

SUBJECT: Carbondale City Managers

Interview: Arranged by Bill Schwegman.

Questions: Prepared by Dorothy (Dede) Ittner.

Self-interview: Mr. Norman's Naples, FL home

Date: April 1, 2008.

Transcriber: Frances Walker

Editor: Dede Ittner.

Dede Ittner: Please share your full name, birth date and birthplace.

Bill Norman: C. (Charles) William or Bill Norman. I was born in Dowagiac, Michigan on September 13, 1929.

DI: Discuss your education, background and qualifications, especially as it applied to the position of city manager.

BN: After graduating from high school Plymouth, Michigan I attended Dennison University on a liberal arts program for two years, that's in Granville OH, where I grew up. I received a degree in 1952. I worked in engineering for a couple of year and then came back to the University of Michigan and received my Masters Degree in Public Administration. I chose public administration for my career because I felt that I would have an opportunity to make a significant change in the way things were done and because I did not like working in a large corporate environment. After working as an Assistant City Manager in Jackson, Michigan, City Manager of Howell Michigan and City Manger of Panels Park Florida, I came to the city of Carbondale as its first city manager. It seems that all of my career I was

Bill Norman, an interview conducted by Dede Lingle Ittner, 1 April 2008. Transcript, Carbondale, Illinois Preservation Commission's oral history project, Special Collections Research Center, Southern Illinois University Carbondale

forced to pioneer as a “first manager”, whether that's because of choice or just circumstances, I don't know. I wasn't really looking for that situation.

DI: How did you happen to apply for and become the first Carbondale City Manager? (hiring process)

BN: I applied for the city manager's job in Carbondale because I read that they were seeking applications in International City Management Association newsletter, where most managers learn of vacancies. I don't recall much of the hiring process that was used, but of course I was interviewed by the mayor and city council at the time. I don't recall how many other applicants there were.

DI: Give the year you began and bit of the “climate” of Carbondale (size, economy, personnel) that that time.

BN: When I started in that position, in - I think 1967 - Carbondale was starting to grow because of the tremendous growth of Southern Illinois University which had occurred prior to and during that period. I would guess that the population was in the range of 8 to 12 thousand. The economy of the community was pretty much dependent on the university and the university had, as I recalled, somewhere in the 12 to 15 thousand range. So they were, in effect, the tail wagging the dog as far as the city was concerned.

DI: What municipal structure was in place?

BN: I was the first City Manager to follow the commission form of government, as I recall, and the commission form of government is where each councilman has you are in effect decreasing the authority and responsibility of each of the

mayor at the time was named Blaney Miller. He was of (little) help to me. Or, as far as I could tell, to the city, but he was heavily supported by members of the business community, particularly the liquor ministry which was a monopoly. I don't remember the name of the man (who) had all the liquor business. The mayor, of course, was liquor commissioner and "they" paid particular attention to him in order keep their licenses in good shape and to prevent competition from coming in.

I recall two of the council that hired me were associated with the University and had played a major role in the adoption of the council manager form of government by a referendum. Those two were Randall Nelson, who was a professor at the University and Frank Kirk, who worked in the University Administration. These were both very capable and very intelligent people who had no particular ax to grind for any special interests.

The mayor that followed Blaney Miller was named David Keene. He was particularly helpful in many ways, a responsible person, very civic minded and humanitarian minded. In some respect that was a problem because he kind of went overboard when it came to supporting the underdog. David Keene owned and operated a moving company. I think it was Allied, but I'm not sure. I recall one story- he liked to employ people who were released from prison to give them a place of employment- he hired such a person and that person ended up stealing substantially from him. This didn't shake his faith in his responsibility for doing good.

DI: Describe your first office location and the staff your staff.

BN: The City Hall at the time was an old brick building (on the northwest corner of E. Main and N. Marion) One of my first jobs was to make myself an office. The second floor of the building had been unused for some time, so we used city employees to build some partitions and I obtained an office in that

manner, although it was not particularly comfortable. I don't recall much of the staff that I inherited in that job. They were not professionally trained.

DI: What were the first major challenges you felt you needed to address?

BN: We had a major job in developing budgeting and accounting systems, so we could keep track of what was happening and present to the council a plan for actions in terms of future expenditures. There was no recognized personnel rules and regulations or record keeping system. (Creating) that kind of thing occupied a major part of my first couple of years at least in that job. The major part of my activity was comprised of seeking federal grants. This was in the time, I think, of Lyndon Johnson and his war on poverty. There was a lot of federal money available for places that were economically handicapped like Carbondale was.

DI: What were the major successes you achieved? (specific projects)

BN: There were two projects that come to mind that major. One was the development of a industrial park (that was completed somewhat later) . I recall the extension of significant water mains and a water tower as part of that part. In fact, I remember climbing to the top of that water tank to inspect the work on it after it was completed. That happened to be a day in the winter when it was quite cold and windy. That was rather an unpleasant task to climb the ladder and walk around on the top of that tank. I remember that the first company to move into the park was a tape manufacturing company. I can't quite remember the name of it. It was something like "Tuck" (correct). They had been able to get federal support for locating there. The other major project which I guess has been a real asset to the community, was the (planned) construction of the Cedar Creek Lake. We were fortunate to utilize the services of an excellent engineering company out of Muscatine, Iowa. They assisted, I suppose, in acquiring the federal funds

that made that project possible. That was to provide a reliable source of water for the city and also recreation. There were two or three programs that were available to assist in that and so the city really has a minimum amount of investment to make.

DI: Describe the most challenging “problems” you had to work through.

BN: Undoubtedly, my least successful effort in Carbondale was to professionalize and develop a competent police and fire departments. Because the police chief and fire chief were long standing members of the community and had strong following and lots of friends, I decided that I wouldn't try to replace them. It was obvious that I needed to do something drastic because they, particular the police chief, was not amenable to my idea of what a professional law enforcement person should be. I persuaded the city council to let me hire a man to be public safety director, who would, in effect, be my assistant and responsible for those two departments. His name was Richard Wilhamy. I had hired him he was police chief in Naperville, Illinois and he did an outstanding job. He was retired from the military and seemed to have the technical and personal attributes to do that job. Regrettably the rumor mill went to work and he found himself unable to really exercise the degree of authority and responsibility that is necessary to do what I had wanted him to do. The result of all of that was a very unpleasant and devastating strike by first, the Police Department, then Fire Department and (finally) the Public Works Department. These (groups) were first demanding his resignation and when HE resigned (I told him he had no choice) they went after me. After a fairly short period of time it became obvious (it was necessary) for me to resign. So that's where that went. (These actions) led or preceded a rather significant event which occurred in 1969 and 1970. There was a major national movement in opposition to the war in Vietnam. One of the University's buildings, which I think housed the (R.O.T.C. which was in Wheeler Hall) was (vandalized) during this period of

time. On top of that, this was during the time of national unrest in the civil rights area. Between the students demonstrating and agitating and the black community demonstrating and agitating, we found ourselves in a very difficult situation. The upshot of all of this, probably the climax, was when the students rioted over Vietnam and demonstrated down town. A group of students decided that the way to get attention would be to blockade the Illinois Central Railroad. They massed on the tracks causing the railroad to have to stop trains outside the city. The police department was totally ineffective to deal with this. So in came the State Police. The captain, or the commander of the state police decided that he was going to get tough and order throwing tear gas into the crowd of kids. The students immediately started throwing bricks through windows and looting stores. That spread from the downtown, throughout the city. This lasted for a matter of several days. After the first day or two days, Marshal Law was declared- I suppose by the Governor. The National Guard was called in. The city was fortunate that the Captain of the National Guard was a moderate, reasonable man and chose to try negotiation instead of using strong arm tactics. Things were quieted down. Of course, Mayor David Keene was heavily involved in all of that activity. He had developed lines of communication with student leaders, so there was some interaction there which was helpful. Unfortunately, Mayor Keene was not respected by the businesses and that led to a lot of dissention between the old timers, the University and the more liberal or moderate minded people. Dave Keene was never given the credit for the outstanding job he did in dealing with many of the problems and in keeping this situation from becoming worse. As luck would have it, I had resigned, giving a couple of weeks notice, just before the riots started. Therefore, I was not really in a position to be actively involved with any of what was going on. I could sit in on the meetings in the police station and watch what was happening. I was frankly grateful that I was no longer responsible for what went on. I

remember one situation where the students took bricks and other heavy objects to the top of the one high rise student building and I overheard a radio call from a group of- I think - National Guardsmen who were on the ground below that building that reported that they were in real danger from falling objects and that they were surrounded and needed help in getting out of there. The whole student riot resulted in a belief by someone, or some group, that the person responsible for all this was the President of the University whose name was Delyte Morris. A lavish new house which cost more than probably any other house in town was being built for him. Students surrounded the President's Office and announced that they planned to burn it down. The story had it that to prevent further campus violence, President Morris decided to close the university. (Other sources feel then Chancellor Mc Vicar made the decision. See the Elston Oral History). It was only a matter of a short period of time- two or three weeks- before school was supposed to close anyway. The students were to retain the grades that they had as of the time of the closing so that they were pacified and that riot ended. While I was not involved, I remember that Frank Kirk was spearheading an effort that was partly city but mostly university, to have the main line of the Illinois Central Railroad relocated from the heart of town, and that seemed to be a major part of his job for the university. Unfortunately, I understand that the tracks are still there and I saw no significant improvement in getting that goal accomplished. Thinking about the strike of city employees, I have reached the point where only the clerical staff in the city hall were actively working for the city for a period of several days. I remember that the fire department did agree to be on standby to respond to any serious fire problems should they occur, but they didn't occur. It was an interesting fact that the police force or security personnel of the university were larger than the city police department, so they were able to maintain a level of control and security during the period of the strike. The city's police chief, whose name was Jack Hazel, was very antagonistic to me from the very beginning and of course the problems that developed didn't make that any better. When the rioting and the serious problems occurred he kind of took a back seat, first to the State Police and then to the National Guard who were more capable of dealing with

situations than he was. I don't remember any problems with maintaining water supply. I do remember that the employees in the sewage plant decided to join the strike. Shortly after they walked out I got a telegram, I think it was, from the state pollution control authorities. They were warning us that if we allowed any untreated sewage to escape the plant that the city would be subject to serious fines. I thought this was ironic that they didn't offer any help in the way of qualified personnel to operate the plant during the time of crisis, but threatened a penalty if things that were beyond our control should take place. Something else that made the whole situation much more bearable for me was that I had previously received an appointment as city manager of Naperville, Illinois and so when my time was up I quickly made plans to relocate to northern Illinois where as luck would have it, I was again the first professional city manager.

DI: Share anything you would have liked to see happen after you left. Further, is there anything you would like to add that would help give present-day Carbondale citizens a clearer picture of what the role of City Manager was/is like.

BN: In response to the last two questions about what I thought should happen after I left and things that the city should be doing, I really have no comment because I have been totally unaware of the circumstances in Carbondale following my leaving. I hope and believe that we helped build a good foundation upon which a city operation could be built. How it was maintained and whether there have been substantial improvements - which I would hope - to the things that we started, I have no knowledge. I hope this appropriately answers the questions which you have asked me.

DI: Our thanks to Bill Norman for adding his viewpoints in the form of answers to this set of questions.