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THE POLITICAL CAREER OF WHITE BEAVER POWELL
MAYOR OF LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN

A Seminar Paper
Presented to
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by
Clarence L. Schlicht
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INTRODUCTION

White Beaver Powell was widely known as a physician and surgeon in his own time and it is mainly as a medical man that he is remembered. Dr. Powell was also a legend in his time as a colorful plainsman and adventurer, other facets of this man's life that are well remembered. But Dr. Powell was important in local politics as well, and it is this side of his full and vigorous life that is the subject of this paper.

Dr. David Franklin Powell, as mayor of La Crosse, Wisconsin four different times, left the imprint of his personality on the local political scene, just as he was influential for a time in Populist or People's Party circles. The purpose of this paper is to synthesize the information concerning the man and concentrate on his political significance. This paper is meant to be a brief survey of his political career rather than an exhaustive study.
THE POLITICAL CAREER OF WHITE BEAVER POWELL

MAYOR OF LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN

ABSTRACT

Dr. D. Frank Powell, a colorful personality and a well known physician and surgeon, rose to political prominence on the basis of his popularity with the common man. White Beaver, as he chose to be called, was important in the Populist movement in Wisconsin, but it was as the mayor of La Crosse that he left his mark on Wisconsin's political history. Four times White Beaver won the highest elective office of the city, one-year terms in 1885 and 1886, and two-year terms in 1893 and 1895.

Each administration accomplished something worthwhile in the progress of La Crosse, but each succeeding administration was also characterized by conflict and controversy.

The sources used include historical records, books, council proceedings and newspapers. No attempt was made to produce an exhaustive study of Dr. Powell. Rather a survey of one of the outstanding political careers in La Crosse's history has been undertaken here.
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CHAPTER I

DAVID FRANKLIN POWELL--THE MAN AND THE LEGEND

White Beaver—the very name conjures an image of someone apart from the crowd. For a score of years the man who bore that name wove the colorful yarn of his personality into the fabric of La Crosse history. Dr. David Frank Powell was formally introduced to the city late in 1890 by a barrage of medical advertisements in a local paper, a series that extolled the "no cure--no pay" policy of the Minnesota physician and surgeon. From that time on La Crosse citizens were to learn the name well, for no local citizen ever matched the amount of newspaper column space devoted to White Beaver. Physician, surgeon and patent medicine man; scout, sharpshooter and Indian medicine man; actor, speculator, philanthropist and politician; any one of these might fill a lifetime for an ordinary person. White Beaver Powell was known far and wide for all of them. His popularity was such that he won, not once, but four times the highest elected office in town, the mayoralty of La Crosse.

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1La Crosse Morning Chronicle, November 6, 1900.
Of such stuff are legends made and Powell was a legend in his own time. White Beaver was a hero of dime novels, but he was also featured in collected biographies of plainsmen of the old West. Some of the legend may be deliberately self-made, since items were printed as news even if submitted by the person involved for personal or professional gain. Dr. Powell's imagination never missed an opportunity for publicity.

David Frank Powell was born in Kentucky the eldest of three sons of Dr. C.H. Powell and his wife from whose side of the family Frank got his Indian blood. Frank was born in 1847, his brother George in 1849, and his brother Will in 1849. The family moved after the death of the father in 1855 and settled eventually in Nebraska where the boys gained experience on the plains and served as scouts during which time they met many of the famous old plainsmen. Powell worked for Dr. James R. Ish and was later his partner in a patent medicine business; it was not until 1869 that he undertook his first formal schooling when he won a scholarship to the University of Louisville for the study of medicine. He was graduated as valedictorian

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3 Hebbard, Mary H., "Notes on Dr. David Frank Powell, Known as White Beaver", Wisconsin Magazine of History, 35 (Summer, 1952), 306.

4 Ibid.
of his class in 1872. He entered the Kentucky School of Medicine from which he was graduated, and was briefly instructor in anatomy before he served with the army.\(^5\)

The sensational side of Powell's personality showed itself while he was anatomy instructor at medical school. Powell fought a duel in the darkened dissection room with Dr. Louis Oppenheimer of the faculty, reportedly over an insult to a young female acquaintance of Dr. Powell. In the first exchange of shots Dr. Oppenheimer's cheek was grazed and the left forearm of Dr. Powell was wounded. A second shot was demanded by Powell who escaped further injury while he found his mark and shattered the bone in Dr. Oppenheimer's right shoulder. Dr. Powell remained scarred for life while Dr. Oppenheimer never regained full use of his right shoulder.\(^6\)

Dr. Powell left for the West and entered into service for the army as a condition of his training and served as post surgeon at Fort McPherson, North Platte Barracks, Camp Stambaugh, and Fort Laramie. There was an unhappy marriage at this time about which little is known.\(^7\)

He became a thirty-second degree Mason. At the age of twenty-three he was Masonic grand lecturer for the state of Nebraska and at that time established the lodge at North Platte and made his friend, Buffalo Bill Cody, master of

\(^5\) La Crosse Tribune, May 3, 1942.

\(^6\) Ibid.  

\(^7\) Ibid.
the lodge.

Dr. Powell was given the name White Beaver by Rocky Bear, a Sioux chieftain for healing the chief's daughter and in recognition was presented with the skin of a white beaver, the highest mark of honor from the Indians.⁸

In 1876 while deer hunting near Black River Falls, White Beaver succeeded in promoting the recovery of Wee-Noo-Sheik, head chief of the Winnebago nation after which a council of Indians declared him a formally adopted member of the tribe and medicine chief of the nation.⁹

In September, 1941, a La Crosse paper proclaimed the coming of Cody's western melodrama, The Prairie Waif, to the La Crosse opera house. Powell was featured prominently in the advertising.

D.F. Powell (Nop Ska or White Beaver), the medicine man of the Winnebagoes, is a graduate of the Louisville, Kentucky medical college, formerly assistant demonstrator of anatomy at the Kentucky academy of medicine, and in 1870 was deputy grand master of Masons in Nebraska, and for years in Colorado and Wyoming. He left the white race eight years ago, and took up his abode among the Indians. Two years of this life is a secret to all but himself and the red men. Cody and Powell are old army comrades.

⁸Hepburn, op. cit., p. 306.

⁹La Crosse Tribune, May 3, 1942.
fellow plainsmen, and have had many a stirring adventure together. He spends several months among the Indians every year without seeing a white face, leads a sort of double life and is "a perfect gentleman or a fiend incarnate," as the Chicago Times once said. Such is the life and character of one of many characters in the play.10

The following day Powell was not even mentioned in the succeeding advertisement.

While practicing medicine in Lanesboro, Minnesota, Powell made frequent trips to La Crosse and in late 1881 the physician moved to La Crosse and set up office there. He remained to practice medicine, off and on, until 1903 at which time Powell took over the management of Cody's considerable financial interests.11 Soon after opening his office in the city Powell sponsored a baseball club that was formed in his honor and named "The Beavers."

Their uniforms, paid for by White Beaver, were the best; and red and gold badges bearing the name of the club, a portrait of the doctor and the club emblem, a huge white beaver, were distributed to the public.12

Shortly after opening his medical practice in La Crosse,

10 *La Crosse Morning Chronicle*, September 18, 1881.


12 *La Crosse Tribune*, May 3, 1942.
Dr. Powell pulled off a spectacular advertising stunt using paper sheets that when folded gave the appearance of a five dollar bank note. These were widely circulated and left to be picked up by people in the streets whose attention was obtained by this trick.\(^{13}\)

White Beaver was famous for his ability with a revolver and many accounts of his marksmanship were reported, both around the area and while traveling with Buffalo Bill's show. Powell was capable of trick mirror and posture shooting, and in June of 1882 a local reporter attended Cole's Circus in La Crosse and stated that he was unimpressed by the shooting act which could have been duplicated by Powell with a revolver.\(^{14}\)

Frank sent his brothers to a "medical college" for one year, and subsequently George, who had been a veterinarian, and Will, who had been a drug clerk in Lanesboro, opened their offices in La Crosse. George, Night Hawk the Indian Surgeon, and Will, the "only physician in the Northwest who makes the diseases of women an exclusive specialty," practiced at "Powells' Medical and Surgical Institute" on the southeast corner of Second and Main

\(^{13}\) Ibïd.

\(^{14}\) La Crosse Morning Chronicle, September 3, 1882.
Streets. The picture advertisements of the Powells tended to play upon the popular belief that Indian medicine was good medicine. They wore their hair long in the tradition of the plainsmen to good effect, too.\textsuperscript{15}

White Beaver, often in partnership with Bill Cody, manufactured and sold a number of patent medicines that were widely used. White Beaver's Cough Cream, Yosemite Yarrow and Wonder Worker were locally manufactured and sold, and distributed by mail as well. Powell never hesitated to give his miraculous medicines to people too poor to pay. Powell was criticized by more orthodox and conservative medical men and felt obliged to issue a newspaper challenge to quiet his critics in 1882.\textsuperscript{16} By 1884 Powell found himself in conflict, too, with the Minnesota State Board of Medical Examiners who refused to grant him a license on the grounds that his conduct was "unprofessional and dishonorable" and that his claims for Wonder Worker to be equally beneficial if used internally or externally could not possibly be true. The Minnesota Supreme Court upheld the decision of the Board. Powell opened a successful St.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., July 19, 1883.

\textsuperscript{16} Hebberd, Mary H., "Notes on Medical Practice of Dr. David Franklin Powell," \textit{Wisconsin Magazine of History}, 36 (Spring, 1953), 191.
Paul office run by assistants who worked under his supervision in La Crosse. Powell made bi-weekly trips to St. Paul and despite, or maybe because of, the Board’s position attracted great numbers of people to his lavishly furnished office which used Indian decor.  

Because La Crosse lacked hospital facilities Dr. Powell offered the use of his home, rent free, for five years if the city would furnish and staff it for use as a hospital; but the arrival of the Sisters of St. Francis and the building of a hospital ended the problem in the spring of 1883.

On the basis of his image, his fame, and his popularity Dr. Powell first entered the local political scene in 1885 when he was successful in his bid for the office of mayor on an independent “workingmen’s party” ticket over a pair of prominent citizens who ran as major party candidates. A year later Powell was again the victor for a second term. In 1893 and again in 1895 he repeated his previous two consecutive campaign victories, this time for two-year terms in office. Increasingly, Powell became involved in controversies with the council.

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17 Ibid., p. 191.  
18 Ibid.  
Powell sprang to political prominence because of his belief in equal rights for everybody. He was instrumental in the formation of a People's Party and his fight to allow every commoner a "square deal" is what made him such a political favorite in the hearts of the people. The establishment of uniformed policemen and full-time salaried firemen was among the changes accomplished by White Beaver for La Crosse.20

In 1887 White Beaver announced that he had bought Indian Hill and spelled out elaborate and detailed plans to turn it into a privately owned park, medical center, and residence that would include wooded nooks, shaded drives, streams and ponds, all available to the public. William F. Cody was to help finance the project and some contracts were let, but the project never materialized. In 1890 the land was offered to the city to provide North La Crosse with a badly needed park. Powell hoped to encourage other wealthy individuals to act similarly for the benefit of the public.21

Cody and Powell were involved in various land deals here and in the West throughout their years of association,

20 La Crosse Tribune, May 3, 1942.

21 La Crosse Morning Chronicle, September 1, 9, 1887, August 20, 1890.
and in 1889 their most ambitious undertaking was announced. Together with Lieutenant Frederick Schwatka, lecturer and Arctic explorer, the two were in control of a corporation that was to direct and finance a Mexican colonizing venture involving over two and one-half million acres of land.22

The Cody-Powell Coffee Company was formed in 1893 for the purpose of manufacturing and distributing Pan-Malt, a substitute for coffee, alcoholic beverages and stimulating drinks. Powell had developed his product, composed of nine ingredients, the principal one being barley malt, while searching for a drug to effect a cure and substitute for the craving of alcohol. Cody introduced the concoction at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 and orders began immediately to come in, some from abroad. The plant was situated on Front Street and shipped large quantities of Pan-Malt to Utah for use by the Mormons.23

During the year 1890 when the messiah craze and Indian ghost dance mania threatened the frontier from the coast to the Mississippi and from British Colombia to Arizona with the possibility of Indian war, Colonel Cody was ordered by General Miles to proceed west to deal with

22 La Crosse Morning Chronicle, February 20, 1889.

23 La Crosse Morning Chronicle, September 22, 1893.
the problem. White Beaver Powell accompanied Cody on his mission, and the two were joined by R.H. Hasian, known as Pony Bob. The party was to go directly to Sitting Bull's camp to arrest the old leader in an attempt to quell the most aggressive group of Sioux. The attempt was stopped just short of completion by a special message from the Department of the Interior which annulled the previous orders. Within two weeks Sitting Bull was slain in another arrest attempt by Indian Police. Troops arrived in time to prevent further trouble but twelve people were killed. Powell criticized the plan of Agent McLaughlin and commented that the Cody-Powell expedition had a better chance of peaceful conclusion since Sitting Bull was known by them and that he had left the Cody Wild West show with a fine horse as a gift, the horse that was with Sitting Bull at his death.

Cody procured a commission as major for Powell when the Spanish-American War broke out in 1898 and White Beaver organized a regiment which he called the Seventh Immunes. The troops, immunized against yellow fever especially for tropical fighting, were in Florida when the war ended. Powell was later made a colonel.

24 La Crosse Morning Chronicle, November 25, 30, December 2, 1890.

25 La Crosse Morning Chronicle, December 16, 17, 1890.

26 Nebberd, Mary H., "Notes of Dr. David Frank Powell, Known as 'White Beaver'", Wisconsin Magazine of History, 35 (Summer, 1952), 309.
In September, 1900, Powell was in La Crosse after he had suffered a great financial loss in the Wyoming lumber fire. He was reported to be optimistic and confident of recovering his fortune through the use of another tract of timber he held, the last valuable timber left in Wyoming. When asked about political matters Powell replied he was for William Jennings Bryan, and that he himself had been offered a Populist congressional nomination but had turned it down. White Beaver retired from other interests in 1903 to become the business manager of Buffalo Bill’s financial empire. By 1906 Dr. D. Frank Powell was dead at fifty-nine.

The city has something besides this history by which to remember White Beaver Powell. Powell Park is named for him; there is also Red Cloud Park on Indian Hill, and on the northeast corner of Second and Main is the fountain left by Dr. Powell to the city. The canopy is gone as is the silver plate which welcomed the stranger to drink in seven languages. At one time a portion of the worn silver plate remained which bore the greeting and farewell of White Beaver to La Crosse: "Gesundheit--

27 La Crosse Morning Chronicle, September 11, 1900.

28 Hebberd, Mary H., "Notes on Dr. David Frank Powell, Known as ‘White Beaver’", Wisconsin Magazine of History, 35 (Summer, 1952), 306.
Auf Wieder-Sehen.  

On the base of the fountain is carved the symbol by which he will always be remembered—a white beaver. A St. Paul writer once said of the man, "Nature makes but one such and then breaks the mold." 

29La Crosse Tribune, May 3, 1942.

30La Crosse Morning Chronicle, October 14, 1884.
CHAPTER II

THE FIRST INDEPENDENT MAYOR OF LA CROSSE

Early in April, 1885, Dr. D. Frank Powell announced his candidacy for mayor of La Crosse as an "Independent." Powell claimed Democrats and Republicans alike had urged him to run, but at any rate he promised, if elected, to work to help especially "the working classes and those outside the so-called ring." ¹

At the time of his announcement the Democratic ticket was headed by D.A. McDonald and the Republicans had not yet found a willing candidate for mayor. Later R.A. Scott was nominated. The results of the mayor's race gave Scott 799 votes, McDonald 1,327 and Powell 1,572, leaving Dr. Powell with a plurality of 253. ²

There was some degree of fear and perplexity, particularly voiced by Republicans that the victory of Powell was sure to be a calamity for the city. After two days the "tide of invective" seemed to recede and a local paper of Democratic leanings commented that "the mayor can

¹La Crosse Morning Chronicle, April 4, 1885.

²La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 7, pp. 637-639; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, April 4, 1885.
only advise; the fact is in La Crosse the mayor presides
over the council." Editorially the same local paper
denied any credit or blame for the election of Dr. Powell
as mayor and insisted that no candidate had deigned to
consult the organ about the matter at all; it had supported
the Democratic candidate "from instinct," not because it
was asked to. Dr. Powell was a "third party" or "independ-
dent" candidate, and a popular one, which in itself had
to be a major factor in the election. He was, after all,
a plurality winner in a field of three candidates. The
Republicans might have been better assured of Powell's defeat
if they had not entered a candidate at all.

Upon taking office in April, 1885, Mayor Powell
addressed the common council and outlined a policy for his
administration. He pledged to work for the benefit of all
and asked the cooperation of the aldermen in promoting the
interests of the whole people, irrespective of their conditions
or locations. Mayor Powell then briefly outlined his policy
as follows:

1) Absolute cleanliness of all places within the
   city if it can be had.
2) Improvements for the benefit of all, whether
   rich or poor.
3) Fairness and equality in taxation.
4) Preservation of order and a judicious development
   of the laws and ordinances of the city.

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3La Crosse Morning Chronicle, April 10, 1885.
4Ibid.
Powell stated that he intended to familiarize himself with his duties and perform them with discretion, fairness and good government.\(^5\)

During the first administration of White Beaver the city witnessed a few controversies, some civic improvements, and one spectacular expression of Dr. Powell's generosity, a gala celebration of the Fourth of July.

I. CONTROVERSIES

For a number of years there had been a reform group the purpose of which was enforcement of the state statute requesting observance of the Sabbath day commonly called the Sunday closing law. The question had been presented to several previous mayors requesting enforcement of the law as applied to saloons and other businesses under the state statute. Mayor Powell did not wish to depart from the precedent of the previous mayors' failure to enforce the law without the opinion of the council. He then requested a vote to guide his actions. The council decided in executive session that the state law was ample and that any citizen could set it in operation. Alderman Losey said it was not fair for citizens to petition the mayor to act upon a matter in which any man had as much power as he. The resolution was tabled which action ended the issue

\(^5\)La Crosse Morning Chronicle, April 15, 1885.
during Mayor Powell's first administration.  

At an adjourned meeting at which the mayor was not present a resolution to borrow $60,000 for construction of sewers, water works, and school houses was adopted. When Mayor Powell returned to the city he announced he would veto the bonding issue because it committed funds for two years bonding the city nearly to the limit, and leaving nothing for emergencies. The threatened veto had aroused citizens to the issue and a large crowd filled the council chamber when the mayor read his lengthy veto message at the next meeting. The council overruled his veto by a vote of fourteen to four.  

At the October council meeting Mayor Powell failed in his attempt to appoint I.L. Usher chief of Police. Powell explained that the man was a friend whom he thought capable, but when the council refused to confirm Usher he named P.L. Clark to succeed himself, an appointment which was unanimously confirmed.  

Losey Boulevard was proposed as a new thoroughfare along the east limits of the city by Alderman Losey and passed by the council. Mayor Powell vetoed it because he opposed

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6La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 8, p. 15; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, April 22, 1885.

7La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 8, p. 36; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, May 10, 1885.

8La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 8, p. 156.
"using money collected by taxation from the masses for purposes of giving pleasure to the few;" the city did not require it for facilitating travel or other business according to White Beaver, and the city was in debt too far to allow any further expenditures except in cases of public necessity. The council by a vote of thirteen to one overrode the veto.  

II. CIVIC IMPROVEMENTS

The outstanding events for the city during the first administration of Mayor Powell were the granting of franchises which brought improved rail service to the city. The council granted a franchise which was accepted by the Chicago, Burlington and Northern company and contracts were let to start construction of depots and tracks.  

A year earlier an ordinance had been passed granting a franchise to the Burlington, but it was rejected because of passenger depot conflicts. On September 9 an ordinance was passed that granted a right of way throughout the length of Second Street so that the Burlington would not have to use jointly with the Milwaukee Road their old depot. The new Burlington depot was planned at Second and

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9Ibid., pp. 167-168; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, October 31, 1885.

10La Crosse Morning Chronicle, August 15, 1885.
About the same time options obtained on Third Street, north of the business district, led to a move by the Chicago and Northwestern to enter the city rather than to continue using the Green Bay Street depot. An ordinance passed in November granted them permission to construct tracks on into the north side.\textsuperscript{12}

Also, during the first administration of Mayor Powell, contracts were awarded for the first electric lights for north side streets; and contracts were awarded for the construction of the Cass Street sewer from Third to Tenth Streets and for water extensions on the north and south sides.\textsuperscript{13}

The city purchased sixty feet of land on State Street between Fourth and Fifth for the erection of a fire engine house and at the same time ordered plans and specifications for the new house at a cost not to exceed $7,500.\textsuperscript{14} The city purchased a new site for school purposes at the corner of Sixteenth and Market Streets and appropriated money for the construction of another school

\textsuperscript{11}La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 8, pp. 115-121; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, September 10, 1885.

\textsuperscript{12}La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 8, 1885, pp. 184-187; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, October 1, 1885.

\textsuperscript{13}La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 8, pp. 52, 63; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, June 13, 17, 1885.

\textsuperscript{14}La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 8, p. 74; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, June 17, July 2, 1885.
building in the fifth ward, south of the Milwaukee Road tracks.15

The north side or fifth ward was divided into two voting precincts because of its continuing growth; Windsor Street became the dividing line. One voting booth was located at the fire engine house on St. Cloud Street and the other in the Wannebo building on Caledonia and Clinton Streets.16

The state census was reported in August and there was a great deal of discussion concerning the relative population status of cities. La Crosse was finally reported as having a population of 21,813, of which the north side had 5,400 thus placing La Crosse third in the state. The city directory put the north side population at 6,523 by counting more accurately mill and river laborers who were not tallied by the state census takers.17 The council adopted the budget for 1886 on a twenty mill basis to raise $203,586 for the operation and maintenance of all city departments and payment of all bonds and interests.18

15La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 8, p. 43; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, May 30, July 11, 1885.
16La Crosse Tribune, May 3, 1942.
17La Crosse Morning Chronicle, August 15, 1885.
18La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 8, pp. 193-195.
III. THE FOURTH OF JULY PICNIC

Mayor Powell failed in his attempt to organize a city-sponsored Fourth of July celebration, so he proceeded to sponsor a picnic and parade himself.19 There were almost daily press accounts of the progress in planning this gigantic undertaking. All the children of the city were invited to register in order to estimate needed provisions. Eventually over 6,000 did so, many of whom came from outside of La Crosse. Carpenters built "teetors," swings, hammocks, and tables and benches; many hundreds each of balloons, hats, fans and parasols were provided; 25,000 sandwiches, hundreds of chickens, barrels of candy and nuts, a ton of cake, and thousands of doughnuts fed the throngs while two hundred waiters cared for the children's wants. Six barrels of lemonade and hundreds of gallons of buttermilk and milk washed it down, while they were entertained by singers and fireworks. Estimates of the total crowd ran as high as 25,000 visitors during the day with 14,000 people thought to be at Lake Park, later called Myrick, at the peak time between one and two in the afternoon. The parade of wagons and marchers was strung out for two miles between the downtown district and the park before the great feast began. All of this was conceived,

19La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 3, p. 41; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, May 24, June 3, 6, 1885.
planned, organized and paid for by White Beaver Powell.\textsuperscript{20}

Dr. Powell was criticized by some who accused him of political motivations, but the picnic attracted the attention of critics all over the Northwest and elicited editorial opinions that if there were such motivations there ought to be more such political opportunities; if he did advertise himself, he advertised La Crosse even more, and certainly the children did not question his motives.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{20}La Crosse Morning Chronicle, July 7, 1885.

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., June 9, July 7, and July 11, 1885.
CHAPTER III

THE PEOPLE'S PARTY

After D. Frank Powell served one term as mayor of the city of La Crosse as an independent, a new party was organized in the spring of 1886, known as the Working-men's Party and headed by Powell for mayor. It advocated that the government protect the rights and promote the interests of the greatest number of people, secure to the workers the full enjoyment of the wealth they create, demand the recognition of unions, and enact laws to compel corporations to pay employees weekly in money for labor of the preceding week.¹

There had been considerable talk about White Beaver declining to run for a second term as an independent, but when the new party was organized, he accepted the nomination. The Republicans nominated John Lienlokken, while the Democrats named George Scharpf. The campaign, comparatively short, made it apparent that the working classes were solidly behind White Beaver. On election day April 6, 1886, La Crosse experienced the worst fire in its history, the burning of the John Paul and the C.L. Colman saw mills and lumber yards and other properties.

¹La Crosse Tribune, May 17, 1942,
the losses totaling more than $500,000. Mayor Powell joined with hundreds of volunteers in fighting the fire. A light vote was cast with the following result: Powell 2,494; Scharpf 1,071; Lienlokken 613.2

As a result of the fire, hundreds were unemployed, and Mayor Powell took steps to help these men by recommending in his inaugural address that all public improvements already ordered be started immediately. Rather than permitting contractors to do the work, La Crosse's unemployed were to work under superintendents; where this conflicted with the charter, contractors were to employ only city men whenever possible. Furthermore Mayor Powell suggested that machines that increased a contractor's profit without lowering costs to the city or that deprived laborers of work should be prohibited. He advocated the adoption of uniforms for police officers; a more uniform system of taxation of real estate, and the acquisition of land for public parks. He pledged himself to administer, to the best of his ability, the affairs of all the people.3

I. THE CONVENTIONS

In July of 1886, a group calling itself the county

2La Crosse Morning Chronicle, April 7, 1886.

3La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 8, pp. 309-311.
convention of the Labor Party met at the court house to
choose delegates to the state convention which was to
meet in La Crosse the following Tuesday, July 13. The
meeting began amidst confusion; it seemed to be the
impression of the delegates that they were to nominate
candidates for county offices but this was disposed of
by a Mr. Cram, called "senator" and also a former all
around handyman of the Republicans, who had bolted his
party. Cram said the nominating was to be done at a
second convention later on.\(^4\)

The chairman, a Mr. McCain, called the whole
thing a "complete fizzle" because of the poor turnout
and it was suggested that an adjournment be taken to
Monday afternoon in the hope of getting out a few more
deleagtes. It was decided it would be worse if the
convention was adjourned without electing delegates;
La Crosse would look better before the state convention if
deleagtes were chosen. Harmony was urged since there
was discord even among the small number present. Finally
deleagtes were chosen and a motion was made and passed
unanimously that they be instructed to vote for D.F.
Powell for governor. The convention then adjourned and the
chairman was requested to call a mass meeting for the
following Monday evening at the court house.\(^5\)

\(^4\)La Crosse Morning Chronicle, July 10 and 11, 1886.

\(^5\)Ibid., July 11, 1886.
The so-called mass meeting of the workingmen of La Crosse was held, but attendance was again very poor and by the end of the meeting had dwindled to about forty. Following a variety of parliamentary maneuvers it was moved to adjourn. A reporter outside the building overheard a number of complaints about the cut and dried nature of the proceedings and that up to this point there had been two grand fiascos of the Workingmen's Party in La Crosse.6

The state convention of the Labor Party was called to order soon after noon by L. Tillmans who was made temporary chairman. After a confused debate that became heated over selecting a credentials committee, a Mr. Schilling of Milwaukee moved to proceed with the appointment of committees on permanent organization and resolutions in order to save time. There was objection on the grounds that this would deprive La Crosse of a voice in the selection of these committees, as the delegates were not all present. After further dispute a motion prevailed to adjourn to 1:30 P.M.

Dr. Powell, who had entered the hall, was granted permission to say a few words. White Beaver explained that a number of newspapers throughout the state had asked him to define his position, which he had done in some

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6Ibid., July 13, 1886.
instances, but his statements had not appeared in print.

He drew cheers with this thrust:

I do not desire the nomination for governor; if you will select from your number a man.... competent and a true friend to the laboring man, I will work for him.... give my time, money and influence to his campaign. But if this convention endorses the nominee of any other party convention, or takes action looking in that direction, I shall certainly become an independent candidate. My motto is, no compromise with Republicanism or Democracy.  

The convention reassembled at 1:30 and the committee on credentials reported 114 delegates entitled to vote by proxy or personally as follows: Milwaukee 68; La Crosse 14; Winnebago 2; Dodge 3; Chippewa 7; Vernon 12; Trempealeau 7. This gave Milwaukee county complete control of the convention. Then the committee on resolutions reported that since it was necessary to place a check on unjust accumulation, and to limit the power for evil of accumulated wealth, and since the two major parties had failed to enact laws for the best good of the greatest number they found it necessary to censure their past record and as a first step in that direction, "we have assembled in the city of La Crosse, Wisconsin, for the purpose of organizing a political party of the people, whose aim it will be to effect the following reforms:"

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7Ibid., July 14, 1886.
1) The re-organization of our state bureau of labor and industrial statistics, and the placing of a man at the head of it who will see that the laws for its government are properly executed.

2) That the public lands be reserved for actual settlers and that all lands now held for speculative purposes be taxed to their full value, and the forfeiture of all lands now held by grant where the contract has not been faithfully fulfilled.

3) The repeal of all laws that do not bear equally upon capital and labor, and the removal of unjust technicalities, delays and discriminations in the administration of justice.

4) The enactment of laws to compel corporations to pay their employees weekly, in lawful money, for the labor of the preceding week, and giving mechanics and laborers a first lien upon the product of their labor, to the extent of their full wages.

5) The abolition of the contract system on national, state and municipal works.

6) The enactment of laws providing for arbitration between employers and employed, and to enforce the decisions of the arbitrators.

7) The prohibition by law of the employment of children under fifteen years of age in workshops, mines and factories.

8) To prohibit the hiring out of convict labor.

9) The enactment of a law for the levy of a graduated income tax.

10) The enactment of a law which will confer equal privileges upon all worthy persons who desire to exercise the rights of citizens.

11) The establishment of a national monetary system, and annulment of the so-called national banking charters.

12) The enforcement of the law against the importation of foreign labor under contract.

The Convention adopted the following additional resolution:

Resolved, that we favor law and order and condemn all officials, anarchists and communists who seek to advance their interests on theories in violation of the rights of man to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

A motion to proceed to the election of a state

Ibid.
central committee was passed; the roll was then called. It showed that Milwaukee had forty-nine delegates actually present, La Crosse eight and Winnebago, Dodge, Chippewa, Vernon, Trempealeau and Jackson counties each one.

Schilling then offered a resolution stating that in view of the doubt abroad throughout the state of the authority of the La Crosse central committee to call a convention, one was to be called at Neenah to nominate a state ticket. 9

The date of the proposed Neenah convention was fixed at Thursday, September 16. The secretary spoke at some length to allay the ruffled feelings of the La Crosse delegation, after which a resolution was passed thanking the La Crosse central committee. Three cheers were given for D.F. Powell and the convention stood adjourned. 10

So ended the La Crosse Labor Party state convention; the Powell contingent never gained the unity, momentum, or support needed, while the Milwaukee delegation was inclined to block the nomination of Dr. Powell. The proceedings and results of these few days' events seem to indicate that White Beaver's political popularity was at best strictly local and that even that lacked conviction. The attempt to railroad the "reluctant" candidate into state prominence politically failed, not with a bang but with a whimper; the convention itself had been shunted aside.

9 Ibid. 10 Ibid.
At the Neenah convention Dr. Powell received the unanimous endorsement of the La Crosse county delegation but the convention was divided into factions, besides Milwaukee, which opposed Powell's nomination. After adoption of the platform the names of Colonel John Cochrane of Dodge County and Dr. Powell were placed in nomination for governor resulting in the former receiving 217 votes and the La Crosse mayor 96. On the motion of Powell the ballot was declared formal and unanimous with Judge Cochrane the nominee of the People's Party. Dr. Powell refused a nomination for lieutenant governor and the convention nominated General Lloyd of Clark County. For the major party nominees in 1886 the Democrats chose former mayor of La Crosse, G.M. Woodward while Governor Jeremiah Rusk was renominated by the Republicans for a second term. 11

II. THE SUNDAY CLOSING LAW

Locally, the La Crosse common council reelected P.L. Clark Chief of Police. Late in October, 1886, the Law and Order League once again began a vigorous campaign to enforce the Sunday closing law by employing a special detective to obtain evidence against saloon keepers and others doing business on Sunday. The league notified Mayor Powell that he would be held responsible for enforcing the law. White Beaver and Chief of Police Clark were warned to take charge of prosecutions or take the consequences of such neglect.

11La Crosse Morning Chronicle, September 18, 1886.
of official duty.\textsuperscript{12}

The mayor notified the citizens of La Crosse that the first enforcement day was set for Sunday, November 7. Forty-eight arrests were made for alleged violation of the Sunday law.\textsuperscript{13} Monday morning found Justice Safford's courtroom filled with defendants, attorneys, and spectators. The district attorney announced that circuit court was not in session, and it would be difficult to try the cases within two to three weeks. The defendants objected to this, insisting on an early trial to prevent a repetition of the cases the following Sunday. To expedite the matter, warrants were made out against one man in each department of the various lines of business involved and his trial made a test case. The following Wednesday the hearing of the Sunday law violation cases came up before Justice Safford who discharged all the defendants on the ground that they were involved in work that was necessary.\textsuperscript{14}

Before the next Sunday the common council held its regular meetings in which it approved the course to be followed by Mayor Powell. The mayor said he had been notified that unless he enforced the Sunday law he would be impeached. The following day the mayor served public

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., October 28, 1886.
\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., November 1, 1886.
\textsuperscript{14}La Crosse Tribune, May 24, 1942.
notice that complaints would be made and prosecutions brought against every violator of the Sunday law in whatever business engaged, including even any freight trains operating within the city limits in order to fully test the law.\textsuperscript{15}

On the second Sunday of the crusade ninety-nine arrests were made. Mayor Powell issued a notice to the chief of police:

Having demonstrated to the satisfaction of the community that a continued enforcement of the Sunday law in La Crosse would be absurd, and acting in conformity with the official wishes in a resolution adopted by the common council, asking the mayor to discontinue to employ policemen to harass business men and the community at large, you are hereby notified to instruct your officers to confine themselves to preserving the peace as long established usages and customs require.\textsuperscript{16}

Later, one case against a saloonkeeper was tried before Justice Ginder but was dismissed for "lack of sufficient evidence." Other actions that had been pending finally were dropped and thus ended one of the rare attempts to enforce the Sunday laws in La Crosse.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{III. CIVIC AFFAIRS}

Before the close of Mayor Powell's second term

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{La Crosse Morning Chronicle}, November 13, 1886.

\textsuperscript{16}\textit{Ibid.}, November 20, 1886.

\textsuperscript{17}\textit{La Crosse Tribune}, May 24, 1942.
the city charter was changed which moved the city limits
east and north, revised the wards of the city, established
the office of comptroller, created a board of public works,
extended election of city officers to two year terms,
changed the date of municipal elections from the first to
the third Tuesday in April and limited the city's bonding
allowance in any one year. The legislature passed the
charter law after which the city was divided into ten wards,
the fifth, ninth and tenth on the north side and the others
on the south side.\textsuperscript{18}

Albert Hardy, superintendent of schools, informed
the council of the crowded conditions of the public schools
and recommended that additional small buildings be rented
to relieve this condition. The council voted to purchase
two lots on the corner of Sixteenth and Vine Streets for
the site of a new school building.\textsuperscript{19}

While the Burlington construction on Second Street
was in progress property owners and others objected to
putting in a double track. Although the franchise permitted
this arrangement many citizens were unaware of the fact and
called a protest meeting. To avoid any possible steps to
prevent the work from proceeding the railroad company mustered
400 men the next morning at daylight, and by night the track
was down.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{18}La Crosse Chronicle, March 25, 1887.
\textsuperscript{19}La Crosse Tribune, May 17, 1942.  \textsuperscript{20}Ibid.
The request of the City Street Railway Company to extend its line on Main Street from Fourth to Twelfth Street met with bitter opposition from property owners and residents on that street. A mass meeting was held at the court house. There were petitions to grant a charter for State Street instead. When the ordinance came before the city council there was much discussion over whether to extend the line on Main or State Streets. The mayor broke a tie vote and the ordinance passed extending the line on Main Street.\(^\text{21}\)

On recommendation of the mayor, salaries of police officers were increased to $66.66 per month and uniforms were ordered for officers; the city furnished the stars and buttons.\(^\text{22}\)

The building of the Burlington and North Western railroads caused a boom in real estate in La Crosse; the tax commissioner reported the assessment of real estate and personal property for 1886 as a total of $7,945,957, an increase of $1,117,635 over the previous year.\(^\text{23}\)

The first agitation for a new city hall came when it was suggested that a site be purchased although it was not

\(^{21}\)La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 8, p. 372; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, June 12, 1886.

\(^{22}\)La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 8, p. 429; La Crosse Tribune, May 17, 1942.

\(^{23}\)La Crosse Tribune, May 17, 1942.
proposed to erect a new building immediately. No action was taken on any of the options at that time, however, because of the financial condition of the city. Instead plans were made for making necessary improvements to the city building on Main Street between Fourth and Fifth Streets.\(^2^4\)

Mayor Powell was not a candidate for reelection to a third term, but the Union Labor Party nominated his brother, Dr. George E. Powell for mayor, together with a full slate for other city offices. The Democrats and Republicans agreed on a fusion ticket. David Austin of the firm of Sawyer and Austin Lumber Company was the fusion candidate for mayor and was elected over Powell by a vote of 2,615 to 1,588. All the other candidates on the fusion ticket also were elected.\(^2^5\) The results of this election can be partially explained by the fact that on the day preceding the election White Beaver Powell, in an open letter to the workingmen of La Crosse published in a local paper, denounced his brother as an insincere labor man who was a political opportunist. White Beaver advocated a vote for the fusion ticket.\(^2^6\)

\(^{2^4}\) Ibid.

\(^{2^5}\) La Crosse Morning Chronicle, April 20, 1887.

\(^{2^6}\) Ibid., April 19, 1887.
CHAPTER IV

THE MAYOR-COUNCIL CONFLICTS

In April, 1923, Dr. Powell returned to political office as the mayor of La Crosse after an absence of seven years. The official election returns reported to the council indicated a popular support greater than the combined vote for his two opponents, Albert A. Hirshheimer and Isaac Moulton. White Beaver received 2,627, while Hirshheimer's total was 1,351 and Moulton's 1,206. However, the mayor was the sole representative of the People's Party to gain an elected office while the Democrats held all the city offices and controlled the common council.\(^1\)

The term of office was now two years; the first year of Powell's third administration was characterized by conflicts with the council over the appointment of the chief of police, the Sunday closing law and the reorganization of the regular committees of the council.

I. CIVIC AFFAIRS

One of the first acts of the new council was the selection of Edward A. Barry as chief of the fire department.

\(^1\)La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 13, p. 457.
The mayor with council approval appointed Frank Powell, not a relative, as city engineer. In June, by Powell's instigation and after repeated attempts failed, an ordinance was adopted making Chief Barry a full-time officer of the fire department. The office was combined with that of fire marshal and the salary finally agreed upon was $1,000 per year. Fire Chief Barry died in January, 1894, and the funeral, one of the largest in La Crosse history, was attended by the members of the fire department and by city officials. A.J. Simonton, who had been captain at the downtown station number one, replaced Chief Barry.

When it was announced by the state board of regents that two new normal schools were contemplated, La Crosse began a campaign to be selected as one of the sites. The city presented its case to the state board. A special committee, headed by the mayor, and working in conjunction with the Board of Trade, selected sites while the council voted in favor of issuing $30,000 in bond money to aid in securing the school. Members of the board of regents visited La Crosse, reviewed the sites and listened to

2La Crosse Morning Chronicle, April 22, 1893.
3La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 14, p. 77; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, June 29, 1893.
4La Crosse Morning Chronicle, January 30, 1894.
5La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 14, p. 422; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, February 8, 1894.
6La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 13, p. 606;
arguments for the selection of La Crosse as one of the chosen spots for a normal school. At this time the mayor, on behalf of the city and county offered to provide a suitable site plus $50,000 in bonds if a school would be located here. The authorization bill was killed by one vote in the state legislature and La Crosse failed to get a normal school.  

The council set aside $5,000 for a new poorhouse to replace the old frame building that was used for the purpose. Although the money was appropriated in August of 1893 the resolution for the building was not passed until nearly a year and a half later.  

On Labor Day Mayor Powell, the principal speaker, declared that, "the history of labor is easily told. Religion, art, science and literature were formed by warp and woof of labor." He said also that there was a "ceaseless struggle between labor and capital.... The time will come when every laborer will be a union man and every farmer an alliance man."  

A special committee was appointed to investigate various types of street paving and after visiting St. Paul,

La Crosse Morning Chronicle, May 19, 1893.

7La Crosse Morning Chronicle, May 26, 1893; April 18, 1895.

8La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 14, p. 173; Volume 15, 1894, p. 282; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, August 12, 1893; November 10, 1894.

9La Crosse Morning Chronicle, September 5, 1893.
Minneapolis, West Superior and Winona, found cedar block to be the most highly recommended. Estimates for paving with different materials on West Avenue from Pine to Cass Streets and on Main from Eleventh to West Avenue were presented.10

In March, 1894, an ordinance was passed regulating the riding of bicycles. It prohibited riding on sidewalks along business streets, compelled use of bells and lamps and set a maximum speed of six miles an hour on such sidewalks as were to be allowed to be used for bicycles. At the same meeting the council borrowed $12,000 to be used in erecting an addition to the Logan Street School.11

II. THE CHIEF OF POLICE

The city charter gave the mayor the power to appoint the chief of police and the council the power to confirm or reject, but not to propose a candidate. With this situation the stage was set for another conflict between the mayor and the council. Mayor Powell, for personal or political reasons, desired to replace Chief Hugh Byrne who had been chief of police since Mayor Doolger had appointed him in October, 1890. The mayor first nominated Frank Wehrer who had been the endorsed Labor candidate for chief and had received 2,000

10 La Crosse Tribune, July 5, 1942.
11 La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 14, pp. 503-504; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, March 10, 1894.
votes. The council turned down the Wehrer nomination and then also rejected five other candidates that White Beaver proposed.\textsuperscript{12}

In such a situation the charter provided that confirmation must be made not less the four days nor more than one week after adjournment. When the council convened in adjourned session six days later the chamber was crowded with spectators. The mayor proposed the names of four more men and in each succeeding case the names failed to gain council approval. Since this was the last day allowed for the selection of a chief of police, White Beaver made no attempt to continue the fight which left Chief Byrne secure in his position.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{III. SUNDAY CLOSING}

What followed was typical of White Beaver's actions. Failing to oust the chief, the mayor issued an order requesting him to report the names of every person engaged in operating a saloon who failed to close on Sunday. During Dr. Powell's previous administration there had been many arrests on similar charges but not a single defendant was convicted.

\textsuperscript{12}La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 14, pp. 282-283; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, October 14, 1893.

\textsuperscript{13}La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 14, pp. 284-286; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, October 21, 1893.
The chief complied with the order and at the next council meeting presented the names of twenty-three saloon keepers. After the report the council transacted other business but adjourned without acting on the chief’s report.¹⁴

The mayor’s next step was an attempt to place the responsibility of enforcing the law upon the aldermen, allegedly because of their refusal to confirm any of his nominations for chief of police. His new order to the chief requested him to notify in writing the aldermen in whose wards saloons were kept open on Sunday and to present duplicates of these notices to the mayor. The chief informed the aldermen that they were expected to prosecute all offenders in their respective wards, and that neglect to do so would be followed by such legal proceedings against them individually as required by the statutes. The aldermen were not intimidated and the very few cases against saloon keepers that were brought to court were dismissed for “lack of evidence.”¹⁵

IV. THE COUNCIL COMMITTEES

When the budget for 1894 was adopted provision was made for an increase in the fire department appropriation

¹⁴La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 14, p. 296; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, November 11, 1893.

¹⁵La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 14, p. 296; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, November 11, 1893; January 30, 1894.
in order to establish a paid department. An ordinance was introduced to create a paid department which also prescribed the duties of the members and department regulations. Then came the usual fight that often ensued when a public improvement was proposed. After long argument the ordinance was tabled until fall.16

The mayor, finding the council not willing to abide by all his policies, attempted to punish some of the aldermen by readjusting the standing committees. Copies of the makeup of new committees were found on the desk of each alderman but before White Beaver announced them he found himself trapped. Alderman Gordon drafted an amendment to the council rule relating to appointment of committees during the organizing meeting when the mayor first takes office. The amendment provided that no change could be made in committees during the two year term, except in cases of resignation, death, or other causes. This amendment was passed but the mayor promptly vetoed it. The council overrode the veto and then Alderman Gordon was ready with another resolution which directed the clerk to recognize in all the usual ways the regular standing committees that had been in existence. This passed also, was vetoed by the mayor and again the council refused to sustain the veto. The fight was to continue into the second year of White Beaver's

16La Crosse Tribune, July 5, 1942.
administration. 17

The political fight between Mayor Powell and his Democratic council was intensified during the second year of his administration. From April, 1894, nearly every project presented either met opposition from some of the council or was vetoed by White Beaver.

Dissension over the mayor's rearrangement of standing committees the previous year continued. The first matter to come up under the new committee realignment was an ordinance permitting the La Crosse and Onalaska Street Car Company to electrify its line within the city limits. Up to that time the council had refused to recognize the mayor's new committees and when the report on the ordinance was submitted the mayor asked what names were signed to it. The reply was that the old committee had signed the report. The chief executive announced that inasmuch as he was in favor of the measure and as one signer of the report was a member of the "true committee," he would consider it regularly presented and the ordinance was adopted. 18

At the May meeting, because of the mayor's refusal to recognize the old committees, no business was transacted and monthly bills and payrolls amounting to $12,089 were

17La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 14, pp. 470-473; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, February 17, 1894.

18La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 14, pp. 578-579; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, April 14, 1894.
held up pending further action. During the adjourned meeting which met a few nights later, Alderman Murray moved that the mayor perform his duty so that the bills might be paid. A request by the same alderman that the matter be taken to court was voted down on the grounds that there was no case at issue. The next step was taken when mandamus proceedings were started in circuit court to compel the mayor to sign a certain order. The mayor, however, recognized the old committees until a decision was rendered and the regular bills for the past two months were ordered paid.\footnote{La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 14, pp. 620-623; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, May 15, 1894.}

Circuit Judge O.B. Wyman rendered a decision fully sustaining the council and at the same time upheld the mayor's original contention that on April 28 he had authority to rearrange committees. The court held that placing printed committee cards upon the desks of aldermen could not be considered a record of the appointment because no time was stated or signature attached. Nothing in the minutes of the council indicated that any new appointments were made on the date named. The mayor was ordered to sign the order which was made the issue in the case. It was an inference, though not a direct statement, that up to the date a change was made in the rules, it was within the mayor's power to rearrange the committees. The same inference barred him from

\footnote{La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 14, pp. 620-623; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, May 15, 1894.}
making any further effort to change them.\textsuperscript{20}

V. UTILITIES

A special committee, after a careful investigation, reported that it had found municipal lighting plants were a saving to cities that owned them over the cost of contracts with privately owned companies. The committee report and a resolution to employ a consulting engineer to make an investigation relative to building a municipal plant was adopted.\textsuperscript{21}

Although the La Crosse City Railway Company had been given two years in which to electrify its line, it began operating its first cars under electrical power in about a year's time and early in August the first cars were put in service. The remainder of the south side line was completed before winter.\textsuperscript{22}

Controversy over enlarging the city water system and installation of a new pump continued through the remainder of 1894 when every meeting of the council was attended by large numbers of citizens. The long delayed

\textsuperscript{20}La Crosse Tribune, July 12, 1942.

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid.
question of enlarging the facilities of the water system, which had been requested at the beginning of White Beaver's third term, was revived by appointment of a special committee to obtain estimates for installation of a new pump and otherwise enlarging the water system. Figures submitted included installation of a new ten-million gallon pump at a cost of $45,000 in addition to new boilers, brick smokestack and thirty inch intake pipe totaling $73,980.23

The committee recommended that the supply of water taken from the Mississippi River with additional and increased pumping facilities would effectively solve the water problem and furnish a never-failing supply of good water in all emergencies, especially if at some future time a system of filtration could be inaugurated.24

After adopting specifications for a new pump came a fight over what type to purchase. Ten bids were submitted ranging in price from $41,875 by the Worthington Company to $59,900 by the Blake Company. A special committee was appointed by the council to consider the bids, together with the board of public works and committees of the Fire Insurance League and Board of Trade. The committee made

23La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 14, pp. 193-194; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, September 15, 1894.

24La Crosse Morning Chronicle, October 13, 1894.
a secret investigation and no one knew what it had done until it submitted its report. It had visited Chicago, Fort Wayne, Toledo, Columbus, Memphis, Nashville and St. Louis to inspect various kinds of pumps included in the list for which bids had been submitted.25

The committee recommended the purchase of the Worthington pump to be placed in the King Street station where the old small pump was located. When the first joint committee report was presented to the common council recommending a Worthington pump it was received and ordered placed on file, which action met with emphasized disapproval of the mayor. For several hours the aldermen argued, made motions, offered amendments to amendments and the mayor vetoed everything until the meeting adjourned without taking any action on the pump question.26

In the meantime the board of public works, basing its authority on provisions of the charter, had entered into contract with the Worthington Company, allegedly contrary to the knowledge of the council and in defiance of instructions; the comptroller, however, refused to sign the contract because it had not been authorized by the council. Law suits were

25La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 15, pp. 365-366; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, December 30, 1894.

26La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 15, pp. 478-483; La Crosse Tribune, July 12, 1942.
threatened by the Worthington Company, which claimed it had begun building the pump ordered by the board of public works. The council then adopted a resolution cancelling the contract, declaring it null and void. It further authorized the board to enter into contract for a crank and flywheel engine with the lowest responsible bidder. The board then awarded a contract to the Holley Company for a ten-million gallon crank and flywheel pump. It was alleged that the stockholders of both the Worthington and the Holley Companies were composed largely of the same persons but that the profit on the sale of the Worthington would have been greater than that of the other. The contract for the Holley pump, however, was accepted; the purchase was made and the issue was solved,27

However, an aldermanic committee investigated charges of bribery that circulated concerning the board of public works. The investigation continued into the next administration, although nothing more serious was indicated than "irregularities" in the board of public works--loose and unbusinesslike procedures.28

Because of a large reduction in the state taxes the city's tax rate was cut to twenty mills, producing $244,566

27 La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 15, pp. 476-483; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, March 6, 1895.

28 La Crosse Morning Chronicle, May 12, 1895.
for maintenance of all the departments of the city including state and county taxes in the budget for 1895. 29

VI. POPULIST POLITICS

In July, 1894, the state wide Populist convention at Milwaukee nominated D. Frank Powell for governor but this time the local scene was comparatively very quiet. By the following November, the election returns indicated that White Beaver commanded a healthy respect as a third party candidate in the state but posed no threat to the established party candidates. Peck, the Democratic gubernatorial candidate received 142,250 votes, Upham, the Republican, 196,116, and Powell 25,604. In La Crosse Powell made a stronger appeal with 1,426 votes against Peck's 2,743 and Governor Upham's 3,923. 30

As the new year opened, politics had again loomed on the local scene and once more Dr. Powell announced himself as a candidate for reelection. Democrats nominated Joseph W. Losey, while the Republican ticket was headed by Judge Thomas A. Dyson. As in previous elections White Beaver had the support of the working men, along with that of other admirers, and defeated his opponents by the following vote: Powell, 2,346; Dyson, 1,799; Losey, 1,477. 31

29 La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 15, p. 546; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, April 3, 1895.
30 La Crosse Morning Chronicle, July 6, November 9, 1894.
31 La Crosse Morning Chronicle, April 3, 1895.
Outstanding in 1895, the first year of Mayor D. Frank Powell's concluding administration, was the establishment of a paid fire department, replacing the volunteer system, and the mayor's second attempt to appoint a new chief to replace Chief Byrne.

In his inaugural address White Beaver stated that his election for a fourth time to the office of mayor of "one of the largest and most thriving cities in the Northwest" was an honor greater than any he had ever hoped for. He went on to say that a man might be elected to office by a state or nation solely because he represented a great party, but that to win office through the votes of friends and neighbors four times was an honor seldom granted to the most ambitious politician.  

In the succeeding meeting, the council, in an effort to cooperate with the mayor, brought up some of the recommendations made by him upon his inauguration, and referred them to proper committees. They included employment of a matron at the city jail, purchase of a chemical engine for the fire department, installing a filtering...
plant in connection with the water system, and building of a municipal light plant.  

I. THE FIRE DEPARTMENT

Important among the election of officers at the inauguration meeting was the naming of C.A. Hunt as chief of the fire department, succeeding Al Simonton. Hunt had held the office before and was not a member of White Beaver's political family, and therefore his election was not given the entire approval of the mayor. His election caused the immediate resignation of John Kneebes, first assistant chief of the north side, and Frank Stueesser was elected by the council to take his place.  

Later the council passed a resolution to create a paid fire department with little debate, despite the fact that it had been considered and debated many times in past years. A full time, paid fire department was accepted as a necessity for the second city in Wisconsin.

In April, 1896, Chief Hunt staged the first annual review of the fire department under the paid system, much to the satisfaction of city officials and the general public.

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2Ibid., pp. 49-50; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, May 11, 1895.

3La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 16, pp. 12-13; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, April 17, 1895.

4La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 16, p. 303; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, September 28, 1895.
At each station everything was found in good order and all improvements under the new system were explained by the chief.5

II. THE POLICE DEPARTMENT

At the regular council meeting in October, the time prescribed by the charter for appointment of a chief of police, the mayor again attempted to oust Chief Hugh R. Byrne. The council chamber was crowded with spectators and before making his nominations the mayor said, "Every alderman knows how his constituents feel. If you should decide wisely, you will have not only the approval of your conscience, but the approval of your constituents as well."6 White Beaver nominated two men, neither of whom were confirmed by the council; the mayor then announced that he would not further oppose the continuance in office of Chief Byrne, which was greeted with great applause from the spectators.7

Mayor Powell sprung a surprise when, after two previous attempts to oust Chief of Police Byrne, he complimented the chief on the manner in which he was conducting the department. It came about when the chief

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5La Crosse Morning Chronicle, April 25, 1896.
6La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 16, pp. 352-353.
7Ibid.; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, October 12, 1895.
recommended the establishment of a police telegraph system, pointing out that the fire alarm telegraph was being changed into a single wire system and that the wires could be put in without much cost. The mayor's communication also recommended that no more money be transferred from the police to other funds during the year.8

Commenting on the matter, the mayor said the chief had attempted to save money in his department and had managed to get along without extra men. Nonetheless the service of the police department had been excellent. With the telegraph system, the mayor said, the chief would be able to get along with fewer men. He thought it would save the city the cost of the system within a year or two. The chief's request was granted and the system was installed.9

III. UTILITIES

A report on the advisability of building a municipal light plant was submitted by a consulting engineer who had been employed. He found conditions favorable for municipal ownership but agitation for a municipal plant met a natural death when propositions were made by the Brush Electric Light Company for lighting the city's streets. It offered to give service on a five-year contract, furnishing 200 or more arc

8La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 16, pp. 280-281; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, September 12, 1896.

9Ibid.
lights for $95 per year, the lights to be placed wherever the
council directed. This increased the number of lights the
city had previously by 40 and reduced the price per light
by $15.10

The special municipal light plant committee reported
that it had heard from sixty-three cities which owned their
plants and in thirty-seven of them the cost per light was
more than that asked by the Brush Company in its proposed
contract. With these figures and the report of the committee,
the council entered into a contract with the local company
for a five year period.11

Competition in the electric light business loomed
early in 1897 when an ordinance was introduced granting
certain privileges to the McMillan Mill and Power Company
of Neshonoc. The ordinance provided for permission to erect
and maintain in the streets, alleys, and public grounds of
the city, poles, wires, and equipment for furnishing
electric light to private and public buildings. It further
stipulated that on March 1, 1899, and each first of March
thereafter, the company was to pay to the city the sum of
money equivalent to two per cent of its gross earnings for
a period of fifteen years. The ordinance was referred to

10La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 16, pp. 354-
355; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, October 15, 1895.

11La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 16, p. 372;
La Crosse Morning Chronicle, October 27, 1895.
a special committee composed of aldermen who were likely to remain after the spring election.\textsuperscript{12}

For several years the street car company had sought to extend its line eastward. Various streets were suggested including State, Main and Cass, but property owners on each of these streets had entered protests. Old tracks still remained on State Street, but the company preferred to remove these rails and relay them on Main Street. At the same time this was granted, the company agreed, at the request of the mayor and council, to a two month's experiment to give reduced fares for workingmen between the hours of 6 to 7 a.m. and 6 to 7 p.m. from October 1 to December 1. Fares were sold at the rate of thirty for $1. The reduced fares had been a request of White Beaver for several years.\textsuperscript{13}

The street car controversy again came up when Alderman Murray introduced an ordinance in January of 1896 providing that no more permits be granted the company for extending its line on streets running north and south on the south side, and specified certain streets east and west on which lines could be extended. It also provided that the company be compelled to sell ten tickets for fifty cents for use only during certain hours in the morning and evening.

\textsuperscript{12}La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 17, p. 515; pp. 548-550; \textit{La Crosse Morning Chronicle}, March 13, 1897.

\textsuperscript{13}La Crosse Tribune, July 19, 1942.
for the benefit of working men. There was a long and heated debate over passage of the proposed ordinance which lost by a vote of ten to nine.14

Although city finances were reported to be at a low point, the council realized the necessity of improving the water system and ordered the laying of several miles of mains in all parts of the city. To finance the project a loan of $22,000 was made from the sinking fund to run for thirteen years with three per cent interest, bonds to be issued for the loan.15

Trouble was reported in the water system when the intake pipe in the Mississippi River became covered with sand. The board of public works was instructed to raise the pipe and clean it, and in the meantime suggestions were made for auxiliary pipes on the river bank. Trouble also was experienced with the new Holley pump and the balance of $7,000 on the contract was held up. The council threatened to collect penalties but later paid the bill.16

In October the comptroller presented the budget for 1897, calling for the sum of $257,426 to be raised with a twenty-one mill tax rate which was a slight reduction over the year before.17

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14La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 16, pp. 486-488; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, January 11, 1896.
15La Crosse Morning Chronicle, May 16, 1896.
16La Crosse Tribune, July 19, 1942.
17La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 17, p. 334;
IV. THE WEIGHTMASTER’S OFFICE

More partisan debate was injected into the council when C.A. Bartlett was removed from the office of weighmaster and ex-police chief P.L. Clark was elected by the Democratic majority as his successor. City Clerk John Vorschota, a Republican, refused either to turn over the keys to Clark or to accept his bond, while Bartlett refused to give up the office.18

The fight was taken to circuit court when Clark brought action against Bartlett to gain possession of the office. The trial occupied several days during which much testimony was taken. Judge O.B. Wyman decided in favor of the plaintiff. Notwithstanding the previous decision of Circuit Judge O.B. Wyman in the weighmaster controversy, a most peculiar procedure was followed by the common council. The court had ruled in favor of Clark in his action against Bartlett over who was entitled to hold the office of weighmaster. Alderman Brown offered a resolution declaring the office vacant which was adopted, and this was followed by the election of Bartlett by a vote of ten to nine, Aldermen Drummond and Torrance, two Democrats, voting with Republicans. The question of salary, both weighmasters claiming pay for the time during the controversy, was

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La Crosse Morning Chronicle, October 24, 1896.

mutually settled after which an ordinance was adopted whereby the weighmaster was to be elected every two years, instead of every year.19

V. POLITICS

In October, 1896, White Beaver filed nomination papers for the seventh congressional district as a candidate for the People's Party but withdrew upon the promise of his rival, Hilliard, to include a "silver plank" at the Chicago convention of the "Popocrates," the combined Democratic and People's Party.20

As the city election drew near Mayor Powell announced that he would not be a candidate for reelection:

There are a number of self constituted leaders in the People's Party who are employing all their talent and influence to turn their party over to the gold faction of the Democratic Party, leaving their own party without a ticket. Now let me say that if the People's Party nominates a ticket, I will support it loyally; but if it does not, and both the old parties nominate gold men for mayor I shall feel obliged to lend my support to the Republicans.21

This reflected the national scene. In 1896 William J. Bryan, campaigning on the silver issue as a Democratic-People's Party candidate for president received 6,502,925

19La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 16, p. 609; La Crosse Morning Chronicle, April 4, 1896.

20La Crosse Morning Chronicle, October 4, 1896.

21La Crosse Morning Chronicle, March 13, 1897.
votes to William McKinley's 7,104,779. McKinley was Republican.  

In their respective conventions the Republicans nominated James McCord for mayor while the Democrats named Alderman Murray, president of the council. The People's Party, contrary to the wishes of Powell, endorsed the Democratic ticket. This enraged White Beaver. He not only failed to keep his promise to support the Republican candidate but he filed nomination papers as an independent candidate on "principles of the People's Party."  

The People's Party had split into two factions which proved to be the downfall of White Beaver. The issue that caused this was over the half-fare rate resolution in the council the previous January when the city street car legislation failed of passage. The Democrats organized an attempt to picture Dr. Powell as a traitor to the working men because he did not deliver the promised half-fare legislation. This was successful when the People's Party convention met and endorsed Alderman Murray as their candidate by a 21 to 13 vote. White Beaver was denounced by the Democratic-controlled People's Party when the "middle of the road" faction deserted him.  

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23La Crosse Morning Chronicle, April 7, 1897; La Crosse Tribune, July 19, 1942.

24La Crosse Morning Chronicle, March 24, 1897.
Mayor Powell's nomination papers were signed in great numbers by Republicans, who no doubt wished to enhance the chances of victory for their own party by splitting the opposition. White Beaver explained that he had not supported the half-fare ordinance because of the fact that Milwaukee had such an attempt declared unconstitutional and he wished to avoid this for La Crosse. Furthermore he felt that the franchise with the city street car company was binding for several more years and rates could not legally be changed anyway.25

The Democratic newspaper mounted an intensive campaign of daily attacks against Mayor Powell's record, his performance compared to his promises concerning the half-fare issue, all of which proved to be very effective.26

The results of the election showed McCord the victor with 3,475 votes; Murray with 2,470; and Powell trailed with 978. It was a clean sweep as the Republicans won all of the city offices.27

At the last regular meeting of the old council Mayor-elect McCord was present and took a seat beside Mayor Powell who introduced his successor.28

25Ibid., March 31, 1897.
26Ibid., March 31 to April 4, 1897.
27Ibid., April 7, 1897.
28Ibid., April 10, 1897.
On inauguration day when the old council met for the last time Mayor Powell was out of the city. The state legislature had passed a new law placing the police and fire departments under the authority of a board of commissioners.

Alderman Murray, president of the council, presided over the meeting as acting mayor. Under the law the commission was to be appointed by the outgoing mayor and Alderman Murray, by virtue of his office, made the appointment, naming as commissioners Joseph W. Losey for four years, James J. Hogan for three years, I.H. Moulton for two years, and John Dengler for one year. 29

Following the announcement of these appointments, the city clerk read a communication from Mayor Powell which said:

In my capacity as mayor of the city of La Crosse, and according to the requirements of law, I hereby constitute and appoint the following named persons to be civil service commissioners in and for said city of La Crosse: George E. Powell for four years, David H. Palmer for three years, W.R. Finch for two years, and F.R. Hickisch for one year. 30

Alderman Murray called attention to the fact that the document from the mayor was dated La Crosse, April 19, whereas the mayor was not in the city at that time, nor had been since the passage of the law. Murray said he made the appointments as acting mayor of the day as required by law.

29 La Crosse City Council Minutes, Volume 17, p. 583.
30 Ibid.
and his appointments would stand. On this defiant and futile note the political career of White Beaver Powell came to an end.

31 Ibid., pp. 583-584.
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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Best source for actual council actions but lacks accounts of debates and arguments.

SECONDARY SOURCES

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A brief biographical sketch reprinted from the Milwaukee Sentinel of May 9, 1906, Powell's obituary.

La Crosse Wisconsin Board of Trade Annual Report 1881-1900. La Crosse, Wisconsin: Republican and Leader Print, 1900.
Report of annual statistics concerning La Crosse.

Brief information concerning Powell, his business and residence.

Brief sketch of Powell's career in La Crosse.

Brief information as to Powell, his business and residence.
   Of value because of references to Powell as an associate, partner and friend of Cody.

B. PERIODICALS

Hebbert, Mary H., "Notes on Dr. David Frank Powell, Known as 'White Beaver,'" Wisconsin Magazine of History, 35, (Summer, 1952), 306-309.

   Both articles provide background material which helps explain his local popularity.

C. NEWSPAPERS

La Crosse Morning Chronicle, November 1890-May, 1906.
   Among numerous articles some are of particular importance: July and November, 1896; August and November 1890 and May 1906—the formation of the People's Party in La Crosse, the Neenah convention, Indian Hill Park, the Indian Ghost Dance threat and Sitting Bull, and Powell's obituary.

   By far the most valuable portion here was the 1942, May to July series concerning the administrative highlights of previous mayors.

Sunday Press /La Crosse/, May 13, 1894, "Progressive La Crosse."
   A special historical issue which included a biographical sketch of Powell, then mayor.