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BUSINESS, LABOR AND POLITICAL EFFICIENCY:  
POST-WORLD WAR II MUNICIPAL REFORM IN EAU CLAIRE, WISCONSIN

HISTORY 489: RESEARCH SEMINAR

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## **Abstract**

For decades historians and political scientists alike have been studying the trends and processes of municipal level political reform within the United States. Their attention has largely focused on answering questions like what social forces, economic factors and political controversies have fueled political change. A great portion of the research on political change has focused on the reforms that occurred during the Progressive Era. It is only within the last few decades that scholars have begun to investigate the wave of municipal reforms that occurred in the years following the Second World War. However, the small body of scholarly research that has developed over the past few decades has largely ignored the reforms that took place within the state of Wisconsin. Through an examination and analysis Eau Claire, Wisconsin's movement to change its government in the late 1940's this paper will attempt to expand the existing scholarship on municipal political reform into an area of the United States.

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## Introduction

Much of the scholarly research concerned with municipal reforms in the United States, both prior to and after the Second World War, has come to a similar conclusion. This conclusion was that municipal reform movements have generally originated from within the middle and upper socio-economic classes of a given city. In addition, most scholars agree that reform minded citizens were often closely linked in some way with their city's local business interests and chambers of commerce. Furthermore, political reformers in many areas were not career politicians. They had their own private sources of income and in most cases their reform efforts faced resistance from the working classes and local organized labor.<sup>1</sup> The consistency with which this pattern has appeared in case studies of reform cities has brought about the creation of a theory within political science circles called the "class theory" of city government. Basically, this theory states that middle and upper class members of a city will support reform while working-class citizens will support machine politics.<sup>2</sup>

Currently there are only a handful of scholarly studies focused on post World War II municipal reform in the state of Wisconsin. The articles and case studies that make up this small body of research focus mostly on older lumber cities, like Oshkosh, or large industrial centers, like Milwaukee. Not surprisingly, the discussions and conclusions presented by these works suggest that many of Wisconsin's successful post World War II municipal reform movements followed the pattern set forth in the class theory of city government. The efforts to reform the

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<sup>1</sup>The following books are recommended for additional background in the area of political reform history: Amy Bridges, *Morning Glories: Municipal Reform in the Southwest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Samuel P. Hays, *American Political History: A Social Analysis* (Knoxville, Tenn: University of Tennessee Press, 1980); Eric H. Monkkenon, *America Becomes Urban: The Development of U.S. Cities and Towns 1780-1980* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988); Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955); E. C. Banfield and J. Q. Wilson, *City Politics* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963).

<sup>2</sup>Amy Bridges and Richard Kronick, "Writing the Rules to Win the Game: The Middle-Class Regimes of Municipal Reformers," *Urban Affairs Review* 34 (1999): 691-706.

municipal government of the city of Eau Claire, Wisconsin, through a 1948 referendum vote, seem to follow this pattern.<sup>3</sup> Eau Claire's reform movement was conceived and headed up by local businessmen. The new city council that these reformers helped put into place replaced a completely pro-labor three-person commission with an almost completely pro-business seven-member city council-city manager form of municipal government.

It is not surprising that postwar municipal reform movements saw business and labor interest on opposite side of the issue. Years between the passage of the Wagner Act in 1937 and the end of the Second World War saw a huge increase in union membership. The Second World War was integral to this growth as it created huge a huge demand for industrial goods. Large numbers of previously unemployed Americans were able to find manufacturing jobs because of this demand. In the years following the war organized labor groups began to make attempts of solidify the gains made during the war. Many Americans feared that with the decreased demand for war goods the American economy would collapse back into another Great Depression. The lifting of governmental price controls and wage fixing destabilized the fragile postwar American economy even more. The unstable economy combined with fears of a second depression created a situation where the strikes of many unions were not welcomed by the general public. The prevailing postwar view was that organized labor was abusing its power, and that something needed to be done to curtail its influence. With public opinion turn against organized labor

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<sup>3</sup> For additional reading on Wisconsin's post World War II municipal reforms see: James Simmons, "Whither Local Government Reform? The Case of Wisconsin." *National Civic Review* 90 (Spring, 2001): 45-62; James Simmons, "Social Conflict and Political Change in Oshkosh: The Search for Local Government Efficiency," *Voyageur* 14 (1998): 22-38; James R Donoghue, "The Local Government System in Wisconsin," *1968 Wisconsin Blue Book*. (Madison: Department of Administration, State of Wisconsin, 1968),108-125; Eric Fure-Slocum. "Cities with Class, Growth Politics, the Working-Class City, and Debt in Milwaukee during the 1940's" *Social Science History*, 24 (2000): 257-305.

during the postwar years, business interests in across the nation were able to mount a political counterattack against organized labor's interests on national and municipal levels.<sup>4</sup>

Wisconsin saw the same economic benefits from the Second World War as many other states. Manufacturing and food production businesses within Wisconsin especially benefited.<sup>5</sup> Unemployed Wisconsinites were able to find work within the industrial sector just as Americans in other parts of the country were. From 1937 until the end of the Second World War Wisconsin's organized labor groups saw large gains in membership similar to those seen in the rest of the nation.<sup>6</sup> From a political standpoint, organized labor had been quite influential on state level political campaigns for many years prior to the war. The labor vote from the highly industrialized Milwaukee County was especially important for politicians many politicians in their bids to gain political power.<sup>7</sup> Wisconsin politics also experienced a business counterattack against labor's interests in the years following the Second World War.<sup>8</sup>

The movement to change Eau Claire's municipal government was strongly influenced by both the unstable postwar economy and the strong anti-labor sentiment of the years just following the Second World War. This paper will show how the issue of municipal reform developed into a conflict that set organized labor against a group of middle and upper class citizens. Additionally, this paper will show how the city's financial stress, caused by increased spending on the services required by a growing population, compounded by rampant nationwide

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<sup>4</sup> R. Alton Lee, *Truman and Taft-Hartley* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966), 1-12.

<sup>5</sup> William F. Thompson, *The History of Wisconsin: Continuity and Change 1940-1965*, vol. 4 (Madison: Wisconsin State Historical Society, 1988), 93-97.

<sup>6</sup> Robert W. Ozanne, *The Labor Movement in Wisconsin: A History* (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1988), 59-66.

<sup>7</sup> Thompson, *The History of Wisconsin*, 463-465.

<sup>8</sup> Eric Fure-Slocum, "Cities with Class, Growth Politics, the Working-Class City, and Debt in Milwaukee during the 1940's" *Social Science History*, 24 (2000): 257-305.

inflation, was used by proponents of political change within the city to rally support for their cause from citizens who were not members of the middle and upper socio-economic classes.

### **City Government in Wisconsin**

In order to better understand the context and significance of the political reform that occurred in Eau Claire back in 1948 a short description of the different forms of municipal government allowed in Wisconsin, along with how and when they were implemented within the city of Eau Claire, will be beneficial.

Since 1924, when the Wisconsin constitution was amended to provide the opportunity for municipalities to gain more autonomy from the state government in Madison, the state has allowed cities of second class or lower standing and villages to adopt one of three different forms of municipal government.<sup>9</sup> The earliest system of municipal government was the “mayor-aldermanic” system. The city of Eau Claire utilized this form of municipal government from the time of its incorporation in 1872 until 1910.<sup>10</sup> The mayor-aldermanic system provides for a city council composed of representatives selected from and elected by general voting age population of the city. Each ward within the city usually elects one representative, although the exact number of representatives elected by each ward does not seem to be mandated by the constitution, called an alderman. Being an alderman is not a full time occupation, and the duties of an alderman are not designed to take up huge portions of his time. A mayor, who acts as the

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<sup>9</sup> Jack Stark, *The Wisconsin State Constitution: A Reference Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 195-200.

<sup>10</sup> Lois Barland, *The Rivers Flow On: A Record of Eau Claire, Wisconsin 1910-1960* (Stevens Point, WI: Worzalla Publishing Company, 1965), 243-244.



chief executive of the council, is elected from the general population of the entire city in a citywide vote.<sup>11</sup>

The second system allowed in Wisconsin is known as a “City Commission.” The city commission system was designed to resemble a business’s board of directors. Its creators hoped that the commission system would bring about a more businesslike efficiency to municipal politics. Under this form of municipal government a city council, or “commission,” governs a city. The commission is usually composed of three to seven members, and acts as both the legislative and executive branches of government within the city. The individual municipalities within Wisconsin determine whether a ward or a citywide vote elects council members. Being a council member in this system is a full time position, and the duties of a commission member are often focused on one aspect of a city’s needs, like sewers or the police and fire departments.

Eau Claire had a three-member council when it operated under a commission system from 1910 until 1950. Members were elected to six-year terms and the elections were staggered so that every two years one of the seats on the commission would be up for re-election. While technically each commission member held the same power, each having one vote on the council, one of the council members was elected to the council as the “Mayor” of the city of Eau Claire.

The commission form of city government developed in 1900 in Galveston, Texas after a hurricane devastated the city and surrounding area. The existing form of government in Galveston did not supply the necessary aid to those in need, so it was replaced by the commission system as a more efficient means of governing the city and supplying aid.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>James R. Donoghue, “The Local Government System of Wisconsin,” in *The 1968 Blue Book of Wisconsin* (Madison: Department of Administration, State of Wisconsin, 1968), 118-123.

<sup>12</sup>Peter R. Gluck and Richard J. Meister, *Cities in Transition: Social and Institutional Responses in Urban Development* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1979), 87-88.

The third form of municipal government permissible under the Wisconsin state constitution is the city manager-city council form. This form of municipal government was introduced in the United States in Staunton, Virginia in 1906. Just as in Galveston, pressures placed on the existing city government by the vast destruction caused by a natural disaster, in this case a flood, caused Staunton's citizens to reform their government in an attempt to create a more efficient means of dispensing aid and rebuilding the city. The system established in Staunton had a city council made up of citizens elected from the city's general population. However, the council was to be led by a man who was trained to handle the complex and intricate problems that the city faced. It was the job of the city council to hire this professional city manager, and the manager's job was to act on behalf of the city council in dealing with the day to day issues of running the city.<sup>13</sup>

The city manager-city council system was the form of government that the advocates of change proposed for the city of Eau Claire in 1948. On the surface the initial suggestion and entire debate to change to a city manager-city council form of government seems to have taken only four short months. However, reformers had been at work within the city of Eau Claire for at least two years prior to 1948. Furthermore, one of the more important motivating factors that set business interests on the path toward reform was the creation of a completely pro-labor government six years earlier in 1942.

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<sup>13</sup> Gluck and Meister, *Cities in Transition: Social and Institutional Responses in Urban Development*, 87-92.

## **The Road to a Pro-Labor City Government**

The political debate surrounding Eau Claire's 1948 referendum to change to the city manager form of government was interpreted by many of those living during the time as a conflict between the pro-labor leaders currently in city hall and business and private interests from the public sector. The following section will present the background history of the development of organized labor's "control" of Eau Claire's city government in order to better understand how and why these two factions came into conflict after the Second World War.

One of the main players from the organized labor pro-city commission side of the city manager debate in 1948 was the United Rubber, Cork, Linoleum and Plastic Workers of America, Local 19. The Rubber workers union was affiliated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and was made up of largely of workers from the U.S. Rubber plant. The growth and development of the U.S. Rubber plant during the Second World War, which caused a large increase in the number of union workers explains how organized labor became such a powerful player in the local politics of the time.

As stated earlier the Second World War created a great demand for manufactured goods within the United States. The United States government bought the plant in 1942 and converted it from a rubber plant to one that would make ammunition. By December of 1943, however, a small arms ammunition surplus was created and, somewhat ironically, a need for rubber tires for airplanes and amphibious vehicles had developed.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> John B. DeRosier, "Nothin' but a Machine: A History of the Eau Claire Rubber Workers on Strike," (Master's Thesis University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, 1998), 4-22.

At the height of ammunition production, from late 1942 through much of 1943, the Eau Claire plant employed nearly 6,200 workers.<sup>15</sup> It was during this period of increasing production and labor demand that organized labor had its first major success in Eau Claire’s municipal politic realm. 1942 saw the election of Orville Christiansen to a seat on Eau Claire’s three-man city commission, defeating the “conservative” Fred Stussy. Orville Christiansen was a graduate of the Eau Claire State Normal School, and taught carpentry in the local high school. In addition to being a teacher Mr. Christiansen was also a member of the local carpenter’s union in Eau Claire. The *Eau Claire Leader*, the city’s local evening newspaper, was quick to point out the role that organized labor had played in getting Christiansen onto the commission. The newspaper noted not only the endorsement that Christiansen received from the CIO and the Trades and Labor Council (affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, AFL), but also noted that it was the support from the pro-labor ninth and tenth wards that was largely responsible for Christiansen’s election onto the commission<sup>16</sup>.

**Table 1. 1942 Municipal Election**

Ward	Stussy	Christiansen
1 <sup>st</sup>	141	180
2 <sup>nd</sup>	266	283
3 <sup>rd</sup> (1 <sup>st</sup> Precinct)	641	329
3 <sup>rd</sup> (2 <sup>nd</sup> Precinct)	183	308
4 <sup>th</sup>	63	177
5 <sup>th</sup>	267	271
6 <sup>th</sup>	369	345
7 <sup>th</sup>	152	343
8 <sup>th</sup>	195	277
9 <sup>th</sup>	250	787
10 <sup>th</sup>	241	805
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,767</b>	<b>4,105</b>

*Source: The Eau Claire Leader, April 7, 1942 p.1<sup>17</sup>*

<sup>15</sup> DeRosier, “Ain’t Nothin’ but a Machine,” 12.

<sup>16</sup> *The Eau Claire Leader*, “Incumbent Stussy Beaten by Margin of 1,338 Ballots” April 7, 1942, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, no map of Eau Claire that shows how the city was divided into wards seems to have survived. For some socio-economic data on a few of Eau Claire’s wards please see Appendix II Table I.

Christiansen's election to the City commission in 1942 was only the first success for the local labor groups. During the following few years a strong and united pro-labor voting bloc based within the ninth and tenth wards would, in combination with a few coincidental factors, elect a completely pro-labor city commission.

In June of 1942 the mayor of the city of Eau Claire, Donald G. Barnes, accepted a commission in the United States Navy, and was allowed to give up his position as mayor in order to serve in the Second World War. Wisconsin's State Legislature had passed a statute allowing men taking commissions in the military to take a leave of absence from municipal administrative positions.<sup>18</sup> Twenty days after Barnes departure from office, the remaining two commission members officially replaced him as mayor with W.J. Mills, one of the two remaining commission members. The city corporation council John B. Fleming was then selected to fill Mills' vacant commission seat.<sup>19</sup> Barnes departure for the Navy was not the last event that would cause a shift in the personnel within Eau Claire's city commission. By November of 1943 a different man would fill the role of mayor.

In November of 1943 W.J. Mills died from what the *Leader* referred to as "complications from a stomach ailment." The only remaining elected commission member, Orville Christiansen, filled the now vacant position of mayor. Christiansen would remain in the mayor's office for much of the next three years until Donald G. Barnes returned from his term of service in the Navy only four months prior to the next mayoral election for the city of Eau Claire.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *The Eau Claire Leader*, "Barnes Accepts Naval Commission" June 4, 1942, p. 4

<sup>19</sup> *The Eau Claire Leader*, "Mills to Become Mayor of Eau Claire" June 24, 1942, p.3.

<sup>20</sup> Barland, *The Rivers Flow On*, 243-244.

Christiansen’s strange road to the mayor’s seat in 1943 was followed by what is probably the most decisive victory ever for Eau Claire’s organized labor groups the city elections of 1944. (W.J. Mills’ term on the commission was up in April of 1944) and Harold E. House was elected to the city commission. Prior to his election to Eau Claire’s city commission House was the president of the United Rubber, Cork, Linoleum and Plastic Workers of America, Local 19. *Eau Claire Leader* stated that not only did he receive an endorsement from the local AFL and CIO unions, but he also was supported by large majorities ninth and tenth wards much like Orville Christiansen was back in 1942. It is also worth noting that the third ward voted against House as it had against Christiansen, but the large pro-labor vote of the ninth and tenth wards was more than enough to overcome this third ward voting.<sup>21</sup> The strong links Mr. House had to Eau Claire’s organized labor explains why the ALF and CIO would have backed him.

**Table 2. 1944 Municipal Election**

Ward	Stussy	House
1 <sup>st</sup>	145	130
2 <sup>nd</sup>	240	252
3 <sup>rd</sup> (1 <sup>st</sup> Precinct)	741	248
3 <sup>rd</sup> (2 <sup>nd</sup> Precinct)	228	249
4 <sup>th</sup>	53	163
5 <sup>th</sup>	323	196
6 <sup>th</sup>	347	256
7 <sup>th</sup>	173	279
8 <sup>th</sup>	132	320
9 <sup>th</sup>	256	627
10 <sup>th</sup>	274	729
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,912</b>	<b>3,449</b>

*Source: The Eau Claire Leader, “House Elected to Council by 537 Votes” April 4, 1944, Headline.*

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<sup>21</sup> *The Eau Claire Leader, “House Elected to Council by 537 Votes” April 4, 1944, Headline.*

The strength and unity that organized labor showed on local political issues was unusual. Rodger Friedland, in his book *Power and Crisis in the City: Corporations, Unions, and Urban Policy* argues that labor unions are very often unsuccessful in getting rank and file union members to vote for union endorsed candidates in local elections, or union endorsed political issues when a purely local issue is brought to a referendum.<sup>22</sup> However, it is possible that organized labor's voluntary ban on strikes during the Second World War may have caused, or allowed, local labor unions to focus their attention on local politics. Furthermore, the general membership of these unions may have felt that local politics were their only means of improving their living conditions since the strike ban had already taken from them their greatest weapon against corporations. The short-term nature of organized labor's success with Eau Claire, in total only three city elections spanning less than five years in total, might not have been considered true "success" according to Friedland. These factors may to some extent explain why the local labor supported candidates experienced such strong and unified support from the ninth and tenth wards.

It is also important to note that other cities within Wisconsin that had a developed industrial economy, specifically Milwaukee and Oshkosh, had also developed labor backed city governments during or prior to the Second World War.<sup>23</sup> New laborers were drawn to industrial cities during the war by the promise of employment from increased wartime production. These

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<sup>22</sup> Roger Friedland, *Power and Crisis in the City: Corporations, Unions and Urban Policy* (Santa Barbara, CA: University of California Press, 1983), 53.

<sup>23</sup> For a complete discussion of the development of these city's labor governments see: Eric Fure-Slocum, "Cities with Class, Growth Politics, the Working-Class City, and Debt in Milwaukee during the 1940's" *Social Science History*, 24 (2000): 257-305 and James Simmons, "Social Conflict and Political Change in Oshkosh: The Search for Local Government Efficiency" *Voyageur*, 14 (1998): 22-38.

laborers helped swell the ranks of Labor Unions in Wisconsin.<sup>24</sup> In some places this increase led to greater political power for the unions due to the increase in the number of votes that a union could possibly sway. While there currently is not enough research available to determine how many cities in Wisconsin developed pro-labor governments at this time, the city of Eau Claire was not the only city in Wisconsin to do so.

By January of 1946 pro-labor candidates filled two of the three positions on Eau Claire's city commission. Donald G. Barnes returned from his tour of duty in the United States Navy, and was reinstated as the Mayor of Eau Claire. However, for some reason Orville Christiansen continued to sign all of his official correspondences as the "mayor" of Eau Claire.<sup>25</sup> It is difficult to determine why exactly Christiansen decided to continue to sign his correspondence in this way. He may have been on ego trip and simply did not want to give up the title of mayor, but a more likely explanation is that he simply wanted to reduce the chance of confusion being created during this time since Barnes' term as mayor would be over in just over three months. Regardless of Christiansen's motives during the first few months of 1946 the city of Eau Claire had two *mayors*.

April of 1946 ended the six year of for Donald G. Barnes as "mayor" of the city of Eau Claire. The only two candidates that ran for the office of mayor were none other than Donald G. Barnes, and Orville Christiansen, who still was a member of the City Commission. Each ran on a platform that was based on promoting the period of time each man had spent as mayor of Eau Claire. Again, the AFL and CIO publicly endorsed Christiansen's bid for election.<sup>26</sup> The results

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<sup>24</sup> Robert W. Ozanne, *The Labor Movement in Wisconsin: A History*, 59-66.

<sup>25</sup> Mayor, Eau Claire, Wisconsin. "Mayor's Correspondence, 1940-1949. University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Special Collections and Archives, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

<sup>26</sup> *The Eau Claire Leader* "Vote On Mayor" April 3, 1946, p. 3.



of this election were surprising to some degree as Christiansen was propelled into the mayor's office by a landslide victory over Barnes with support from not only the normally labor supporting 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> wards, but also with a large amount of support from the previously non-labor supportive first precinct of the 3<sup>rd</sup> ward.

**Table 3. 1946 Mayoral Election**

Ward	Christiansen	Barnes
1 <sup>st</sup>	248	131
2 <sup>nd</sup>	554	195
3 <sup>rd</sup> (1 <sup>st</sup> Precinct)	696	526
3 <sup>rd</sup> (2 <sup>nd</sup> Precinct)	569	173
4 <sup>th</sup>	238	133
5 <sup>th</sup>	335	419
6 <sup>th</sup>	520	334
7 <sup>th</sup>	395	293
8 <sup>th</sup>	459	131
9 <sup>th</sup>	1157	249
10 <sup>th</sup>	1056	314
<b>Total</b>	<b>6237</b>	<b>2903</b>

*Source:* The Eau Claire Leader "Vote On Mayor" April 3, 1946, p. 3.

With Christianson's election to the office of mayor, yet commission seat became vacant. It was left to Mayor Christianson and commission member Harold House to select whomever they wished to fill the vacancy. The man whom Christianson and House selected for the third commission seat was a local lawyer, Otis G. Linderman. Linderman was an interesting selection for the labor backed Christianson and House to make since he had some fairly strong business connections, as his family owned the Linderman Box Company, and he was a member of the Junior Chamber of Commerce in Eau Claire.

It is difficult to determine what exactly drove Christianson and House to select Linderman, although common sense suggests that his level of education probably had an

influence on the decision. It is entirely possible the Linderman was friendly to labor, but the available source material makes it difficult to determine his stance on labor one way or the other.

Regardless of whether Linderman was pro-labor or not, the available source material does show him to be a staunch supporter of Eau Claire's city commission system. In fact it was Linderman, and not Mayor Christiansen, who would become the public voice of the city commission speaking at numerous civic meetings and debates focusing on the issue of changing the structure of Eau Claire's city government.

The preceding pages have attempted to make clear that the city of Eau Claire managed to participate in the wider trend of growing wartime pro-labor political power in both Wisconsin and the larger United States through a combination of ninth and tenth ward voting support and a series of beneficial coincidences. This combination had placed pro-labor candidates into controlling two thirds of the city commission as early as 1944, and furthermore Orville Christianson had been the *mayor* of Eau Claire since 1943. It was this pro-labor council, created during the Second World War, which eventually was scapegoated by reformers during the postwar years for most of the troubles that the city of Eau Claire would face at that time.

One of the main criticisms reformers in Eau Claire put forth against the commission system was that the current city commission was not competent to run the city's day-to-day business and had failed to plan for the future of city's future during the war. The financial state that the city of Eau Claire found itself by early 1948 was indeed quite dire. The city had accrued the third largest municipal debt of any city in the state of Wisconsin in spite of increases in property tax rates and property valuations.<sup>27</sup> However, if labor-backed commission candidates were too incompetent to run the city, why then did it take until early 1948 for a strong public

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<sup>27</sup> Barland, *The Rivers Flow On*, 243 and 255.

reform movement to emerge in Eau Claire? While on the surface it appears as though the referendum to reform Eau Claire's government came out of thin air in early 1948, proponents of changing the city government had actually been attempting to gain influence over the commission. At the same time, this same group tried to professionalize the city government in more subtle ways. The following pages will describe the actions that the Eau Claire Chamber of Commerce took prior to 1948 in regards to reforming the municipal government. The pre-1948 actions of the Chamber of Commerce suggest that business interests within the city of Eau Claire had wanted reform for some time, but were forced to wait until 1948 when Eau Claire's growing population combined with post-World War II inflation combined to create a crystallizing political issue that would be able to rally support to their cause.

### **Early Efforts Toward Reform**

On June 26, 1946, only two months after Christiansen had been elected mayor and Otis Linderman had been selected to fill Christiansen's city commission seat, the Eau Claire Chamber of Commerce took the first step toward professionalizing the city government of Eau Claire. It was on this day that the Chamber of Commerce held a luncheon, attended by all three members of the city commission, during which they announced that they were going to hire a city-planning specialist from Minneapolis to complete a preliminary city planning survey for the city of Eau Claire.<sup>28</sup>

This city planning specialist, I.S. Shattuck, had already completed similar surveys in cities like San Francisco, Oakland, Fargo N.D. and Port Huron, Michigan. The Chamber of Commerce was going to cover Shattuck's fee of \$75 a day to complete his preliminary survey,

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<sup>28</sup> *The Eau Claire Leader*, "Chamber of Commerce Engages City Planning Consultant for Eau Claire Survey," June 27, 1946, p. 10.

which would only contain suggestions of what an actual city planning program should consist of and estimates of how much the program would cost.

The Chamber of Commerce promised to present the findings of Shattuck's preliminary survey to the city commission once it was completed. The only major adjustment that the city commission members seem to have made because of this preliminary survey was a city planning committee.

Mr. Shattuck had suggested in his luncheon with the city commission that many communities had found it beneficial to create official city planning commissions that could in the words of Shattuck "take the planning out of politics."<sup>29</sup> However, the planning committee that was created could only make suggestions to the city commission. The city commission paid so little attention to the suggestions made by this committee that by 1947 the committee had all but fallen apart.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to the Chamber of Commerce, the Eau Claire County Taxpayers Association was making efforts to encourage the city commission to reform the city's current budgetary accounting system. The taxpayer group criticized the city commission for the number of city expenditures that had exceeded their approved level of appropriations. Furthermore, G.P. Strader, the president of the taxpayer group, complained that only the budget estimates had been published, rather than the actual expenditures of the city as was required by law. Mr. Strader noted that he believed that the budgetary inefficiencies or violations of the law were due to simple oversights rather than any "willful intent to circumvent the law."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *The Eau Claire Leader*, "Chamber of Commerce Engages City Planning Consultant for Eau Claire Survey," p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> *The Eau Claire Leader*, "Linderman Talks on City Manager and Other Plans: Speaks Before Water Street Group," March 13, 1948, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> *The Eau Claire Leader*, "Council Urged by Taxpayer Group to Install System of Strict Budgetary Accounting," June 26, 1946, p. 12.

These two events demonstrate how there existed, to some degree, as early as 1946 a body of citizens who recognized that Eau Claire's city government might have been in need of some reform. Moreover, the Chamber of Commerce's decision to bring in a professional from outside of not only Eau Claire, but the whole of the State of Wisconsin, suggests that the fear of "carpetbaggers," (which some have attributed to the overall lack of reform governments in Wisconsin as a whole),<sup>32</sup> was not so much of a factor in the minds of those sitting on the board of directors for the Eau Claire Chamber of Commerce. The fear of having someone from outside the city brought into a position of power was actually a major factor in the defeat of a 1919 referendum to change to the city manager system in Eau Claire.

### **The Emergence of an Organized Reform Movement**

By the end of 1947 criticisms aimed at the city commission began to appear in the *Eau Claire Leader*. These small rumblings of discontent foreshadowed the coming of the larger debate that took place during the first months of 1948<sup>33</sup>. The first four months of 1948 would see not only the first presentation of the idea to change to a city manager-city council system in Eau Claire, but also the referendum in April of 1948 that decided in favor of the city manager form of government.

The proposal to structurally change Eau Claire's city government from the three man commission system to a city manager-city council form was first proposed by local insurance salesman John H. Carney. On January 14, 1948 Mr. Carney presented the idea in a speech that he gave to the Eau Claire Junior Chamber of Commerce. Over the course of the next few months the arguments lodged by Mr. Carney and his supporters against the city commission

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<sup>32</sup> James Simmons, "Whither Local Government Reform? The Case for Wisconsin" *National Civic Review* 90 (Spring 2001): 47-48.

<sup>33</sup> Barland, *The Rivers Flow On*, 243.

would go through a series of evolutions. During this speech however Carney spoke out against what he saw as a lack of planning that had placed Eau Claire under an extremely large debt. Carney was the Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce Committee in Eau Claire so he likely had knowledge that not every citizen possessed concerning the city's financial system.<sup>34</sup>

Carney's strong business background and socio-economic standing fit together quite well with the profile set forth by historians and political scientists as the type of person one might expect to be a proponent of a reform type of municipal government. Since, Richard Hofstadter's 1935 book *The Age of Reform*, political reform on the municipal level has been understood as a movement of the middle and upper classes of society. Often these middle and upper class citizens' interests are linked closely with the interests of business within the city, are at odds with the interests of working class citizens, and organized labor.<sup>35</sup> John H. Carney was a member of Eau Claire's higher socio-economic classes as he owned his own insurance sales office. He must have also been a man with strong links to business interests in Eau Claire because of his place within Eau Claire's Chamber of Commerce.

The next morning Carney was quoted in the *Eau Claire Leader* as having said that a "forty million dollar a year business like Eau Claire cannot be left to amateurs." Carney cited the current affairs publication *The Green Light* as the source of his idea of implementing the city manager-city council system in Eau Claire. Carney also stated that the city manager system was already in place in fourteen other Wisconsin cities, one of which was the state capitol of Madison.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *The Eau Claire Leader*. "City Manager to be Subject of Jaycees," January 14, 1948, p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> Amy Bridges and Richard Kronick, "Writing the Rules to Win the Game" *Urban Affairs Review* 34 (1999): 691.

<sup>36</sup> *The Eau Claire Leader*, "City Manager Would Give More Efficient Service, Jaycees told," January 16, 1948, p. 2.

In the decade that followed the Second World War Wisconsin experienced a wave of municipal reforms (see table 1). This wave of reform was in fact the second in the state's history, the first occurred during the 1910's and 20's as a result of the prevailing "Progressive" political movement of the time. There has been a small amount of scholarship put forth in the past few years that attempts to bring to light the motivating factors that sparked Wisconsin's second wave of municipal political reforms. James Simmons in his article "Whither Local Government Reform?" The Case of Wisconsin" argues that reformers in Wisconsin cities became active in response to a set of "economic crisis" (infrastructure decay, urban blight, factory relocation, job losses, population decline, and so on).<sup>37</sup> Simmons does not disagree with Hofstadter that the middle and upper classes originated most proponents of change he does present an analysis specific to Wisconsin.

It might not seem very important that fourteen other cities in the state of Wisconsin had already decided to change their forms of municipal government. However, this pattern not only provides the context in which the debate to change forms of municipal government took place within Eau Claire, but political scientists have identified the influence of other cities in a geographical region as an important contributing factor when a city decides to change its form of government.<sup>38</sup>

After John Carney was finished proposing the possibility of changing Eau Claire's city government a woman named Marian Mumford, a representative for the Wisconsin Citizens public Expenditure Survey Specialists (WCPES) and member of the Eau Claire County Taxpayers Association, got up and spoke. During her speech Ms. Mumford related how the

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<sup>37</sup> James Simmons, "Whither Wisconsin Reform? The Case of Wisconsin" *Naval Civic Review* 90 (Spring 2001): 54.

<sup>38</sup> Amy Bridges and Richard Kronick, "Writing the Rules to Win the Game" *Urban Affairs Review* 34 (1999): 692-93.

WCPES report on the condition of the city's financial situation and total indebtedness had not been taken seriously by the city commission. Ms. Mumford was quoted in the *Eau Claire Leader* as saying that "There is a marked resistance on the part of the city council to modernize its methods. There is no use of scientific methods in carrying out public improvements; and the city council is a little kingdom unto its own."<sup>39</sup>

By the end of January Carney formed a group of reform-minded citizens within Eau Claire with the aim of promoting the change to a city manager-city council form of government within Eau Claire. This group of citizens, with John Carney at the helm, would eventually take up the name The Citizens Community for City Government<sup>40</sup>. Throughout the next three months this group of citizens would be extremely active in campaigning for a change to the city manager form of government.

On February 1, 1948 the Citizens Community for City Government invited the city manager of Madison, Wisconsin, Leonard G. Howell, to come and speak at a hotel in Eau Claire. Not only did the group invite the general public to the event, but the city commission was given an official invitation also. Mayor Christianson, accompanied by council members Harold House and Otis Linderman, elected to accept the invitation and were present at the meeting.<sup>41</sup>

Mr. Howell's speech was the first action of the Citizens Community for City Government reported in the *Eau Claire Leader*. However, the speech delivered by Mr. Howell was not the only event that the Citizens Community for City Government had planned for the evening. After Mr. Howell's speech had concluded John Carney began to pass out a petition that called for a referendum vote to change from a commission form to a city manager-city council form of

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<sup>39</sup> *The Eau Claire Leader*, "Danger Signs in City Government Apparent in '46, Chamber of Commerce Informed." January 17, 1948. pg. 2.

<sup>40</sup> *The Eau Claire Leader*, "Meeting to be Held at School on City Manager," February 11, 1948 pg 12.

<sup>41</sup> *The Eau Claire Leader*, "Meeting to be Held at School on City Manager," p. 12.



government in Eau Claire.<sup>42</sup> One can only imagine what thoughts were passing through the minds of the sitting city commission members as these petitions were being passed through the audience that evening, but it seems very likely that they took the presentation of the petitions as a slap in the face.

The Citizens Community for City Government was not the only voice speaking out in favor of changing to the city manager form of municipal government. The owner and editor of *The Eau Claire Leader*, Marshall Atkinson, was very much in favor of the proposed change to the city manager system in Eau Claire. He was so in favor of the change that he would run a 19-part editorial series in which he would present the virtues of the city manager system and attempted to address any reservations that the citizens of Eau Claire may have had. Throughout the month of February, the *Eau Claire Leader* also ran several reprints from other newspapers that related some of the successful transitions to the city manager-city council form of municipal government.<sup>43</sup>

### **The Battle Over City Government**

It was not until the first week in March of 1948 that the Eau Claire chapters of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) began to investigate seriously the allegations that the Citizens Community for City Government had levied against the city commission. On March 6, 1948 James P. Voll and Magne Repaal, the respective leaders of the AFL and CIO in Eau Claire at that time, met with the city commission with the purpose of discussing the charges of the Citizens Community. Magne Repaal, the leader of the CIO in Eau Claire, had the foresight to bring along the CIO council's attorney

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<sup>42</sup> *The Eau Claire Leader* "Petitions for City Manager Placed in Circulation," February 1, 1948 pg 2.

<sup>43</sup> The *Eau Claire Leader* ran three reprints in February: one from St. Cloud (February 1), one from Fairbault (February 15), and one from LaCrosse (February 28). The aim of these reprints seems to have been to illustrate the businesslike efficiency that was possible under the city manager-city council form.

Edward Larkin to help establish whether or not the city commission was guilty of any of the charges placed against it. To this point, proponents of changing Eau Claire's government had focused largely upon the city's debt as evidence that the city commission was not competent to run the city. Furthermore, the city commission had yet to present a satisfactory response to the accusation that they had shuffled money out of a school bond issue to cover for the city's budget shortfall.

According to the article published in the *Eau Claire Leader* the following day it was during this meeting that mayor Christiansen produced the city commission's bank records for the previous year, which satisfied the labor leaders that there had been no financial misconduct on the part of the city commission. After dispelling any misgivings that they may have had concerning the city commission's handling of the Eau Claire's finances, the leadership of the AFL and CIO in Eau Claire seem to have decided that it was in their best interests finally to step up in defense of the city commission system. During the very same meeting in which Christiansen supplied the bank records clearing the commission of any misconduct the leaders of the organized labor groups decided to schedule a public meeting for March the 16<sup>th</sup> with the aim of setting the facts straight concerning the conduct of the city commission.<sup>44</sup>

Organized labor was not the only voice that became quite active after the March 6<sup>th</sup> meeting. In the short interval between this first meeting and the larger public gathering scheduled for the 16<sup>th</sup>, both mayor Christiansen and councilman Linderman made statements published in the *Leader* speaking out in their own defense concerning the allegations Mr. Carney had raised against them. Mayor Christiansen stated that there was indeed a separate account for the school bond issue that John Carney accused them of not segregating as required by law, and

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<sup>44</sup> *The Eau Claire Leader*, "Labor Leaders Meet with Council: Public Gathering Arranged," March 7, 1948, p. 7.

that Mr. Carney should “stick to the relative merits of the various forms of government,” rather than trying to attack the character and competence of the city commission members.<sup>45</sup>

In a meeting with a group of Water street businessmen, Otis Linderman presented a much more extensive and thorough defense of not only Eau Claire’s current city commission, but also the city commission system as a whole. Linderman stated that the city being over budget was not the fault of the commission members or the commission system. Furthermore, he said that it was not at all uncommon for cities within the state of Wisconsin to go over budget due to the fact that the cost of goods and services had gone up so much after the Second World War. In addition councilman Linderman also noted that the city council-city manager system was experiencing difficulties of its own as Stevens Point, Wisconsin had already dropped the system and Madison was considering returning to a mayor-alderman system as well.<sup>46</sup>

It did not take John Carney and the Citizen’s Community long to officially declare their desire to be heard at the March 16<sup>th</sup> meeting. In this substantial article published in the *Leader* Carney not only asked to be allowed to speak at the meeting, but he also attempted to make the city manager form of government more appealing to Eau Claire’s “Labor Units” by citing other labor organizations that had supported the city council-city manager form of government.<sup>47</sup>

The public meeting at the State Theater in Eau Claire should have been a great opportunity for the city commission, organized labor groups and other supporters of the city commission to build support for their cause. However, in hindsight this meeting may have actually done more harm to their cause than good. First of all, not inviting the John Carney, or

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<sup>45</sup> *The Eau Claire Leader*, “School Bond Money is Segregated, Says Mayor in Statement,” March 11, 1948, p. 11.

<sup>46</sup> *The Eau Claire Leader*, “Linderman Talks on City Manager and Other Plans: Speaks Before Water Street Group,” March 13, 1948 p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> *The Eau Claire Leader*, “City Manager Backers Ask Voice at Meeting called by Labor Units,” March 10, 1948, p. 7.

any other member of the Citizens Community, to speak at the meeting, even if it was simply an oversight, may have made it appear as though the supporters of the city commission did not want the other side of the argument to be heard. Even though John Carney was allowed to speak at the meeting, Councilman Linderman spoke for nearly an hour and a half leaving Carney only five minutes at the end of the meeting to speak. Carney objected and a quick vote was taken to allow him more time to speak. In the end he was only allowed a total of 15 minutes in which to make his arguments.<sup>48</sup> A few citizens were convinced by the treatment Mr. Carney received that the commission supporters did not want to allow a real debate to occur, and subsequently voiced their opinion in the form of letters to the editor that appeared in the *Leader* in the days following the meeting.

The manner in which Councilman Linderman went about defending the commission system seemed to have further damaged the public's image of the council. There is a particularly potent letter to the editor that appeared in the *Leader* that scolded Councilman Linderman for engaging in personal attacks against Mrs. Mariam Mumford for her report on the financial practices of Eau Claire's city commission.<sup>49</sup>

The one victory that commission supporters seem to have taken away from the meeting on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March was an admission from John Carney that the city commission appeared to be innocent of any misconduct in regards to the school bond issue. After this meeting the school bond issue did not enter the newspapers again. The supporters of the city manager-city council system shifted their focus exclusively to promoting the efficiency and planning power of the city manager system. Unfortunately, for the commission and its supporters this accusation may have

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<sup>48</sup> *The Eau Claire Leader*, "Linderman Defends Council, Raps Critics at Labor-Sponsored Meet; Proposed City Manager Discussed," March 18, 1948, p. 10.

<sup>49</sup> *The Eau Claire Leader*, "Letters to the Editor" 1948.

already served its purpose by causing the citizens of Eau Claire to doubt the honesty and competence of the city council.

After the March 16<sup>th</sup> meeting, until just before the referendum vote on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April, very little pro-commission writing appeared in the *Leader*. However, for most of this eighteen day span the editor of the *Eau Claire Leader*, Marshal Atkinson, ran his nineteen part editorial in support of the city manager-city council system. Pro-commission rhetoric did not appear again in the *Leader* until the AFL and CIO paid for two very large ads in the paper just three days before the referendum was to take place. These two ads attempted to once again answer John Carney’s charges of poor management that had led to the city of Eau Claire’s large municipal debt.<sup>50</sup>

On April 6, 1948, only three days after the first pro-commission ads appeared in the *Leader*, the referendum vote was held in Eau Claire. The citizens of Eau Claire voted to abandon the commission system with 5,396 voting in favor of changing to the city manager-city council form and 4,293 voting to retain the current commission system.

**Table 4. City Government Referendum Results**

<b>Ward</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
1 <sup>st</sup>	187	142
2 <sup>nd</sup>	438	307
3 <sup>rd</sup> (First Precinct)	996	453
3 <sup>rd</sup> (Second Precinct)	515	395
4 <sup>th</sup>	203	194
5 <sup>th</sup>	491	231
6 <sup>th</sup>	572	353
7 <sup>th</sup>	334	287
8 <sup>th</sup>	255	331
9 <sup>th</sup>	638	765
10 <sup>th</sup>	767	853
<b>Total</b>	<b>5396</b>	<b>4293</b>

*Source: The Eau Claire Leader* “Commission Form to be Abandoned,” April 7, 1948, p. 1.

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<sup>50</sup> *The Eau Claire Leader*, April 2, 1948 and April 3, 1948. Advertisements, p. 7.

The referendum decided that a seven-member city council made up of men or women elected at large would be created in 1950, after mayor Christiansen's term of service expired. Each citizen of Eau Claire who was old enough to vote would each vote for seven candidates, and the seven candidates who received the most votes would compose the new council.<sup>51</sup> Those seeking to cast the 1948 referendum simply as a business versus labor or socio-economic based clash might cite the composition of the newly created city council as evidence in support of their arguments. It is true that only one labor endorsed candidate, James P. Voll, was elected to the city council in 1950, and many of the other members were businessmen or lawyers. One notable exception was Leonard Haas. At this point Haas was teaching at the State Normal School in Eau Claire. While he appeared to have few business connections at this point in his life it is worth noting that he would eventually become involved with the Eau Claire Chamber of Commerce in the 1950's.<sup>52</sup> However, taking into account the manner in which the new council was to be elected along with a closer look at the candidates that labor groups in Eau Claire endorsed suggests another possible answer.

The city wide elections for the new seven member city council allowed each citizen to cast votes for seven different candidates. The new elections had the potential to be dominated by the strong labor vote that existed in the 1940s. However, of the seven individuals that organized labor groups endorsed only one, James P. Voll, had any experience in a leadership role. James P. Voll was the president of the Eau Claire trades and labor council.<sup>53</sup> Virtually every other candidate who received an endorsement from labor could claim no such experience. The main argument in favor of the city manager form of government was that it would bring more

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<sup>51</sup> *The Eau Claire Leader*, "Heavy Vote Expected in Election Today" April 5, 1948, p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> Leonard C. Haas and Richard L. Pifer, *An Oral History of the University of Wisconsin—Eau Claire: a 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary publication* (Eau Claire: Special Collections, McIntyre Library, UW—Eau Claire, 1991), 3-18.

<sup>53</sup> *The Eau Claire Leader*, "Heavy Vote Expected in Election Today," p. 6.

experience and expertise into the city government. The businessmen and lawyers endorsed by the Citizens community for city government could all point to either their successful businesses or education as strong reasons for their election to this new “professionalize” city government. When considered in the governmental “professionalizing” context of the time it does not seem so strange that the only labor endorsed candidate with leadership experience would be the only one to be elected to the new city council.

### **Beyond the Rhetoric**

The 1948 referendum can reveal a substantial amount of information when analyzed within its historical context. Many factors influenced Eau Claire and its movement toward a city manager-city council system. First, the general anti-labor climate of postwar American combined with the Chamber of Commerce’s pre-referendum actions and the fact that many proponents of changing the city government had connections to Eau Claire’s business sector. These facts support the theory that the referendum might have been used as a means of breaking organized labor’s political power. An analysis of the actual voting results from the referendum seems to add further support this theory. The analysis will be accomplished by utilizing a method similar to that used by the historian Dr. Samuel Hays in an article from his book *American Political History: A Social Analysis*.<sup>54</sup> In this one of the essays from this book he attempted to find empirical evidence to support his thesis that reform movements were in fact attempts by the middle and upper classes of a city to reassert control over the city’s government. By using Hays’ methodology, it will be possible to determine if there is a correlation between

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<sup>54</sup> Samuel P. Hays, *American Political History: A Social Analysis* (Knoxville, Tenn: University of Tennessee Press, 1980), 200-226.

the socio-economic class of Eau Claire's city wards and their voting patterns concerning the referendum.

The socio-economic standing of each ward was determined by taking the average amount of property tax that each taxed citizen within the wards in question paid, and comparing that amount to the average amount paid throughout the entire city. If a ward paid a higher amount in taxes on average than the city as a whole it one would expect that ward to vote in favor of the reform style government. However, if a ward on average paid a lower amount in property taxes one would expect that ward to vote in favor of retaining the older form of government.

The wards that have been selected for study in this paper are the third, eighth, ninth and tenth wards. Not only were these wards the highest population wards within the city in 1948, but as earlier sections of this paper have shown the voting patterns of these three wards in the city elections leading up to the 1948 city referendum suggest that the third ward generally voted against candidates that were given labor endorsements, while the ninth and tenth wards voted in favor of those with the endorsement. In addition the third ward showed the strongest support for the city manager system in the 1948 referendum while the eighth, ninth and tenth were the only wards to vote in favor of retaining the commission system. If socio-economic standing did affect voting patterns within Eau Claire at that time it seems probable that it would have manifested within these wards the most. Appendix II Table I shows the comparison between the average amounts these wards paid in property taxes as compared to the city of Eau Claire as a whole.

The data in the table supports the argument that there was a class division between the wards with the third ward being more affluent than any of the other three. This result is exactly what one would expect in light of the past voting patterns of these wards in the city elections. However, this fact raises another interesting question concerning the 1948 referendum. If the



eighth, ninth and tenth wards were generally more working class wards why did they show only lukewarm support for the city commission form of government? In the past the ninth and tenth wards showed a strong tendency to vote for labor endorsed candidates. However, these wards only gave lukewarm support to the commission system in the referendum. What caused organized labor to lose so much of its influence within these wards?

A possible explanation can be found in a book on Progressive Era municipal reform by Dr. Eric Monkkennon entitled *America Becomes Urban*. In this book Dr. Monkkennon argues that during the 1920's growing urban populations caused a "...broader shift from a regulation to a service city," and this shift fueled movements to change city governments.<sup>55</sup> Basically, Monkkennon argued that it was the rise in a city's social service spending (schools, police, fire departments ect.) that led citizens to seek a new form of government. As progressive era cities grew in population, more city services began to be demanded by the citizens of the city. Eventually increases the property valuation of the city and tax increases could no longer keep up with the rising cost of servicing the city and the city government was forced to take on an ever-increasing debt.

According to Monkkennon, the growth of a city's debt and bureaucracy could cause, or be triggered by, a lapse in a city's governmental leadership. The inability of the city government to manage city finances caused voter frustration and the belief that their government was incompetent, or corrupt. While there were never any accusations of outright corruption against the city commission of Eau Claire. John Carney and his Citizens Community for city government; however, did try to portray them as "amateurs" ill-equipped to handle the city's finances. Appendix II Table III contains data concerning Eau Claire's population growth as

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<sup>55</sup> Eric Monkkennon, *America Becomes Urban* (Berkeley, CA: University of Californian Press, 1988), 115.

compared to the state of Wisconsin as a whole. Appendix II Table II contains information concerning the budget for the city of Eau Claire.

Table III shows the population of the city of Eau Claire grew at a rate at or above that of the state of Wisconsin since 1920. In fact, between 1920 and 1950 the city grew at nearly twice the rate as the state as a whole did. However, this prodigious thirty-year growth rate does not explain the spike in debt, property valuation, tax rate and civil spending as seen in Table II from 1946 through 1948. This strongly concentrated spike was likely caused by two main factors. First, there were a very large number of veterans that returned to the city of Eau Claire after the Second World War causing a concentrated population spike in the years just following the war.<sup>56</sup> This increasing population would have required more money to be spent on services within the city. Tables II and III do show some correlation between increases in spending in city service spending and Eau Claire's growing population. The second factor that influenced Eau Claire's financial situation at this time is probably the most important. As the federal government stopped its practice of fixing wages and prices after the Second World War massive inflation rocked the economy of the United States. The years following the Second World War saw the dollar loose almost 53 percent of its value, while the cost of goods and services continued to increase. The devaluation of the dollar combined with ever the ever-increasing cost of goods would have greatly compounded any financial problems that the city of Eau Claire would have faced following the war. These two factors led to financial problems in not just Eau Claire, but in many cities throughout the United States.<sup>57</sup> Appendix II Table IV shows just how much of an effect inflation had on the city's finances. Even though the budget almost doubled between 1941 and 1948 the city was not expending much more buying power when inflation is taken into

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<sup>56</sup> Barland, *The Rivers Flow On: A Record of Eau Claire, Wisconsin 1910-1960*, 241-242.

<sup>57</sup> Simon N Whitney, *Inflation since 1945: Facts and Theories* (New York: Praeger, 1982), 20.

account. The affects of inflation were not totally lost on the city commission members in 1948. Otis Linderman noted how goods simply cost much more after the war during the March 16<sup>th</sup> town meeting. It is surprising that the commission members and organized labor groups did not make attempts to highlight this point.

## **Conclusion**

As this paper has shown the crystallizing political issue that lay behind the 1948 referendum in Eau Claire was the dire financial situation that the city found itself in at that time. Even in spite of increases property valuations and the mill rate the city still saw a large increase in bonded debt after the Second World War. Between 1945 and 1948 increases occurred in three major civil service budgets (education, police and fire). The increasing financial demands placed on municipal services were made even greater by the rampant inflation in post war America. Proponents of political change within Eau Claire utilized the financial struggles of the city to convince the general population that the current form of city government was incapable of successfully running the city.

Just as most political science and political history scholars might expect the proponents of political change in Eau Claire came from the middle and upper socio-economic classes. Additionally, a few of the prominent reformers had obvious links to the business interests within the city of Eau Claire.

Organized labor's political power eroded in the years following the Second World War. There was a wave of anti-labor sentiment that swept the nation, and Eau Claire's referendum occurred within that context. The results of the actual referendum do not conclusively prove that there was an attempt by the middle and upper classes to "take over" Eau Claire's city

government. However, the events surrounding the referendum and the major players who promoted it seem to support this theory.

There is, however, one exceptional aspect of Eau Claire's 1948 referendum. While many other cities within the state of Wisconsin were reforming in order to promote population growth and revitalize stagnating economies Eau Claire reformed, at least in part, as a result of the prodigious population growth. Current research suggests that most Wisconsin cities experienced a period of stagnation after the Second World War, which led citizens to change their city's governments. More case studies will need to be completed in order to determine if most cities in Wisconsin actually did experience economic stagnation. Once these studies have been completed they may be compared and compiled so that a truly comprehensive regional study of Wisconsin's post war wave of municipal reform movement can be completed.

## Appendix I. Two Waves of Municipal Reform in Wisconsin

Cities	Commission Plan		Manager Plan	
	Adopted	Abandoned	Adopted	Abandoned
Antigo	1914	1952		
Appleton	1911	1918		
Ashland	1913	1918	1947	1955
Beloit			1929	
Chippewa Falls	1918	1929		
Eau Claire	1910	1948	1948	
Fond du Lac	1915	1956	1957	
Fort Atkinson			1931	
Green Bay	1916	1926		
Janesville	1912	1918	1923	
Kenosha			1922	1958
Ladysmith	1913	1951		
Lake Geneva			1948	1961
Lake Mills			1954	
Madison			1947	1951
Marinette			1951	1960
Menomonie	1912	1951	1969	1986
Oshkosh	1912	1933	1957	
Portage	1912	1918		
Port Washington	1917	1939		
Rhineland			1926	1950
Rice Lake	1913	1922		
Ripon			1941	1943
Superior	1912	1929	1941	1958
Stevens Point			1928	1936
Two Rivers			1925	
Watertown			1948	1960
Whitewater			1955	

Source: James Simmons "Wither Local Government Reform? The Case for Wisconsin" *National Civic Review* 90 (Spring 2001): 47.

## Appendix II

**Table I. Comparison of 3<sup>rd</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> 1945 Ward Valuations<sup>58</sup>**

Ward	Number of Taxed Residents	Average Value per Taxed Resident
3 <sup>rd</sup>	2,270	\$2,394
8 <sup>th</sup>	638	\$1,221
9 <sup>th</sup>	1,724	\$1,312
10 <sup>th</sup>	2,527	\$1,272
<b>Citywide</b>	<b>10,694</b>	<b>\$2,045</b>

*Source:* Treasurer, Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Tax Rolls, 1875-1909, 1945-1990. University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Special Collections and Archives, Eau Claire Wisconsin.

**Table II. Civil Service Spending and Municipal Debt 1941-1948**

Year	Valuation	Mill Rate	Bonded Debt	Police Department	Fire Department	Education	Total Value in 1941 Dollars <sup>59</sup>	Total Budget
1941	\$27,026,855	0.035	\$988,000	\$58,600	\$65,839	\$428,000	\$499,639	\$1,455,684.54
1942	\$27,641,780	0.035		\$58,250	\$67,289	\$442,250	\$512,055.11	\$1,501,200.59
1943	\$25,749,515	0.035	\$787,000	\$68,700	\$68,374	\$443,300	\$493,150.16	\$1,476,507.65
1944	\$27,246,480	0.035		\$67,900	\$73,000	\$470,000	\$510,240.34	\$1,479,198.25
1945	\$31,610,895	0.035		\$67,300	\$83,000	\$552,650	\$574,075.83	\$1,603,229.14
1946	\$36,246,710	0.035	\$481,000	\$103,993	\$163,985	\$663,463	\$702,163.22	\$2,006,444.02
1947	\$40,146,605	0.04		\$133,270	\$183,260	\$580,514	\$591,324.97	\$2,222,771.72
1948	\$49,648,725	0.043	\$1,586,000	\$147,050	\$236,875	\$712,828	\$668,973.82	\$2,704,829.07

*Source:* Eau Claire, Wisconsin. "Eau Claire city directory including Altoona." St. Paul: Wright Directory Company. The 1941, 1943, 1946 and 1948 editions. Budget information was taken from: City Council, Eau Claire, Wisconsin. "Proceedings, [microfilm] 1872-1959." University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Special Collections and Archives, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

<sup>58</sup> Time constraints kept me from being able to calculate the socio-economic standing of all of Eau Claire's wards.

<sup>59</sup> Total Value of Police, Fire and Education spending.

**Table III .The City of Eau Claire’s Population Growth**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Eau Claire</b>	<b>Percent of Change</b>	<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>Percent of Change</b>
1910	18,310	4.53%	2,333,860	12.8%
1920	20,880	14.04%	2,631,839	12.8%
1930	26,287	25.9%	2,939,006	11.7%
1940	30,745	17%	3,137,587	6.75%
1950	36,058	17.28%	3,434,575	9.46%

*Source:* Blue Book 1940. Madison: The State of Wisconsin, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940 and 1950.

**Table IV. Comparison of Inflation Adjusted Budgets**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Budget</b>	<b>Adjusted Budget Value in 1941 Dollars</b>
1941	\$1,455,684.54	\$1,455,684.54
1942	\$1,501,200.59	\$1,353,843.48
1943	\$1,476,507.65	\$1,254,604.77
1944	\$1,479,198.25	\$1,479,198.25
1945	\$1,603,229.14	\$1,309,303.80
1946	\$2,006,444.02	\$1,512,550.11
1947	\$2,222,771.72	\$1,465,235.17
1948	\$2,704,829.07	\$1,649,833.50

*Source:* City Council, Eau Claire, Wisconsin. “Proceedings, [microfilm] 1872-1959.” University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Special Collections and Archives, Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Inflation calculations were done on a calculator found at: <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>

## Annotated Bibliography

### Primary Sources

Blue Book 1940. Madison: The State of Wisconsin, 1940

I consulted the Blue Books for voting records. I used to determine the voting trends of the ten wards of the city of Eau Claire in national elections. Some population information was also available from a few of the Blue books.

Blue Book 1942. Madison: The State of Wisconsin, 1942.

Blue Book 1944. Madison: The State of Wisconsin, 1944.

Blue Book 1946. Madison: The State of Wisconsin, 1946.

Blue Book 1948. Madison: The State of Wisconsin, 1948.

Blue Book 1950. Madison: The State of Wisconsin, 1950.

Chamber of Commerce, Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Map guide, Eau Claire, Wisconsin [map]: for vacationers, visitors, and newcomers. University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Special Collections and Archives, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

This map is one of two maps that I have found showing Eau Claire from around the time of the 1948 referendum. I used this map to gain some idea of what Eau Claire looked like from around that time of the referendum. Unfortunately, the ward divisions are not on this map.

City Council, Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Proceedings, [microfilm] 1872-1959. University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Special Collections and Archives, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

This archive contains the budgetary information of the city for every year between 1938 and 1950, also holds information concerning the public policies of the council from that same time period. I searched these records for evidence of policies that would anger business interests and also for evidence pointing toward the inefficiency that the council was accused of in the run up to the referendum.

Eau Claire, Wisconsin. 1941 Eau Claire city directory including Altoona. St. Paul: Wright Directory Company.

These directories are important because they contain a page of city statistics listing the amount of debt the city had, the valuation of the city, estimates of the population of the city between the 1940 and 1950 censuses along with other valuable data that I could not find in any other source. It also allowed me to locate where prominent players in the political debates lived within the city.



Eau Claire, Wisconsin. 1943 Eau Claire city directory including Altoona. St. Paul: Wright Directory Company.

Eau Claire, Wisconsin. 1946 Eau Claire city directory including Altoona. St. Paul: Wright Directory Company.

Eau Claire, Wisconsin. 1948 Eau Claire city directory including Altoona. St. Paul: Wright Directory Company.

Eau Claire Leader-Telegram. Nov. 1, 1947-April 10, 1948.

There is a 19 part set of editorials focusing on why Eau Claire should change to the city manager system along with numerous letters to the editor in which citizens of Eau Claire express their reactions to both the editorials and events described in the paper, such as rallies and discussion sessions. Although the paper acknowledged that it was in favor of the change to the manager system the actions and reactions of those on both sides of the issue are fairly well documented. Furthermore, this paper would have been the prime source of information for the citizens of Eau Claire in regards to the referendum and the arguments presented by both sides.

Haas, Leonard C. Leonard Haas papers, 1928-1988. University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Special Collections and Archives, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

I hoped to find some insights that Haas may have had concerning postwar Eau Claire's political climate and political reform movement. However, I was able to find very little information. What I did find was mostly superficial information that was not already available from other sources.

Haas, Leonard C. and Richard L. Pifer. "An Oral History of the University of Wisconsin—Eau Claire: a 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary publication" (Eau Claire, WI.: Special Collections, McIntyre Library, UW—Eau Claire, 1991).

This book is a written transcription of an interview of Leonard C. Haas by Richard L. Pifer. The book is focused on the experiences of Haas in regard to the University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire. There is very little information within the book about Haas and his time on the city council.

House, Harold E. Harold E. House papers. University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Special Collections and Archives, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

These papers, though largely from Mr. House's time as the president of the Rubber Workers Union, do shed some light on his activities along with those of the City Commission from 1944 until 1948. The archive also contains a small amount of interesting information regarding referendum.

Mayor, Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Mayor's Correspondence, 1940-1949. University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Special Collections and Archives, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

These letters reveal some of the daily concerns of the Mayor of the city of Eau Claire from 1940 to 1948. Of particular interest are two letters concerning the attempts of the city government to get federal aid with which to build schools when materials became available, and attempts to pass bond issues from around the mid 1940s.

Treasurer, Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Tax Rolls, 1875-1909, 1945-1990. University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Special Collections and Archives, Eau Claire Wisconsin.

This archive contains the records of the taxes levied on citizens of Eau Claire. I used the records in conjunction with voting records to get an idea of how each socio-economic class voted on the 1948 referendum.

## Secondary Sources

Alford, Robert R. *Bureaucracy and Participation*. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969.

This book is basically a comparative analysis of the economic condition of the cities Green Bay, Kenosha, Racine and Madison, and how the different economic situations of the cities influence their political structures.

Barland, Lois. *The Rivers Flow On; A Record of Eau Claire, Wisconsin From 1910-1960*. Stevens Point, WI: Worzalla Publishing Company, 1965.

This book was useful in gaining some knowledge concerning the dates of changes in Eau Claire's Municipal government along with the names and dates of citizens elected to Eau Claire's city council and city commission.

Bridges, Amy and Richard Kronick. "Writing the Rules to Win the Game: The Middle-Class Regimes of Municipal Reformers" *Urban Affairs Review* 34 (1999); 691.

This article presents an argument that during the Progressive Era middle and upper-class reformers in the United States were able to gain political control of some cities by disenfranchising opposition groups within the city. Once the reformers had increased their power by disenfranchising other groups of citizens the reform minded citizens would then push a structural change through a referendum to both help solidify their power. The article also points out a correlations between the size of the immigrant population along with the relative level of voter participation within the city as good indicators of whether or not a city would be conducive to structural reforms or not.

Bridges, Amy. *Morning Glories: Municipal Reform in the Southwest*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.

This work presents the history of municipal reform efforts of larger cities within the southwest from the 1920s through the 1960. Bridges conclusion that many of these post war reforms in the southwest were connected to business vs. labor antagonism fits with what appears to have happened in Eau Claire.

Bromage, Arthur. *Manager Plan Abandonments*. New York: National Municipal League, 1954.

This book originally started out as a pamphlet that was circulated during the 1950s to present some of the reasons why certain cities had abandoned the city manager form of government. It was useful in this paper because it contains a section concerned with why Steven's Point, Wisconsin dropped the system.

Buenker, John D. *The History of Wisconsin, Vol. 4: The Progressive Era*. Madison, WI: Wisconsin State Historical Society, 1973.

This book presents a very nice overview the State of Wisconsin's history during the Progressive Era. It was useful since it presents not only some broad useful background information, but also sites other sources that give more detailed information concerning topics that the author could only touch on due to the broad topic area that is covered in the volume.

DeRosier, John B. "Nothin' But a Machine: A History of the Eau Claire Rubber Workers on Strike" Master's Thesis University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, 1998.

This history helps to place the actions of the United Rubber Workers Union, whose president ended up on the city commission, into the context of the time, and offers some information that might help explain what appears to be slow support for people that they helped to put into office.

Donoghue, James R. "The Local Government System in Wisconsin." In *1968 Wisconsin Blue Book*. Madison, WI: Department of Administration, State of Wisconsin, 1968. 108-125

This is one chapter in a larger article within the Blue Book that focuses on the some of the history of the city manager plan in Wisconsin on a statewide level.

Donoghue, James R. "Local Government in Wisconsin." In *1979-1980 Wisconsin Blue Book*. Madison, WI: Department of Administration, State of Wisconsin, 1980. 143-157.

This is one chapter from a large article in the Blue Book discussing local government in Wisconsin. It focuses on reasons why the author feels the system has generally not been successful in Wisconsin. This article helped put Eau Claire's decision to move to a city manager system into a wider State of Wisconsin perspective.

Fure-Slocum, Eric. "Cities with Class, Growth Politics, the Working-Class City, and Debt in Milwaukee during the 1940's" *Social Science History* 24, (2000): 257-305

This article describes how post World War II politics were shaped by the competition between Labor and business interests within the city of Milwaukee. These anti-labor sentiments seemed to exist across the state of Wisconsin, and not even Eau Claire was able to escape their effects.

Friedland, Roger. *Power and Crisis in the City: Corporations, Unions and Urban Policy*. New York: Schocken Books, 1983.

This work is concerned with how labor attempts to accomplish its political goals when it has to deal with business interests within a city. This book gave me some background in how organized labor functions in the politics of a city.

Gluck, Peter R. and Richard J. Meister, *Cities in Transition: Social and Institutional Responses in Urban Development*. New York: New Viewpoints, 1979.

This book presented a detailed history of the three different systems of city government that are allowed in Wisconsin. I used information from this book to help describe each system for the benefit of readers with little background in municipal politics.

Hays, Samuel P. *American Political History: A Social Analysis*. Knoxville, Tenn: University of Tennessee Press, 1980.

The Essay "The politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era" is of particular interest. In this article he puts forth his argument that it was a group composed of middle and upper class members of a city that pushed through reforms, and not the actual *people* themselves. Something similar might have happened in Eau Claire.

Monkkenon, Eric H. *America Becomes Urban: The Development of U.S. Cities and Towns 1780-1980*. Berkeley, CA: University of Californian Press, 1988.

This book presents a very interesting argument in regards to the fundamental causes of municipal reform that fits quite well with what was happening in Eau Claire just after the Second World War. Monkkenon believes that it was financial stress caused by the increasing population of cities that in turn caused a large increase in the amount and cost of city services. The increase cost could not be matched by tax increases and the municipalities went into debt. The combination of tax increases along with increasing debt is what pushed citizens to accept large structural changes to the cities governmental forms.

Ozanne, Robert W. *Labor movement in Wisconsin: A History*. Madison, WI: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1984.

This book was useful to this paper because it not only presents some of the only statewide figures concerned with Wisconsin union membership, but also provided some useful background information surrounding organized labor's history within Wisconsin and its involvement in the political world on a state level back into the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Lee, R. Alton, *Truman and Taft-Hartley*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966.

This book describes the political climate in postwar America through a study of the Taft-Hartley Act. I used it for its detailed description of the development of anti-labor sentiment in the United States after the Second World War.

Schnore, L. "Forms of Government and the Socioeconomic Characteristics of Suburbs." *Administrative Quarterly* 8, (1963): 1-17.

This article attempted to demonstrate a correlation between the socioeconomic composition of cities and suburbs and the type of local governmental structure that the city operates under. The article is able to show a correlation between the socioeconomic standing of a city's citizens and the type of government that the city operates under; however, the correlation is somewhat small. While interesting it did not prove very useful to the final version of this paper.

Simmons, James. "Whither Local Government Reform? The Case of Wisconsin." *National Civic Review*, vol: 90; no:1 Spring 2001.

This article attempted to explain why so few cities within the state of Wisconsin have adopted reform governments. It also considered what, if any, social, political and economic outcomes may have been produced within cities that decided in favor of reform governments. Additionally it presented a much more in depth background history of the two periods of municipal reform within the state of Wisconsin.

Simmons, James. "Social Conflict and Political Change in Oshkosh: The Search for Local Government Efficiency." *Voyageur* 14 (1998): 22-38.

This article not only helped to illustrate how there was a larger wave of municipal reform going on in Wisconsin during the years just following the Second World War, but also provided some interesting points of comparison between the series of events that occurred in Eau Claire and that of Oshkosh.

Stark, Jack. *The Wisconsin State Constitution: A Reference Guide*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997.

I used this book to gain some insight into the legal aspects of changing from the commission system to the city manager system by reading the section focused on the “Home Rule Enabling Act” (Article IX). This book also provided an in depth analysis of the Wisconsin constitution as of 1997 from a legal point of view.

United States Department of Labor Statistics. “Inflation Calculator.” <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl> (accessed on April 20, 2008).

I used this calculator to calculate the exact effect that inflation had on the budget of the city of Eau Claire. By using the value of the dollar in 1941 I was able to compare different budgets to each other.

Whitney, Simon N. *Inflation since 1945: Facts and Theories*. New York: Praeger, 1982.

I used this text in order to gain some understanding of the effects that inflation on the United States economy after the Second World War.