

# Quincy History



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## History of Quincy Municipal Departments

By Paul D. Harold

The Honorable Thomas S. Burgin, in the chapter he wrote on Quincy government for Quincy 350 Years, pointed out that the formerly robust town meeting form of government fell into disrepute between 1840 and 1870, leading to "agitation" for a change to the city form of government.

### Town Meeting Government

For one thing, civic leaders and their way of doing things seemed old-fashioned and stodgy compared to the rough-and-ready vitality of the youthful American democracy. For another, town meeting government seemed on the road to ruin, with finances uncertain as municipal debt ballooned from \$8,000 in 1844 to \$112,000 in 1874 - a 14-fold increase. Town Meeting repeatedly raised money to pay the debt, then promptly spent the funds on meeting citizens' immediate needs for municipal services.

The problem was obvious: town meeting, then, as ever, strapped for money, never appropriated enough to meet expenses for the various services that the burgeoning population expected.

John Quincy Adams II and other leading citizens called for a return to a proper town meeting where issues could be properly addressed. But the Town of Quincy was growing too fast, and while Adams' approach did help the situation somewhat, there was no denying the need for more and better municipal services.

### Change to City Government

Dissatisfaction with the municipal government's inability to respond eventually led, in 1884, to a citizens' meeting at which the question of a city charter was discussed. Although the group appointed a committee to study the issue, everyone agreed that the present state of affairs could not continue. And so, after more than three years of study, public meetings and vigorous debate, a charter was approved by Town Meeting on December 1, 1887, and passed by the State Legislature without debate on May 27, 1888. Governor Oliver Ames immediately signed it into law, and a Town Meeting, which Quincy's Town Selectmen immediately called, adopted the new form of government on June 11 by a vote of 812 to 454.

Just over half of the town's 2,400 registered voters turned out to vote on the issue; but when the town moderator announced the results at Town Hall, cheers went up and the bell in the old Stone Temple across the street let out a peal.

Why the "agitation" to change from a town meeting form of government to a city?

After all, town government had been good enough for Quincy's two United States Presidents, and the town had a good many strong points.

It was famous for its school system, praised by the State Board of Education as "a striking example of what can be accomplished" after the School Committee of 1873, chaired

by John Quincy Adams II, hired Col. Francis W. Parker to revitalize public education and invent "The Quincy Method".

Quincy had the fabulous Thomas Crane Public Library, an 1882 rendition in stone by Henry Hobson Richardson so famous that a picture of it appeared in the Encyclopedia Britannica.

It was world-famous for shipbuilding and granite.

It had the Adams Temple done in Quincy Granite, and matching Town Hall across the street. It had 35 schoolhouses, including a high school. It had the Old Colony Railroad and the Neponset Turnpike spanned the river en route to Boston.

It had a busy economy, a growing industrial base with the world's largest gear maker joining the more traditional granite and shoe industries, three major banks, and its own newspaper. It had fabulous resort areas in Houghs Neck and Squantum, and its own Yacht Club.

Quincy also had another flourishing institution —the Quincy Mutual Fire Insurance Company— that gives a hint of one reason people demanded a stronger municipal government. For one major area of concern in Quincy was, and always had been, the threat of fire.

As early as 1644, the seven voters who assembled for the Old Braintree Town Meeting that year voted to require "every householder" to have

a ladder to stand against his chimney to protect himself and the town against fire. In 1792, the Quincy Fire Society was formed for the mutual protection of its members' homes in case of fire. In 1853, the State Legislature approved an act to establish an actual Fire Department in Quincy; and in 1860, the aforementioned Quincy Mutual Fire Insurance Company was formed.

So strong was the concern about fire that the present Quincy Fire Department was established as the very first ordinance of the new City of Quincy, on February 25, 1889. Although the "City" of Quincy had been approved in 1888, it was not until January 7, 1889 that the city government came into being. And with lightning speed—for those horse-and-carriage days—the new government formed a fire department.

With all of the growth in industry, had come a burgeoning population of workers and, for those who worked in Boston, the Old Colony Railroad made Quincy an easy commute.

The railroad opened in 1845 and eventually opened stations in Quincy, Wollaston, Norfolk Downs and Atlantic. Although large employers such as Tubular Rivet, Boston Gear and Pneumatic Scale had not yet located next to the tracks, enterprising real estate developers at Wollaston Land Associates were hard at work finding ways to promote sales of the 300-plus acres they owned on and near Wollaston Hill. When they arranged with the Old Colony Line to issue free three-year passes to anyone who bought a Wollaston Land Associates house lot, the building boom really got going.

The new residents of these rapidly-expanding residential neighborhoods wanted municipal services, and plenty of them. After all, many of them were moving from urban Boston to the rural boondocks of Montclair, Wollaston Heights, Norfolk Downs (then known as Massachusetts Fields) and Atlantic. They expected services, and they knew how to vote to get them.

Fast on the heels of the Quincy Fire Department came the Quincy Police,

organized on April 22, 1889 by ordinance No. 19, which officially established the office of Deputy Manager of the Police Force and defined the duties of then-incumbent, Robert J. Williams. Although increasing numbers of drunkards, tramps, thieves and rogues had inspired establishment of a Police Court in 1858, the idea of having regular police officers was still a bit too advanced, despite an editorial in *The Quincy Patriot*, which urged formation of a permanent force of Night Constables to protect Quincy residents from "the hardened and depraved" who infested nearby Boston.

The ordinance did, however, instruct the mayor to appoint one of the city's constables as Deputy Manager of the Police Force each year, the actual manager being the mayor himself. With an official Keeper of the Lockup and a mix of constables and special policemen, including the Special Liquor Police formed by the Selectmen in 1888 at the insistence of Henry H. Faxon, the "department" took up residence in the cellar of the newly-renamed City Hall, where four cells had been constructed two in 1856, two more in 1870, to restrain miscreants.

But it wasn't enough. By the fall of 1864, *The Quincy Patriot* had complained that Quincy was increasingly attractive to burglars (from Boston, no doubt), and Quincy's population was increasing.

Although constables in the Town of Quincy had been elected by popular vote, police in the new City of Quincy were required to take Civil Service exams and win appointment from a list. They were still called constables or Special Police; and even though the charter called for a "Chief of Police." The Council's ordinance called for a "Deputy Manager of Police." And so it was that Quincy's first mayor, Charles Hunt Porter, selected George O. Langley as the city's first Deputy Manager of the Special Police, at a salary of \$100 per year.

It was not until 1892, when Quincy's population approached 20,000, that an actual Quincy Police Department was established, including a chief with a salary of \$1,000 per year

and ten patrolmen at \$16 a week apiece. Not until 1902 did the department buy a patrol wagon and horse to transport prisoners - an investment which also provided the city's first ambulance.

### City Government

Speaking of the mayor and council, it should be noted that the change from town (selectmen) government allowed neighborhood concerns to come to the fore at City Hall. The new city council had 23 members, but only five were elected at-large. The remaining 18 were ward councillors - three from each of the new city's six wards. The council was elected annually, as was the mayor, and turnover was quite common in those early years.

Given the emphasis on ward representation, it was easy for, an average citizen to get someone to listen to his concerns; although it would not necessarily be so easy to get an idea approved. Even if you had all three of your own ward councillors on your side and convinced all five of the at-large variety to join them, you were still four votes short of commanding a majority of the council. So the way to get matters approved—then as now—was through the art of compromise.

On the School Committee, three members served at-large in staggered terms while six were elected from their respective wards. And while the Measurer of Leather, Measurers of Grain, Sealer of Weights and Measures and City Undertaker all served city-wide, the city had six Fence Viewers, six Measurers of Wood and Bark and six Field Drivers, selected by ward in each case.

Even the Principal Assessor and Chief Engineer of the Fire Department each had six assistants, one from each ward.

Mayor Porter, in welcoming the new form of government, memorialized the auspicious occasion to the "Gentlemen of the Council" in his inaugural, thusly: "We take this step after a fair, full and long discussion; and while it is one that will make great changes in our form of government, it seems to me if we administer the government on sound

business principles, bringing to the carrying out of ideas embodied in our charter a singleness of purpose, no one of our citizens will look with regret upon our new departure.

"The inexorable logic of events decided the question as to whether we would become a city or not. The steady and rapid growth of our town caused the old-fashioned town meeting to be a failure in our community and we take upon ourselves new duties, and a decided change in the method of administering our internal affairs.

"The charter under which we are to act has many new theories; their value will be determined by time. No New England city has a charter like our own. Briefly stated, the mayor is held directly responsible to the citizens in conducting the affairs of his office. The Council is the legislative body of our city.

"Necessarily there will be a great deal of friction in starting, and this, the first year, will be taken up in learning our duties. I bespeak the charity of all the citizens in our undertaking."

Mayor Porter reminded the Council that, as a town, Quincy had been "eminently conservative", and that no town had shown a higher regard for its traditions and landmarks.

He recalled that the town of "Braithrey" had been incorporated in 1640; that the North Precinct, now known as Quincy, had separated in 1792; that the Neponset River had become Quincy's northern boundary in 1820; that as recently as 1855 and '56, some areas of the Farms and Squantum had been annexed.

He pointed out that "no community has contributed citizens who have become more distinguished in the history of our country than has our own. The town is full of traditions and is justly proud of the fame which surrounds the names of her sons, who in executive chairs, in the halls of legislature, the camp and the field, have brought renown to this good old community", and saw hope in the fact that "our townspeople have always taken a deep interest in their affairs; changes were very carefully discussed, and only adopted after long and

protracted debates.

"I believe that our progress, although slow and conservative at first, is well founded because of our previous conservatism. I am aware that it is not well to dwell too long upon this phase of our town life. Wisely and properly directed, however, the best results will be obtained by moderate counsels and not too rapid changes."

Bearing in mind the town meeting's spending habits, Mayor Porter then went to the crux of the matter, pointing out that while the Town of Quincy had raised the net sum of \$171,000 at its previous annual town meeting, the new City of Quincy, operating under different laws, would be limited to raising about \$140,000.

"You therefore see that it is impossible to levy this year so great a sum as was raised last year by nearly \$30,000. Our resources being considerably diminished, it is extremely necessary that our tax budget should be most carefully scrutinized, and all expenditures be brought as low as possible, a wise economy being the true course to pursue."

The mayor noted that although the town had appropriated \$13,000 the previous year to pay loans, it also borrowed \$20,000, increasing the new city's net debt.

But the "not too rapid changes" approach could not ignore the desperate need for improvement in municipal services. The Report of the Board of Health for 1889, for example, reported that 3,120 inspections had been made, resulting in the discovery of 546 nuisances, with "uncleaned privy vaults and cesspools" the most common at 224 "owing to the larger volume of water used for domestic purposes since the introduction of running water, and a lack of modern means of carrying off the same, to wit: a sewerage system.

"The more compact the population, the greater becomes the necessity for sewers", the board noted. "This question is of vital importance to every individual of the city..."

Indeed it was, as was the need for a "dumping ground for garbage and waste" which would be "sufficiently

isolated" so as not to annoy any neighbors.

Of similar importance was the report of the Swill Department, wherein the board reported that more than 150 families "take advantage of this means offered by the city to get rid of what to them has heretofore been a source of much annoyance." The board urged that the city "abolish the nuisance caused by the collection of Swill by individuals" by prohibiting the practice by ordinance.

The Commissioner of Public Works, meanwhile, reported that our streets are not in as good condition as they should be," given the fact that there were 100 miles of streets and that "we have the hardest traffic passing over them of any other place in the country."

### City Government Departments

It was on this philosophy of city government and to meet the demands of the people of Quincy for better services, that the new city government was organized under the Mayor and the City Council. The listings of the city departments at ten year intervals reflect not only the changes in services demanded but also the growth of the city and the increasing difficulty in meeting these demands.

The city departments listed in the 1890 Annual Report are as follows: Assessors, Fire, Highway, Law, Police, Water, and the Board of Health, Park Commissioners, School Committee.

In 1900 we have Assessors, Fire, Health, Law, Park, Police, Poor, Public Works, Sewerage, and Water under Public Works.

In 1910 the following appears Auditors, School, Sewer under Public Works, and City Engineer.

In 1920 the Hospital Department, the Sewer Department, and the Planning Board appear.

The Welfare Department is on the 1930 list.

Added in 1940 are the Engineering Department, Fire and Police Signal Department, Highway, Park, and Purchasing.

**1950 Municipal Departments**

City Clerk  
 Planning Board  
 Legal Department  
 Purchasing Department  
 License Commission  
 Civil Defense  
 Board of Assessors  
 Welfare Department  
 Veterans' Services  
 Police Department  
 Fire Department  
 Health Department  
 Personnel Department  
 Quincy City Hospital  
 Thomas Crane Public Library  
 Public Works Department  
   Highway Division  
   Water Division  
   Forestry Division  
   Cemetery Division  
   Sewer Division  
   Engineering Division  
 Building Inspector  
 Wire Inspector  
 Sealer of Weights and Measures  
 Park Department  
 School Department  
 Retirement Board  
 Quincy Housing Authority  
 Recreation Department  
 Municipal Election

**1960 Municipal Departments**

The City Clerk  
 Board of License Commissioners  
 Personnel Department  
 Purchasing Department  
 Civil Defense  
 Police Department  
 Fire Department  
 Planning Board  
 Health Department  
 Managers of Historical Places  
 Quincy City Hospital  
 Welfare Department  
 Park Commission  
 Recreation Commission  
 Cemetery Board of Managers  
 Veterans' Services  
 Thomas Crane Public Library  
 Presidential Election  
 Quincy Retirement Board  
 Quincy Housing Authority  
 Building Inspection  
 Plumbing Inspection  
 Wire Inspection  
 Weights and Measures  
 School Department  
 Public Works  
   Building Construction  
   Street Construction  
   Sanitary Division  
   Water Division  
   Sewer Division  
   Engineering Division

**1970 Municipal Departments**

Public Works Department  
 Water Division  
 Department of Planning  
 Purchasing Department  
 Weights and Measures  
 Council on Aging  
 Police Department  
 Fire Department  
 Plumbing Inspector  
 City Hospital  
 Health Department  
 School Department  
 Junior College  
 Library Department  
 Park Department  
 Forestry Department  
 Cemetery Board  
 Waterfront and Waterways  
 Personnel Department  
 Housing Authority  
 Engineering Division  
 Sewer Division  
 Civil Defense  
 Conservation Commission  
 Wire Inspector  
 North Quincy Improvement Project  
 Building Inspector  
 Veterans' Services  
 Recreation Department

**1980 Municipal Departments**

Hospital  
 Personnel Department  
 School Department  
 Police Department  
 Fire Department  
 Public Library  
 Cemetery Board  
 Health Department  
 Plumbing and Gas Fitting  
 Sewer Division  
 Public Works Department  
 Development  
 Department of Weights and Measures  
 Engine Department  
 Water Department  
 Forestry Division  
 City Clerk's Office  
 Planning Department  
 Veterans Services  
 Council on Aging  
 Park Department  
 City Solicitor  
 Recreation Department  
 Building Inspection  
 Wiring Inspection  
 Conservation Commission  
 Purchasing Department  
 C.E.T.A  
 Civil Defense  
 Housing Authority

**1990 Municipal Departments**

Building Department  
 City Clerk  
 City Solicitor  
 Conservation Commission  
 Council On Aging  
 Data Processing  
 Fire Department  
 Health Department  
 Quincy Hospital  
 Quincy Housing Authority  
 Thomas Crane Public Library  
 Park, Forestry, Cemetery Departments  
 Personnel Department  
 Planning and Community Development  
 Police Department  
 Public Works Department  
 Purchasing Department  
 Recreation Department  
 School Department  
 Veterans' Services Department  
 Weights and Measures Department  
 Wire Inspection Department

Since 1990, developments have continued to better meet the demand for city services at the time, and to render these services more efficiently. The history of continuing change presented above is the reason that we have the Quincy city government organization that we do today. It is hoped that a better understanding of the history may lead to a better understanding of the city government.

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