

# **The Origin of the City Manager Plan in Staunton, Virginia**

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### **March 1, 1954**

The year 1953 marked the 45th anniversary of the origin of the city manager plan of government in Staunton, Virginia. Since its inception in 1908, much has been written about the council-manager plan of government, which is the new name replacing the older, but more popularly accepted term, city manager plan. The mechanics and development of the plan have been well documented, and tons of promotional literature extolling the virtues of the plan have been circulated. My long years of association with the Staunton city government, however, have impressed me with the need for a publication which would deal solely with the circumstances surrounding the origin of the city manager plan in my native city.

Through the years, we in Staunton have received uncounted requests for information on the origin of the plan from students, teachers, schools, cities, and towns. In order to answer these requests, I had compiled a great deal of material on the subject, both from

official city records and from persons who were intimately connected with initiating the new form of government. The late John Crosby, who is generally credited with having been the father of the city manager plan, and Samuel D. Holsinger, our second city manager, were invaluable sources of information through the years.

In 1952, I secured the services of the Bureau of Public Administration of the University of Virginia to prepare a manuscript which would present all of the pertinent information concerning the origin of the city manager plan in Staunton. This publication is the result, and I hope, a successful result, of my collaboration with the Bureau of Public Administration. It is my hope that this information will be helpful both to students of government and to those cities, towns, and counties which today are making a fight to achieve responsible local government.

I wish to make it clear that Staunton is nationally recognized as the first city to adopt and put into operation the city manager form of municipal government. Staunton has never accepted, therefore, the claim of Mr. Richard S. Childs that Sumter, South Carolina, should enjoy that distinction. Richard S. Childs had added the features of a unicameral council and the short ballot to the city manager plan, as adopted in Staunton in 1908. The latter form of the plan was eventually adopted by Sumter in 1912. However, it may be noted that Alexander Graham and the Wright brothers are still credited with the invention of the telephone and airplane respectively, although both have been wonderfully developed far beyond the original idea.

I should like to thank Mr. Seth Burnley, city manager of Staunton, for making all of the public records available to the Bureau of Public Administration and also express gratitude to my old friend, Mr. Samuel D. Holsinger, for his informal advice and knowledge of the early days of the city manager plan. Appreciation is also due the Staunton Leader Papers for the use of their newspaper files

covering the events leading up to the installation of, and the first years of operation under, the then new form of government.

Every story should have a moral, and I believe the Staunton story is no exception. Remove the name Staunton, and the dates from this story, and the struggle for responsible government herein narrated could well be descriptive of hundreds of other cities and towns. The fight for responsible government is timeless and should be a continuing fight even after a responsive form of municipal organization has been adopted. It is not the city manager plan of government that is America's great contribution to municipal administration, but rather it is the successful utilization of the plan by the citizens of approximately 1,150 communities, both large and small, in this country and elsewhere.

[Signature]

William A. Grubert

Mayor, City of Staunton

### **The Staunton Story**

A stranger who happened to be in Staunton, Virginia, in early April of 1908 and chanced to read the "Personals" column of the daily newspaper might have had some cause for wonderment when he came upon the following note:

Personals . . . Mr. C. E. Ashburner and wife, of Richmond, are registered at the Virginia Hotel. Mr. Ashburner is the

newly elected *city manager* for Staunton. . . .

Our hypothetical stranger might have reasoned that he had heard of mayors, aldermen, councilmen, and superintendents of departments, but “city manager” was something new. On inquiry of the local residents he might have been told that the City Council of Staunton some weeks earlier had provided for the creation of the position of “general manager” but that the newspaper and the citizenry had quickly settled on the title of city manager as more descriptive of the position. If, finally, our stranger had asked what other cities had city managers, the only possible answer would have been none.

Forty-five years later it is clear to all that the arrival of Mr. Ashburner in Staunton as the first city manager marked the beginning of a movement for the reorganization of municipal government in the United States that has not yet run its course. As is true of all kinds of inventions, however, whether governmental or otherwise, the Staunton contribution to responsible municipal government was not achieved overnight. The creation of the position of city manager required almost two years. It is this part of the Staunton Story—the origin and early years of the city manager plan—that will be told here.

### **Staunton’s Government Before 1906**

Staunton, located in the heart of the historic Shenandoah Valley, was first settled in 1732. The hamlet was named in honor of Lady Staunton, the wife of Sir William Gooch who ruled as lieutenant governor of Virginia from 1727 to 1749. The General Assembly, feeling that the growth of towns on the frontier would enable the populace "to defend themselves on any sudden incursions of an

enemy," and because "many families settled there," established Staunton as a town in 1761.<sup>2</sup> Staunton was formally incorporated as a town in 1801 and a mayor, recorder, four aldermen, and six common-councilmen constituted its governing body.<sup>3</sup> The mayor, recorder, and aldermen served as justices of the peace and the aldermen and common-council sat together as a unicameral council.

The growth of Staunton was slow, as the population in 1850 was only 2,500. The use of Staunton, in the War Between the States, as the chief base of supplies for the Army of Northern Virginia and as the hub of Stonewall Jackson's famous Valley campaign, stimulated growth and the population had doubled by 1870. Staunton was incorporated as a city in 1871.<sup>4</sup> Its population increased slowly until 1905, when, as a result of annexation, the number of inhabitants reached 11,336. The population then remained fairly stable until the decade prior to 1950 when it grew from 13,337 to 19,927.

### **Environment of Local Government in 1906**

Staunton, in 1906, was a conservative, prosperous city that maintained itself as a trading center for the surrounding agricultural region. Its most distinguished son, Woodrow Wilson, was serving as president of Princeton University. The citizens comprised a homogenous population. Many, like Wilson, descendents of the Scotch-Irish from Pennsylvania and others were of English origin from Tidewater Virginia. Municipal government was nonpartisan and the men who were successful in the business and commercial life of the city were regarded as the natural choices to manage the city's government.

Conversely, membership on the council was rewarded by a feeling of pride in serving the community and more practicably by being in a position to take part in determining the course of municipal affairs that often had a direct effect on the business interests in

the city.

The administration of the city government was vested by the charter of 1894, in a mayor and a unicameral council of twelve members.<sup>5</sup> As city-county separation is practiced in Virginia, the city was independent of Augusta County and all local government services were provided by the city. The primary responsibility for administering the various municipal activities was vested in council committees. The main function of the mayor, who possessed the veto power, was to review the ordinances as passed by the council for conformance to the laws of the State. Thus, Staunton, like many American cities at that time, was governed through a system of committee administration.

These committees, fifteen in number, had jurisdiction over the following subjects:

auditing

finance

fire

health

lights

ordinances

police

printing

public buildings

relief of poor

retrenchment

safety

schools

streets

water

Conscientious and civic-minded as many of the councilmen were, they did not have the time to administer the city's affairs, and the results of committee control could only be poor operation and ultimate loss of control over municipal activities.

Staunton was pictured as a conservative city that ran to church spires and schools rather than to smoke-stacks and industries. The city, geographically, was divided into three distinct areas. The business district, some four square blocks, lay on the floor of a valley surrounded by long, high hills. The second area, on the slopes, was the main residential district and included small stores, schools, and churches. The third area, about a mile from the business district and atop the hills, consisted of scattered residences and comprised the suburbs of the city proper. The wretched condition of the city streets connecting these three areas was to play an important part in the development of the city manager plan.



## **Mud, the Cornerstone of the City Manager Plan**

Under its council committee system of government, Staunton had managed to pave and maintain the streets in the small business district. The streets in the main residential area on the hillsides had at one time been roughly paved with crushed stone, but lack of maintenance had reduced them to little more than mud roads. The third area, located on the hilltops, had no streets at all. The condition of the best residential streets, which ran up the hills from the business section, has been graphically portrayed by Henry Oyen:<sup>7</sup>

Each of these streets had a single street car track, on ties only, at one side. The rest was plain mud. In bad weather, wagons went hub deep in the mire, and it was a feat to make a crossing on foot. The sidewalks at one time had been cindered; but that was long ago and they had given up the ghost of respectability and had sunk back into the mire in company with the streets . . . . As for side streets, picture a red clay country road with a gully washed out in the middle and you may know what they were like.

Street work was performed under the direction of a superintendent of streets who in turn reported to the council's street committee. Money was available, and appropriated, for street construction and maintenance, but no one knew how the money was spent as no records were kept. The appropriations were dissipated in high contract and material costs and inferior work. There was never any suspicion of collusion or graft unless one utilizes the term of "honest graft." One example of honest graft common to the

times was the practice of contractors' bidding a different price for city work than they would bid for a comparable task for private business.

Needless to say, the city price was much higher than the business price. Under this system, the street department was paving about one block a year while the other streets were reverting to mud. Popular concern over the street situation was indicated by the large number of petitions that were submitted to the council requesting street improvements. At one council meeting, for example, the street committee received and reported on a total of 18 petitions!<sup>8</sup>

What was true of the streets was also true of the city's finances. Although the city possessed an annual income of approximately \$160,000, it was forced to borrow money each year to meet its operating deficits.<sup>9</sup> By 1905, Staunton was a city that was sliding down its muddy streets into a morass of indebtedness. The Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals in that year upheld a suit against the city, in which a taxpayer objected to the issuance of street improvement bonds totaling \$500. The indebtedness of the city at that time amounted to \$578,000 and was above the debt limit imposed upon municipalities by the state constitution. Attention had been focused on the streets because the inefficiency of the street operation was plain for all to see. Other municipal activities, performed with the same lack of planning and supervision, further shrunk the value of the taxpayers' dollars. Poor as the municipal management had been, it was yet to worsen before it improved.

### **Transition to Bicameral Council**

A special census conducted in 1905, following Staunton's annexation of additional territory from Augusta County in that year,

revealed that the city had attained a population of 11,336.<sup>10</sup> Having passed the 10,000 population mark, Staunton was forced to reorganize its government, as the constitution and general laws of Virginia at that time required a bicameral council consisting of a board of aldermen and a common council in all such cities. Had Staunton remained a city under 10,000 population, it could have retained its unicameral council.<sup>11</sup> The City Council, which was required to fix the number of members in each branch of the new council and apportion them equitably among the wards, prescribed eight members for the Board of Aldermen and fourteen for the Common Council. The governing body, besides being split into two branches, was thus increased from twelve to twenty-two members.

A special election for members of the new City Council was held on June 12, 1906, and the new government was installed on June 18. The results of the first meeting of the Common Council and Board of Aldermen indicated the lack of harm that was to prevail between the two bodies, as the Board of Aldermen adjourned without waiting to meet with the Common Council to determine the composition of the various committees.<sup>12</sup> The failure to appoint the committees that administered municipal functions left the various city departments drifting without leadership. This prolonged dispute over the composition and chairmanships of the committees lasted through the summer months, during which time each body of the City Council appointed its own committees.

The small city thus found itself in the unenviable position of having its municipal activities under the control of thirty committees, each body having appointed fifteen. Moreover, because of the multiplicity of committees and the total lack of harmony between the two bodies, there actually little or no control exercised over municipal function. Finally, early in September, the dispute was resolved by an agreement under the terms of which each body placed three members on each of the fifteen committees. Nine of

the chairmanships were awarded to the Common Council and six to the Board of Aldermen.<sup>13</sup>

Although the reduction in the number of committees was an improvement over the situation that had existed during the summer of 1906, it soon became apparent that the new bicameral system was unwieldy and lacked coordination and centralization of authority. What the new system meant in everyday practice can be illustrated by the procedure which faced a citizen who desired a street light on his block. First, he would have to make his request to the members of the light committee. Such requests were usually in the form of petitions bearing enough signatures to assure attention. If the light committee approved the request, the chairman would then attempt to secure the approval of his branch of the council and should this be successful, it was then necessary for the proposal to be passed on favorably by the other branch. The chairman of light committee would then request the chairman of the state committee to have a hole dug for installing the street light.

Finally, in order to pay for the materials, the light committee, finance committee, auditing committee, Common Council, and Board of Aldermen had to approve the expenditure.<sup>14</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that some people began to think about how to reduce or eliminate this complexity in Staunton's government.

### **Emergence of Manager Idea**

The seriousness of the street situation was such that, early in July 1906, a member of the Common Council, Hugh C. Braxton, introduced a resolution that called on the street committees of the Common Council and the Board of Aldermen to investigate the advisability of hiring an engineer to head the street department.<sup>15</sup> When the report called for by the resolution was received by the

Common Council on August 7, 1906, however, it was found that the committees had looked beyond the needs of the street department to those of the whole city government. The recommendation of the committees called for the creation of the position of “Municipal Director” and the transfer to that official of the administrative duties then exercised by the council committees. It is in this report that there is to be found the first statement of the role of a city manager:<sup>16</sup>

. . . Regarding Staunton simply as a business corporation . . . it is evident that the same principles should be applied as would be applied in the case of any ordinary business concern. . . . Therefore, your committees recommend that all administrative work of the city be placed in the hands of some competent salaried official, to be employed by the city, who shall undertake the management of streets, water, fire department and electric lights, insofar as the work . . . has been done under the supervision of the various committees. The duties of such an employee would be to carry out all work that the Council or its Committees directed to be done . . . . In short, such an employee would have the duties generally imposed upon the general manager of a business corporation, and in him would combine the duties in other cities imposed upon paid heads of departments; he would be the manager or superintendent of the city’s work . . . . He should be directly responsible to the Council and under its immediate control . . . .

The report was adopted by the Common Council. When the report was referred to the Board of Aldermen, however, that body adopted an amendment that eliminated all references to the municipal director and proposed only the creation of the position of

superintendent of streets.<sup>17</sup> No further action was taken until later that year.

### **The Contributions of Crosby, Sydnor, and Braxton**

Three men—John Crosby, W. O. Sydnor, and Hugh C. Braxton—deserve major credit for initiating the manager movement. John Crosby, a member of the Common Council, is generally regarded as the father of the city manager plan. He had served as a county clerk in Augusta County for 15 years and had evidently taken a broader view of his duties than most of his modern day successors. As Crosby tells the story in later years:<sup>18</sup>

. . . . I was Clerk of the Board of Supervisors, which is the governing body of the county. As I kept the records and attended to all the business under the jurisdiction of the board, reporting directly to them in carrying out its instructions for the government of the county, I was in a sense the General Manager or Executive Officer for Augusta County.

. . . . I could see no reason why the business affairs of the City should not be managed in the same manner as that of the county. If the affairs of Augusta County were operated with a governing board of six members and an executive secretary, why was it necessary to have a bicameral council of 22 members and 12 standing committees to operate the affairs of the city of Staunton?

. . . . My idea was to simplify the governmental machinery and replace the committees with a general manager appointed by the council and working under the council, to attend to all the businesses of the city, reporting to the council. In

carrying this idea out, I offered a resolution that was presented to the council for the establishment of the office of City Manager, who would have charge of all the executive work of the city, except that under the jurisdiction of the mayor. This resolution, for some reason, was never recorded . . . .

The resolution mentioned above by John Crosby was referred to the committee on finance, where it was pigeon-holed, and no committee report was forthcoming. The *Staunton Daily Leader* gave credit to John Crosby for initiating the movement to create the office of manager. As the paper stated at the time:<sup>19</sup>

. . . . Mr. Crosby was at considerable pains to get correct data and information from cities employing directors or boards of control, and the *Leader* gave publicity to the subject from time to time. After an exhaustive search, Mr. Crosby prepared a resolution that was to have been presented to the council, but in the meantime a paper which carried out his ideas pretty thoroughly, without quite radical changes, was offered by Mr. Braxton and this was adopted, Mr. Crosby concurring . . . .

It seems evident that Crosby's idea of a manager was based upon his previous governmental service as the clerk of a county board of supervisors. Since Staunton, by state law, was required to have a bicameral council it could not adopt the commission type of government. However, Crosby felt the city should employ one commissioner, or manager, who would administer the city's affairs in much the same manner as he had served as the unofficial executive officer in the county. Strange as it now seems, the city manager

movement in Staunton owed much to Crosby's experience in county government.

W. O. Sydnor, an alderman, served on the board's street committee and was the author of the street committees' report. Sydnor, the local agent for the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, was interested in applying business management methods as the corrective for Staunton's mismanagement. His inspiration came from observing the administrative efficiency of the railroad as contrasted with the utter lack of administrative responsibility in the city government.<sup>20</sup> He was the first to draw a parallel between the director of a business corporation and a municipal director—or city manager. The reasoning employed by Sydnor in the report recommending a municipal director to act for the city in the same manner as a general manager for a business corporation is substantially the same type of reasoning as is used today by the supporters of the city manager plan.

Hugh C. Braxton, a member of the common council and of that body's street committee, was a wholesale broker. Braxton was deeply interested in solving the street problem and was soon appointed chairman of the street committee. His enthusiasm for the manager plan arose from the practical solution it offered to the street dilemma. Braxton was a practical man who, when faced with a difficult problem, embraced the manager plan as the most practical solution.

### **Action and Reaction**

The initial report of the street committees admirably stated the position of those members of the City Council who favored municipal reform. Strong opposition was voiced, however, by two influential members of the council. One, an alderman and chairman of the finance committee, and the other, a member of the Common Council, were supported in their opposition by practically all of the



officers and employees of the city.<sup>21</sup> The people of the city were generally favorable to the installation of a manager for many reasons.<sup>22</sup>

. . . . The total lack of system in the old aldermanic form of government, the discouraging absence of information available for the property owners and taxpayers as to what they were paying for what they got, how much the contract work, supplies, and equipment for public use were costing, as well as the unbusiness-like, time-consuming, and aggravating conditions to which the citizens were subject when they had business with the city, crystallized public sentiment for a change of methods in the management of the municipal affairs. The delays and other annoyances growing out of a system based upon 'everybody's duty and nobody's performance' had been making converts for years to plans for an overthrow of this ineffective and unsatisfactory plan of city government. Businessmen foresaw not only the economy, but many indirect benefits from the change . . . .

The proponents of the manager plan, in the months ahead, could always count on a favorable vote in the Common Council, but it was to be seventeen months before the Board of Aldermen permitted Staunton to become a footnote in the pages of history. In the hectic months ahead, proposals from the Common Council were met with counter proposals from the Board of Aldermen. In October 1906, Hugh Braxton submitted a paper to the City Council that expressed his disillusionment over committee administration in general and the work, or lack of work, performed by the street committee in particular.

The paper reviewed the non-performance of the street committee since its organization in July and advanced three suggestions for improving the situation. Braxton urged, first, that the two street committees work together in harmony now that they had been united. Second, he proposed that all street construction and maintenance be suspended until a definite work plan could be adopted. As a reflection of his probable belief that the creation of the office of municipal director had been stymied by aldermanic action, he recommended:<sup>23</sup>

3. That a competent and expert commissioner be employed as soon as possible to take charge of the street work of the city and to perform such other duties as may be properly imposed upon him . . . ."

The office of commissioner, as envisioned by Braxton, would at first be responsible only for street construction and maintenance, but the door was left open so that the commissioner could ". . . perform such other duties as may be properly imposed upon him . . . ." Braxton and his colleagues on the Common Council were apparently willing to accept a half-a-loaf of reorganization initially as long as there was a possibility that the commissioner could later be given additional managerial duties. But the Board of Aldermen was not yet persuaded. The following month, in December 1906, the Board resolved that council committees were adequate to administer all of the city's affairs with the possible exception of streets.<sup>24</sup>

The Board then passed two ordinances. One of these would have created the office of city engineer and superintendent of streets. The second ordinance, which was the board's version of the pending common council's municipal director ordinance, would

have established the office of auditor and imposed on that official the duties of clerk of council, purchasing, and bookkeeping.<sup>25</sup>

These two ordinances reached the Common Council on January 1, 1907, and on the motion of Mr. Braxton were referred to the committee on ordinances for consideration in relation to the municipal director ordinance.<sup>26</sup> The Common Council's committee on ordinances, which included John Crosby as one of its three members, submitted a report on February 5 that recommended the creation of an executive department headed by a municipal director.<sup>27</sup>

In the meantime, the *Daily Leader* continued to support the reorganization movement, although the editors were not aware that a new form of municipal government was emerging. The newspaper favored the commission form of government and believed that the manager and commission plans were similar. In expressing its support of the manager plan, it revealed that it did not quite grasp the difference between the two plans when it observed that, “. . . A municipal director is a man who has charge of and runs the business of a city. Some cities have three and some five. Staunton has 22, and they all try to run it a different way.”<sup>28</sup>

A special meeting of the City Council was called for February 14, 1907, to discuss the municipal director ordinance. The Common Council, on that date, adopted the municipal director ordinance by a vote of seven to three.<sup>29</sup> The ordinance provided for an executive department under a municipal director who would be appointed by the city council for a two-year term. As executive officer of the city he was to be its chief finance officer, make all contracts, purchase supplies, maintain and issue financial reports, and generally supervise the administrative affairs of the city. The ordinance further empowered the municipal director, on and after July 1, 1907, to appoint several of the department heads, subject to the approval of the City Council.

The board of aldermen, on the same day, appointed a committee of three members to meet with a similar group from the

Common Council to prepare a new ordinance concerning the office of municipal director.<sup>30</sup> The Common Council named a corresponding committee in March but again, no decision was forthcoming.<sup>31</sup>

After some delay, the Board of Aldermen, on June 13, 1907, proposed that a joint committee be established composed of two aldermen and two councilmen to study the Galveston-Houston and the Norfolk plans of government.<sup>32</sup> One of the two aldermen selected for this joint committee—Mr. H. L. Lang—favored the commission form of government. The Common Council favored the proposal and appointed John Crosby and Hugh Braxton as its representatives on the joint committee.<sup>33</sup> John Crosby, in recognition of his contribution in initiating the manager movement, was named the chairman of the group.

It is not known whether the proposal for a joint committee was another delaying measure by the alderman or whether it reflected a genuine interest in exploring alternative plans of city government. In any event, there were those who despaired of the possibility of change. The *Staunton Daily Leader* had been printing many feature stories concerning the commission form of government and, as the months passed, was becoming exasperated with the long gestation period of the reorganization movement. It was the editor's opinion that ". . . when old Gabriel blows his final trumpet, some of Staunton's councilmen will still be lingering on this side of the edges of time and calling on him to wait a minute."<sup>34</sup>

**COUNCILMEN.**

Stamton, Va  
February 13/04

Gentlemen:

You are hereby notified that a Special meeting of the City Council is called for 7 o'clock Thursday evening, Feb'y 14, 1904, to consider an Ordinance creating a Municipal Director for the City of Stamton

By order of the President  
Oletha Argenbright, Clerk

**Announcing the first City Council meeting ever scheduled to discuss the creation of the position of city manager.**

### **Days of Decision**

The joint committee, approximately six months after its appointment, issued its report on January 13, 1908. In this report, the joint committee expressed enthusiasm for the commission form of government but noted that, because of the constitutional requirement for bicameral councils in cities over 10,000 population, it was impossible to adopt the plan in Virginia. The committee stated, however,

that the commission plan could be modified so that instead of having a board of commissioners elected by the people, a general manager responsible for municipal administration could be elected by the City Council. The differences between a commission and a manager type of government were listed as:<sup>35</sup>

. . . . (1) That the officer is appointed by the Council instead of being elected by the people. (2) That the executive and administrative work of the city would be in the hands of one instead of five men. (3) That the executive and legislative functions would be entirely separated, not only as respects the capacity in which they are discharged but also as respects the persons by whom they are discharged . . . .

There is a prevalent but mistaken belief, because of this report, that the City Council was forced to adopt the city manager plan as a modification of the commission form of government. The reorganization forces had, however, from the very first favored the manager plan. The members of the board of alderman who had suggested that a study be made of other types of government had one of two motives in mind. A few, like Mr. Lang, were genuinely interested in adopting the commission form as a cure for Staunton's governmental ills; others selected the study device as another delaying tactic. But the wording of the report indicates that those aldermen who shared Mr. Lang's views were, because of the constitutional restrictions, won over to the manager idea. In essence, therefore, the supporters of the manager plan paid written tribute to the commission form of government and emerged victorious with the manager plan, which they had always wanted.

The joint committee presented an ordinance to carry out its recommendations to create the position of general manager. The Common Council passed the ordinance on the same day it was presented by a vote of seven to two.<sup>36</sup> The Board of Aldermen approved the same ordinance on January 16, 1908, by a vote of five to one.<sup>37</sup> The ordinance contained five brief sections:<sup>38</sup>

Be it ordained by Council of the City of Staunton, Virginia.

1. That there be appointed by the two branches of the Council in joint session as soon as possible after the adoption of this resolution, and thereafter annually at the regular election of city officers in July of each year an officer to be known and designated as “General Manager.”

2. The General Manager (except in the case of the first appointment under this resolution, which shall be until the next regular election of city officers in July, 1908) shall hold office for the term of one year and until his successor is duly appointed and qualifies, unless sooner removed by the Council at its pleasure.

3. The General Manager shall be paid an annual salary of . . . . and he shall have the right to employ one clerk at a salary of . . . . per annum to be paid by the city—the amounts to be hereafter fixed by the Council.

4. The General Manager shall devote his entire time to the duties of his office, and shall have entire charge and control of all the executive work of the city in its various departments, and have entire charge and control of the heads of departments and employees of the city. He shall make all contracts for labor and supplies and in general perform all of the administrative and executive work now performed by the several standing committees of the Council, except the finance, ordinance, school, and

auditing committees. The General Manager shall discharge such other duties as may from time to time be required of him by the Council,

5. The General Manager, before entering upon the duties of his office shall execute a bond before the Clerk of the Council in the penalty of \$5,000.00, with good and sufficient surety, conditioned for the faithful performance of the duties of his office.

After many months of study and discussion, the efforts of those who had pressed for a fundamental reorganization of the city's government were crowned with success. Staunton was to have a "General Manager" to take over from the council committees the direction of the city's administrative affairs. But while the official title of General Manager was to be retained for many years, from the beginning the more descriptive title of "City Manager" was used by Stauntonians to refer to the office. The *Staunton Daily Leader*, which was the first to employ the title of City Manager, observed on the eve of the passage of the manager ordinance:<sup>29</sup>

If Staunton gets the kind of man she wants to fill the new office of "City Manager," she will go four better the "Commission of Five" cities and should reap the same beneficent results.

Thus was added to the lexicon of municipal government a new, and at the same time unofficial, title and for a very practical reason. General managers there were in private business but this was a governmental general manager. To avoid confusion, therefore,



everyone in Staunton quickly settled on the use of “city manager” in the language of the day.

### **The First City Manager**

The City Council, on April 2, 1908, elected Charles E. Ashburner of Richmond as the first general manager of Staunton.<sup>40</sup> There had been many applicants for the position, the majority being local men. The City Council deserves credit for conscientiously seeking, and finally selecting, the best qualified applicant and establishing the precedent of selecting an out-of-town man for the job. The inauguration of the new form of government was welcomed in the following editorial:<sup>41</sup>

With the election of a city manager, Staunton passes into a new era. It is hoped and believed that this move is a strong one in the right direction. The eyes of the whole State will be centered upon the administration in Staunton, and the hearty cooperation of every branch and department of the city government and the individual citizens, should be brought to bear with the efforts of the manager, to make the new office the success it promises to be under such a plan.

The Council’s selection of the new manager augured well for the success of the new form of government. Charles Ashburner, the son of a British army officer, was born in Bombay, India, in 1870. He was educated in England, France, and Germany, and received his engineering degree from the University of Heidelberg. After arriving in the United States, he had wide engineering experience in diversified positions in Virginia.<sup>42</sup>

Ashburner was no stranger to Staunton, as he had been the maintenance engineer for the Staunton division of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad several years before. At that time, the Council was receiving bids to repair a washout that had resulted from a leaky damn. The lowest bid from local contractors to repair the damage was \$4,000 and some of the councilmen, particularly W. O. Sydnor, considered the bid too high. Sydnor, the railroad's local agent, consulted with Ashburner who advised him that the job could be done for \$737. The Council took his advice and the repairs were actually accomplished for \$725.<sup>43</sup>

The first city manager was an aggressive, capable person who was essentially a builder and a promoter. Leonard D. White has painted a vivid description of Ashburner in the following words:<sup>44</sup>

The original, and in many ways the indelible, impression of Ashburner is that of an inexhaustible human dynamo, forever driving ahead with constant acceleration, never content with the achievements of the past, but with full realization burning up the ultimate treasurer of reserve power in the relentless pursuit of the immediate objective . . . .

He is, of course, nervously high-strung. He talks in staccato explosions. He pounds his desk at the least provocation. In conversation, he shoots straight at the mark. He interrupts a question with his answer as soon as he grasps the point. He makes up his mind with an almost disconcerting abruptness. He has no patience with views contrary to his own, and often condemns them with unnecessary violence. He is irritable and sometimes arbitrary.

In spite of these qualities, not infrequently disturbing to inquiring citizens who pass by his desk, Ashburner possesses a rare winsomeness which unexpectedly comes smiling through the tempestuous vigor of his characteristic attitudes . . . .

Surcharged with energy as he is, Ashburner never creates an impression other than that of complete sincerity. His loyalty to his city, to his profession, and to his own high standards of personal conduct is carried to the last degree . . . .

This picture of Ashburner, as a man of action and impatient of detail, is confirmed by Samuel D. Holsinger who served as Ashburner's clerk and later succeeded him as general manager in 1911.<sup>45</sup> While Ashburner concerned himself with the primary task of building streets, bridges, and sewers, he left the office work and the details of administrative management to his clerk who actually served as his administrative assistant.

Mr. Ashburner remained in Staunton for three years, from 1908 to 1911, and went on to serve as city manager of Springfield, Ohio; Norfolk, Virginia; and Stockton, California. The value of his services is indicated from the growth of his salary from \$2,500 while at Staunton to the \$20,000 annual salary which he received at Stockton. Ashburner was chosen as the first president of the City Managers' Association in 1914.<sup>46</sup> This honor probably stemmed from a recognition of his services as the first city manager. Staunton was indeed fortunate to have selected, both as its first city manager, and as the first to represent a new profession, a man whose educational background, experience, and character have seldom been surpassed by later managers.

### **Proof of the Pudding**

Staunton had elected a manager “. . . to attend to the business of the city and produce dividends for the taxpayer by keeping his taxes down to the minimum rate and giving him value received for every dollar he pays into the municipal treasury. The immediate problem

confronting the new manager was that of reclaiming the city streets from the mud. Ashburner was a builder, and he tackled a job with enthusiasm. The Council had, in 1905, passed a resolution authorizing a small stretch of sidewalk on one of the main streets but money was never available to do the job. Ashburner found the resolution among the Council papers on his arrival and called for bids. The minimum bid submitted by local contractors was \$2.25 per square yard, or a total of \$486. Ashburner immediately decided that the city should go into the paving business, and the sidewalk was laid for a cost of 96 cents per square yard, or a total of only \$209.28.<sup>48</sup>

No streets had been paved for years under the old system of committee administration, but during the first three years of operation under a manager, 28,730 feet of macadam and asphalt streets were laid, in addition to 14,084 feet of granolithic sidewalk and 4,925 feet of granolithic curbing. All of this work was paid for from current revenues. Other city activities were also scrutinized, and savings were accomplished all along the line. In the single item of coal alone, it was found possible to cut coal consumption one thousand tons a year by using better firing methods. As the average price of coal was then \$2.80 per ton, the city realized a savings of \$2,800 per year, which more than equaled the manager's salary. The sewage disposal system of the city had long been woefully inadequate for its population and many streets had no sewers. In three years of operation under the new form of government, the sewer system was extended by 14,201 feet and 15,149 additional feet of water mains were laid. This work was all performed without incurring any new debt.

Ashburner was responsible for making all purchases for the city and he gave as much attention to the buying of small items as he did the city's coal contract. Shortly after taking office, the City Council requested him to devise a street numbering system.

Ashburner submitted his street numbering plan to the Council and went on to comment on the street numbers selected by the Council:<sup>50</sup>

. . . . The street number, selected unofficially by your body, cost us 40c each. I submit herewith a better sign that would cost us only 22c and respectfully recommend its adoption. As you will note, the enamel on the first sign is easily removed with a knife blade whilst it is not possible to make an impression on the cheaper sign. Awaiting your commands,

I remain very truly yours,

Chas. E. Ashburner, General Manager

The City Council was evidently impressed, for approval was given to purchase the signs recommended by the manager. A few months later, in August 1908, there was still some controversy concerning the purchase of supplies for the fire department. Both bodies of the Council immediately backed the manager in the following resolution:<sup>51</sup>

Whereas some question has arisen with reference to the proper authority for the purchase of supplies for the Fire Department:

Resolved: That hereafter all purchases of supplies for the Fire Department be made only through the General Manager's office as in cases of other purchases for the city.

Ashburner located his office on the second floor of an office building in the center of the business district to make it easily accessible to the public. One of his first acts was to place a complaint box at the foot of the stairs for the convenience of the public. The complaints thus gathered were sent to the pertinent city department and action reports on the complaints were returned to the manager's office. The manager was officially recognized as a community leader in 1911 when he was directed to perform additional duties as executive secretary of the local chamber of commerce. In this capacity, he was to aid and assist the local chamber in advertising the city and advancing the community.<sup>52</sup> This merely constituted official recognition of Ashburner's status in the community, as he was soon regarded as the personification of city government by the people. When a girl was lost in the surrounding mountain country, it was "City Manager C. E. Ashburner [who] at once took charge of the search, and turning in a fire alarm, soon gathered together a number of posses" and returned the girl to her home.<sup>53</sup>

The vigour with which Ashburner tackled his job early won the plaudits of the community. The *Staunton Daily Leader*, after three and a half months of manager government, recounted the street improvements, bridge construction, water supply extensions, etc., and stated:<sup>54</sup>

Other things too numerous to be here specified have been accomplished in the last few months and a system and order have been shown that was never dreamed of before the office of city manager was created. Those who originally opposed the idea must certainly have been converted by this time, or their eyes are closed to the progress and system inaugurated under Mr.

Ashburner as manager for the city.

The spirit of reform carried over from the installation of the manager plan resulted in the passage of an ordinance on May 5, 1908, which prohibited city employees from attempting to influence municipal elections.<sup>55</sup> This perhaps was the first foreshadowing of the nonpartisan feature that later became accepted as part of the city manager plan. An ordinance giving the manager power to appoint and remove city employees was passed by the City Council but was vetoed by the mayor as being contrary to the state law which specifically vested such power in the committees.”

Mr. Ashburner remained as manager in Staunton until July 1911. He had earlier submitted his resignation in April 1911, due to ill health, but hearing of charges reflecting upon his administration of the office, had withdrawn it so that charges could be filed against his official conduct. There had been some friction between the manager and the superintendent of streets which was seized upon by those opposed to the manager plan. No charges were brought against the manager and when he resigned at the expiration of his term on the following July 1, the City Council thanked him for the “unfaltering effort and ability” with which he had performed his duties and extended its good wishes for his future success.<sup>57</sup>

The success of the manager plan in Staunton was due to the continued support of the councilmen and aldermen who had sponsored the plan; the excellent selection of Charles Ashburner as the city’s first manager; and the resulting economy and efficiency in municipal operations.

## **The Staunton Contribution**

The council-manager plan, as it later developed, has three distinguishing features: the integration of administrative authority in an executive appointed by and responsible to the council, the consolidation of powers in a unicameral council, and the short ballot.

Staunton's contribution, the basis of the plan, was the idea of a manager who was given sole authority to carry out the city's policies as determined by the council.

It is interesting to note that the concept of a city manager has not changed materially since Staunton made the historic break from the traditional practice of committee administration. No curb was placed upon the area from which the manager could be chosen. The manager was to serve at the discretion of the council and his services could be terminated at any time. He was the chief executive officer of the city and exercised full authority over the city's employees. Finally, the manager was responsible solely to the council and subject only to that body's authority.

There is not much doubt that the present day council-manager form of government would have evolved without the initiation of the city manager plan in Staunton. However, the emergence of the professional municipal executive in Staunton, and the publicity afforded the successful operation of the city's manager plan in Staunton by magazines and newspapers throughout the country, proved the workability of the plan to the cities and towns which later adopted the plan. Harry Toulmin, Jr., an early student of the city manager form of government, has succinctly stated the Staunton contribution:<sup>58</sup>

The city manager idea has been a distinct improvement and success in Staunton. True as it was that the city manager



plan was yet to be developed in its entirety, nevertheless Staunton had the basic idea and pioneered the innovation despite risk and ridicule. To Staunton then goes the laurels for the first practical application of a business manager scheme to civic affairs.

## **Appendix**

### **Report on Municipal Director by Street Committees, August 7, 1906**

To the Council of the City of Staunton:

The Committees on Streets of the two branches of the City Council, acting jointly in pursuance of a joint resolution passed in July last, directing them to consider and report upon the matter hereinafter discussed, having given full consideration to the question, now report as follows: the question under consideration was the advisability of making some change in the manner in which the necessary work of the city of Staunton is done. At present, this work is carried out in a manner different, in so far as your Committees can ascertain, from that practiced by any other city in the State, due to the fact that Staunton's revenues are not large enough to justify the employment of salaried heads of departments, so that the heads of Committees of the Council have necessarily acted as heads of departments, without salary and to a great extent upon their own initiative, expecting subsequent ratification by the Council. The result has been that members of the Council have had put upon them a responsibility and cares, which should have been no part of their work, On the other hand, the city's business has been dependent entirely upon the voluntary work of these officers, elected to perform other duties.

Regarding Staunton simply as a business corporation to the extent that it is engaged in selling water to its citizens, in protecting

them from fire in return for the fire protection paid for by them in the shape of water taxes, in lighting its streets and in furnishing police protection (this last covering not only the actual services of the police force, but cleaning, repairing, and keeping in order its streets) and in giving streets to its citizens, it is evident that the same principles should be applied as would be applied in the case of any ordinary business concern.

It would be absurd to expect the office force of such a business concern to see to the active operations of the company: a manager would be employed who would have all these matters in charge, and the business could not be economically administered in any other way. At the same time, such a manager should not be hampered in any way by instructions from the office force, and would report directly to the directors or owners of the concern.

Therefore your Committees recommend that all administrative work of the city be placed in the hands of some competent salaried official, to be employed by the city, who shall undertake the management of streets, water, fire department and electric lights, in so far as the work of these different departments requires the active management of some responsible head and in so far as this work heretofore has been done under the supervision of the various committees.

The duties of such an employee would be to carry out all work which the Council, or its Committees directed to be done in the way of laying and repairing water mains, making new streets and repairing the old, seeing to the sweeping of the streets and the collection of garbage, and the proper maintenance of the fire department.

In short, such an employee would have the duties generally imposed upon the general manager of a business corporation, and in him would combine the duties in other cities imposed upon paid heads of the departments; he would be the manager or

superintendent of the city's work.

The functions of the various committees of the Council would be simply to supervise the work of this employee, directing, where necessary, what he should or should not do, so far as not to conflict with the orders of the City Council. Such an employee should be a competent civil engineer, as well as a man of good executive ability. He should make detailed reports of the work and expenditures of the various departments to each regular meeting of the Council. He should be directly responsible to the Council and under its immediate control, and shall receive such salary as the Council may determine to be paid for this year out of the Contingent fund.

In view of the conclusions of the Committees, it is suggested in order to carry them into effect, in case the Council adopts this report that the Committees on Ordinances be instructed to prepare and present at some official meeting of the Council, an Ordinance authorizing the creation of the municipal office of Municipal Director, defining the term of the office and its compensation, the manner of election and the duties of the office, taking care that this last branch of the ordinance shall be broad enough to permit the imposition of new duties whenever the Council sees fit.

Respectfully submitted,

Jos. W. Blackburn, Street Committee

Wm. Larner, Common

Hugh C. Braxton, Council

W. O. Sydnor, Street Committee

H. D. Lang, Board of

GT. W. Fretwell, Aldermen

**A Paper on the Failure of Committee Administration, October 2, 1906**

To the Honorable City Council:

As a member of the Committee on Streets of this body I desire to place on record my earnest and emphatic protest against the further continuance of existing conditions in this department of the city's work, and to urge the prompt adoption of some remedy therefor.

Though we have been in office since last July, no meeting of the Street Committee of this body has ever been called by its chairman, nor has the Committee ever assembled for the transactions of business except on one occasion when we met to discuss and consider the question of employing Mr. Hutcherson—the former superintendent of streets. At this meeting no other business pertaining to the department was transacted. About ten days ago, a meeting was held at my instance for the purpose of selecting some member of the committee to take charge of Street affairs.

At this meeting Mr. Larner was directed to take charge until an appointment could be made by the President under the resolution adopted two weeks before providing for such changes by the Presidents of the two branches in their respective street committees as would bring about harmonious action. The above covers in full everything that has been done in Council or in Committee since our organization last July—and it is not surprising, therefore, that the affairs of this department are in such

unsatisfactory condition, and that the work is not receiving proper attention in any particular.

The present Superintendent of Streets is working almost entirely on his own initiative and responsibility, without directions or instructions from any competent head. The work which is being done is being done in a most unsatisfactory and unnecessarily expensive manner, and is consuming the small unexpended balance of this year's appropriation without any permanent improvement to the streets.

The work which has been done on the streets in the past has been done in such an unsatisfactory way and by the use of such antiquated and expensive methods that a large part of each year's appropriation has always been spent in doing over and in making repairs to work which has been done in previous years. The work is being done in the same way now, and unless a change of some sort is made we will have to go right along each year expending our appropriation without securing any lasting benefit or improvement. I have called the attention of the street committee to the way the street work has been done in the past, and I have urged upon the members of the committee the necessity of making permanent and lasting improvements which will leave us free in succeeding years to apply our appropriation to new improvements instead of expending it in patching up the old.

During the past four years this city has expended the large sum, of \$45,000 in round figures upon its streets. That no benefit or improvement commensurate with this expenditure has resulted, is plain to the most casual observer, and is a subject of comment and criticism on the part of the people. We must find a remedy and apply it promptly. Subject to the action of the Council, I respectfully suggest:

- (1.) That perfect and complete harmony be at once secured in the working of the two committees of the respective branches of

this council, so that said committees may work together as one joint committee in the manner provided by resolution heretofore adopted.

(2.) That all further expenditure of the appropriation of this committee be at once stopped, except for the removal of garbage, the watering and sweeping of the streets and other work of urgent necessity until harmonious action of the joint committee can be secured and some definite plan be adopted for the future work of the department,

(3.) That a competent and expert commissioner be employed as soon as possible to take charge of the street work of the city and to perform such other duties as may be properly imposed upon him—said appointment to be in accordance with the report of a special committee of this body heretofore provided.

I most earnestly urge the prompt action of this body along the lines above indicated, or in some other way which will secure the desired result, so that a speedy end may be made of the intolerable conditions at present existing, and the work of the department placed on an intelligent and satisfactory business basis. It is true that none of us receive any compensation for the services which we are called on to perform, and that we all have our own private businesses to occupy our time and attention, but inasmuch as we have accepted this burden and responsibility of these public duties we owe it to ourselves as well as to those at whose distance we assumed these burdens and responsibilities to bestow upon them such attention as is necessary. If we are not willing to do this work as it should be done, we had better step down and out and let others take our places.

Respectfully,

Hugh C. Braxton

**Municipal Director Ordinance Adopted by the Common Council, February 14, 1907**

Be it ordained by the Council of the City of Staunton, Virginia:

First, that there shall be created and established for the city of Staunton an executive department, the head of which shall be known and designated as that of Municipal Director.

Second, the Municipal Director shall be elected by the Council of the City in joint session assembled.

Third, the term of office shall be for two years except the first term, which shall expire on the 1st day of July, 1907.

Fourth, the Municipal Director shall be executive officer of the city. He shall devote his whole time to the duties of his office and shall not engage in any other business while holding the office, He shall receive such compensation for services as may be fixed by the Council, which compensation, shall not be diminished during time he holds the office, and shall give bond with sufficient surety payable to the City of Staunton as a condition for the faithful performance of his duties, in such penalty as may be prescribed by the Council.

Fifth, the Municipal Director shall have charge of all the executive business of the city, shall supervise and see to the proper performance of all sorts, make all contracts for work authorized by the Council or the appropriate committee or committees, and shall perform as much other executive work as may be required of him from time to time by the council or the standing committees thereof.

Sixth, as soon as the commissioner of the revenue in each year shall have completed his assessment, he shall deliver to the Director his books of assessment of real and personal property completed. It shall be the duty of said director to verify the correctness

of the same, and charge the account of the treasurer of the City with the total amount of the taxes assessed upon real and personal property, including capitation tax and tax on incomes

Seventh, as soon as the commissioner of the revenue completes his books for semi-annual assessments of water taxes, h shall deliver the same to the Director, who shall verify the correctness of said books, and charge the account of the treasurer with the total water taxes as shown thereon to be due the City.

Eighth, the Municipal Director shall also purchase all supplies of every description, needed by any of the departments of the city work, upon the written requisition therefore by the city employee, engineer or superintendent of department needing such supplies. If the cost of such supplies exceeds \$100, said requisition shall be approved by the committee having in charge that branch of the city work, otherwise the approval of the chairman, of such committee shall be sufficient. Whenever the cost of the articles referred to therein shall exceed the sum of \$100, or if under that amount and it is practicable to do so, the director shall take bids for such supplies and award the same to the lowest responsible bidder, but shall reserve the right to reject any and all bids. The employee, engineer, or superintendent of the department for whose use said supplies were bought shall endorse the correctness of the bill rendered for the same before it is approved and audited. In no case shall such purchase exceed the appropriation made by the Council for the department for which such supplies are purchased.

Ninth, it shall be the duty of the Municipal Director to keep or cause to be kept proper books of account of his transactions and vouchers for all payments and to make such reports and statements as may be required from time to time by the Council. His books of account and vouchers shall be open at all times for inspection by the Council or the standing committees thereof, and shall exhibit



accurate and detailed statements of all moneys received and expended by him for account of the said city, and by all city officials under his control and management, and shall show in detail the property owned by the city and time income derived therefrom. He shall also keep separate accounts of each and every appropriation for the various departments made by the City Council showing the date thereof and the purpose for which the same is made, and shall show for what each payment of any public money is made and the manner of making the same, and to whom same is made. He shall keep a separate account with each department of the city government under his control and management, and also such other accounts as may be necessary to show a complete statement of the receipts and disbursements, and it shall be his duty to attend in person-i every regular meeting of the City Council.

Tenth, as soon as practicable after all accounts have been allowed by the City Council at its monthly meetings the Director shall furnish the chairman of each committee with the amount of the unexpended balance to the credit of the department which his committee has in charge.

Eleventh, the director shall make or cause to be mi-made out quarterly an itemized statement of all accounts authorized to be paid by the Council and post or cause to be posted in front of the Court House and also cause the same to be published in such newspaper as the Council may direct. He shall also on the first day of April in each year make to the Committee on Finance a written statement showing all his transactions which shall be reported by the said committee to the Council. He shall also on the first day of April in each year, make to the City Council a written statement, setting forth in detail the appropriations made to the several departments of the city work, and likewise the details of all expenditures made by each department, which latter shall be approved by the several committees having in charge the city work. When all the statements referred to in this section have been accepted by the

Council, the Director shall cause them to be published in pamphlet form.

Twelfth, on and after the 1st day of July, 1907, the superintendent of the water works and of electric lights, the superintendent of street hands and the overseer of the poor, shall be appointed by the Municipal Director subject to confirmation by the Council in joint session.

### **Report of the Joint Committee on a General Manager, January 13, 1908**

To the Honorable Council for the City of Staunton:

Your joint Special Committee appointed for the purpose of investigating upon the expediency of creating a system of government for the City of Staunton by a Board or Commission, beg leave to report that after careful consideration and such investigation as has been possible, it is unanimously of opinion that such a system of government is practicable and expedient, and will, if put into effect in Staunton, operate to bring about a more efficient and economical administration of the city's affairs. The fundamental principle upon which the latest evolution of municipal government by a commission or Board of Control rests in the separation of legislative and executive functions—the former being exercised by the City Council and the latter by a Board of Control or Commission. This principle found its practical expression in the famous Galveston-Houston plan, whose successful operation has attracted such widespread attention, and which seems destined to revolutionize municipal government in this country. This plan briefly stated is as follows:

The Mayor and four citizens all elected by the people constitute the Board of Aldermen. This body exercises all of the

legislative functions usually exercised by a City Council. These same officials also constitute what is known as the “Board of Commissioners,” and in this latter capacity discharge all of the administrative and executive functions of the city government. They receive adequate salaries, and devote their entire time and attention to the administration of the City’s affairs. They are elected with reference to their fitness and qualifications along the line of the work of the various departments, and divide the management of affairs among themselves, as it most expedient. This plan has worked most successfully in these two cities, and with such modifications as are needed to adapt it to local conditions in other cities and towns in various parts of the country in which it has been, and is being tried.

In considering the adoption of this plan, your committee was confronted at the threshold of its investigation by the fact that the Constitution of this State prescribes the entire scheme of municipal government for cities and towns by the inflexible provisions which necessitates the retention of the bi-cameral Council and the exercise by it of certain fixed and enumerated powers. This, of course, effectually prevents the adoption of the Galveston-Houston plan in its exact form. Your Committee, however, finds that this difficulty is not insurmountable, but that a plan can readily be adopted which preserves the essential features of the Galveston-Houston plan. Instead of having a Board of Commissioners elected by the people, let the City Council appoint as General Manager some competent and suitable man and delegate to him the entire control and management of the city’s executive and administrative affairs, making the duties of his office exactly those of the Board of Commissioners under the Galveston-Houston plan. The official thus appointed will give his entire time and attention to the various departments of the city's business, will receive adequate salary, to be prescribed by the Council, will discharge in general all of the executive and administrative duties now appertaining to the City Council and its various

standing Committees, and will hold offices at the pleasure of the Council.

Ample authority for the appointment of such an official is found in Section 30 of our City Charter and in Section 1038 of the Code of Virginia, in both of which it is expressly provided that the City Council in addition to other enumerated officers may appoint such other officers as it deems necessary and proper, and define their powers, prescribe their duties, and fix their compensation. It will be observed that your committee suggests the appointment of only one such officer. This, in the opinion of your Committee may be all that is necessary for a city of this size. One competent, active, and careful business man, devoting his entire time to the work should be able to discharge the duties of the office and obtain the best results in each department. It will be, of course, necessary that this officer should employ a clerk to keep the books and attend to the usual routine office work, as the general manager will be continually engaged outside of his office in looking after the work in the different departments. The only difference between the plan above outlined and the Galveston-Houston plan, are:

1. That the officer is appointed by the Council instead of being elected by the people.
2. That the executive and administrative work of the City would be in the hands of one instead of five men.
3. That the executive and legislative functions would be entirely separated, not only as respects the capacity in which they are discharged, but also as respects the persons by whom they are discharged.

The officer would be directly responsible to the Council, which could exercise a constant supervision over him and his work, and when necessary, remove him at its pleasure. Your committee recommends, if this plan be adopted, that the standing committees of the Council, as at present constituted, be continued to act as advisory bodies to confer from time to time, as may be necessary, with the

general manager and suggest and report to the Council such ordinances and resolutions as may be necessary in the line of their respective departments. The auditing committee would, of course, continue to discharge its present duties.

Your Committee most earnestly recommends that the plan above suggested be adopted by the Council at the earliest possible moment. The present condition of the city's affairs and the impossibility of administering them under the present system in a satisfactory manner imperatively require that some change be made and your committee is clearly of time opinion that the adoption of this plan will result in a large saving to the city, and secure a prompt and efficient administration of its business.

Your Committee further recommends that the Council for the City of Staunton appoint a Committee composed of two members, one from each branch of the Council, who will invite other cities considering this form of municipal government, to appoint a committee to cooperate with them for the purpose of urging the Legislature of the State (now in session in the city of Richmond) to pass such legislation as may be necessary to have the Constitution of this State so changed that the Council for the cities can be abolished, and the Commission form of municipal government, fashioned after the Galveston-Houston plan be substituted.

Respectfully Submitted,

H. L. LANG

J. M. SPOTTS

JOHN CROSBY

HUGH C. BRAXTON

Special Committee

*Note*—The Virginia General Assembly enacted such enabling legislation in 1916; and under it the old bicameral system, with its Board of Aldermen and Common Council—eight Aldermen and fourteen Councilmen—finally was discarded. Under this authorization, Staunton’s first five-man Council took office on September 1, 1920. The first men thus named to the small Council were: J. W. H. Pilson, H. L. Lang, Francis N. Moran, S. P. Silling, and H. McK, Smith. At the first meeting of these five, J. W. H. Pilson was elected to the honorary office of mayor.

<sup>1</sup>*Staunton Daily Leader*, April 7, 1908, p. 4. Italics supplied.

<sup>2</sup>Hening, *The Statues at Lage*, Vol. 7, 1756–1768, pg. 473.

<sup>3</sup>*Acts of Assembly*, Virginia, 1801, pg. 21. Hereinafter cited as *Acts*.

<sup>4</sup>*Acts*, 1870–1871, p. 229.

<sup>5</sup>*Acts*, 1984, p. 201.

<sup>6</sup>Henry Oyen, “A City with a General Manager,” 23 *The Worlds Work* 220–228 (1911)

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 227.

<sup>8</sup>*Records of the Common Council*, Staunton, 1904–1911, pp. 125–128.

<sup>9</sup>John Crosby, “The Staunton Plan,” a reprint of an article in the *Municipal Journal and Engineer*, New York, December 29, 1909, 9

pp.pp.

<sup>10</sup>Records of tire Common Council, Staunton, 1904–1911, p. 156.

<sup>11</sup>*Constitution of Virginia*, 1902, Sec. 121; Acts, 1906, p. 21.

<sup>12</sup>*Staunton Daily Leader*, June 19, 1906, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup>*Records of the Common Council*, Staunton, 1904–1911, p. 245.

<sup>14</sup>Mary Swan Carroll, “History of the Staunton City Manager Government,” unpublished manuscript available in the Staunton Public Library and the Joint Reference Library at 1313 East 60th Street, Chicago, Illinois.

<sup>15</sup>*Records of the Common Council*, Staunton, 1904–1911, p. 229.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid*, pp. 238, 239. The full text of this report is contained in the Appendix.

<sup>17</sup>*Records of the Board of Aldermen*, Staunton, 1906–1914, p. 21.

<sup>18</sup>Carroll, *op. cit.*, pp. 31–32. The quotation is taken from a personal letter from John Crosby to Mary Swan Carroll.

<sup>19</sup>*Staunton Daily Leader*, October 16, 1906, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup>James R. Haworth, “How the City Manager Idea Got Its Start in America,” 39 *The American City*, 111–112 (1928).

<sup>21</sup>William A. Grubert, “The City Manager Form of Government and My Personal Acquaintance with the Men Who Were Responsible for Its Origin,” 17 *Virginia Municipal Review* 105–107 (1940).

<sup>22</sup>Robert C. Hiden, “Running a Town as a Business,” 54 *Harper’s Weekly* 13–14 (May 21, 1910).

<sup>23</sup>*Records of the Common Council*, Staunton, 1904–1911, p. 248. The full text of this paper is contained in the Appendix.

<sup>24</sup>*Records of the Board of Aldermen*, Staunton, 1906–1914, pp. 51, 52.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 53–56.

<sup>26</sup>*Records of the Common Council*, Staunton, 1904–1911, p. 270.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 275.

<sup>28</sup>*Staunton Daily Leader*, February 11, 1907, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup>*Records of the Common Council*, Staunton, 1904–1911, p. 282. The full text of the ordinance is reproduced in the Appendix.

<sup>30</sup>*Records of the Board of Aldermen*, Staunton, 1906–1914, pp. 67, 68.

<sup>31</sup>*Records of the Common Council*, Staunton, 1904–1911, p. 287.

<sup>32</sup>*Records of the Board of Aldermen*, Staunton, 1906–1914, p. 106. The Galveston-Houston plan was the commission form, and the Norfolk plan, which, is found in *Acts*, 1906, p. 280, embodied a Board of Control which had general supervision over municipal administration.

<sup>33</sup>*Records of the Common Council*, Staunton, 1904–1911, p. 316.

<sup>34</sup>*Staunton Daily Leader*, September 30, 1907, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup>*Records of the Common Council*, Staunton, 1904–1911, p. 348. The full text of the joint committee's report is reproduced in the Appendix.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 349.

<sup>37</sup>*Records of the Board of Aldermen*, Staunton, 1906–1911, pp. 150, 151.



<sup>38</sup>Records of the Common Council, Staunton, 1904–1911, p. 348.

<sup>39</sup>*Staunton Daily Leader*, January 15, 1908, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup>*Records of the Common Council*, Staunton, 1904–1911, p. 372.

<sup>41</sup>*Staunton Daily Leader*, April 2, 1908, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup>Leonard D. White, *The City Manager* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927), p. 90.

<sup>43</sup>Henry Oyen, *op. cit.*, pp. 223–224.

<sup>44</sup>Leonard D. White, *op. cit.*, pp. 92, 93.

<sup>45</sup>Samuel D. Holsinger, by succeeding Ashburner in 1911, became the world's second city manager. He still resides in Staunton.

<sup>46</sup>Harold A. Stone, Don. K. Price, and Kathryn H. Stone, *City Manager Government in the United States* (Chicago: Public Administration Service, 1940), pg. 13.

<sup>47</sup>John Crosby, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup>Henry Oyen, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 226–228.

<sup>50</sup>*Records of the Common Council*, Staunton, 1904–1911, p. 395.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 410.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 606.

<sup>53</sup>*Staunton Daily Leader*, June 22, 1908, pg. 1.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, July 15, 1908, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup>*Records of the Common Council*, Staunton, 1904–1911, p. 382.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 483.

<sup>57</sup>*Records of the Common Council*, Staunton, 1904–1911, p. 645.

<sup>58</sup>Harry A. Toulmin, Jr., *The City Manager* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1915), p. 19.