned a pioneer flour mill in Durango (where the Doubletree
Hotel is now located). At this time, one of the common problems was the driving of herds of cattle through North Durango [which at that time was just shortly north of the Animas River Main Avenue bridge], creating a nuisance and damaging the lawns. Nonetheless, at its meeting on November 8, 1927, Council approved James Jarvis’ request to be allowed to drive about 800 cattle on West Third Avenue, "as the trail over Griffith Heights was in almost an impassable condition,” with the understanding that he would reimburse the property owners for any resulting damage.

April 16-26, 1929 and May 21, 1929 – April 15, 1930: John A. Wilmer

It seems that the 1929/30 Council year was the year for the most musical chairs in the role of mayor. Perhaps one reason for this was that at this time there was no additional compensation for the additional time a Council member spent as mayor. Mayor Wilmer resigned a second time as mayor on April 15, 1930, having served for a year:

In 1929 the City selected Reservoir Hill (the later site of Fort Lewis College) for the Durango airport. This required that the City purchase more than 600 acres of land there from various owners. In 1931 the Council agreed that it would be good to sell Brookside Park and use the money at the Airport Park.

1930/31: Nels T. “N. T.” Thomsen

1931/32: J. J. Musser

The Great Depression hit Durango. The Rev. F. R. Shoemaker and others appeared before Council on February 17, 1931, to request immediate relief for the unemployed. The City took immediate action to hire 45 men to work on the streets. In 1932 City Manager Wigglesworth reduced the salaries of City employees, starting with a cut of his own salary from $208.33 to $187.50 per month.
1932/33: J. A. “Jack” Clay
Clay, an engineer, moved to Silverton from California in 1905 to manage the Animas Power and Water Company, and thence to Durango to manage Durango Gas & Electric. He became a vice president of their successor, the Western Colorado Power Company. He also served on the Chamber of Commerce, on the school board, and on the first Colorado highway advisory board. Duane Smith quotes that “it was said of him when he left Durango in 1937 (when he was transferred to Salt Lake City) that he was a ‘civic minded, pusher, booster, big hearted,’ substantial citizen.”

1933/34: Earl A. Barker
Grandfather of Rod Barker (owner of the Strater Hotel). A group of businessmen, including Earl Barker, bought the hotel in 1926.

1934/35: J. P. Channell
A Republican, he campaigned to represent the 19th District in the State Senate at around this time. He had owned Channell Motor Company since 1923. As president of the Durango Chamber of Commerce for four years starting in 1928, he (quoting Duane Smith) “pushed for lower railroad rates, money to improve Wolf Creek Pass and highways, strengthening of
rural La Plata County, and `merchant institutes’ to improve business tech-
niques.”

1935/36: M. L. Cummins
Cummins married Myra Hoagland in 1925. One of his achievements as
mayor was to have the airport at Reservoir Hill fenced so roaming livestock
and randomly driven automobiles would not endanger planes that were
landing or taking off. He resigned as mayor on May 26, 1936, “following
the established custom of rotating the office of mayor” annually.

Durango Municipal Airport on Reservoir Hill
1936/37: Charles Guy Shepard
Shepard’s son, Charles Guy Shepard, Jr., was a student veteran at Fort Lewis College, 1946/47. One of the last accomplishments on Shepard’s watch as mayor was to authorize the City Manager to apply to the U.S. Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works for a loan and grant to aid in financing the construction of a sewage disposal plant.

1937/38 and 1938/39: O. K. Nabors
Council seems to have been quite inactive during this period, at least as is indicated by the minutes of City Council meetings. One development was a resolution to form a City Planning Commission in October of 1938.

1939/40: Nels Newman
Newman later served as a La Plata County Justice of the Peace, around 1948/49.

1940/41: Robert McNicholas
McNicholas married Jessie Goodman in 1907, and apparently had a painting business; he submitted the high bid for papering and painting the upstairs offices and Firemen’s sleeping quarters in City Hall in August, 1949.

As President of City Council (as reported in the Council minutes of November 26, 1940) McNicholas appealed for donations “in the way of guns, ammunition, binoculars etc., to be shipped to Brittain [sic], for use of their non-combatant citizens.” Miss Mary McLean of Durango presented one pair of binoculars in response.

1941/42 through 1944/45 (4 terms): John Fankhauser
World War II affected the City, as it did everyone. Seven days after the
Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, Mayor Fankhauser signed a resolution in support of the war effort (shown on the following page).

City Manager O. W. Harrah was called up for active duty in the Army in 1942. A few years later, on 12/11/1945, Council instructed the City Clerk and the City Attorney to write a letter of protest to the Commanding Officer of the 2nd Air Force at Peterson Field, Colorado Springs “in regard to the B-17 Bomber flying over the City of Durango at a very low and dangerous altitude.”

(U.S. Air Force photo: Boeing B-17E “Flying Fortress” bomber, c. 1942)
Fankhauser was married to Mable Skoog (since 1928). On May 25, 1943, Council appointed Fankhauser “to succeed himself” as mayor. He served four terms, a record that was second only to Charles Stilwell’s five.

1945/46: Nels Newman
One of Newman’s first issues as mayor was hearing from Bob Christy of the El Rancho Tavern (by the way, probably the longest-running continuously-issued City of Durango liquor license), who “told the Council of the conditions that exist in Durango with the juveniles entering his Tavern and other places where liquor is sold creating a nuisance when they are refused a drink.”

1946/47: Herb Williams (appointed April 9, 1946 as the interim mayor; resigned July 23, 1946), then Robert S. Ayres
On April 30, 1946, Mayor Williams informed the mayor and trustees of the town of Animas City that the City of Durango was increasing the charge for carrying Animas City water through the Durango water system, levying a flat charge of six cents per thousand gallons. The Animas City officials agreed that the new arrangements were fair and equitable.

Animas City in the mid-20th century
1947/48: Robert S. Ayres
Ayres was a grandson of Robert E. Sloan, who (with T. C. Graden) founded Graden Mercantile Company in 1881. Ayres took over the management of the family business after it burned in 1947. He also was Vice-President of the Navajo Trail Association, promoting the Navajo Trail, “America’s shortest paved all-weather East-West Scenic Highway.” Ayres and fellow mayors Barker, Hogan, Kroeger, Morrissey, Stillwell and Wegher received a large number of votes in April of 1963 as delegates for the City’s Charter Convention (see the results on page 41).

1948/49: Tom O. Kimball (resigned 9/14/1948), then Howard N. Foster
Kimball, who ran Durango’s Coca-Cola bottling company, was the chairman of the Republican Party of La Plata County and was mayor when the town of Animas City was merged into the City of Durango after both communities voted on October 28, 1947 and overwhelmingly agreed to unite. He had already served as a legislator in the Colorado House of Representatives (1940-1946). He resigned from Council to run for the State Senate, where he served from 1949 to 1952. In 1953 President Eisenhower appointed him to be a US Marshall for the State of Colorado--a federal position that in those days mostly entailed transporting prisoners. He died on September 26, 1969.

1949/50: Samuel H. “Sam” Miller
Miller owned a motel on North Main Avenue. Some of the matters engaging the mayor have been perennial: Mayor Miller had to deal with the problem of making repairs to the vault roof over City Hall. His colleagues must have liked what he did (for no extra pay as mayor then), because when as per custom he tendered his resignation to his four colleagues on April 24, 1950, one commissioner moved acceptance of the resignation “with regret” and another commissioner voted no. As an example of how the closeness of the Durango community often causes overlapping interactions, Fred Klatt tells how “Sam had a great big kid who was on a little league football team I coached (I was in my early 20s), dwarfed the other 12-year-olds. Sam wanted him to be a running back, but we had to use him on the line as the rules prohibited someone so big as a running back! In later years, he was an all-American lineman at CU, and played for the Browns for a few years. Matt Miller. Sam always gave me credit for starting the kid off right, I felt the same way!”

As the nation (including Durango, which after all had possibly provided the uranium used in the atomic bombs dropped on Japan) entered the Cold War, the City made preparations for civil defense.

1951/52: H. C. Beaubien
In 1951, the City and the County were considering a proposal for a City and County Building for courthouse and city hall purposes.
1952/53: Robert McNicholas

McNicholas had previously been mayor, 1940/41. He, along with his good friend Al Andrews, both of whom had been elected to Council in 1939, lost the election in 1953, in a time of great flux in City government. When he left office in April of 1953 he noted that when they came on board in 1939 the City was $50,000 in debt and had practically no equipment, but now it had a balance of over $49,000 and a number of pieces of new equipment, including six dump trucks and a “Patchmobile”. He concluded, “As I love Durango and wish for it a great future, it is my sincere wish that [the newly elected council members] stand solidly on [their] oath of office and never by any act of theirs tarnish their oath or violate the faith and trust the people have placed in their hands.”

Mayor McNicholas’ parting statement to Council:

When my good friend, Al Andrews and I were elected to the City Council in 1939, we inherited an indebtedness of over $50,000.00 and practically no equipment.

Now, in the change of administration we are proud to report to our successors a cash balance as certified by Wm. J. Horther at close of business April 14, 1953 of $49,125.97 after all bills are paid and all commitments paid, except for the street signs—and the funds are budgeted and available for these.

In addition to the cash on hand there are a number of pieces of new equipment, including six new dump trucks, Patchmobile, Hough Loader, Street Sweeper, Trash Truck, Seaman Paving Mixer, Fire Truck, 1000 gal. pumper, Snow Plow, Diaphram Sewer Pump, Mechanical Sewer Rodding machine, Cemetery Pump and a number of pieces of old equipment, all of which have been overhauled and are in good workable condition. Also, the City has on hand an inventory of $15,000.00 consisting of pipe, fittings, culverts, parts, tires, etc.

The newly elected Councilmen have just signed an oath of office to uphold the Constitution of the United States of America, the Laws of the State of Colorado and City of Durango.

As I love Durango and wish for it a great future, it is my sincere wish that they stand solidly on this oath of office and never by any act of theirs tarnish that oath or violate the faith and trust the people have placed in their hands.

[Signatures]

Durango, Colorado
April 14, 1953

Fiorini was Durango’s first Italian mayor. The leader of a small band for many years, he played his accordion at many dances and weddings in the area. One of his favorite accordions, now in the Animas Museum, was used in the movie *Midnight Passage* with Jimmy Stewart. In the first year of his mayoralship Council approved a resolution to convey to the State Board of Agriculture 193 acres on Reservoir Hill (site of the former municipal airport) for the use of the branch of the Fort Lewis Agricultural College at Durango, for a token sum of $1. Penciled into the official minutes book is a note that this resolution was vacated and repealed on March 25, 1954, when the sale price was increased to $8,400. Per the agreement, if the lands ever cease to be used for educational purposes, the City has the right and option to purchase the lands, “together with all improvements thereon situate and all rights and privileges thereunto appertaining, for the sum of $8,400 cash in hand.”

1955/56: T. Harold Wilson owned a furniture store at 8th and Main; a stone bench in his honor is in front of First Baptist Church on the Boulevard.

1956/57: Frederick V. Kroeger owned the eponymous Durango hardware store, an expansion of his family’s Farmers Supply Company that dated back to 1921. He was a 1938 graduate of Fort Lewis College when it was a two-year program at Hesperus. Improving the conservation and storage of water was a key focus of his leadership; he was one of the original supporters of the Animas-La Plata Project. He died on 12/26/2015 at age 97, having devoted much of his life to caring for his “bride” Eleanor and their son Stanley, both of whom preceded him in death.

1957/58: Harry J. Miller

Duane Smith called Miller outspoken and impatient and remarked that he “crashed right into the ‘old Durango city people.’”

1958/59: Silas C. Brown

At this time, the City was busy getting more and more streets paved—and was planning a dinner party in honor of the noted female muleteer, Olga Little.

1959/60 and 1964/65: Melvin V. Flock

As the story goes, Mel Flock reported that in these days Council would always go into executive session after its meeting (maybe not even officially) and cut all the City deals, without the press knowing about it. Apparently the *Durango Herald* reporter would “leave the meeting”, only to duck into the men’s room. Putting a stethoscope to the bathroom wall (which was next to the Council chambers), he would listen to the “secret” meetings. One evening (as it is told), a member of
Council stepped into the men’s room, and voilà! The reporter from the Herald was “listening” in.

1960/61: John Wegher
Mr. Wegher married Frances Baudina in 1949. When he took office, he gave Flock the mayor’s gavel, “banded with a Silver and Engraved band.”

Changing the City’s Charter is a major deal, involving a special election. Below is the abstract of votes cast for candidates for the 1963 convention to revise the City’s charter. John Wegher and other mayors (past and future) were among the successful candidates for the charter revision convention.
1961/62: Robert L. “Bob” Beers
A 1931 graduate of Fort Lewis High School, Bob Beers joined the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1933, and was assigned to what he called the “porcupine committee,” to shoot the rodent because he was a pretty good shot, according to a Herald article on August 15, 2008, when he was 93. A Durango businessman (he owned several gas stations and the Basin Petroleum propane business), Beers was one of dozens of individuals who launched the Purgatory ski resort in just one year in the late 1950s. He taught skiing there for 44 years, until he was 94. As the Herald noted in his obituary on April 6, 2011, Beers (shown here at age 95) took political heat for being the mayor who got more of the city’s streets paved (Main Avenue and the highways through town were already paved), and was one of the main advocates at the Colorado Legislature for moving Fort Lewis College into Durango from Hesperus in the mid-1950s.

1962/63: Paul F. Gemmill
Around this time, Council was hearing reports of alcoholism. In January of 1959 the Ministerial Alliance had asked the City to cease from issuing any new liquor licenses. Now, Ned Wallace of FLC and Mike Kennedy of the State Liquor Department told Council how minors were altering I.D. cards to obtain alcoholic drinks. Council appointed a Special Commission to study the problem of alcoholism in Durango. It would re-visit the issue in 1971.

1963/64: R. E. O’Brien
This was the year the new/current City Hall was built. In November Council instructed City Manager Rank to take bids to demolish the old one.
1965/66: Carl A. Bell
On motion of Mayor Bell, Council passed a resolution thanking Frontier Airlines for providing air service to Durango since 1946, and for improving that service in the past three years with “modern pressurized turbo-prop aircraft” and new promotional fares that attracted more new visitors to the area.

1966/67 and 1967/68: James M. French
One of the first actions of the new Council in May of 1966 was to endorse the Animas-La Plata Water Diversion Project, at the urging of Attorney Sam Maynes (representing the Southwest Water Conservancy District) and R. H. Tyner of the U.S. Soil Conservation Service.

1968/69: L. Wayne Lee
Descended from a Durango pioneer family, Mr. Lee was the first Colorado graduate to be drafted by the Denver Broncos (1961) and was the youngest person (at the time, in 1965) to be elected to City Council (at age 28). During his term, the City built a new water and sanitation system and several parks and recreational areas including Fantor and Schneider parks, and instituted a retirement program for fire fighters (source: Herald obituary June 22, 2014). One of the issues he raised (on April 16, 1968) was the possibility of dust control on unpaved streets.

1969/70: G. Michael “Mickey” Hogan
Owner of Hogan’s, a long-time family-run Main Avenue clothing store that closed in 2011, Mr. Hogan was known as a gentleman and a man of action. He led the effort to pass the 1977 airport bond issue for construction at the Durango-La Plata County Airport on Florida Mesa. He died on September 1, 2019, at age 89.

1970/71: Robert L. Brown
A major deal in 1970 (as it is each time it arises; it requires a public vote) was the renewal of the electric light, heat and power franchise, granted to the Western Colorado Power Company for another 20 years.

1971/72 and 1972/73: Charles D. Self
Self received the largest number of votes among the six men who ran for City commissioner in the April 1969 election.

May 1, 1973/74: John E. Murphy
Murphy, a manager at La Plata Electric Association, was active in the Durango community. His son Pat had Murphy Motors and (from his wife’s father) Carroll Motors, later site of the Durango Arts Center; they later merged with the Morehart car company and moved out to Bodo Park.
1974/75: Edwin W. “Ned” Wallace
Ned Wallace was a Fort Lewis College coach (basketball and football) and Dean of Students. As mayor, he pushed for a strong central business district plan, “to make every attempt not only to preserve it physically, but to preserve it as the economic center of this immediate area” (source: oral history interview by Duane Smith).

1975/76: Myrle L. Cornelius
Cornelius was a pilot in the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II. He used to enjoy telling people, “I spent my honeymoon in Europe; it is a shame that Barbara was not there.” He worked for Ray Goodman, his wife’s father, in his paint contracting business, and eventually became the owner of the business, and changed the name of the company to Cornelius Paint Company. He died in 2010 at age 87.

1976/77 and 1977/78: Maxine Peterson
The first woman to be elected to City Council, and the first female mayor. Maxine worked in her home and raised four children. Her husband, Pete Peterson, was an English professor at Fort Lewis College. During her years on Council, the City worked with the County to agree on equitable ways to jointly fund the Library, the Airport, the youth advocacy program, the 55 Plus Center, and the sanitary landfill. Also, the City adopted a Central Business District Plan, built a new Service Center at Bodo Industrial Park, and began to plan for a continuous park system with bike paths. Maxine recalls Willard Croonenbergs from the State Highway Department telling her, “You are crazy—nobody will use those bike paths!” Without knowing it, Maxine was fulfilling the vision of an earlier woman, Ella Birkheimer, who repeatedly pressed the City to improve its parks system and asked in 1946, “We have a beautiful natural river running through our City and what have we done with it?” Duane Smith wrote (in his 1980 history of Durango, Rocky Mountain Boom Town) that “at a time when citizens where bringing complaints to Council meetings and council members were feeling harassed, Maxine believed that ‘The council needs to develop its own goals. We need a better picture of what we want so we can make sure it happens, rather than just reacting.’”
1978/79: Myrle L. Cornelius (2nd term as Mayor)  
Owner of the Cornelius Paint Company; his wife Barbara was a granddaughter of former mayor George Goodman. Cathy Williams, who worked in the City Manager’s Office in the early 1970s, recalls Cornelius as “a jovial, low-key young man who was active with the constituency, eager to make Durango a better place to live for all generations.” He would make impromptu visits to City Hall to sign documents in his painting coveralls.

1979/80 and 1980/81: John J. “Jeff” Morrissey  
Morrissey was Mayor during the City’s centennial celebrations. His wife Nikki Morrissey recalls that he fought hard to get the Animas-La Plata Project built. Subsequently, he was a board member of the Animas-La Plata Water Conservancy District. He died on 7/14/2015 in Durango at 70.

1981/82: Robert “Bob” Hatfield  
Hatfield grew up in the dark purple/brown-colored historic house on the “Boulevard”, East Third Avenue. His father, E. Ellison “Tommie” Hatfield, was the City’s attorney from 1940-1950 except for two years’ absence for service in the Air Force during the War.

1982/83: Ian “Sandy” Thompson  
Sandy Thompson was the executive director of the Crow Canyon Archaeological Center near Cortez from 1985 to 1991, and played a leading role in its development as an important center for archaeological research and education in the Southwest. He also was associate editor of the Durango Herald from 1970 to 1973. He died in 1998.

1983/84: Ira L. Plotkin  
Durango’s first Jewish mayor? Plotkin grew up as an Orthodox Jew in Washington, D.C. and moved to Durango in 1975 to teach history at Fort Lewis College until 1990. He was married to Kay Corbitt Plotkin in 1980 and they were known for their generosity. He started an organized Jewish community, the Four Corners Jewish Community Center. Under Plotkin’s urging, the City dedicated the 9th Street Bridge for Gardenswartz in 1984. He didn’t seek re-election in 1985 when he was stricken with Hodgkin’s
disease. (He died in May, 2012.) Joe Colgan remembered hearing Plotkin say, “Serving on the council has made this old liberal a fiscal conservative.”

1984/85: William F. “Bill” Casey
A gregarious character and a strong Democrat, with whom Jasper Welch recalls having had plenty of debates. Duane Smith called him a “jolly fellow who liked history.” Greg Bell described him as “a crusty, humorous councilor, who brought a lot of wisdom and common sense to the council.” Casey was on Council about when Bob Ledger came on as City Manager. Robert Rank had served from 1960 to 1980, and survived a City Manager recall election as the lightning rod for citizen discontent with the City during a rough time; Ron Jack had a two-year stint as City Manager before being fired, and then Ledger was hired in 1982 and presided over a prosperous season of Durango’s history until retiring in 2007.

1985/86: Ann Brown
Durango office administrator for a number of elected federal officials; probably one of the most knowledgeable persons regarding the ins and outs of politics affecting Durango and Southwestern Colorado.

1986/87, 1995/96 and 1990/91: Leonel B.
(pronounced Līonel; also known as “Belty”) Silva Silva was Durango’s first Hispanic mayor. His friends knew him as Belty, not Leonel. He owned 6th Street Liquor at 3rd Avenue and 6th. He campaigned in 1985 on a pledge to close the “communication gap” between the City Council and city residents. Duane Smith noted that Silva “did much to develop the Durango Housing Corporation and its apartment house complexes.” As of 2011, Silva was on the Fort Lewis College Board of Trustees. He moved to Centennial, Colorado, to be close to his grandchildren.

1987/88: Fred W. Klatt III
Owner of the Klatt Travel Agency on Main Avenue, and subsequently a County commissioner for three terms. In his 1985 campaign for Council he posed his race as a referendum in support of capital funding (i.e., long-term debt) to modernize and expand the Durango-La Plata
County Airport terminal. He was one of the last business owners to serve as mayor, and experienced negative impacts on his business due to some strong stands he made in the political realm. In 2011 Klatt observed, “It’s a small wonder that ANY persons involved in operating their own business runs for a Council position. I’ve heard that benefits can accrue to business owners in larger cities; quite the opposite in Durango!”

1988/89: Gregory W. Bell
A math professor (he taught computer science) and later an administrator at Fort Lewis College, 1978-2005. Council selected Dr. Bell at age 38 to fill a vacated seat in 1985, due to what Mayor Brown called his “positive attitude” and experience on the City Planning Commission. His wife Dinah Leavitt was a professor of English at Fort Lewis College and chaired the City’s Liquor Licensing Authority. Greg Bell is not related (so far as he knew) to Carl Bell who was mayor in 1965/66.

1989/90: Marilyn K. “Lynn” Shine
A business student and an employee of Southwest Community Resources, Shine (like a number of others who have been elected to Council) was formerly a member of the City’s Planning Commission.

Shipps was a librarian at Fort Lewis College, 1969-1980s. During his year as mayor the City welcomed delegates from the other two Durangos (Mexico and Spain), Main Avenue was repaved, sidewalks in the Central Business District were replaced, and funds were allocated to add an addition to the front of the 1907 Carnegie Library Building to make it accessible to persons with handicaps.

Dr. Dolphin was Vice President for Business and Finance at Fort Lewis College, and subsequently its president, through 2004. Stricken with polio as a young man, Dr. Dolphin set a strong example as a person who succeeded in overcoming a physical handicap. He led the build-out of the FLC campus in the 1990s. He died on October 19, 2019, at the age of 84.
Her husband Tom was Mercy Hospital’s personnel director (and previously at the City). Later in life, Lynn Shine was employed on the Front Range of Colorado as a housing initiatives coordinator for the Colorado Department of Local Affairs.

1994/95 and 1998/99: Jasper A. Welch III
Owner of Four Corners Management Systems, offering management consulting in the Four Corners Region since 1991. During his first year as mayor, Durango was growing and recovering economically. Sales tax revenues were strong in those days. During his second year as mayor, Durango’s sustained economic growth and strong development created significant debate about growth. In 2020 he began to serve on the City’s new Long Term Finance Committee for strategic planning.

1996/97: Lee L. Goddard
Owner of Goddard Enterprises, buyer and seller of used construction equipment; he raised five children. His platform included encouraging economic growth and supporting small businesses.

Council in Council Chambers at City Hall, circa 1997/1998
(left to right: Goddard, Mayor Shine, Mayor Pro Tem Welch, Langhart, and Silva)
1999/2000 and 2004/05: Joe Colgan
Dr. Colgan was a professor of accounting at Fort Lewis College from 1981 to 2000. A CPA, Dr. Colgan also served on the boards of directors of the La Plata Economic Development Action Partnership, Durango Adult Education Center, Catholic Diocese of Pueblo Foundation, Animas La Plata Water Conservancy District, and the Durango School District 9-R Board.

2000/01: James C. “Jim” Sheppard
Jim Sheppard and Fred Klatt (and other former mayors) also served on the Chamber of Commerce board of directors. Sheppard was President of Centennial Savings Bank (predecessor of the Durango branch of Vectra Bank). He and his wife Loretta moved to Durango in 1969 when he was 33. Klatt described him as a “funny guy, always had great jokes. Like me, [Klatt wrote, he] was very fiscally conservative, was very up-front and direct in his dealings with people.”

2001/02: Amos Cordova
Another Hispanic mayor, Cordova was a 1977 graduate of Durango High School. He served as Vice President of the Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad and later as a board member of the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad.

2002/03: John Gamble
A social worker and director of Volunteers of America of Southwest Colorado, Gamble traveled to Durango, Mexico, with a delegation in 2003 for the last meeting of the three Durango sister cities.

2003/04: Virginia Castro
The third Hispanic mayor of Durango, Castro was an accounts manager at Mercury Payment Systems. She moved to Durango in 1993 and was married to the late Clayton Todd Patton (an avid outdoorsman) from 2001 to 2005. In 2005, five months into her second term as a Council member, she stepped down to be with her injured sister.

2005/06: Dale Garland
A Durango High School social studies teacher, Garland subsequently was an ex-officio member of the Mayor’s Youth Advisory Commission that was formed in the fall of 2010.
2006/07: Sidny Zink
A CPA with Fredrick Zink and Associates, across from City Hall on East 2nd Avenue.

2007/08 and 2012/13: Doug Lyon
Dr. Lyon is a business management professor at Fort Lewis College, which also was his alma mater. His second term as mayor began during a time of financial adjustment for the City (due in part to the voters’ defeat of the LPEA electricity franchise) and Durango’s preparing to host the start of the USA Pro Challenge, bringing world-class bicyclists and spectators (though way below the promoter’s estimates) to the city on August 20, 2012.

2008/09: Renee Parsons
Ms. Parsons came to public notice as the president of the Friends of the Animas Valley grassroots organization that opposed the River Trails Ranch development. She frequently was the lone vote in a 4-1 vote by Council. In the year she was mayor, Council meetings (which typically start at 6:30 p.m. on a Tuesday evening) often lasted four or five hours.

2009/10: Leigh Meigs
An attorney, Leigh Meigs and her husband Steve lived and worked in Durango since 1986. Described as a progressive, she was elected to Council in 2007, part of a wave of anti-development sentiment that ruled that election. She resigned from Council in 2010 after taking a job in Cortez as District Court Magistrate for the 22nd Judicial District.

2010/11: Michael Rendon
Former coordinator of the Environmental Center at Fort Lewis College, Rendon was 30 when he (unsuccessfully, that time) ran for Council in 2003. He told the Durango Telegraph, “I bought a house here a year ago, and at that point, I made a commitment to Durango. Because of that, I have a vested interest in the future of this area.” He was the first male director of the Sexual Assault
Services Organization. One of the more significant acts of Rendon’s year as mayor was Council’s authorization and licensing of the sale of marijuana for medicinal purposes.

2011/12 and 2016/17: Christina Rinderle
A realtor, Rinderle (elected as Christina Thompson) was one of the youngest persons to have served as mayor. She moved to Durango in 1999 to work as botanist and researcher for Ecosystem Management International, and subsequently managed office building renovations and live/work project redevelopment at Crossroads Durango.

2013/14 and 2017/18: Dick White
Another mayor with a Ph.D. (his, in astronomy), Dick White moved to Durango from the East Coast in 2003 and became involved in causes of sustainability, renewable energy, and climate control, which factored into his focus as mayor. He was Mayor Pro Tem again for 2016/17.

2014/15 and 2018/19: Anita “Sweetie” Marbury
A retired school teacher in the Four Corners, Ms. Marbury attended meetings of City Council and City boards and commissions since 1987. When campaigning, she stated that her biggest issue was recycling. At the start of serving as Mayor Pro Tem again for 2017/18 she stated that her top issue was housing.

2015/16 and 2020/21: Dean Brookie
An architect and a self-described Democrat, Mr. Brookie has lived in Durango since 1980. Housing and visioning plans for north Main topped his list of priorities as mayor, but deciding the location for the upgraded sewage treatment plant and responding to the EPA’s Gold King mine spill disaster above Silverton were the most difficult issues of his first term.

2019/20: Melissa Youssef
The longtime founder and CEO of a Durango-based medical billing firm, Mrs. Youssef has been active on the boards of numerous local nonprofit boards. Her declared mission has been to ensure that citizens’ voices are heard, respected and represented, and to strive for a high quality of life for all who live in Durango.
# Mayors of Durango: Alphabetical list, A to Z

(*unless noted otherwise, the year of the term began and ended around early April)

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- Interesting Historical Facts about Durango, by Todd Ellison, 2013 (12 pages)
- Durango...Your Hometown: A primer for 3rd graders and up, by Todd Ellison (updated annually) (32 pages)
- Money-Saving Lessons from Durango Municipal Court Case Records, by Todd Ellison, 2011 (32 pages)
- Nine Ways the City of Durango Supports Bicycling, and Nine Durango Biking Laws, 2012 (12 pages)
- Introduction to Historical Minutes and Ordinances of the City of Durango, by Todd Ellison, 2009 (11 pages)
- Historical List of Officials of the City of Durango, Colorado, from 1881 to current (12 pages)
- Historical Chronology of City Councilors, Mayor, and Mayor Pro Tem, 1881 to current (15 pages)
- Two biographical walking tours of Greenmount Cemetery: Highlights tour, and Spanish Flu-era burials tour
- Durango’s Response to Infectious Diseases, 1881-1929, by Todd Ellison, 2020 (20 pages)
- A Brief Chronology of the City of Durango’s Airports, by Todd Ellison, 2020 (16 pages)
- Centennial Durango 1880-1980, written by Marjorie Wells, photos by John Hughes (19 pages)
- History of the City of Durango Vending Ordinance, 1982-1991 (5 pages)
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- History of the Durango Public Library, by Mary C. Ayres, 1947 (11 pages)
- History of City Parks as Reflected in City Council Minutes, 1888-1988 (47 pages)
- History of Hillcrest Golf Course, from Records and Past City Council Meetings, 1932-1981 (1 page)
- Durango's 1895 D&RGW Baldwin C-18 Locomotive No. 315 History and Newspaper Clippings (22 pages)
- Durango Temperature and Precipitation Summary Data, 1894-2001 (4 pages)

Also online, thousands of City of Durango primary source documents:

- City Ordinances (more than 3,100 of them, from 1881 to current).
- City Council Resolutions (more than 2,400 of them, from 1944 to current).
- Minutes of more than 11,000 meetings of City Council, City boards and commissions, from 1881 to current.
- Agendas of more than 6,000 meetings of City Council, City boards and commissions, from 1978 to current.
- Plans, reports and studies that were produced for the City, 1956-current (nearly 300).
The history of Durango is the history of the West in microcosm. The history of the West is the history of westward expansion, and thus of the New World.

History is the study of persons and the effects of the decisions they have made.

This is the first-ever chronological history of the mayors of Durango (95 of them so far, from 1881 to 2020). It introduces you to little-known facts about some of the people who made a lasting impact by serving as mayor. Its goal is to place each person’s service in a broader context.

Durango was one of the first cities in the US to switch to the City Manager-City Council form of government.