

## Chapter 16: The First City Manager

To some it may have seemed that only a few months had passed since you had to turn left off Pennsylvania, just after leaving Nichols Hills, and jog down a dirt road to the new addition called The Village.

In fact, those who had not been around for a while probably would have had trouble recognizing the place.

Since its meager beginnings in 1950, the community had grown like Johnson grass from a mere 7 people to an estimated 15,000. Seemingly overnight, the community had grown to city size. By 1959, the community was served by three elementary schools including Andrew Johnson Elementary, Ridgeview Elementary and Casady School. The community also boasted exceptional police and fire departments. Chief Jack Reed headed the six-man police department while the six-man fire department came under the direction of Chief Bassil Tunnell.

Though it must have sounded a bit strange, the official name of the community was now “the City of The village.” Some would say that the name still sounds as strange today as it did back in 1955 when then city attorney Wayne Quinlan proposed changing the name of the town to one “more fitting and appropriate for a community of this size”. Although, town trustees directed Quinlan to investigate the legal details of making the change, the notion died a quiet death and the community’s unique name has remained unchallenged ever since.

As the transformation of the Town of The Village to the City of The Village began to take place, one extremely important development, at least from the author’s perspective, was the adoption of the Council-Manager form of city government. In accordance with the provisions of the new city charter, the City Council wasted no time in hiring the City’s first city manager.

On May 7, 1959, the City Council voted unanimously to hire Gene Bumpass as the first city manager of The Village. Bumpass, a longtime resident of The Village, was born near Ardmore in 1911. Having served as a Captain in the Army Air Corp during WWII, Bumpass was an original member of the Oklahoma Highway Patrol and retired from the Highway Patrol in 1958 after twenty-one years of service. Before returning to The Village, Bumpass served a short stint as the Police Chief of Altus.

According to longtime Mayor and City Councilman Wayne Schooley, “Bumpass was known as one who went quietly about his job, and yet one who took forthright positions on matters that came up.”

Stephen E. Reel, who spent several years under the tutelage of Bumpass before succeeding him as city manager, remembers Bumpass as a “behind the scenes kind of city manager but one who had a quick temper.”

According to Reel, Bumpass rarely, if ever, saw any gray area in the issues at hand. “It wasn’t in Gene’s style to back down either,” recalls Reel.

Those that worked for Gene vividly remember some of his eccentricities such as his penchant for crossword puzzles and his most unusual way of doodling.

“Gene would sit back in his chair with his pocket knife in hand and proceed to fold and cut pieces of paper into ever smaller and smaller squares. After quietly listening to what you had to say, Gene would simply throw the tiny pieces away and then start over again,” said Reel.

Over the fifteen-year career of Bumpass, budgets were tight. Tight budgets, however, did not seem to stop Bumpass from expanding city services.

According to protégé Stephen Reel, Bumpass paid close attention to finances and was very fiscally responsible and despite budget limitations, by the time Bumpass retired in 1974, the number of uniformed employees in the police department had tripled from five to fifteen employees. The fire department had also grown from six to fourteen members.

Bumpass officially retired on February 19, 1974. At the following Council Meeting held on March 5, 1974, Stephen Reel was anointed as Bumpass’ successor. The appointment, however, was not to become effective until April 1, 1974, --April Fool’s Day! The irony of this would not be overlooked by the local media, which delighted in the coincidence and seized on the unfortunate timing by filling the airwaves with what I’m sure they thought were humorous, harmless and lighthearted barbs.

Shortly after retiring, Bumpass tried his hand at politics by running for County Commissioner. In what must have been a devastating loss, Bumpass failed to unseat the well-known incumbent, Dick Richardson. Richardson would later serve jail time for his part in the infamous County Commissioner kickback scandal of the late 1970’s.

Having failed in his election bid, Bumpass continued to remain active by working in the real estate business. In his retirement, Bumpass became an avid golfer, a sport that he thoroughly enjoyed until his health began to fail. Bumpass passed away on September 1, 1995 and was laid to rest at Rose Hill Cemetery next to his son, Mike, who had so tragically preceded him in death so many years before.