



City Of Wichita – Previous City Managers

Louis Russell Ash (June 19, 1917-October 3, 1919)



Born: 1873 - Kentucky

Died: April 7, 1930 - Kansas City, Missouri

Interred: unknown

Mr. Battin's successor was Louis R. Ash, a civil engineer from Kansas City, selected at a salary of \$5,000 after the commissioners had searched far and wide for a suitable city manager. Mr. Ash was 43 years old when appointed and was considered one of the most capable civil engineers in the Middle West. He was even-tempered, diplomatic and an executive of great ability. One of the first commissioners described him as having a high character and as being extremely enthusiastic over the city manager plan. The responsibility for the successful beginning of city manager government lay in the hands of the first permanent city manager. Fortunately, he had an excellent commission supporting him.

City Engineer Brockway, appointed by Ash, reported that Ash was the only city manager he ever had to go around when once he appealed to Mayor L.W. Clapp about a departmental matter over which there was a disagreement. It happens that both men were engineers. Mayor Clapp simply told Brockway to "stick in there" since he could not interfere with administrative matters.

Once the city manager took a sewer job into his own hands and saved the city approximately \$50,000. His estimate was \$50,000 under the bids. Under the mayor-council government the construction combine had been used to running affairs very much as it pleased. It now attempted some more highhanded tactics. Ash with the commission's permission tackled the job and saved \$2,578 on his own estimate and nearly \$50,000 for the city. Ash's estimate was based on his knowledge of what the work should cost, not on what the local combine was willing to do it for.

Further accomplishments of the Ash administration were equally notable and included:

1. A definite step forward in purchasing. Under the old regime, the purchasing of supplies was left to the various departments, and this was found to result in confusion and very often purchases were made without proper authority. Often the employee doing the work would order the article needed, and the first information regarding it would be the invoice or bill. Also, it was difficult to keep a proper check on prices and to prevent the duplication of bills. With the new plan, no purchase could be made except upon proper requisition, countersigned by the manager. In this way, no purchase was permitted except by proper requisition and a check was kept which prevented duplication of bills by giving the auditor a copy of the requisition for notation on his records. This was certainly a step forward although a single purchasing agent was not placed in charge until Bert C. Wells became city manager.
2. A system of inspection in the fire department was inaugurated during the year 1918 by which the business district was kept clear of collections of trash and refuse that would create a fire hazard. At first these inspections were considered by some to be an intrusion; later on the benefit to be derived from them so appealed to the merchants of the city that excellent cooperation was given.
3. Generous salary increases were given and in 1919 some employees were receiving 60 percent more than in 1917. Members of the fire, police, and public service departments were especially fortunate. Patrolmen were advanced from \$75.00 per month in 1917 to \$105.00. Detectives, from \$75.00 to \$120.00 and Captains from \$85.00 to \$125.00. These are illustrative of the trend in salaries.
4. The police department was reorganized under the supervision of a chief brought in from Kansas City.

During 1918, a Bureau of Records and Identification was established. Formerly the department had maintained no such systematized records and it was impossible to properly cooperate with other police departments throughout the country. Often criminals escaped because of a lack of proper means of identification.

5. The city established a municipal concert series utilizing the new \$200,000 Forum. The greatest names in music are familiar to Wichitans through this added service of the municipality.
6. Late in 1917, a bacteriological laboratory was established as an adjunct to the health department. In 1919, a public clinic was established in regard to venereal disease.

Mr. Ash resigned in 1919 after two years as city manager to return to the firm of Kansas City engineers from which he had been loaned for one year. He was succeeded by Mr. L.W. Clapp of Wichita.

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

Other Interesting Facts

He was employed as a mathematics professor at Coe College in Iowa before moving to Kansas City in 1901.

In Kansas City, he was largely responsible for "the double deck viaduct at Main Street" to aid traffic flow and work on several other bridges in Missouri and the world.

He worked as Supervisor of the 12th Street Viaduct and 23rd Street Viaduct and as a proponent of zoning in city planning in Kansas City.

In Kansas City, he was a partner in the engineering firm of Harrington, Howard & Ash.
