

An Introduction to the Historical Minutes and Ordinances of the City of Durango



The minutes of eleven thousand City of Durango meetings, all of them publicly accessible on the City website records portal at <http://durangogov.org/Records> from the very first meeting on May 16th, 1881, provide an intriguing look at the City over time. Here are some highlights from those minutes, followed by 15 study questions to assist teachers in helping students learn about their city's history by examining primary sources.

The Durango City Council minutes describe many fascinating topics, including:

- the Pest House for quarantining persons who had smallpox or scarlet fever,
- the work of the City Scavenger and the job of the Street Sprinkler,
- the feeding and care of City prisoners,
- the City Jail at the back of City Hall (just downstairs from the sleeping apartments of the “Fire Boys” and their bedbugs—which the Fire Department was authorized to eliminate by purchasing acids or whatever was necessary to destroy them),
- the problem of cattle and dead animals in the Animas River above the City’s water intake,
- the many reasons why 1897 was the darkest hour of the City Government,
- granting a peddler's license to a poor lady, and
- employing a man to drive down nails in the City’s board sidewalks for 2 weeks on 7/2/1895.

If you only have time to read the minutes of one City Council meeting, the six pages of minutes of the regular meeting of 6/21/1910 (pages 433-438 of Minutes Book 7) are worth it. They cover a variety of topics, including the first automobile licenses the City granted, City public works projects including a water main extension, construction of cement cross walks, sidewalks and curbs, a road through the dump ground near 8th Street, an intriguing order directing the City Attorney to proceed against any property owners who complained about making proper sewer connections, a report of the Pipe Line Tender and Head Gate Keeper on the very poor condition of the water pipeline the City had built the previous year, restriction of hours of irrigation from 6 to 9 p.m., and a letter from U.S. Senator Simon Guggenheim informing Council of federal appropriations for the start-up of Mesa Verde National Park.

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"At the core of much human error is a lack of perspective. Most people refuse to believe that the past is relevant to them, and they suffer for this foolish myopia." (Nosson Scherman, *The Chumash: The Stone Edition*, 11th edition, 2007, p. 1101)

Some things do not seem to change; they have been perennial issues of the City
(suggestion: do keyword searches of the Minutes and Ordinances cabinets for these terms):

The City water supply has sometimes been nearly in crisis. Often, the City of Durango and the Town of Animas City have faced a lack of municipal water. To address the issue, the early City Councils moved from a pumping to a gravity fed system and evaluated Florida River, Cascade Creek, and Junction Creek as sources of municipal water to supplement the Animas River. Challenges included a long-standing lawsuit in the 1880s (which the City eventually lost) by the Junction Creek and North Durango Domestic and Irrigation Ditch Company. The water supply was often in a desperate situation (for example, see minutes of 7/1/1902, pages 285-286, and 7/7/1902, pages 292 and 294). An analysis mentioned in minutes of 9/16/1902 mentions that an Animas River water sample sent for testing contained a “considerable quantity of lead and arsenic.” In the spring of 1909, the City was hustling to repair a huge break in the wooden pipeline it had built the previous year to move water from the Florida River to the City’s reservoirs. 500 feet of pipe line had slipped out of place on the mountainside (see minutes of 11/9/1908, page 109; see also minutes of 3/30/1909, page 164 reporting that “the pipe line leading from the Florida River was in very bad condition and a large amount of work would be necessary during the coming year before the City could be supplied with the required amount of water”) and the Mayor was sending frantic telegrams to the National Wood Pipe Co. of Salt Lake City to obtain stave pipe to make repairs to meet the City’s demands for water for the following summer. The City always rose to the occasion, however. By 6/1/1909 the minutes were reporting that work on pipe line and reservoir repairs was nearly complete. However, on 9/7/1909 City Engineer Wigglesworth reported that \$50,000 was needed to make necessary repairs and changes (page 262). Another crisis hit the City as recorded in the minutes of 10/7/1911, 2 days after devastating flood damage. The City completed *those* repairs in June of 1912, thanks to the hard work of a “gang of laborers.” To read their names, see the list of men paid in minutes of July 2, 1912, page 203.

At some points in the early years, the City was not certain that it had obtained easements and deeds that were on the exact land where its Florida River water delivery systems were built. Council was still addressing this as recently as 4/21/1981 when it was meeting to clarify City easements across land surrounding the Florida River headworks of the City water system.

Even when there was not an outright crisis, the municipal water supply needed maintenance, management, and infusions of funds. The City Reservoir perennially required cleaning. The City had to switch to using water meters, and had to decide whether to be consistent in enforcing its charges or to give free water in special situations. The early City minutes are replete with water rents disputes, requests for rebates and adjustments, and frequent protests by water consumers over their water rates (some wanted to be charged a flat rate, others wanted to pay according to how much water they used). One user, Fred Miller, was arrested for not paying, and was allowed to leave the City to rustle up the money (1/3/1899).

Public works are expensive and controversial! Street paving, sidewalk construction and repair, and construction of sewers starting about 1906 occupied much of the resources of the City and its citizens. The sidewalks and street crossings were built of wood in the early decades, and wooden boxes were used for street drainage (3/15/1904). At one point the City requested bids for 50,000 feet of lumber (see minutes of 11/20/1894 and 12/18/1894). The City was still accepting bids for constructing board sidewalks as recently as 6/16/1908. Maintaining wooden board sidewalks was an ongoing challenge. Problems included claims and lawsuits by persons who were injured on City sidewalks (e.g. 2/20/1900, 2/21/1905 and 12/5/1905) (and Mr. Likens’ claim for his horse injured on a defective crosswalk, see 2/6/1906), questions of liability (minutes dated 9/6/1892, 6/6/1899 and 6/20/1899), and property owners who failed to pay for sidewalk repairs. The City hired a temporary worker to nail down

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dangerous nails and boards one summer. In 1904 the City switched to constructing its street crossings from stone from the City's own quarry (6/7/1904, pages 65 and 69) and began pouring cement sidewalks, rather than using wood for everything. In 1909 the City moved toward only building cement sidewalks (cf. minutes of 7/20/1909, page 245). Council passed a resolution on 8/5/1910 condemning wooden sidewalks on Main Ave. from 5th-12th Streets, to be replaced by cement concrete.

The City has experienced numerous financial exigencies. Topics of concern to Council have included decreased sales tax revenues, economic slumps/depressions in 1890/91 and 1897/98, and attempting to balance income and expenditures, to avoid spending more than it was taking in, and subsequent demands for economy (for example, minutes of 11/5/1891, page 320; 7/6/1893, page 82; 8/3/1893, pages 99-100; 1/5/1897, pages 150-151; 1/4/1898, page 310). On 8/6/1895, Council reduced the City's police force to the Chief and 2 policemen due to the population decrease and because of diminished City revenues, and also because the City had "been for some months in a quiet and orderly condition." On 1/3/1911 the City was on the verge of having to take out a loan to pay its bills; private individuals took up a subscription to clear the exceptionally large amount of snow from Main Avenue; this was just two months after the City's sidewalk replacement project was nearly dive-bombed when the contractors (Forsgren and Pyle) were forced to stop work because they ran out of money to pay their laborers and suppliers. Soon, the City had to take out short term bank loans to cover its monthly bills. On July 2, 1912 (page 202), Alderman Hanno of the Finance Committee reported that less than \$500 would remain in the City Treasury after paying current bills – and that was while the City was supplementing its funding by borrowing thousands of dollars from First National Bank at 6% interest. Nonetheless, on 7/16/1912 Council agreed to purchase a motor fire truck for \$6,300; the new truck was scheduled to arrive on 9/25/1912, in time to be exhibited at the annual Fall Fair. However, before that could happen, on 8/16/1912 Council heard a protest by "heavy tax payers" holding each council member accountable for its illegal action in committing to an expense that exceeded appropriations, and Council rescinded the contract it had made with American La France Fire Engine Company of Elmira, New York, for the purchase of the truck

Building permits: including inconsistencies in enforcement, what to do about buildings already constructed but in violation of ordinances, and Building Committee's failure to following procedures for issuing them (3/1/1904). Removal of burned or dilapidated buildings (such as the Old Baird House in 5/4/1909, page 188). Construction of wooden frame buildings within the City fire limits.

City/County responsibilities and conflicts in shared areas such as bridges through town, property taxation (for example, 6/7/1904, p. 69), and allocation of tax revenues.

The City Clerk always has had to work to create and maintain a secure and ample place to store valuable City records. Do a keyword search of the early City Council minutes for the words "safe" and "vault" to see the challenges facing early City Clerks. By the way, the first female City official was City Clerk Helen M. Rodgers (see minutes of 4/17/1894).

The Boulevard/ 3rd Avenue: street construction/repairs/grade, irrigation and maintenance of trees and lawn on the median, an insurmountable problem of dandelions (spelled dandy lions in the minutes of June 1909) taking over the lawn, debates about the traffic pattern, parking (starting with the first mention of it on page 482 of the minutes of the regular Council meeting on 8/5/1910, within 2 months of the City issuing its first automobile licenses), and sidewalks.

Fall Cleanup could have begun in 1912! The meeting minutes of 8/20/1912 (page 226) reported a proposal that City teams haul away tree tops and debris placed in streets after tree trimming season. The proposition lost on a vote of 3 for and 3 against (the Mayor and 2 aldermen were absent).

First mention of movie-making in Durango was in Council meeting minutes of 3/2/1915 (page 518) when the Durango Film Producing Co. (through its representative Fred P. Dovy) requested permission

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to construct a 50 x 70 feet wooden studio platform on vacant Lots 24-26 Block 62 to be used in connection with the Wakelin Building on Lot 23 for the production of moving pictures.

Liquor licenses: includes dealers' complaints about fees, requests for rebates, illegal nature of rebates; question about John Jakino's saloon in Mexican Flats in southern Durango; saloons destroyed by fire; \$300 annual fee [higher than today's rate in contemporary dollars].

Animas River bridges: including Fassbinders Bridge and bridge by Gradens Mill, footbridge known as the Winick Bridge; foot bridge across Animas River at foot of 14th Street near the electric light plant (see regular Council minutes of 11/21/1905, 11/7/1911 on page 112, and 1/2/1912 on page 140); why 14th Street was never extended as a full street all the way to the River; see minutes of 11/13/1905 for details of selection of bids for construction of the Main Avenue stone bridge across the Animas River that still is in use today; it replaced a wooden bridge that was always in need of jacking up, holding together, and other pressing repairs; it was finished by the end of 1906 (about 6 months late) and at a cost overrun of between \$5,000 and \$6,000, which his bonding agents had to cover, along with clearing the river channel so the water could flow past the bridge (see minutes of 12/18/1906 and 1/4/1907, pages 426-429 and 433). The City's plans for replacing the Main Avenue bridge over Junction Creek in North Durango went into overdrive at the 10/7/1911 Council Special meeting after the flood of October 5th finished destroying the previous bridge.

Attorneys' opinions and their fees (for example, Ordinance No. 1898-0312).

Dump grounds: challenges of finding an acceptable site and getting people to dump there and not in their back yards or alleys, etc. A report in the Council minutes of 6/24/1913 mentioned that rubbish was being dumped for about a mile, and the arroyo assigned for the dump ground was hardly used at all.

Signs the City had posted defining the dumping limits had all been torn down and destroyed.

Snow clearing responsibilities (for example, Ordinance No. 1899-0317).

No smoking rules (4/29/1899).

Interesting topics and persons to research in the early minutes:

Prisoner care: feeding, boarding (where?), and medical care (see frequent itemization of these expenses in the bills/claims allowed), and work (5/4/1897); by G. Swartz, and others; jail conditions, jail locations; separation of women and children from men and hardened criminals; no heat in the jail; passing on the firemen's used bedding to the jail after the Fire Dept. bought new bedding.

City Scavenger position: M. Tierney, discussions about withholding his pay now and then; other jobs he did for the City; offensive condition of his own property (5/18/1897); intoxicated and in jail (2/16/1904). [See study questions below.]

Loose animals running through the city: Practically from the beginning, City Hall has received complaints about loose animals, particularly loose dogs and livestock running through the City. On 5/4/1909 (page 187) Nels Hansen complained that his son had been bitten by Rowe Pingrey's dog and Mr. Pingrey was giving him no satisfaction. Over time Council has passed numerous ordinances in this regard, including #206 on 8/21/1888 "Prohibiting the Running at Large of Horses, Asses, Mules, Cattle, Swine, Goats, Dogs, Geese within the Corporate Limits and Describing the Mode of Prosecution in Such Cases", and designating the Riverside Corral to be used as the public pound of the City of Durango for the year 1888. The City had a Pound Keeper (AKA Pound Man) who was responsible for impounding loose stock. The minutes include a funny story about a cow that impounded itself and cost its owner \$.50. Another time a team took itself to the pound instead of returning to its stable and cost its owner \$2.50 to redeem (see the minutes of 12/6/1898, page 444). Sometimes Council gave the pound keeper incentive by allowing him to keep half of the proceeds of the fines he collected

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(1/3/1899). On 8/6/1907 (page 525) the City *Marshal* was allowed to keep 50 cents for each dog license fee he collected. On 6/2/1914 (page 449) Council appointed a Dog Catcher and allowed him to keep (as his sole compensation) \$1 for each dog he impounded, if he impounded 25 dogs; if fewer, he earned 50 cents per dog. Being the Pound Man or Stock Herder was a tough job—that, and being the City Scavenger. The minutes of 3/19/1895 report complaints about Pound Keeper S. W. McGuire (page 405) after he issued summons to about 60 stock owners, 7 of whom appeared before the committee of investigation, which found no evidence of any irregularities or overcharges, and concluded that “Mr. McGuire keeps the Pound as satisfactorily as such a place can be kept,” and instructed him to keep a strict account and description of all stock impounded. A hundred years ago the City had a position of Stock Herder (see minutes of 4/19/1904 and 5/17/1904, pages 35 and 53). The City provided the feed for the employee’s horse for rounding up cattle, etc., though it seems the stock herder or the City Marshal had to come up with the horse (see 5/16/1899). During a smallpox epidemic Council ordered the Marshal to kill all dogs running at large belonging to parties affected with contagious diseases.

Named animals, including a bear named “Pickett” and Fire/ Water/ Street department horses named “Joe”, “Skates”, “Tig” (or Tige as spelled on page 515 of the minutes of 9/20/1910 and page 552 of 11/23/1910), “Mac”, and “Rube” (3/3/1908, page 596).

Nuisances (for example, Ordinance Nos. 1898-0308, 1898-0315, 1901-0352): filth, cesspools, etc.

Disease and epidemics: scarlet fever, smallpox, influenza, whooping cough; the issue of vaccinations (regulations adopted 2/21/1911 and mentioned elsewhere in City Council minutes) and what the City paid for them (1/3/1899); inspections of cesspools and slaughterhouses; burning bedding; posting warning signs (3/7/1899); Mexicans barred from City after outbreak south of town (minutes of special meeting 11/23/1896, page 135); quarantines (5/23/1899, 5/26/1899, 6/20/1899=confined to the County Pest House); on 7/6/1905 the City Marshal was instructed to kill all dogs running at large and belonging to parties who are affected with contagious diseases (see page 227). The Council meeting minutes of 5/7/1909 described the city as infested with scarlet fever, and Council order 100 cards to be printed that describe the ordinances regarding the penalties for disregarding quarantine; the cards were to be posted on dwellings where there was infectious disease. The following week’s minutes clarified that the rumors that there was a great number of cases in the city were unfounded: there were 6 cases, with just 5 families in quarantine, and that there had been 3 deaths within the City from the disease. To read reports of the manner in which Health Officer Driver went about his business and why he resigned, read the minutes of regular meetings of City Council on 11/21/1911 (go to bottom of page 120) and 1/2/1912 (pages 132-135 and 138-139).

Prostitutes...and how to find them [in OnBase, that is]: Unlike typewritten or computer-generated documents which the City’s online records management can “read” and convert by using OCR (optical character recognition), the handwritten minutes and ordinances are illegible to the database management system. That is why the City Clerk’s Office has created an abstract to summarize the key words and content of every set of handwritten minutes. If you do a keyword of the Minutes cabinet for words like prostitute, inmates, houses of ill fame, and bawdy houses, you will find frequent mention of those particular topics in the early days of the City. A good question is why the City tolerated houses of prostitution, and whether it really wanted to abolish them. After all, this was a steady source of income for the City treasury. At one point, the City Marshal was allowed to keep 15% of fines collected (see 11/15/1898). Until the minutes stopped including the detail of City officers’ monthly reports in April of 1890, they regularly listed the names of prostitutes who had to pay their monthly \$5 fine. One of them was Annie Durfee; when she died, the City assisted in the costs of her burial. The City temporarily discontinued levying fines (see minutes of 3/5/1889) but soon reinstated them.

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Occasionally the City Marshal would ask Council what he should do about “inmates” who refused to pay their fines (see 2/7/1885, 2/21/1893). On 4/3/1906 the Council instructed the Marshal to arrest all prostitutes and to order all pimps and people of like character to leave town. Do you think they did? [See study questions below.]

Attempts to regulate moral behavior have included an ordinance that Council passed on 3/2/1897 to “Prohibit the Practice of Fornication in the City of Durango, and Providing a Penalty for the Violation Thereof” (Ordinance No. O-1897-0302). On 2/4/1902 Council adopted a resolution instructing the City Marshal “to arrest all males and females who practice fornication or adultery on First Avenue or in the residence portion of the City, and to prohibit the inmates of lewd or bawdy houses from occupying any rooms or rooms on the east side of the railroad, or frequenting saloons.” Previously (on 1/2/1901), one of the Aldermen had proposed a resolution ordering Goodman Paint and Wall Paper Co. to remove pictures of an obscene nature from its store window on Main Avenue because the crowds stopping in front of that window were so large as to obstruct and interfere with travel, and the people's morals were in jeopardy. The resolution stated that “If the company does not remove the pictures at once it will be the responsibility of the Marshal to do so, forcibly if necessary.” In 1890 Council passed Ordinance No. 229 mandating Sabbath observance in (actually, not the Sabbath but a portion of Sunday), but passed Ordinance No. 420 repealing it in 1905 (11/7/1905, page 274). (See study question below.)

Gas vs. electric for **lighting** in early 1880s; love/hate relationship of the City and the Durango Light and Power Co.; selective placement of the first street lights around town; Thomas L. Loftus electric light franchise described by Ordinance No. 430 was declared null and void and forfeited (see minutes of 7/2/1907, pages 503-504), “Council requested the advice of the City Attorney in regard to this matter and he replied by tendering his resignation.”

Relationship between City of Durango and Town of Animas City (for example, see 9/20/1887, 12/20/1887 and 2/19/1889 minutes re: water supply problems); consolidation of the City and the Town by annexation of Animas City into Durango was considered from at least 1904 (see minutes of 6/21/1904) until it finally happened in 1947 by Ordinance No. 0768

In the early decades City officers had to post bond for the faithful performance of their duties. The amounts posted varied according to the financial responsibilities of the official, ranging from maybe \$500 to many thousands. Those who guaranteed them sometimes balked at paying up when the official landed in trouble. For example the case against City Treasurer R. Burgess, April-June 1889, and the notable case of City Clerk Charles E. Meuser who defalcated (you may want to [look that one up in the dictionary](#); for more on his case, see below) and was arrested in Chicago, but his bondsmen would not pay the amount he had embezzled. On April 14, 1902 his successor W. H. Moore was replaced also for defalcation. (No doubt, this is why the responsibility for taking in fees and payments was transferred from the City Clerk to someone in Finance later on. However, when the voters amended the City Charter on 6/29/1915 the City Clerk and City Treasurer functions were merged into one person's duties—along with *also* serving as the Police Magistrate! -- 7/6/1915, page 563.) By 1909, when new officers were chosen each April the City advertised for bids and awarded a contract for one company to provide the bond for all of the officers. By 1910 the City was itself paying the premiums on those bonds; on 4/18/1911 (p. 15) the new Council gave each bonding agent in Durango a share of that business, but very soon (on 5/2/1911, p. 22) the legality of the City paying premium on City officials' bonds was questioned, and when City Attorney Woody gave his legal opinion that the City no right or authority to do so, the Council ignored his input and took no action to reverse its decision.

Occasionally a City officer or elected official abdicated, leaving town without giving notice, or suddenly resigned his position: for example, Councilman John Lynton on 10/16/1888, Alderman T. A. Wingate on 10/05/1897, and the notable case of City Clerk Charles E. Meuser on 11/03/1897 (see above; the

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City offered a \$100 reward for his arrest), and the City Engineer on 1/17/1899. At other times, an official refused to resign when told to do so, for example (2/7/1895) City Marshal J. M. Nicholas: when Acting Mayor J. C. Sanford demanded his resignation, Mr. Nicholas answered that he could not comply with the request. Other officials were much beloved and respected, such as Mayor A. L. Harris, who died at age 78 (see minutes of 8/29/1898), shortly after the death of his wife, he having presided over the very previous Council meeting on August 16, 1898. He had been elected mayor of Kansas City in 1866, moved to Colorado in 1876, mined in Howardsville, became of citizen of Durango in 1881, and was elected Mayor of Durango 1895. City Hall was draped in mourning for 30 days in his honor. After being asked a question during a Council meeting on 9/17/1907 about a \$25 tent show license fee he collected, Mayor McConnell resigned at once (page 538). Why? One of the downsides of using minutes for historical research is that they generally do not tell us reasons and motivations for making a decision.

City officials and officers frequently did business with the City – until it was discussed in the City Council meeting of 4/15/1902 (see page 253). Modern notions of conflict of interest did not seem to be considered (for example, T. C. Graden, Fire Chief George Goodman, Alderman/Mayor Pro Tem W. T. Darlington 7/18/1899, and many others). Some early City procedures appealed directly to personal self-interest, for instance the minutes of 6/8/1910 state that the Council retained Street Supervisor Dupraw to collect the poll tax, at a commission of ten percent on collections he made.

Employee benefits: paid vacation of 15 days granted to all regular members of Fire, Water and Police Department; it had to be taken in the summer (6/18/1901). It was expanded to all City employees effective 7/1/1902. On 8/11/1915 (page 573) Council passed a resolution to insure payment of compensation to employees or their dependents with the State Compensation Insurance Fund under provisions of the new Workmen's Compensation Act.

Sometimes, personalities on City Council clashed during meetings. Alderman Sanford and Alderman Joseph Clarke confronted one another often during City Council meetings, usually pertaining to matters of morals (cf. minutes of meeting 08/04/1891, Minutes Book 2, page 266, and ongoing through page 315). On 8/17/1909 Council passed a resolution asking Alderman Morelock to explain the charge he made during the previous meeting on 8/3/1909 that "You are not working for the people but for an individual; you are crooked." This was after Council had (against the objections of Mr. Morelock) awarded the City's annual printing bid to the Democrat Printing Company rather than to the Durango Herald which (according to Morelock) was the lowest responsible bidder. Council asked Mayor Goodman to appoint a committee to investigate this charge that members of Council were dishonest men who were moved by unlawful and corrupt motives, and also to investigate the bids that were submitted. Morelock withdrew his charges during the following meeting on 9/7/1909 and his comments were ordered expunged (though they are still available to read on the margin of page 254). In another vein, on 8/21/1891 Council itself preferred charges against the Police Judge, the City Marshal, the City Attorney, and the City Clerk, and replaced all of them despite protest by the current/former office holders (see Minutes Book 2, pages 274-280). The inner dynamics of proceedings of Council became rather less interesting in 1913 when it was reduced from 9 men to 3 when the City adopted the Commissioner form of government. There was less discussion; two men could decide a matter, whereas under the Aldermanic form of government it required 4 and (in the case of a tie when the Mayor would vote) 5. That didn't last long: in the general municipal election on April 6, 1915 (as noted in the minutes of the 4/7/1915 Council meeting, page 528), voters replaced incumbent Mayor Henry R. Scouton with Andrew F. Hood and voted by a large majority to change the City Charter to move to a Commissioner-Manager form of government.

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Often, Council handled a situation by **referring it to a committee** (either a Standing Committee, which was comprised of the different aldermen or city council members, or an ad hoc special committee of between 1 and 3 councilmen) or by tabling a petition, sometimes indefinitely. Do a keyword search of the minutes to see how often something was “laid on the table”. There was a great number of special committees, such as the Horse Committee, Committee on Fences, Committee on Pool Room Ordinances and Committee on Proposed Milk Ordinance (8/3/1909, pages 254-255), the Committee on City-Owned Ranches, the Waste Paper Can Committee (5/17/1910, page 402), and the special Committee on Route for Stock through Durango (9/3/1912, page 229).

Additional **interesting Durango figures to study in the City Council minutes** include City Marshal John H. Brumley; Henry Strater and Frank W. Strater; Strater Hotel; and J. P. Coston.

Though the minutes provide many details and provide wealth of information, some of the more detailed records of early City decisions are lost. The minutes of 4/14/1890 recorded an order for “City Clerk Blair Burwell to procure suitable record for purpose of recording the reports of officers” (page 88 of Minutes Book 2). These reports have apparently been lost, with the result that we only have early reports of Durango City officers until about April of 1890.

To review some of the many **lawsuits against the City**, run a search of the City Council minutes for the key words “vs. City”.

Second hand stores: why were there so many of them, and where did they obtain their inventory?

The “arts” in Durango: opera house, bands, etc.

Parks and trails in and around the City of Durango: a fairly recent development is the Centennial Trail from the end of 10th Street to the south end of the McPherson Chapel grounds on Fort Lewis Mesa (cf. minutes of 4/21/1981).

Greenmount Cemetery: cattle loose in cemetery; ownership of plots; lots occupied and not paid for; frequent repairs of road to the cemetery; irrigation; buildings; maintaining the front gate.

Fire Department: hose companies; fires and the threat thereof; fire hazards; condemned buildings; fire hose purchases; fire wagon (including its name, and its name change from Kephart to William J. Bryan on 7/19/1898, page 391); Fire Chief George Goodman, who was elected Mayor in 1909 and City Commissioner on 6/28/1915.

City compassion for persons in poverty: rebates of water rent charges and financial provision for families in need and individuals who were sick (1/7/1896, 2/18/1896, 8/5/1896, 6/16/1896, 2/4/1896), meals for the poor (5/2/1899)

Automobiles began making a presence in the City Council minutes starting in 1909 with an “Ordinance to License Garage Keepers” (Ordinance No. 475, passed on 7/6/1909) and are first mentioned in the minutes of 7/20/1909 (page 244) (unless we missed an earlier reference). In its meeting of May 3, 1910, Council established speed limits 10 MPH in the business district and 18 MPH elsewhere. The first automobile licenses noted in City Council meeting minutes were granted to Dara C. White and The Pioneer Consolidated Co. on 6/21/1910. In the regular meeting minutes of 4/16/1912 (page 172) we read of Council’s first consideration of the possibility of purchasing a modern motorized fire truck to replace the City’s horse drawn vehicle. (The LaFrance fire vehicle that the City eventually purchased is on display in the D&SNGRR Railroad Museum at the railroad depot.) In the minutes of 6/18/1912 (page 198) we read that there were many alleged speeding violations by “autoists”; the City Marshal was authorized to rent a stop watch for 30 days or so much longer time as may be necessary and use it to endeavor to enforce the speed ordinances, arresting all offenders. The matter came up again on 5/26/1913 (page 329), which may contain the first mention of motorcycles in the City Council minutes. The first mention of a gas pump in the City of Durango seems to be in the Council minutes of 9/2/1913 when J. W. Jarvis was allowed to install underground gasoline storage tank in front of his building on

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2nd Ave. along with a Bowser “Red Sentry” enclosed long distance pump that was placed between the lot line and the inside of the curb. On 12/16/1913 Council [which under the new Commissioner form of government was reduced from 9 people to 3] refused to give permission to the Durango Ford Car Agency Company to place a Bowser gasoline pump on the sidewalk in front of their garage at 945 Main Ave., said pump to have been for use of general public in filling the tanks of their automobiles with gasoline. The minutes, as is often the case with minutes, do not explain *why* they rejected the company’s request. On 3/30/1915 Council gave Durango Novelty Works permission to put in a 4 barrel gasoline tank in the street fronting their store on 8th Street, to be used in connection with a pump to be installed on the curb, but it had to be installed under the supervision of the Mayor with regard to safety.

Topics we would not experience nowadays:

Sprinkling city streets; manually at first, then in 1901 using a Studebaker street sprinkler that was pulled by a horse in harness (see minutes of 5/21/1901 and 6/4/1901).

Weighing-scales in the city streets – a keyword search for “public scale” will draw you into many City Council meetings that addressed this issue.

Milk inspection by the City: On 9/15/1914 (page 486 of the Council meeting minutes) upon recommendation of City Milk Inspector (and Health Officer) Hobby, the City Clerk issued dairy licenses to Mrs. W. B. Canley, M. Connor, Charles Couray, Clark Craven, John Thomas, R. E. Thompson, Garrett Wall and Waters and Kolz. No license had yet been issued to the San Juan Creamery Co. pending compliance with the Milk Inspector’s demands for further improvements in the creamery.

In 1895 the City agreed to reimburse Mr. and Mrs. G. A. Scoville for **lace curtains damaged** when rocks flew from the streets when the City was blasting (see minutes 7/2/1895, page 468)—but on condition that they give the City the damaged curtains. Good thing their windows were open at the time!

Columbian Island, AKA Columbus Island, retail liquor license granted, 1893, on condition of installation of metallic enclosed box for water closet and police access.

Permission to **cut grass in city parks for personal use** (minutes of 6/21/1898, page 383).

Stables at City Hall (1898) and Fire Department (3/7/1899).

In the early days there was free delivery of City mail within Durango, provided that the City would add about 19 street lights to those already in place (5/23/1899).

Citizens’ protest re: manner of **disposal of waste water from steam laundries** (7/22/1896, 8/7/1900, 3/4/1902).

The need to employ someone to wind the **Town Clock** (9/5/1899, 3/20/1900 and 4/3/1900).

Interesting topics to research in the early ordinances:

O-1905-0418: Prohibiting free speech without a permit.

O-1915-0528: Need for a woman’s comfort station [described in the minutes in 1915 starting at the Council meeting of 4/20/1915, page 533; it was located on the south portion of the first floor in the Century Building on Main Avenue, 6/15/1915, page 549].

O-1895-0286: Only the women who were frequenting bawdy houses were fined.

O-1918-0557: Requiring all males ages 18 to 55 to engage in some useful occupation.

O-1918-0558: Forbidding speaking German in Durango during the War.

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Study questions for school children:

- 1) Why were so many persons interested in being the **City Scavenger**? What did the job entail? What did it pay? How did Michael Tierney (the first one with that title) do? What can you tell about him from the mentions of him in the early City Council minutes? Why was he awarded the City Scavenger contract, years later (see minutes of 6/6/1899, 6/4/1901, and 4/23/1903), considering the City's previous experience of his work? On 7/7/1899 Tierney was reported as neglecting his duty, not promptly removing dead animals and chickens from City limits. He was cited again on 5/6/1902 (after having been hired again despite his previous poor work record), and again on 2/16/1904 and 3/1/1904 (pages 10-11).
- 2) Why do you think the City took no steps to prevent the establishment and maintenance of **bawdy houses and "theatres"** that were the venues for promiscuous activity in the first decades of the City of Durango? (Do a keyword search for Clipper Theatre.)
- 3) **Water and sanitation** have been perennial issues and the source of great expense and debt for the City of Durango. Explain why this is so. What were or are the particular challenges of Durango in terms of providing an ample supply of pure drinking water to the city? (for instance, see Minutes Book 5, page 153, of 3/5/1901 minutes, and pages 302-307 of 8/5/1902 minutes). [Hint: do a keyword search of the City Council minutes for the terms "gravity system water supply" and "pump".] Why did the City use a Chemist and Metallurgist (3/19/1901) as a consultant to study the water quality of the Animas and Florida rivers? If you had been the City Engineer in the 1880s - 1900s, what would you have recommended as the best and most efficient means of providing pure drinking water and for disposing of wastes?
- 4) Why **1897 was a rock-bottom year** for the City of Durango? For starters, look up these issues in that year's City Council minutes: depression, depleted treasury, great indebtedness, inability to fund its bonds, difficulty paying current bills, spending money nonetheless for non-essentials, law suits against the City, embezzlement by the City Clerk (53 ballots cast at one Council meeting in a failed attempt to choose his successor on 11/17/1897), etc.
- 5) Produce a table of the **monthly total of bills allowed in 1900** (or of some other year after that), and convert those figures to today's dollars. The first Council meeting of each month decided the previous month's bills and claims for payment. To compute this, see the inflation calculator at this Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis page: <https://www.minneapolisfed.org/about-us/monetary-policy/inflation-calculator> The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' consumer price index calculator at http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm only goes back to 1913. What were the two largest single expenses for the City government each month?
- 6) Why was it such an **important matter for a railroad to have City water**? (11/3/1897, 10/16/1900, 11/10/1900; hint, read page 101 of Minutes Book 5).
- 7) [Leopold Van Ranke](#) (1795-1896), the father of modern history, pioneered using administrative primary source records to write history from the bottom up. (During the same period that Durango was being formed, he was writing the history of the popes, using government clerks' records in the Vatican as some of his sources.) You can do the same, using City of Durango records. What can you deduce about the character of **George Goodman** from the evidence in the early City Council minutes? What are the possible advantages to using City minutes for biographical research, as opposed to using newspaper articles?
- 8) Considering that the US Government had just released its **1900 census** reports, why did the City Council pass Ordinance No. O-1900-0341 instructing its City Clerk to conduct a "Census and

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- Enumeration of All the Inhabitants of the City of Durango” at once? (11/20/1900, 12/4/1900, 1/2/1901)
- 9) Do a keyword search of the City Council minutes and ordinances for the word **franchise**. For what types of services did the City grant franchises? Why did it grant franchises rather than allowing for free-market competition for the provision of those services?
 - 10) What is the proper **role of morals in City Government**? Comment on several of the City ordinances pertaining to moral behavior of citizens of Durango. Whose standard of morals should be followed? What would become of a city if no moral standards were upheld by city government?
 - 11) Why were so many **City ordinances** adopted in 1901 (31 of them -- Nos. 352 through 382)? Conversely, why were only 5 ordinances (Nos. 303 through 306) adopted in 1897?
 - 12) Describe the City and County’s method for dealing with **contagious diseases**. What do you think of the name, Pest House?
 - 13) **City Clerk W. H. Moore** evidently took pride in his work. Not only would he highlight key terms in red in his minutes, and write key terms in the left-hand margin (though scavenger was invariably misspelled scavenger there even though it was spelled correctly in the minutes), sometimes he would do a bit of artwork. Look at the color image on page 196, minutes of 8/20/1901 – what word do the letters spell out?
 - 14) **Bicycles** have always been big at the City of Durango (though never as big as the wheel sculpture in front of City Hall). What was the minimum fine for someone caught riding a bike on a public sidewalk in 1892? To find the answer at <http://durangogov.org/Records> you will select the Search Type **Ordinances-INDEXED SEARCH** and narrow the date range to end 1/1/1893 (leave the From start date empty) enter ***bicycle*** [with the asterisks] in the Ordinance Title (or in the Subject box) to retrieve this search result (Ordinance O-1892-0258). More than 2,500 City of Durango ordinances, dating from 1883 to present, are accessible to you and to anyone who has Web access. Now, figure how much that fine would be in **today’s** dollars. You *could* use the US Bureau of Labor Statistics’ handy online consumer price index calculator at http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm but it only goes back to the year 1913, so instead you will have to use the formula at this Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis page: <https://www.minneapolisfed.org/about-us/monetary-policy/inflation-calculator>
 - 15) **The First Amendment** to the US Constitution is the first of the ten items of the Bill of Rights. One of the things the First Amendment does is prevents Congress from making a law that abridges the freedom of speech. In other words, federal government officials cannot censor the speech of people in the U.S. What ordinance did the Durango City Council pass in 1905 that relates to this issue? [Hint: the early handwritten City of Durango ordinances are only keyword searchable by words in the actual title of the ordinance. For this one, the word “speech” won’t get you anywhere but the word “speaking” will.] Questions of the constitutionality of this ordinance and a related 1918 ordinance (prohibiting speaking German during the Great War) are outside the scope of this exercise. Was this 1905 ordinance ever repealed?

Compiled 12/23/2009 by Todd Ellison, Records Administrator, Office of the City Clerk (updated 5/18/2020)

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For further reading online, see <http://durangogov.org/Records>

(do a Subject or Title search of the **Histories-INDEXED SEARCH** Search Type)

These and other titles are freely available and keyword searchable:

- Interesting Historical Facts about Durango, by Todd Ellison, 2013 (12 pages)
- Durango...Your Hometown: A primer for 3rd graders and up, by Todd Ellison (updated annually) (32 pages)
- Money-Saving Lessons from Durango Municipal Court Case Records, by Todd Ellison, 2011 (32 pages)
- Nine Ways the City of Durango Supports Bicycling, and Nine Durango Biking Laws, 2012 (12 pages)
- Introduction to Historical Minutes and Ordinances of the City of Durango, by Todd Ellison, 2009 (11 pages)
- Historical List of Officials of the City of Durango, Colorado, from 1881 to current, by Todd Ellison (15 pp.)
- Historical Chronology of City Councilors, Mayor, and Mayor Pro Tem, 1881 to current (15 pages)
- Two biographical walking tours of Greenmount Cemetery: Highlights tour, and Spanish Flu-era burials tour
- Durango's Response to Infectious Diseases, 1881-1929, by Todd Ellison, 2020 (20 pages)
- A Brief Chronology of the City of Durango's Airports, by Todd Ellison, 2020 (16 pages)
- Centennial Durango 1880-1980, written by Marjorie Wells, photos by John Hughes (19 pages)
- Chronology of Land Use Code Revision Process for City of Durango, 1980-1989 (3 pages)
- History of the City of Durango Vending Ordinance, 1982-1991 (5 pages)
- A Walk through History: Main Avenue Durango between 5th and 11th Streets (8 pages)
- Walking Tour of "The Boulevard," Historic East Third Avenue, described by house number (2 pages)
- Movie and T.V. Films Shot in the Durango, Colorado area, 1917-1974 (9 pages)
- Durango Power Plant History Chronology, 1885-1949+ (23 pages)
- History of Library Funding, 1900-1981, by Maxine Hoeffner (11 pages)
- History of the Durango Public Library, by Mary C. Ayres, 1947 (11 pages)
- History of City Parks as Reflected in City Council Minutes, 1888-1988 (47 pages)
- History of Hillcrest Golf Course, from Records and Past City Council Meetings, 1932-1981 (1 page)
- Durango's 1895 D&RGW Baldwin C-18 Locomotive No. 315 History and Newspaper Clippings (22 pages)
- Durango's Living History: An Anthology on Local Historic Preservation, compilation of monthly columns in the *Durango Herald* by Duane Smith, Jan. 1995 - April 1996 (32 pages), and compiled by members of Durango's Historic Preservation Board, Aug. 1992 - Nov. 1993 (21 pages)
- Durango Temperature and Precipitation Summary Data, 1894-2001 (4 pages)

Also online, thousands of City of Durango primary source documents:

- City **Ordinances** (more than 3,100 of them, from 1881 to current).
- City Council **Resolutions** (more than 2,400 of them, from 1944 to current).
- **Minutes** of more than 11,000 meetings of City Council, City boards and commissions, from 1881 to current.
- **Agendas** of more than 6,000 meetings of City Council, City boards and commissions, from 1978 to current.
- **Plans, reports and studies** that were produced for the City, 1956-current (nearly 300).