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THE BEND BULLETIN.

CITY GOVERNMENT BY COMMISSION

Originated in Galveston Eleven
Years Ago.

RESULT OF GREAT FLOOD.

How It Rebuilt the Town, Constructed the Sea Wall, Restored Credit and Scored Such a Success That It is Now Spreading Throughout the Land.

By JAMES A. EDGERTON.
Americans are long suffering under abuses, but when the limit is reached they go after the evil without gloves. Our municipal governments present a case in point. For generations we have stood their rottenness, inefficiency, grafting and disgrace. Now they are becoming so bad we can put up with them no longer. The result is that we are eraduating the old system root and branch and substituting therefor the commission plan of government. The old scheme had got past the mending point. It had become honeycombed with ward and partisan politics. To ourselves it was a reproach to other nations a standing joke. It was a combination of Tammany and Hinky Dink. The exposures in St. Louis, San Francisco, Pittsburg and elsewhere only scratched the surface. It was time for a new deal, and the new deal has come. Now the cities of the entire land are falling over each other in their haste to try on the commission system. Wherever inaugurated it has worked like a charm. Everybody is happy over it except the professional politicians and the grafters.

The commission form of government in America is only a trifle more than ten years old. It started in 1888 as a result of the Galveston flood. So staggering was the catastrophe that the old form of government was unable to meet the crisis. Alderman McMaster proposed that the council resign in a body and call in business men and experts to deal with the extraordinary situation. This was done. A commission of five was formed, two of them elected by the people and three appointed by the governor. Afterward the supreme court decided that the governor had no right to appoint, and all the commissioners were elected.

Prior to the hurricane and tidal wave that so nearly swept her off the map Galveston had the usual discouraging history of municipal misgovernment. As a result she was in debt, her bonds were below par and her treasury on the verge of bankruptcy. Under the commission system the city was rebuilt, the grade raised several feet, the streets repaved, a retaining sea wall constructed, the debt cut down, expenditures kept within the revenues, city employees paid in cash, bonds brought to a premium, streets kept cleaner, sanitation improved, saloons kept out of the residence districts, politics banished from the city hall, public gambling abolished, civic spirit awakened and a condition of harmony and prosperity begun such as Galveston had never before known. In other words, the new government did better in the face of the calamity than the old had done in times of tranquillity. One most significant fact is that, despite the expenditures required to rebuild, raise and protect the city, the tax rate was kept down lower than that of any large city in Texas.

To show the contrast between the old Galveston government and the new, public improvements had stopped under the former "ring rule" and public buildings were deteriorating. Finances were going behind at an average of \$100,000 every year, city employees, including even schoolteachers, were paid in scrip, and the bosses, who were growing rich, had such a grip it was impossible to shake them loose.

All that is now changed. The floating debt has been retired, a sinking fund started, public improvements are going forward, bills are paid in cash when due, and the political bosses have become unpleasant memories. That these and other beneficent results are due to the commission system of government is proved by the fact that other cities adopting the commission plan have had a like experience.

Under what came to be known as the Galveston plan each of the commissioners took charge of some branch of the city government. For this he was responsible to the commission as a whole and to the people. So successful was the system in the city of its origin that other municipalities in all parts of the land began to study it with interest.

To one who does not believe in universal panaceas and cure-alls the working out of the commission form of government is little less than marvelous. It has agreeably surprised both its friends and enemies. Is it long looked for solution of our municipal government problems? An unqualified affirmative answer is almost too good to be true, and it is too early to go that far, yet the more one studies what has actually been accomplished under the new system the more enthusiastic he grows. My own prediction is that as soon as the bulk of American cities realize just what has been achieved in the commission towns there will be such a scramble to make the experiment for themselves that it will result in a virtual municipal revolution.

COMMISSION PLAN IN MANY CITIES.

Results of New Form of Government
Uniformly Favorable.

The unvarying success of the Galveston or Des Moines plan of city government has been so pronounced as almost to challenge belief. Here are the actual records of a few cities:

Gloucester.—Commission plan in effect 1909. The first year's report showed all bills paid and a reduction in the city debt of \$18,000. It is claimed that the roads and streets have been better kept at \$6,000 less annual expense. The city bookkeeping has been reformed, and the commissioners point to a reduction in the expense of caring for public property. It is still too early to demand much in the way of tangible results.

Haverhill.—Commission plan in effect in 1908. The first year's report under the new plan showed a saving of \$97,500 in running expenses. When the commission took hold the financial status of the city was very bad. It had reached both its debt limit and tax rate limit and was steadily falling behind in its payments. Appeals were being made to the legislature for an extension of the tax rate limit, but this extension has now become unnecessary. In addition the city has voted no license, the revenue from the saloons being no longer needed. The commission has been fighting a big battle against the gas and electric light monopolies to obtain lower rates for the city and for private consumers and has obtained from the people permission to resort to municipal ownership if necessary. There was fierce political opposition to the commission at the expiration of its first term, but it was re-elected. Party lines in Haverhill, which was formerly a Republican city, have been completely broken. The commission consists of two Democrats, two Republicans and a Socialist.

Cedar Rapids, Ia.—Commission plan in effect in 1908. The commission has reduced the tax rate and the debt, while making certain big improvements, such as the acquisition of a big island in the river out of current expenses, instead of bond issues. The island is for municipal buildings in a handsome park setting, in accordance with a "city beautiful" plan devised by an expert. The police and fire department forces have been enlarged despite the reduced tax rate.

Leavenworth, Kan.—Commission plan in effect in 1908. The commission has reduced the bonded indebtedness by \$112,000, while the tax rate has remained stationary. Kansas is a prohibition state, but Leavenworth had always defied the law and allowed the saloons to exist, subject to periodical fines which brought in \$80,000 a year. The commission closed the saloons and disposed of this illegal revenue without disturbing the tax rate. Over \$200,000 was spent in special improvements the first year as against an average of \$25,000 in previous years. In the first two years under the new system six miles of street were paved as against twelve miles in the preceding twenty-five years.

THE REFORM OF DALLAS.

How the Galveston Plan Cleaned Up a
Sister Texas City.

Following Galveston and Houston, the city of Dallas took up the commission form of government and made it so completely democratic that its enemies charged it with being "populistic." Dallas incorporated into its charter the initiative, the referendum and the recall. That the new form of government has worked well in the four years it has been in operation in Dallas is shown by some of the results. A floating debt of \$207,000 was inherited from the old regime. This has been wiped out completely, and the sinking funds required by law established. At the end of the last fiscal year they contained \$447,000. From this it will be seen that in less than four years the savings of the city have amounted to \$654,000. In 1908 the profits of the city waterworks system amounted to \$100,000, and these profits are being sweetened with each succeeding year.

The forward strides of the city have been so rapid under the quickening influence of good government conditions that Dallas and the county in which it is located are preparing to build the largest concrete viaduct in the world at a cost of several million dollars. A bond issue of \$1,300,000 has been authorized by the people for public improvements, and a well developed program for the physical development of the city has been laid out. A new sewerage system is being undertaken, and Dallas citizens are preparing for another doubling of population in the decade ahead.

The city hall finds many opportunities to make its influence for greater things count in indirect ways. It was desirable that a new municipal building be erected, and to do this it was necessary to dispose of the old one. So the mayor and the commissioners, co-operating with the chamber of commerce, interested some St. Louis capitalists in a hotel proposition and landed a new \$1,000,000 hotel. They sold the old city hall and made a new one possible all in a single deal. At the same time they were trying to secure the location of a great Methodist university at Dallas, and in this also they were successful.

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