



## City Of Wichita – Previous City Managers

### Earl C. Elliott (June 1, 1921-August 1, 1927)

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Born: about 1879

Died: unknown

Interred: unknown

Mr. Clapp's successor, Mr. E.C. Elliott, was appointed chiefly to take care of the water works which was expected to be taken over by the city, but this did not materialize. He was employed at a salary of \$6,000. He held office from June 1921 to August 1927. He was a native of Indiana and a graduate of DePauw University. More criticism has been levied against Mr. Elliott than any other city manager. His strongest supporters were forced to admit that he was not tactful or diplomatic. One of his department heads described him as "brilliant, cold-blooded, and untactful." Mr. Powell, one of the commissioners, noted that he was a "good, capable fellow who got good results but who was not well liked because of his lack of tact. Commissioner Dehner didn't like him because he (Elliott) was honest." Another department head reported that Elliott was a good city manager but that he had the ability to antagonize people. "He made no effort to be tactful to service club committees, Chamber of Commerce committees, etcetera." One of the police matrons reported that Elliott "tried to run the police department too much which didn't work too well."

While Mr. Elliott accomplished a great deal as city manager, he was handicapped by his terseness and almost hostile manner. The director of finance reported that when Mr. Elliott appointed him he said, "The job is open. You have ten days to decide, but don't bother me." He was a fighter and did not hesitate to tell the commission what he thought and would fight for his stand.

His resignation after six eventful years was the climax of a number of crises. His administration had hardly begun when one of the newly elected commissioners who was a direct representative of organized labor was forced to resign because he was an employee of the Missouri Pacific Railway Company, a company which held a city franchise with the result that none of its employees could serve as a city commissioner without violating a state statute. Mr. Elliott in an official statement denied having anything to do with the dispute and said that the matter rested entirely in the hands of the commissioners. Nevertheless, there was considerable feeling over the controversy and the city manager lost as a result.

Furthermore, the police and fire departments were undergoing considerable criticism which was somewhat justifiable. The fire chief was not considered a good disciplinarian and a serious factional fight developed within the department with the assistant chief involved as one of the leaders. An investigation resulted, the assistant was dismissed and the chief picked out his new successor. The interference in the police department by Commissioner Dehner has been related before in this report and needless to say the affair was not a savory one. Shortly after city manager Wells came into office, Dehner was forced to resign.

Mr. Elliott reported that the biggest fight of his term was over a Ku Klux Klan convention which he denied the use of Wichita streets for a parade.

However, the most immediate cause of his resignation was the failure of the commission to ratify or approve his estimate of the cost of completing a drainage canal project. This made it impossible for the contractors to draw their pay and therefore let the whole project come to a standstill.

It had been known for some time that he could not possibly work in harmony with Commissioners Dehner,

Nighswonger and Lawrence who had evidenced a distinct hostility toward his policies. In his letter of resignation of May 10, 1927, to Mayor Coombs he said, "Knowing that the opinion exists in the city commission that a change of managers would be desirable and feeling that while this situation exists municipal activities are hampered to the detriment of the city, I herewith hand my resignation which I ask you to consider effective on August 1, 1927."

Despite the fact that Mr. Elliott had proved to be the only city manager who had resigned under pressure, many of his critics were forced to admit that he was an excellent city manager. He was a man of strong personal convictions, aggressive and forceful but lacked the seemingly necessary quality of getting along with the public.

He was a strong supporter of city manager government and believed that its success depended largely on the legislative body. He pointed out in an interview in August 1938, that under city manager government, work was done more rapidly and better; that there was one responsible person whose services could be acquired at less expense than five city commissioners. He did not believe in civil service for municipalities as it "makes it too hard to get rid of people." He felt that his hardest job was the enforcement of the prohibition law but that the city had made great advancement under city manager government.

National recognition came to Mr. Elliott in 1923, when he was elected president of the International City Managers Association. He later became a high official in the California Water Service Company.

Some accomplishments of his term as city manager included:

1. The passage of a milk inspection ordinance in 1921 which provided for a rigid inspection of dairies, established certain standards of milk and offered a very great safeguard to the public.
2. Reduction in the tax levy from 9.70 in 1921 to 8.5 in 1926 in the face of rapidly expanding services which the city undertook. This levy was the lowest of any first class city in the state. This reduction of taxes was considered one of Mr. Elliott's greatest contributions while city manager.
3. Removal in 1922 of garbage collection from twenty-four independent contractors and placing it in the hands of one contractor.
4. The initiation of an extensive flood prevention program in 1924.
5. The erection of thirteen bridges over the Arkansas and Little Arkansas Rivers.
6. The establishment of a municipal university of Wichita in 1926.

Other accomplishments of this administration are too numerous to mention here.

Above text from *City Manager Government in Wichita, Kansas*.

### **Other Interesting Facts**

Prior to becoming City Manager, he was Vice-President of the Wichita Water Company (1961-1921).

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