

## Edmonton Civic Politics, 1891-1913

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[See table of contents](#)

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EDMONTON CIVIC POLITICS  
1891-1914

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*John P. Day*

Edmonton's position as a western Canadian city was unusual. It experienced the massive growth common to other prairie cities in the pre-war period. But prior to the great population explosion following the C.P.R.'s arrival in 1891, it had developed a number of social institutions which in varying ways and with varying degrees of success attempted to cope with the transition. It also possessed an identity which did not vanish altogether. The C.P.R.'s arrival made it necessary to formalize these institutions by means of incorporating as a town. The rapid expansion which followed saw the new town attain the status of a city as Edmonton attempted to fit the older social institutions into the rapidly developing pre-war boom.

Civic politics in this period divide into several distinct periods, each with their own peculiar flavour. The first period, which might be termed the "Age of McCauley," began with the first civic election for the 1892 term, when the new town took a definite step away from the old settlement aristocracy of the 1880s, and ended in 1894 with the controversial Town vs McDougall case. The second period might be called the "Age of the Duel," for town politics were dominated by both the long-standing personal rivalry between Frank Oliver and Dr. H. C. Wilson, and the parties which each supported, the Liberals and Conservatives respectively. This period ended with John A. McDougall's first mayoralty in 1897. A third period, which could alternatively be called the "Age of the Professionals," or the "Age of Short," saw the town dominated by professional men, who believed in municipal ownership of utilities and a professional town civil service run by the Commission system. This period ended about October, 1905, when the reactions against the new city's professional system became predominant. A fourth period, which can be called the "Age of Unrest," saw counter-attacks on the "Professionals" and the development of fairly definite civic parties. Against a background

of rapid and unmanageable growth, administration after administration went down to defeat. The "Populist" party, whose ranks included community groups, ethnic communities, trade unions, and vague reformists did not trust an "undemocratic" and bureaucratic City Hall and wanted a "people's" government. A group of commercial men believed that sound business principles and good businessmen could run a more "progressive" and "efficient" administration. One sub-group of the Commercial Party were out-right reactionaries, hankering for a return to earlier and simpler days. Each opposition group vied for support and each gained it and then lost it, until John A. McDougall's second administration came to its conclusion at the end of 1908. A fifth period could be described as the "Partisan Age." The three groups, the Professionals, the Commercials, and the Populists became regularly organized and increasingly hostile to each other. The Professionals held on to the mayoralty until the 1914 term, but increasingly lost ground to the other two. A brief period of quiet lasted through the 1909, 1910 and 1911 terms, but the annexation of Strathcona, another period of rapid growth, and the widening of the franchise broke the city political scene wide open. The age culminated in a coalition of the Populists and the Commercials which defeated the Professionals for the 1914 term. A catastrophic police scandal ruined the coalition, and the remnants were routed by the "clean government" regime of W. T. Henry, which presided over the war-time collapse of Edmonton's economy.

I. The Age of McCauley (1891-94)

There were three basic trends in this period. The first was the urgent need to counteract the forces pressing for a transfer of the Edmonton area's centre of business and society from the north side to the south. The second was the response to the need to set up the fundamental services of government, and the third was the transfer of social and political influence from the settlement's elite of the 1870s and 1880s.

The emergence of South Edmonton as a potential threat to the collection of businessmen scattered along Jasper Avenue east of 100

Table 1: Population Figures, 1892-1918 \*

	Edmonton	Strathcona	Total	Edmonton Population Index, 1911=100	Both Sides Index 1911=100	Both Sides Index 1912=100
1889	300 ( <u>Bulletin</u> )	200 ( <u>Bulletin</u> )	500	1.2	1.7	0.9
1892	700 (town)			2.8		
1894	1,021 (N.W.M.P.)	371 ( <u>Bulletin</u> )	1,392	4.1	4.6	2.6
1895	1,165 (N.W.M.P.)	505 (town)	1,620	4.7	5.4	3.2
1899	2,212 (town)	1,156 (town)	2,368	9.0	12.0	7.2
1901	2,626 (Dominion)	1,550 (Dominion)	4,176	11.0	14.0	7.8
1903	5,455 (town)			22.0		
1905	7,500 (town)			30.0		
1906	11,167 (R.N.W.M.P.)			46.0		
1907		3,500 (city)				
1908	18,500 (Henderson's)	4,500 (Henderson's)	23,000	74.0	76.0	42.0
1911	24,900 (Dominion)	5,579 (Dominion)	30,479	100.0	100.0	57.0
1912		53,611				100.0
1913		67,243				120.0
1914		72,515				136.0
1915		59,339				42.0
1916		53,846				100.0
1917		51,000				95.0
1918		53,000				99.0

\*It should be observed that the only reliable figures are those of the Dominion Census. In general, there are always conflicting figures, and one has to choose the least unreliable. Confusion reigns between 1903 and 1908, and no figure for 1907 can be given with any confidence.

Street was recognized immediately.<sup>1</sup> The railway was king so far as transportation went, and in 1891 the railway meant the C.P.R.. The C.P.R. had been known to "boom" townsites along its route at the expense of earlier settlers, often in connivance with local Conservatives.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, when it became known that the C.P.R. had decided to run the Calgary and Edmonton railway only as far as the south side, the north side became concerned. When it was noticed that the C.P.R. was negotiating with three river lot owners in order to lay out a townsite, the north side became alarmed. The alarm was in no way allayed by the fact that the son of the Crown Timber Agent was one of the river lot landowners being negotiated with.

Within a week of the decision in the summer of 1891 to build the terminus of the railway on the south side, the north side settlers held a general meeting to consider incorporation. The thinking appeared to be that the north side would be able to claim the name of Edmonton officially, and so to hold off the potential pretender to the name.<sup>3</sup> The boundaries decided upon were so drawn as to exclude the "Lower Settlement," which had a community feeling of its own, but to include an industrial tax base. So the town's west boundary ran along 121 Street, including the Hudson's Bay Reserve, but excluding Malcolm Groat's farm, east along 108 Avenue (to exclude a marsh known as Drunken Lake) to 101 Street, up 101 Street to Rat Creek, and east to 95 Street, where it ran south to 101 A Avenue, and then east to the river.<sup>4</sup> The decision by the residents to incorporate was opposed both by the Timber

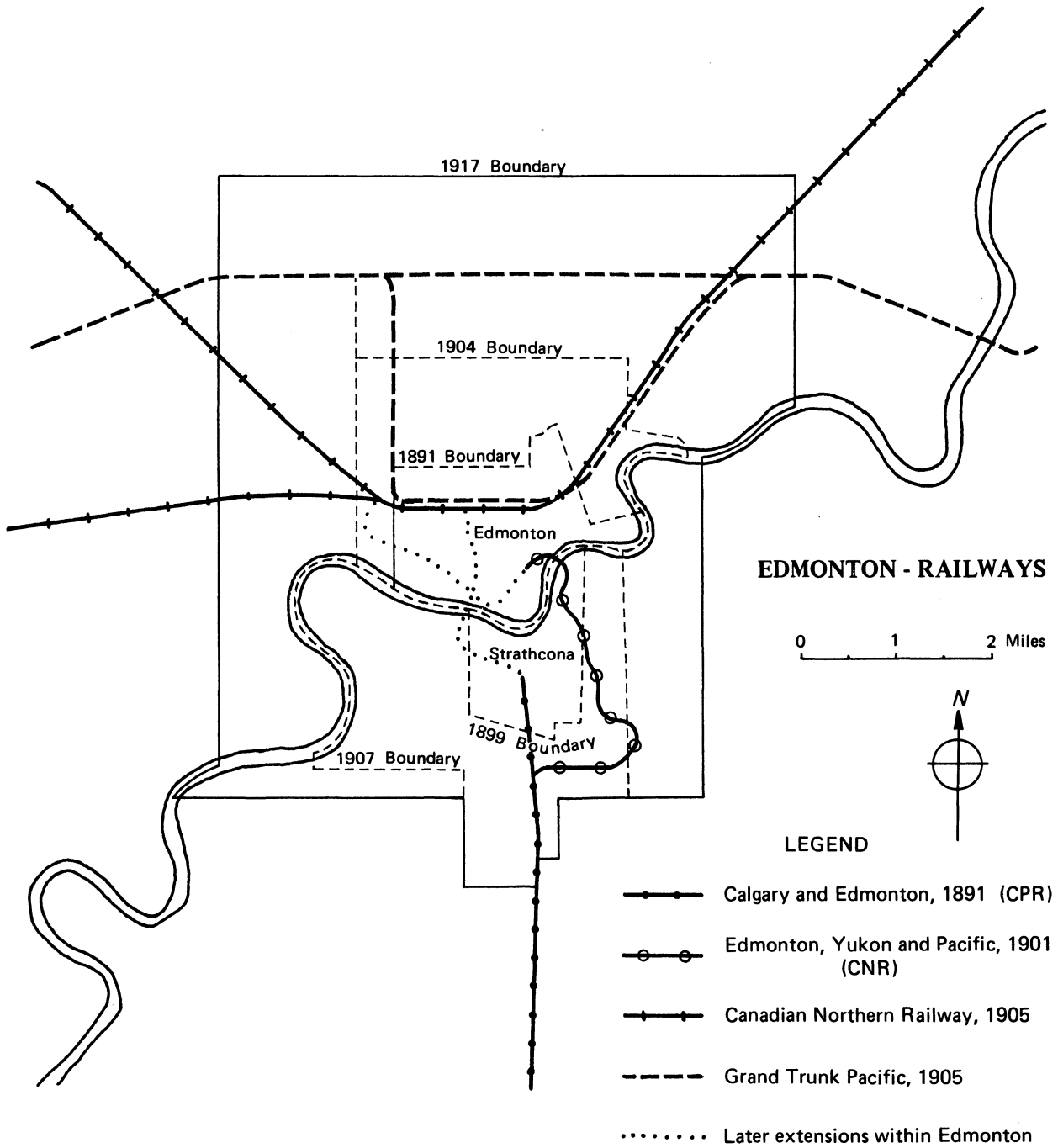
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<sup>1</sup>Edmonton Bulletin, 23 July, 8 August 1891.

<sup>2</sup>Such was generally believed to have been the case in the choice of Regina as the Territorial capital; much of the land in the area was owned by Edgar Dewdney, then Lieutenant-Governor.

<sup>3</sup>The use of "Edmonton" or "North Edmonton" was a matter for debate between the Edmonton Bulletin and the South Edmonton News as late as 1894.

<sup>4</sup>Bulletin, 25 July, 8 October 1891.



Agent, Thomas Anderson, and the C.P.R.,<sup>5</sup> but the area's members in the territorial legislature, Frank Oliver and H. C. Wilson, were both north-siders and sympathetic, despite their different political views.

Aside from incorporation itself, other steps were taken to ward off the threat. The lower ferry crossing was moved to a place more convenient for reaching the Jasper Avenue merchants<sup>6</sup> and the new town began a publicity campaign to promote its possibilities to new arrivals. Much more drastic steps were taken, however, when Thomas Anderson attempted to move the Dominion Land Office, which contained most of the federal government's presence, across the river in June, 1892. A crowd blocked Anderson's progress at the ferry, and the N.W.M.P. were summoned. The new Town Council then organized a militia "to keep the peace." Mayor McCauley, who had had a record of throwing claim-jumpers' houses over the cliff,<sup>7</sup> sent the "special constables" out to meet the Police, and after a bombastic speech, persuaded A. H. Griesbach, the Police's Commanding Officer, not to interfere until answers to telegraphs sent out to every possible official were answered. The answers were unanimous in stating that the permanent federal offices were to remain on the north side. And that was the end of the Land Office Rebellion.<sup>8</sup>

Relations between Edmonton and South Edmonton (later Strathcona) were never to be quite as bad again, and, although a long standing rivalry continued, the two communities managed to live in relative harmony thereafter. When the two amalgamated in 1912, there were only a handful of people on either side who opposed it.

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 25 July 1891.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., June-August 1891.

<sup>7</sup>He was prosecuted on two occasions in 1882, in company with several others, for throwing the houses of Z. George and J. M. Bannerman over the river bank.

<sup>8</sup>The best account is in an unpublished manuscript at the City of Edmonton Archives (C.E.A.), R. J. Shalka, *The Dominion Land Office*, pp. 45-8. The best known source is the Bulletin, 20-23, June 1892; note, however, that the Dewdney Papers at the Glenbow Alberta Institute, Calgary, dispute the accuracy of its account.

Once Edmonton had established itself, the problems of town government had to be faced. Jasper Avenue (sometimes called Main Street east of 101 Street) was a sea of mud, although a few sidewalks were put up by enterprising merchants, while the cuts through the bush which marked the river lot borders were somewhat laughably called streets. The activities of an as yet unknown arsonist led Council to speed up the re-equipping of the Volunteer Fire Brigade, and to appoint a night watchman, who was the precursor of the Police Department.<sup>9</sup> The Town acquired the right to license the two ferries, and the operation of them continued to be a contentious issue for some time. Council worked hard at coping with these problems, fighting with individuals who resented the idea of moving their buildings in order to straighten out and widen the streets, putting up sidewalks and street crossings,<sup>10</sup> and spending huge sums on the new Fire Hall which was being rebuilt at Fort Edmonton Park, and fire equipment. Only one full-time clerical employee was needed. The Council itself wandered from building to building until these things were somewhat under control. It was not until 1904 that the new City of Edmonton acquired a city office, but the Fire Hall was a suitable monument to the Age of McCauley.

It may be added that the incorporation of the Town in 1892 brought a quick end to the influence of the old social elite of the 1870s and 1880s. The older Edmonton Settlement was not an organized village at all, and open "town meetings" of everyone were held when it was thought necessary. Normally, Donald Ross, proprietor of the Edmonton Hotel, chaired these meetings,<sup>11</sup> and there is little doubt from school board election results that he was the unofficial mayor. The assorted "old

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<sup>9</sup>Edmonton City Hall Vault (E.C.H.V.), Council Minutes, 15 February, 3 August 1892, 8 February, 5 July 1893.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 1892-3.

<sup>11</sup>From 1876 until 1885, this was almost invariably the case. After 1885, he alternated with McCauley.



timers" had established themselves as leading figures and the old influence of the Hudson's Bay Company continued to be an important factor.

Now, in the Age of McCauley, there was little disagreement over issues and politics tended to be intensely personal. Mayor Matthew McCauley was by no means an uncontroversial figure, but was known as an honest and reasonably efficient School Board Chairman.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, these years were marked by the ill-health of the Town Conservative, Dr. Wilson,<sup>13</sup> whose personal following was therefore absent. Frank Oliver's voice, the Edmonton Bulletin, for the moment, was predominant and McCauley was Oliver's man. In any case, nobody was yet strong enough to challenge McCauley, and his past activities against claim-jumpers ten years earlier suggested that he would be a good man to oppose Strathcona's pretensions. However, the old town meritocracy or aristocracy, depending on which view one takes, did rather badly at the polls in the first election; Donald Ross went down to defeat in the aldermanic contest, and so did most of the "big names."<sup>14</sup> In subsequent elections in this period, incumbent aldermen were by no means assured of victory and a real feeling by the electorate that these men should not get "uppity" is quite apparent.<sup>15</sup> Campaigning was rarely indulged in, the candidates generally assuming that they were well enough known. There was some talk about east end versus west end, or manufacturing versus commercial rivalries, but nothing substantial appears to have emerged in this time. Council ran fairly smoothly, often retiring after meetings to a nearby saloon for a sociable evening.

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<sup>12</sup> McCauley had been on the School Board since 1884, and had been the chairman since 1887.

<sup>13</sup> Wilson was Speaker of the N.W.T. Assembly until a stroke forced him to resign in 1891. He then spent a year in Europe.

<sup>14</sup> Bulletin, 6 February 1892.

<sup>15</sup> In the elections for the 1892, 1894, and 1895 Councils, 18 re-elections were possible. On six occasions, Councillors were re-elected, and four were defeated. Seven retired from office, and one was defeated in a mayoralty campaign. No councillor was invariably successful.

## II. The Age of the Duel (1894-97)

Looking back at early Edmonton many people often see Frank Oliver as a single great figure of the early days. In fact, although Oliver was respected for his independent views, he was not the predominant force in Edmonton life until the 1890s.<sup>16</sup> It is hard to realize that it was Dr. H. C. Wilson who was. But Dr. Wilson did not publish a newspaper,<sup>17</sup> and a stroke forced him into an early retirement in 1891. During a tour in Europe to recover his health, he was forced to leave a clear field to his arch-rival, Oliver and Oliver's anointed protege, McCauley. By 1894, however, he had begun to recover and although he was no longer the man he used to be, Dr. Wilson intended to re-enter the political wars.

Moreover, there was cause for disgruntlement in Edmonton. The railway had brought a spurt of new settlement and new business into the area, but it also brought an end to Edmonton's isolation from larger-scale economic events. It so happened that the early 1890s were at the tail end of a major depression. The lumber industry, for example, was dreadfully savaged by the recession and it is likely that other businesses failed as well.<sup>18</sup> In 1894 assessment figures fell off badly and the mill rate went up.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the river crossing problem was still serious. The two ferries suffered from being subject to tender, for John Walter lost the license to a stubborn, cantankerous and ill-humoured old timer, William Humberstone.<sup>20</sup> The river was

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<sup>16</sup> Oliver had been beaten by Wilson in the Territorial election of 1885, and had run second to him in a two-member riding in 1888. Incidentally, no pretense was made that these were non-partisan contests.

<sup>17</sup> He may have been behind two unsuccessful newspapers, the Edmonton Times of 1893-4, and the Edmonton Herald of 1895-97. No known copies of either paper survive, nor is it certain that Wilson was connected with them.

<sup>18</sup> See Table 2. The Department of the Interior Annual Report gives detailed statistics of the trade.

<sup>19</sup> See Table 2.

<sup>20</sup> Bulletin, 3, 16 February 1892.

Table 2: Economic Indicators, 1892-1912

	Assessment	<u>Mill Rate (1911=100)</u>		Revenue (1911=100)	Lumber Sales (1911=100)
		Protestant	R. Catholic		
1892	1.4	98	117	0.5	
1893	2.1	83	101	1.2	8.8
1894	2.1	118	126	1.7	6.0
1895	2.4	94	99	1.6	8.6
1896	2.0	105	92	1.4	6.4
1897	1.7	116	116	1.3	6.0
1898	2.2	124	147	1.8	18.0
1899	2.6	115	129	1.9	15.0
1900	2.7	143	180	2.3	19.0
1901	3.0	157	162	2.5	24.0
1902	3.7	143	149	5.0	41.0
1903	6.9	121	110	8.4	48.0
1904	8.7	124	113	9.0	54.0
1905	14.0		117	13.0	70.0
1906	37.0		73	25.0	62.0
1907	47.0		98	65.0	71.0
1908	49.0		106	73.0	110.0
1909	55.0		129	87.0	n.a.
1910	65.0		124	98.0	n.a.
1911	100.0		100	100.0	100.0

(Source: Town, City Annual Reports, Department of the Interior Annual Reports)

Table 3: Economic Indicators, 1911-19

	Assessment (1912=100)	Mill Rate (1912=100)	Revenue (1912=100)	Lumber Sales (1912=100)
1911				63.0
1912	100	100	100	100.0
1913	153	133	144	34.0
1914	154	146	84	57.0
1915	139	139	74	51.0
1916	107	175	73	20.0
1917	81	221	61	4.1
1918	75	250	62	n.a.
1919	65	295	67	n.a.

(Source: City of Edmonton Annual Reports, Department of Interior Annual Reports).

bridged in the winter, but the ice's freeze-up and break-up made the river totally uncrossable for twelve weeks in the year. Obviously, a bridge was needed, and there were some who thought that a known ally of the federal government would be a better man to get money out of it for the needed bridge. A good politician had a lot to work with. And Dr. Wilson was a first-class one.

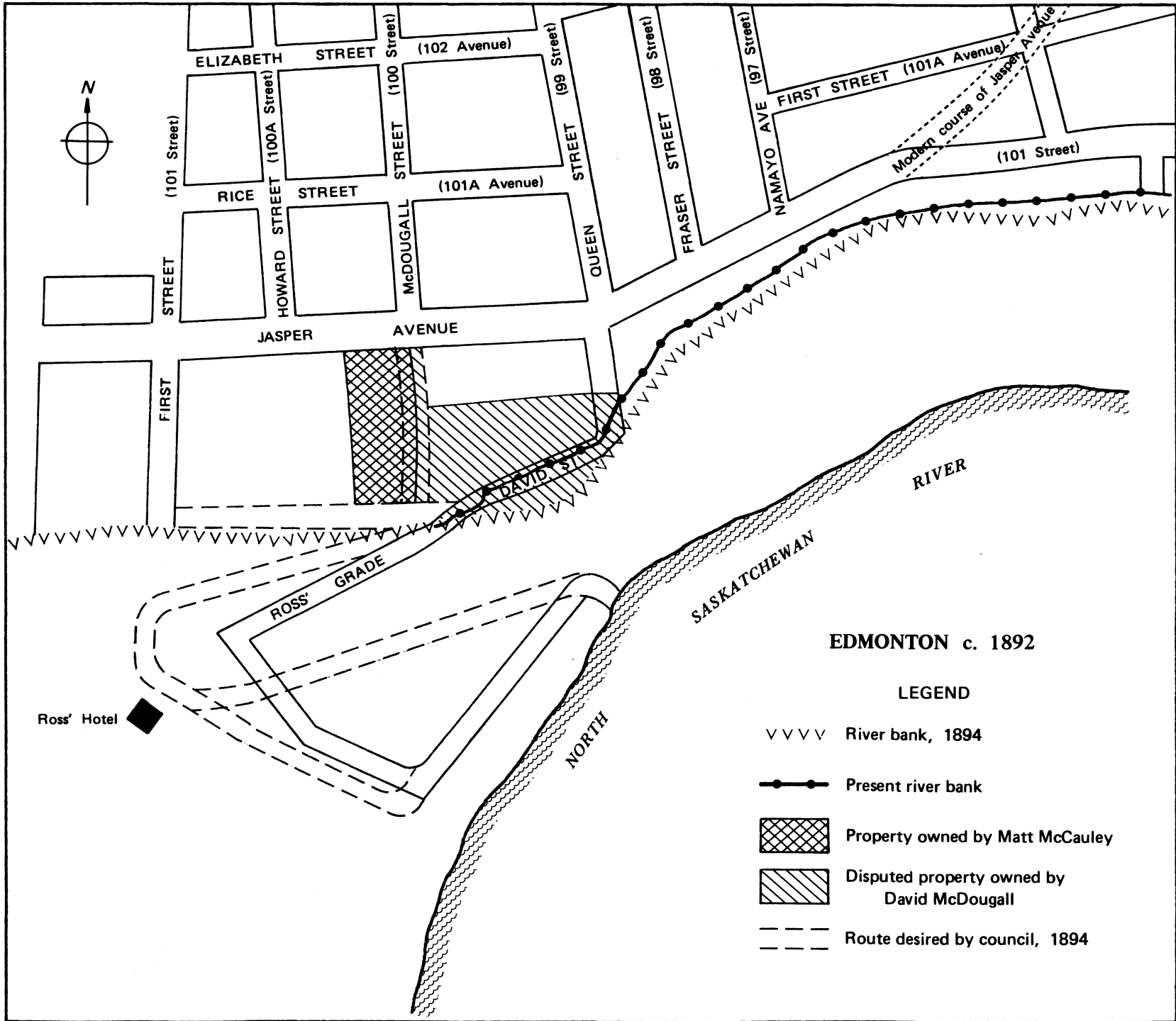
1894 marked Dr. Wilson's effort at a come-back; a come-back which he may have hoped would go beyond civic affairs. He chose to fight on two issues; the problem of the bridge and the Town's continuing troubles in opening up proper roads. In the former case, his supporters attempted to place him on a delegation to Ottawa instead of McCauley,<sup>21</sup> while the second issue was fought over the approach to Ross' grade.

McDougall Hill today is among the steepest of grades; it was a lot steeper when it was Ross' Grade. The approach to it was from 99 Street (Queen's Avenue), then along David Street, which is now largely gone over the river bank, and then down the hill on a route parallel to the present McDougall Hill, but steeper and having a much tighter turn at the corner (see Map 2). It could only have been a first class nightmare for drivers of horse-drawn vehicles. Council hoped to open up a new route by extending 100 Street to the bank and putting in a new grade. The owners of the land in question, David McDougall and the Methodist Mission drove a very hard bargain and negotiations broke down. A three-man tribunal, consisting of S. S. Taylor, W. S. Edmiston, and Dr. Wilson, was appointed to settle the issue. Taylor came out for the Town's point of view and Wilson for David McDougall. Edmiston agreed with Wilson, but somehow kept personally on good terms with everyone. Wilson and Taylor heaped abuse on each other for some months in the letter columns of the Edmonton Bulletin, and it was generally assumed that Wilson was really attacking McCauley.<sup>22</sup> The Councillors, who

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 5 March 1894.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., July-October 1894.



appear to have been resigned to Dr. Wilson's becoming Mayor, consequently put up John A. McDougall at the last minute.<sup>23</sup> A Wilson slate of aldermanic candidates opposed a McDougall/McCauley slate, and the one public election meeting made it clear that McCauley, McDougall, and Oliver were all one and the same.<sup>24</sup>

Wilson won the mayoralty handily for the 1895 term, and was re-elected by acclamation for 1896. But McCauley's supporters won a majority on Council in both terms, and McCauley himself returned as an alderman in 1896. Moreover, the town's finances did not improve, and Wilson was no further to bringing the bridge to Edmonton. Worse still, Oliver smashed the Alberta Conservatives to pieces in the federal election of 1896. Laurier won the election, and McCauley won the by-election for Oliver's seat in the Territorial Legislature. Finally, Wilson never did fully recover his health. The Council censured him in a dispute over expenses of a delegation to Ottawa, and he quit.<sup>25</sup> The anti-Wilson men, now organized as the Municipal Reform League, won the mayoralty by-election for Cornelius Gallagher, and the 1897 term for McDougall. Only one of the League's aldermanic candidates failed to win.<sup>26</sup>

McDougall's first mayoralty effectively ended this period. The year in many ways was the worst of the depressed years between 1892 and 1897, as assessment levels continued to fall and tax rates continued to rise. This Council of men devoted to a "pay-as-you-go" policy and "sound business principles" were soon at loggersheads with the Volunteer Fire Brigade. In any case, the Oliver-Wilson duel had been clearly

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<sup>23</sup>The abruptness of this decision is emphasized by the fact that McDougall had already signed Wilson's nomination papers! Five out of the seven councillors and mayor supported McDougall, Bulletin, 12 December - 10 January 1894.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 10 January 1895.

<sup>25</sup>Council Minutes, 13 October 1896.

<sup>26</sup>Bulletin, 30 November 1897.

decided at a federal level in 1896 and interest in the M.R.L. consequently declined. Its members had mixed successes for the 1898 term, reflecting the electors' feeling that the Liberal-Conservative rivalry could be better pursued elsewhere.

### III. The Age of the Professionals (1898-1905)

In the elections for 1898, W. S. Edmiston, the architect of the Fire Hall who had been able to steer clear of the Wilson-Oliver duel, won the mayoralty by acclamation. He was to be followed by K. W. MacKenzie, a schoolteacher turned bookseller, and William Short, a lawyer. None were notable figures in Territorial or Federal politics, although Short was known to be a Conservative, and ran on an anti-woman's suffrage ticket in the 1921 provincial election.<sup>27</sup> All were "professional" men, and all worked towards building up a professionalized civic government, with expanded services. Opposition to these mayors was very sporadic after Edmiston routed Cornelius Gallagher and the remnants of McDougall's Municipal Reform League, and after a new electoral system, which saw only one-half of the aldermen elected each year, was adopted for the 1899 term.<sup>28</sup> The elections for the Councils of 1900, 1901, 1902 and 1903 saw only one "opposition" candidate, Philip Heimnck, elected. There were low turnouts; only in 1903 did any candidate get more votes than the 175 polled by Edmiston in his aldermanic campaign for the 1895 term.

There was, it is true, some opposition. French-Canadian candidates such as J. H. Picard and J. H. Gariepy appear to have been rather unpopular, despite the considerable endorsement of them by the Bulletin. The Fire Brigade regularly put up at least one candidate who would denounce Council's "lackadaisical" attitude towards fire prevention. Throughout this period, they all did badly. In 1904, H. C. Taylor did run a close race against Short, but Taylor was another

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<sup>27</sup> He briefly served as editor of the Edmonton Herald in 1895; for his 1921 campaign, see the Edmonton Journal, and Edmonton Bulletin for August 1921.

<sup>28</sup> E.C.H.V., City Clerk's Reference Book.



professional man, being a lawyer. He was rather desperate for any issues to oppose Short, and ended up by campaigning on the issue of opposing a proposed enlargement of the town of South Edmonton, since the land on the south side was "really Edmonton's."<sup>29</sup>

Why was there so little opposition? Perhaps it was because Edmonton began to expand fairly rapidly but not so rapidly that it was unmanageable. The Klondike Gold Rush provided a short-lived burst of economic activity, but, more important, it brought a number of new people in, who, having failed to make the Klondike, decided they could do as well in Edmonton. The great waves of immigration were beginning, and large numbers of the immigrants passed through Edmonton, providing business for the townsfolk. Edmonton's population grew from 1,165 in 1895 to 2,626 in 1901, and doubled again by 1903.<sup>30</sup> Assessment figures grew more slowly, but they doubled between 1897 and 1902, and accelerated after that.<sup>31</sup> Thus, while economic growth by almost every measure was expanding, it was growing quickly, and the town's business became increasingly complex. Another reason for the lack of opposition may have been simply that the histrionics of the Wilson-McDougall battle had temporarily exhausted everyone's interest.

The three mayors were concerned with three main issues. They wanted municipal ownership of utilities, they wanted the town's business run smoothly and professionally, and they wanted railways. The latter was accomplished quite easily, once the federal government got around to starting the Low Level Bridge in 1899. Kenneth MacKenzie negotiated with the Canadian Northern Railway to build a railway line across the bridge to the C.P.R. station, and both Short and MacKenzie smoothed the path for a right-of-way and a union station for the Grand Trunk Pacific and Canadian Northern Railways. Like many other municipal officials, they were unhappy with the railway team of MacKenzie and Mann, who provided a tiny station in Rosedale instead of a large one in the town

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<sup>29</sup>Bulletin, 15 December 1903.

<sup>30</sup>See Table 1.

<sup>31</sup>See Table 2.

centre in 1902.<sup>32</sup> The two companies, moreover, drove a hard bargain on routes through the town, but by November, 1905, Edmonton got what it wanted; a major railway centre close to the downtown area. Hardly anyone complained.

The mayors also worked to buy out the old private telephone and power companies and to set up a waterworks and sewage system. All of this was accomplished by 1903,<sup>33</sup> and, although some opposed the policy after the event, hardly anyone complained, even if taxes went up. New taxes were but old private transactions, and the electorate did not expect something for nothing.

However, these new services added to the old ones required expertise. Until this point, the Council, or committees of aldermen handled everything retaining the services of only one fulltime official, the Town Clerk. The aldermen began to feel overloaded and few ran for re-election. Mayor MacKenzie retired with a vow never to run again, and was persuaded to stand for the 1905 term only after a very substantial salary was attached to the office.<sup>34</sup> More permanent officials slipped in, and the process was finally capped by William Short, who, in drawing up the City Charter in 1904, provided that the new city's affairs would be run by the Mayor and two appointed Commissioners.<sup>35</sup> Council would become purely a legislative body no longer running things on a day-by-day basis.

The town's continuing expansion (see Map 3) and the increasing burdens of work requiring full-time employees gave an added impetus to a civic pride which took the form of incorporation as a city in November 1904. At that moment, with provincial status for Alberta in sight, and

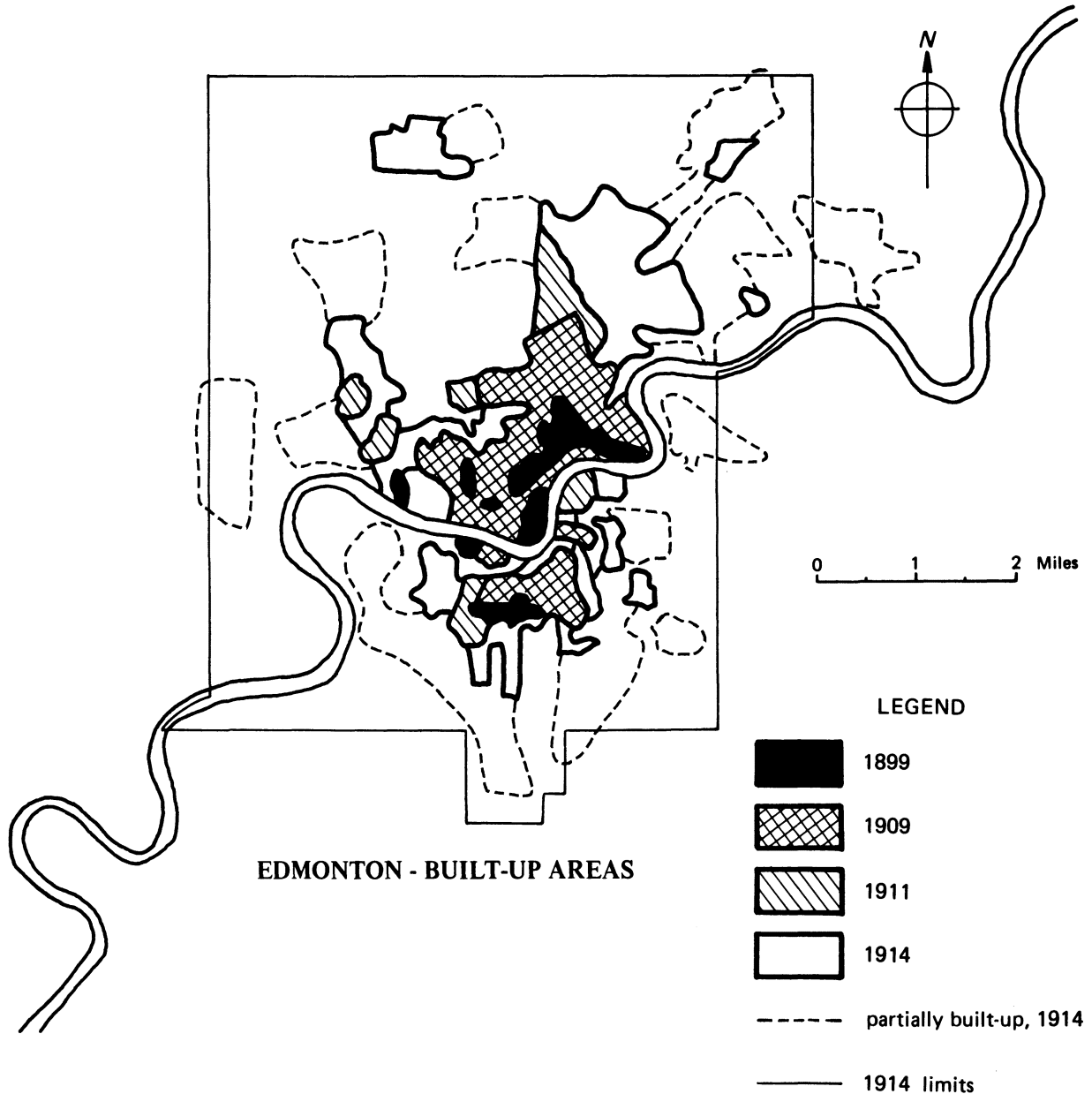
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<sup>32</sup>Such at least is the oral tradition.

<sup>33</sup>Town of Edmonton Annual Report, 1903.

<sup>34</sup>Council Minutes, 6 January, 10 January 1905.

<sup>35</sup>The Charter text is reprinted in the Journal and Bulletin in October and November 1904.



a good prospect of Edmonton's being the new capital city, the whole world seemed to belong to the new city. Short retired in a blaze of glory with Kenneth MacKenzie returning as his anointed successor, a prestigious City Council and a new office block for the city offices. But the people were restless and a number of undercurrents were beginning to flow in the ostensibly calm waters.

#### IV. The Age of Unrest (1905-08)

In 1903, Edmonton had 5,455 people. In 1905, it had 7,500 and in 1908, 18,500. Assessment figures increased fivefold in those same four years. The amount of money raised for taxes increased eightfold and expenditures by the new city by just as much. This growth can be traced in the lumber industry as well. In these four years, Edmonton's growth was not only rapid, it was unmanageably so. Private industry suffered severe dislocations; in housing, for example, no less than 20% of Edmonton's citizens were forced to live in tents in 1907, so bad was the shortage.<sup>36</sup> These were the challenges which the new city's administration were faced with; as well as providing light, power, water, sidewalks, etc., to the newcomers, Edmonton was now the capital city of the new Province of Alberta, and things had to be done to give it a more dignified look, such as paved streets and cement sidewalks. Moreover, the new city had extended its boundaries to 127 Street, 118 Avenue and 82 Street.

Ostensibly, the 1904 and 1905 Councils were like the old ones. William Short was succeeded by Kenneth MacKenzie in 1905, and a slate of aldermen pledged to continue the "professional" outlook on city government did well. The new Commissioners were the former Town Clerk, G.J. Kinnaird, and a man with a distinguished career as a Commissioner in England and Winnipeg, J.H. Hargreaves.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Bulletin, August 1907.

<sup>37</sup>Hargreaves' biography is in the Journal of 6 February 1905.

Quiet moves were made to make the police and fire chiefs more professional, and most of the great issues remained matters of little contention. The agreements with the railways were completed; the battle for Edmonton being Alberta's capital city was fought by Frank Oliver, still the city's M.P., and now Minister of the Interior to boot; the housing of immigrants, the laying of cement sidewalks and the new Civic Annex caused few difficulties.

However, the "professionals" were beginning to arouse opposition on three fronts. Various dissatisfied groups began to emerge, which eventually were to coalesce into quite a formidable force. These people are best described as "populists." Some, such as J.R. Boyle, and Charles May had a fundamental distrust of bureaucrats, especially appointed Commissioners who apparently ran everything without so much as by-your-leave to the elected aldermen. Others represented communities which felt neglected, notably Norwood and Riverdale, but also including most of the East End.<sup>38</sup> Others represented ethnic groups: the Germans and Ukrainians were beginning to endorse candidates of their own,<sup>39</sup> and the French-Canadians found a champion in Wilfred Garipey to balance the "professional's" J.H. Picard.<sup>40</sup> There were now a large number of tenants in Edmonton, who, however, did not have the vote, and were appropriately dissatisfied. Finally, the labour unions wanted men who would sympathize with their cause.

A second major group were the straight-out reactionaries. Led by W.A. Griesbach, these people wanted a return to the simpler days of town government, a return to private ownership of utilities and a reliance on volunteer agencies to carry out fire and police duties.<sup>41</sup> The Volunteer Fire Brigade was the main source of their strength. This group did not last long, however,

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<sup>38</sup> Full slates of "East End" candidates were put up for the 1907 and 1908 terms.

<sup>39</sup> Examples include a German candidate, Gustave Koermann for the Council of 1907, and an Eastern European, Gregory Krikewsky, for the Public School Board for the 1909 term.

and were eventually absorbed into the "business" group.

This third coalition, the "business government" people tended to be composed of the commercial and entrepreneurial elements of society. They distrusted the new civil service as bureaucratic and lacking in business sense, and unable to provide imaginative leadership.

Each of these groups had their turn at trying to cope with the city's growth. Kenneth MacKenzie worked harmoniously with the Commissioners and had a good majority of "older statesmen" as Councillors to support him. The attacks of Boyle and May on Kinnaird and Hargreaves were easily turned aside, as were Griesbach's ruminations against Commission government in general. But the atmosphere in the 1905 Council became increasingly tense, and a fist-fight was only narrowly avoided between two aldermen in July.<sup>42</sup> After the inauguration Day of Alberta on September 1, 1905, the cement sidewalks so quickly laid for the great event began to collapse and buckle. Fire Hydrants refused to work. Water ran into the basement of the new Civic Annex and the foundations had to be shored up.<sup>43</sup> The city's former auditor and Commissioner Kinnaird, ran a battle all year over each other's competence. Drainage in the new Norwood subdivision was inadequate. The West End was too far away from the single fire hall, and there was trouble over the one departure from municipal ownership; the chartered street railway company was doing nothing at all.

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<sup>40</sup> Wilfred Gariepy (1875-1957) later achieved provincial ministerial status, and had a brief period of national notoriety as an Independent M.P. for Trois-Rivieres after the 1945 election.

<sup>41</sup> W.A. Griesbach, I Remember (Toronto, 1944); Journal, first two weeks of December, 1906.

<sup>42</sup> Journal, 9 July 1905.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 12 September 1905; Bulletin, 21 March 1906.

Although Mayor MacKenzie left office at the end of 1905 with a good reputation, the "professionals" were solidly repudiated in the elections for the 1906 term. Charles May swept into office on a platform of doing away with the Commission form of government, and lowering taxes.<sup>44</sup> May (the uncle of "Wop" May, the bush pilot) proved to have much in common with two other populist politicians, Joseph A. Clarke and John Diefenbaker. A forceful speaker and an effective, able oppositionist, May proved to be both erratic and ineffectual in office. Two aldermen, Picard and Thomas Bellamy, were able to block all efforts to undermine the Commissioners and the Commissioners were their enthusiastic supporters.<sup>45</sup> The unfortunate May had virtually no control over Kinnaird and Kinnaird beat off his efforts to sack Commissioner Hargreaves while he was unable to handle a Council which was out for the blood of both Commissioners. May found himself forced into saving Kinnaird time and again.<sup>46</sup> He was forced into presiding over the dissolution of the Voluntary Fire Brigade whose members went over into open and consistent war with him. It would be unfair to say that May was unable to accomplish anything; the police, fire and engineering departments were re-organized and he did begin to straighten out the street railway problem. He also acquired the city's first parks. But normal services rapidly fell behind the increasing expansion of the city and his attempt to reach an agreement for an automatic telephone exchange failed. He was completely adrift as to any coherent policy; he had come in against the

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<sup>44</sup>Journal; Bulletin, 1-15 December 1905.

<sup>45</sup>Particularly delightful cases occurred on 27 February, and 7 March 1906 (Journal).

<sup>46</sup>Council Minutes, 21 February, 27 March 1906.

"professionals", but the civic civil service structure was expanded under him. He swung erratically between opposing the Commissioners, supporting them, and supporting one but not the other. He went out of office a bitter and discredited man.<sup>47</sup>

W.A. Griesbach became Mayor in 1907 at the head of those who wanted the older days of the town administration to come back and on a programme of strict economy. Except for fire services (Griesbach was a former member of the Volunteer Fire Brigade), the strict economy programme was followed. And this meant thousands of new residents were denied sanitary or power services. The street railway problem dragged on, and the new telephone exchange system was nowhere in sight.

J.H. Picard put up a well-organized and stoutly-contested attempt to vindicate Griesbach's mayoralty and the Commission government principle for the campaign for the 1908 term. But John A. McDougall came out of retirement to lead the "Commercial" party, and blasted the whole method of running the city, the professional mayors, May, Griesbach and the Commissioners. He wanted the city run on business principles. McDougall ran up more than 70% of the vote.<sup>48</sup> He tore through legal agreements; he fired most of the city's officials; he did complete the street railway; he got the automatic telephone exchange. And then he went on to become one of Edmonton's two M.L.A.'s in 1909. It was a legendary mayoralty. But he was lucky in that the rapid growth of Edmonton had slowed down by 1908, allowing the city to catch up in services. And somebody had to pick up the pieces, but nobody dared apply for the positions held by the fired officials.<sup>49</sup> The remaining city

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<sup>47</sup>His "authorized" biography in J. Blue, History of Alberta, Volume III (Edmonton, 1921) was particularly at pains to try and correct the record of his government.

<sup>48</sup>Bulletin, early December 1907.

<sup>49</sup>Council Minutes, 28 May, 17 December 1908. The City Engineer's job was not filled until 1910.



officials were in a state of terror.

Once again, Edmonton wanted a rest from the tremendous upheavals of the last few years, and, although McDougall's memory was revered, McDougall's style of government was no longer desired. The professionals, the populists, the reactionaries, and the commercials had all had a chance at coping with the city's rapid growth. All had been repudiated.

#### V. The Interlude and Armageddon (1909-15)

Under the mayoralties of Robert Lee, and George Armstrong, the city reverted to a style of government similar to those of Edmiston, Short, and MacKenzie. There was some continuing opposition to the Commissioners, and some of the more reactionary members of Council, such as J.D. Hyndman and H.L. McInnis, sought to sell off the utilities to private enterprise and took a particularly hostile view towards labour unions.<sup>50</sup> However most of the aldermen were not interested in a return to the McDougall or Griesbach style of government, and wanted the city's business to get done. Between 1909 and 1911, a slower rate of growth helped and the "professional" party was solidly in charge.

The other groups, however, were also active. The East End put up slates of candidates in 1907 and 1908, which included ethnic and labour union candidates. "Wage earner's" candidates and "Tenant Franchise" candidates ran in 1909 and 1910 without much success. However, East End candidates could get elected on occasion. The desperate groups of the old "populist" movement were drawn together under the hand of Joseph Andrew Clarke, known as "Fighting Joe", whose colourful style and brilliant political abilities were matched only by his inability to administer. Clarke's leadership, however, reunited the "populists" and they were ready to attack the old order by the end of 1911, when the 1912 elections for the first Council of the amalgamated cities of Edmonton and Strathcona were held. Their hand was strengthened by the provincial government, who extended the franchise to tenants during the

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<sup>50</sup>Bulletin, early December 1907.

spring 1911 session.

The "business" party attacked Robert Lee's mayoralty in the 1910 elections but without success. However, in W.J. Magrath, they found an outstandingly successful real estate promoter who was tired of the "unprogressive" and "bureaucratic" city administration.<sup>51</sup> The real estate boom which followed the amalgamation of Edmonton and Strathcona appeared to lend support to their contention that they were the cause of the area's growth. And had not McDougall shown how formalities, red tape, and officials could be overridden?

In the election for 1912, G.S. Armstrong won an easy mayoralty victory, and had the support of several "professional aldermen". One or two "business" aldermen won, and the "populists" made a breakthrough, electing four aldermen out of ten. These elections were gentlemanly. Those for the 1913, 1914 and 1915 terms were not.

The mayoralty election for 1913 was symbolic. William Short came out of retirement to fight for the "professionals." He had never been inactive, but, like Kenneth MacKenzie, had been leading citizen's groups of one sort or another, seeking a public library, better services and so forth. MacKenzie was also out of retirement, having run for the Public School Board the year before for the sole purpose of upholding the then superintendent against his enemies on the Board.<sup>52</sup> Clarke, already an alderman, went all-out in pressing the "underdog's" cause, including those who were tenants, ethnics, or wage earners. W.J. Magrath led the entrepreneurial forces. After an extremely tumultuous campaign, Short won by over three-to-one over either, although the two losers put together did not do quite so badly.<sup>53</sup> However, only one of the five aldermen elected for that year was a Short supporter, and his support slowly declined on Council as the year went on.

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<sup>51</sup>Edmonton Capital, 15 November - 20 December 1912.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 1-15 December 1911.

<sup>53</sup>The final result was: Short 3,732, Magrath 1,220, Clarke 1,111.

In 1913, the first signs of the end of the real estate boom were becoming clear, and Short managed to make himself unpopular in an attempt to set up a municipally-owned natural gas company.<sup>54</sup> Both the "business" party and the "populists" were quite aware that they could not defeat Short by themselves, but apparently both felt that they could beat Short by coalescing against him. The entrepreneurs were given the chance to win the mayoralty, and they chose a successful real estate businessman who had hitherto been entirely apolitical, W.J. McNamara. McNamara also brought one fraternal order which had been left somewhat out in the cold, the Knights of Columbus, into the coalition. Clarke and his allies would be given control of Council. The East End, the entrepreneurs, the ethnic groups and the labour unions were thus thrown against the West End, the old fraternal orders, the "professionals," and the city bureaucracy. McNamara did defeat Short, although it was an extremely close race, but Clarke won a decisive victory in the aldermanic contest.

The McNamara-Clarke administration lasted for seven months. Short's supporters never ceased attacking the alliance,<sup>55</sup> but with decreasing success until a police scandal broke out. It was found that the police were at best looking the other way on the subject of prostitution and gambling. It was clear that McNamara had instructed the police to be tolerant, and it was suspected (but never proved) that Clarke was running a protection racket.<sup>56</sup> The affair overshadowed even the outbreak of World War I in the public's mind. In August, the administration came to a complete collapse after Clarke and McNamara came to blows

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<sup>54</sup>Newspaper accounts, 18 March - 1 April, 1913, November - December, 1913.

<sup>55</sup>Capital, 13 May 1914.

<sup>56</sup>The police inquiry proceedings and report are printed in all newspapers for June and July 1914.

in the Council Chamber itself.<sup>57</sup> Things drifted aimlessly until the elections for the 1915 term when a "clean government" slate under W.T. Henry decisively defeated McNamara and his supporters. Henry, a follower of Short, continued to hold office until 1917, with a collapsing economy, and the ravages of war putting the old battles of civic politics out of mind.

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<sup>57</sup>Bulletin, 12 August 1914.