



2014

One Hundred Years of Stewardship The Beginning of the Council-Manager Plan in Pennsylvania



Edward A. Beck

By Martin C. McDaniel, Edgeworth Borough Manager

According to the late William M. Kelly, Mayor of Edgeworth, Pennsylvania, 1991-1997, in an article in the *Edgeworth Preservation Newsletter*, April 1994, the stage was set for the formation of Edgeworth Borough in the late 1800's. The burgeoning heavy industry of early Pittsburgh made that area less desirable as a place to live for those who could afford to commute by railway, creating the growth impetus for Edgeworth. Edgeworth having no industrial pollution, became a haven for managers and professionals. A reputation soon followed that Edgeworth was an "upscale" residential area.

In the Edgeworth section of Leet Township, horses, pigs and cows were no longer a convenience but a nuisance. Increasing population required that community standards be developed. Out of these needs arose the concept of Borough incorporation and an active effort commenced in 1902.

This culminated in the official founding of Edgeworth Borough on December 20, 1904 in the residence of James A. Huston. Edgeworth Council established its first headquarters in a room above McCullough's grocery store at 407 Chestnut Road (the building is now a beauty salon).

It was not until ten years later on February 2, 1914 that Edward A. Beck, a graduate of Purdue University, was appointed as the first Borough Manager. Edgeworth was the first municipality in Pennsylvania and 14th in the nation to adopt the new experimental form of government known as the "Council-Manager Plan."

Council outlined its plans as follows, "to bring the borough government under one operating head, thus replacing the cumbersome, unsatisfactory and expensive operation of municipal government through Council committees; and with a view to having the business of the borough conducted on the same general principles as a well-organized corporation."

The new manager was given the responsibility of assuming all the administrative functions of the Borough, exercising direct control over all departments and employees, and preparation of contracts subject to the approval of Council. In addition, Mr. Beck was to act as street commissioner, engineer and secretary. He was to oversee the finances and prepare an annual budget. "The Manager was to be responsible to Council, who in turn will be responsible for his acts, as well as their own, to the people of Edgeworth."

In the 1917 Town and Country edition of *The American City*, Mr. Beck authored an article "The Borough Manager Plan in Edgeworth, Pa." In it he outlined the progress that was made over the previous three years under this new system of local government.

- Approximately 3.25 miles of streets were newly constructed versus a total of only 1.5 miles in the ten years prior to 1914.

- Over 1.25 miles of previously improved streets were resurfaced "placing all the paved Borough streets in first class condition."

- 75 percent of the total street mileage was paved.

- 6 miles of concrete sidewalks were laid which was greater than the total constructed prior to 1914. The goal being to provide continuous sidewalks on at least one side of most streets.

- Over a mile of sewer lines was constructed.

- A new health code implementing sanitary collection and disposal of garbage was adopted.

- Attractive street and traffic signs were erected throughout the Borough.

- Gas street lights were discontinued and replaced by 2.5 miles of ornamental electric lights.

- The present borough building, designed by renowned architect Frederick Russell (Edgeworth's first burgess), was erected at a cost of \$18,000.

■ Improvements were made to organization structure and accounting practices resulting in increased efficiency and economy.

■ The tax rate prior to 1914 of 8.8 mills remained the same. The Borough was able to build up a safe cash balance for all periods of the year and at the same time did not incur any indebtedness for capital improvements.

In some ways Edgeworth's borough government has changed in the last 100 years but in other ways has remained the same. Of particular note is the assessed valuation of property in the borough. In 1914, the total value was \$4,100,000 - borough records indicate there was disagreement about the validity of the assessed values. After last year's county-wide re-assessment which set the value at \$355,000,000 - disagreement still persists! Over the years, the borough's population has remained constant. The borough is for the most part totally developed - existing houses are demolished to make room for new ones. The most recent version of the Edgeworth Elementary School (2006) replaced two prior school buildings built in 1905 and 1976 on that site.

We no longer have the elected position of burgess - the burgess was charged with enforcement of law and order in addition to passing on all legislation and other official acts. The burgess was replaced by the office of mayor in 1961. We no longer have citizens able to volunteer and serve as elected auditors but now retain certified public accountants. We no longer have residents who list their occupations as livery men, coachmen, blacksmiths, gardeners, tinkers, farmers and drovers. We no longer have residents whose occupations and business location allow them to be ready and available to respond at a moment's notice as volunteer fire fighters - we now have bankers, lawyers, doctors, brokers, architects, engineers, real estate agents, teachers and managers.

However, today there is still an important 1914 Edgeworth treasure in use. The Edgeworth Borough Building was completely renovated and modernized in 1986 but still maintains the original meeting room table of golden oak and matching chairs that were purchased in 1914 (Long gone are the 6 brass spittoons!).

The borough continues to operate under the council-manager form of government. Borough leaders were pioneers in this movement- there are now over 4,000 communities in the United States and more than twenty countries including Australia, New Zealand and Canada subscribing to this model of good government. We proudly celebrate 2014 as the 100th anniversary year of the International City Management Association.

Edward A. Beck served as borough manager for three and a half years. His annual salary was \$2,400. His resignation was accepted by council with the following resolution of "heartly appreciation for the high character of service faithfully rendered. Coming as a stranger into our borough, he brought marked professional skill and experience, coupled with tact, courtesy, and common sense and unfailing good humor... we feel a warm personal regard for our associate who has won by merit the friendship of each and every one of us, and he leaves us with the sincere best wishes for the largest measure of success and usefulness in the field of city management for which he is so specially fitted."

I have had the privilege of serving as manager of this fine community since 2000. In addition to Edward Beck, seven other men and women have held the position. Wilbur Cotton was appointed Borough Manager in 1918 followed by Robert Lloyd in 1920. Harry F. Burkholder served for 25 years from 1923-1948. James A. Bailey served from 1949-1953. Robert E. Lunn had the longest tenure (1953-1980). He was followed by Douglas C. Arndt (1980-1990) and Belynda D. Slaughaupt (1991-1999).

Mr. Beck believed that "the success of any form of manager system is dependent upon a Burgess and Council who will select a manager solely on his fitness for the office, will inaugurate a broad constructive policy and firmly support the manager in carrying it out."

It is my hope that future elected officials and managers will remain as diligent stewards in supporting and preserving the integrity of the council-manager form of government as past and present officials. By their actions, will continue to show dedication to the concepts of effective and professional management of local government.
