

## The Civic Narrative—Post WW II to 1960s

In 1893 Portland's population was 100,000. When there were things to be done in the City it was easy enough to bring together a handful of men and just do it. For example, in the early 1890s the Group of 100 was formed to "examine the finances of the city." The Group of 100 was a who's who of the downtown power elite, the Honorable H.W. Corbett as chairman. An Oregonian editorial paternally referred to the group's ability to exert a moral influence on the community "[as] such an influential body of citizens can have." The Civic Improvement League in the early 1900s sponsored the creation of the Edward Bennet Plan for Portland. The Initiative One Hundred in the early 1900 pushed for parks development in Portland.

Abbott (1983) summarizes the ways things were done in planning and public projects in the early 1900s, what brought this generation of civic leaders together on one project after another was the assumption that planning was properly organized by the substantial citizens of a city. Portland's civic leaders recognized no clear distinction between public concerns and the interests of banks, landholders, utilities and corporations. Wealthy businessmen and their allies in the professions repeatedly took the initiative in ordering the physical growth of the city through private committees and semi-independent commissions. With minor variations, their same role was apparent in the first steps toward a park system, the promotion of comprehensive urban design, the provision of harbor facilities, the response to the housing shortage of 1918, and the establishment of land use planning and zoning as a municipal function. (Abbott, Planning p. 48)

World War II brought large changes to Portland, when the population grew from 305,000 in 1940 to 410,000 in 1945, due in large part to cheap electricity from the Columbia River, and easy, but inland, access to the Pacific ocean, which made it the perfect center for the creation and repair of war ships. While World War II unsettled civic life in Portland, when the war was over civic life in Portland settled back into old and familiar routines. "Government agencies, real estate investors, and different sections of the city reasserted their separate agendas for public action as the postwar boom made the pursuit of self-interest respectable after years of sacrifice for the home front." During World War II and after the Portland Area Postwar Development Committee led the way in creating a vision for the city's future, including by bringing Robert Moses to town to help shape the vision, a vision filled with highways.

Richard Neuberger, a representative voice of that period through his writings in Saturday Evening Post and other journals, in 1947 described Portland as a "combination of the rustic and the metropolitan. Jerked by the war from an Arcadian existence among flowers and first, it looks back longingly on the not-so-distant days when Columbian blackmails nibbled in front yard and no factory smoke shrouded the spectacle of four quiescent volcanoes squatting in year-round snow cloaks on the horizon.

Urban renewal, a tool the city has used to spectacular effect in the last three decades, was suspect in the mid-1950s: a city commissioner at the time was quoted in the Oregon Journal as describing it as "the very essence of communism." A photograph of Portland's Redevelopment Board (a predecessor of the current urban renewal agency, the Portland Development Commission) sums up the power structure of the city then: a group of men in suits and ties sitting around a rectangular table, on which ashtrays are lined up like today's water bottles.

In the 1950s and most of the 1960s, citizen involvement was achieved by rounding up the usual elites, professionals, and elected officials. PSU urban planning professor Carl Abbott summarizes the process of neighborhood planning between 1957 and 1967 in his book *Portland: Planning, Politics, and Growth in a Twentieth-Century City*:

City Planning Commission reports make no reference to neighborhood groups or citizen involvement. They were prepared by city employees for their colleagues in city hall. ... During Terry Schruck's first three terms as mayor [1957-1972], planners worked from the top down, applying professional values and expertise to small-scale problems and informing local residents of the resulting proposals.

Racial minorities and women were underrepresented in most city-authorized commissions, boards, and committees. In 1960, women--though traditionally quite active in clubs throughout the 1950s and 1960s--made up only 29 percent of the city's civic body membership, and they tended to be channeled into specific niches. Of the total of 120 women on civic boards in 1960, about half served on five commissions: arts, metropolitan youth, zoo, Pittock Mansion, and Japanese Garden commissions--all valued civic institutions, but hardly comparable to more powerful commissions such as planning, Portland development, and housing, on which only ten women served out of a combined roster of fifty-three. Civic actions were for the most part polite and unimaginative. In 1961 several neatly dressed women, members of the Portland Garden Club, formed the Beauty Brigade and "marched" on city hall to oppose auto ramps coming off of two bridges in downtown Portland. As late as 1967 a City Club report on race in Portland identified only one civic body, other than the emerging Model Cities Program, that had black representation: the Metropolitan Relations Commission, which the City Club committee accused of being a public relations arm of the mayor's office.

Women did have a critical role in civic life. They were the de facto social service workers. In the 1950s and early 1960s one of the most dominant forms of civic associations was women's clubs. There was a virtual army of women roaming the civic byways in those days: 600 women's clubs, with at least 18,000 (about 1 out of 10 women in Portland) members involved in civic activities (Salute, 1962).

However, under the surface of everyday civic life in Portland there has always been a dreamer, schemer, and radical underbelly. This may be explained as Schwantes theorizes by the place of the Pacific Northwest in the westward expansion. . . As documented in *Utopian Societies of Puget Sound*, the northwest drew dreamers to its thick woods and isolated valleys and islands, founding communes and intentional communities in the 19th century that could easily be mistaken for much later communes in the 1960s. The bounty of the northwest represented opportunity for those who believed they were on a mission to tame the wilderness, and for others it represented opportunity, a second change to start over, a place to accomplish great things.

The *Firebrand* was a journal briefly published by Portland anarchists in the late 19th century that featured shocking articles advocating free love and radical dismissals of some laws and mores. In Portland, in the 1890s, radicals in Portland, as Schwantes notes, "pursued their goals openly, preaching their gospel on busy street corners, and mingling freely with potential converts. Reform study groups such as the Academy of Socialism and the *Firebrand* and Social Science Clubs of Portland, abounded in the new Northwest, and debates among anarchists, socialists, single taxers, and others became a popular form of entertainment." the *Firebrand* family, those publishing the journal and others loosely affiliated with the group, trying to make ends meet, also attempted to live off the land in the countryside near Portland. "They spend days in the nearby mountains picking wild blackberries to can for winter survival... Between

canning provisions and tending the cow, chickens, and cats, they set type and edited copy." (Schwantes, p. 283).

There were also political reformers that early on had a tremendous impact on the Oregon political system. During the progressive era Oregon became well known as a "political experiment station," because of its role in pioneering the use of the initiative, referendum, direct primary, recall, and direct election of U.S. senators—measures that became known as the "Oregon system." The Oregon system was pushed through by William S. U'Ren and the People's Power League, a group also advocating the single tax system based on Henry George's best selling book, *Progress and Poverty*.

Robert Johnston has made a strong case for looking at Portland's history as a series of struggles between the traditional civic elite, and alliances of lower middle class—small property-holders and shopkeepers, lower-level white collar workers, artisans and skilled workers, what he refers to as the "radical middle class." Johnston documents the influence populist movements had on Oregon politics, and Portland in particular. There were several key City elections when the coalitions of middle class and those of the white civic elite clearly came to the foreground. Will Daley, one of the architects of Oregon's direct democracy experiments, won election to the Portland City Council in 1919. As president of the Portland Central Labor Council in Portland he was the first labor official elected to the Portland City Council. Daley was cast as a socialist by the establishment. An Oregonian article described his contribution to the city in the following way:

"a resume of socialistic plans and rosy dreams...design in more or less remote future to make of Portland a rainbowed haven of little work and abundant ease. Assessing the property owner, and not the tenant, for water; charging the general taxpayer and not the water fund for the installation of fire hydrants; installing a municipal garage collection system; fixing a \$3 [per day] minimum wage for unskilled labor, and water metering the city—all were shown to be a part of the Daley socialistic propaganda." (r. Johnston article, p.?)

Then in 1917 he ran for mayor against the popular and colorful George Baker. He only lost the election by 2000 votes out of 48,000. As Johnston notes Daley was brought this close to being a Portland mayor by an alliance of working and small businesses. In a plot that has repeated itself through Portland's history, a mysterious break in at Daley's house revealed that he was a socialist, a fact that the Oregonian made sure the public knew about, and a likely reason why he lost the election to Baker. At least three times during Portland's history, the police or other appointees of the city managed red squads and subversive watchdog programs.

Not all of Portland's civic organizations have been peace loving, charitable or progressive. Anti-Catholic nativists surfaced in Portland after World War I. In the statewide primary of 1918, such groups as the American Patriotic Association, the American Patriotic League, and the Oregon Federation of Patriotic Societies were active in the election. The key issue was free and compulsory education, a way of prohibiting private Catholic schools. The Klu Klux Klan was active in this anti-Catholic movement. The Klan also for a time controlled Multnomah County Republican organization. In the 1922 election, 12 of 13 Klan-backed legislative candidates won nomination. Two Klan-backed candidates were elected to the Board of County Commissioners. (Demarco, p. 115)

How a community treats its challengers is a good test of its civic nature. Portland's has been sometimes innovative, sometimes shaky, and sometimes frightfully narrow minded and down right prejudicial and bigoted. The City created a red squad, alluded to earlier, during and after World War I, to "watch" the subversive threats of socialists and union activists. Similarly, after World War II, the City established a red squad to monitor organizations

that might be plotting revolution. Then, once again, fearing the worst, the City of Portland Police established a subversives watch program within the Portland Police, during the 1960s and 1970s to watch over subversive blacks, Native Americans, Youth, or anyone who seemed to hang a flyer on a telephone pole. While the act of establishing such taskforces and its breadth or impact can tell one a lot about the community, what is also fascinating is that the function of archiving such ephemeral data, in a twisted way, is an invaluable function for historians. The files kept, and in some cases still preserved, are remarkable historical records of organizations that might not otherwise even make it to newspaper content.

#### Civic Narrative—1960s—1970s

In 1967 at a panel discussion on the protests of youth held at the annual meeting of the Mental Health Association in Portland, Ace Hayes (age 27), predicted coming revolution and bloodshed. He told the audience, "You have to use violence...that means there are people in this room who will be killing each other shortly." Ace represented a perspective that was hard for most to understand. Portlanders were used to seeing young civil rights activists involved in civil disobedience and student war protesters, but still a declaration like Ace's was difficult to assimilate. The only context Portlanders had for coming to grips with this "generation gap" was the previous decade's difficulty with juvenile delinquency. But Ace's "delinquency" was informed by politics with an edge.

The language, music, fads, or mores of young people have always been an assault on the previous generation. But, in Portland in the 1950s it was assumed that the young would take up wherever the previous generation left off. They would join civic organizations, buy into the American dream, and after a short period of "sewing their oats," live conventional lives.

There was alarm at the rise of juvenile delinquency. In Mayor Dorothy McCullough Lee's reign (1949-1952) Portland experienced a growing problem with teenage gangs battling police and making downtown streets unpleasant at night. By the mid-to-late 1950s juvenile delinquency in Portland had risen to new heights, if not in actual incidents, at least in the perception of its citizens. In December, 1956 the police reported that November had been the worst month for juvenile crime in Portland's history (Youth crime rate, 1956).

The concern about juvenile delinquency in Portland resulted in the creation in 1958 of a Metropolitan Youth Commission, the focus of which was to coordinate efforts to work with youth and to quell juvenile delinquency problems. However, neither the Metropolitan Youth Commission nor the citizens of Portland were prepared for what happened to its young people in the 1960s.

The popular assumption was that youth were rebelling because of new role models portrayed on television, in movies, and most of all, through rock and roll music. The juvenile delinquents--like the popular movie that made James Dean a star--seemed to be rebels without a cause. Their actions were not political, and those committing illegal or violent actions were few. For every rebel, it was possible to point to many more youth who played by the rules. The key difference in the later 1960s, as illustrated by Ace Haye's declaration of revolution, was that a political philosophy, however skewed or incoherent, lay behind his statements and actions. Ace was a rebel with a cause.

Protests and demonstrations by young people had been few and far between in Portland's history. "Protests" by students in the 1950s were more understandable, if somewhat unmannerly, such as the 150 male students who rampaged through a women's dormitory at University of Oregon upon hearing that

the women had resolved not to go on any dates during homecoming (Del Mar, 2003). Following World War II there were occasional protests by Portland college students about Truman's compulsory military service policy, and the few protesters were monitored carefully by the Portland Police "Red Squad."

Portlanders tried to reassure themselves that youth such as Ace were in the minority, but increasingly it was difficult to overlook the strange behavior of young people. In the mid-to-late 1960s it seemed that strangely dressed youth were everywhere, hippies as they were called, or called themselves. A series of articles in the Oregonian (Barry, 1967) attempted to explain the new phenomenon. "The beats, also known as hippies," one article explained are seriously working toward an intellectual goal--Zen, a form of Buddhism--and have made their way of life a cult or religion....they are essentially in revolt against the established institutions in society and like the beats are opposed to work...they rent apartments (pads) usually in rundown dwellings...in the pads the beats sit around on the floor legs crossed discussing, Zen, Christ, Martin Luther, searching for the God within...police say they found in some of the pads they raided complicated lighting devices that had been designed to project psychedelic patterns on walls, floors and ceilings. Some of the pads hit in the raids still had Christmas trees...while "freaked out" (high on drugs) some beats have been known to engage in some pretty sordid sexual activities (p. 16).

Portlanders were well aware of the hippies and the counter culture in 1967-1968. Special issues of Life magazine and other popular magazines carried graphic portraits of the lives of hippies and the values of the counter culture. While the epicenter of the counter culture was San Francisco, the Interstate Freeway (I-5) that stretched from Vancouver, BC to Los Angeles, served as a conduit for hitchhiking youth who moved from city to city, including Eugene, Portland, and Seattle. The college students and dropped out youth knew how to find their kind in any city. There were college campuses (Portland State College and Reed College in Portland), particular neighborhoods that might be found by looking for "head shops," selling drug paraphernalia, food co-ops, mini versions of the Height Ashbury neighborhood in San Francisco, and dance clubs and coffee shops, that were advertised via posters on telephone poles.

There was also fear that innocent young people would be dragged into this other life. It was seductive. Even an undercover police officer in Portland had to be "saved from drifting into the beat life (Magner, 1967)."The very phrase hippie and counter culture was applied profusely during this period to describe anything new or unconventional. Francis Invancie, in a campaign for a City of Portland commissioner's seat, dubbed his opponent, Tom Walsh, "king of the hippies" for his support of, among other things, stopping the Mt. Hood Freeway. An activist Mitzi Scott (Bonner, 2001b) recalled that when Neil Goldschmidt celebrated his successful bid for mayor in (1972) a businessman, George Rives, attending his reception commented

A houseful of hippies. Loud music, you know, and so on. And George Rives says - I'll never forget it - he says, "Oh, my God," he says, "If my friends from the Arlington Club could see this, their worst fears would be confirmed. Now, he meant it in a funny way, okay? He laughed. We all laughed. It was hilarious. But you know at the time I mean, I think that's how a lot of downtown business people - and maybe others, as well - viewed Neil. Oh, my God, you know, ACLU, former Legal Aid attorney, this fast-talking guy is going to be our mayor, and what is going to happen to this city?

Civic Narrative-1980s and 1990s

Citizen governance in Portland hit its peak in the 1980s. The City created more citizen advisory committees during the 1980s than any other decade. In the 1980s there were 76 civic bodies (46 new ones) working on social issues. The more contentious types of civic actions, such as demonstrations and protests, peaked in the mid-1970s. Activists who were on the streets in the late sixties and early seventies were more likely by the mid-1980s to be presenting testimony at public hearings, involved in local neighborhood battles, or deliberating public policy by sitting on citizen advisory committees. During the 1980s citizens in Portland pulled off a "velvet revolution." Bud Clark, a neighborhood activist from northwest Portland, was elected mayor in 1985. At about the same time (1981-1986) Margaret Strachan, another neighborhood activist from northwest Portland, became a city commissioner. Strachan's commitment to civic democracy was evident in how she developed a process for updating and expanding the City's Downtown Plan of 1972, and the Central City Plan. To a gathering of planners she emphasized that "the process we're using turns the traditional planning role upside down. It starts with citizens, is driven by them, is controlled by them and approved by them. The planner serves as guide, skilled professional, and pencil for the public (Hovey, 1998, p. 43)."

While the 1980s can be viewed as the pinnacle of citizen governances, by the end of the century there was a sense that some parts of the fabric of civic life in Portland had unraveled. During the 1990s the number of citizen advisory groups declined, and the City withdrew from two of its most innovative, but cumbersome, democratic innovations, the bureau advisory committee structure and neighborhood needs reports.

It is also notable by comparing news about neighborhood actions in the mid-1980s and the late 1990s, a rather astounding difference is notable. In the mid 1980s three fourths of the news about neighborhood action was positive. Neighborhood associations were described as saving neighborhoods, hosting block parties, and involved in positive encounters with government through sanctioned planning processes. In the late 1990s the opposite was true. Two thirds of the news about neighborhood actions was negative. Headlines referred to neighborhoods as battle zones: "Battle of Boise," "Long dispute over fire station resolved," "North Portland opposes Jail," "Two of Portland's victories for NIMBY movement," "Southeast neighborhoods unsatisfied with city services." The neighborhood system, established to provide the city with intermediary organizations, had instead spawned outside challenging groups.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, community activism which focused on limiting the powers of government through dismantling public programs was on the rise; so were activists and activist groups that viewed government as an obstacle, rather than a partner in achieving individual and community benefits. Empowered individual citizens and citizen groups used the initiative system to undermine representative government process, forcing politicians to spend more time acting on legislation presented by outside challenging groups rather than their own agenda.

During this period civic innovations also emerged in the public and nonprofit sectors to respond to the complexity of empowered citizen groups, and the consequent need to re-establish community consensus about a common vision for the community. In the early 1990s the City of Portland embarked on an ambitious process to re-involve the public in the future of Portland by creating a 40-member policy committee, the Portland Future Focus. In recognition of the need to repair the relationship between citizens and governing structures in 1994 the City of Portland re-evaluated Portland's 20-year old neighborhood involvement system through the creation of the Task Force on Neighborhood Involvement. When Portland once again elected a populist mayor Tom Potter, in 1994, the neighborhood system was revisited through the Portland Vision and

Community Connect programs initiated by the mayor. To avoid some of the pitfalls of over articulation of interests by citizen-interest organizations, the Coalition for A livable Future was created, a coalition of 60 groups focused on constructive dialogue about managing growth in the region.