

History Comes Alive!

Tales From the City Archives



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First CAO Sam Leask Sought 'More Service for Less Money'

From 1951 to 1961, Samuel J. Leask Jr. became the first City Administrative Officer for Los Angeles. But the institution of administrative management for the City began back in September 1916, by ordinance as the Efficiency Commission. With the 1925 Charter, the office became known as the Bureau of Budget and Efficiency. The Bureau was under the direction of a director appointed by the Mayor under the civil service provisions of the Charter.

Formal City management of administrative affairs

dates back to the City's first Charter, mandated by the State in 1878. Two important changes occurred. The first was when the City Auditor became an individual office. Prior to that, the president of the Common Council held those duties. This accounting official, elected by the Council, was in charge of the City fiscal books, countersigned warrants, issued licenses and prepared fiscal estimates for the following year. The second became a reality when department heads were mandated to turn in an annual report of actions occurring within in their domain for the prior year.

Another major step in the management of administration came in the City's first home-rule Charter of 1889. For the first time, department heads were mandated to account for all purchases and expenditures within their offices. Budgeting as a citywide procedure was in its infancy.

In the new Charter of 1925, the term Auditor changed to Controller. Also, the above mentioned Efficiency Commission became The Bureau of Budget and Efficiency. The 1955 Master's Thesis of the future Los Angeles Harbor General Manager, Fred G. Crawford, noted the duties of the Director of this Bureau were "[to] investigate the administration, methods, standards of efficiency, and duties of positions in various departments of the City, and ...to make recommendations to the Mayor and the Council that would result in improved economy and efficiency in the conduct of City government."

In 1928, a Charter amendment added a Special Salary Committee, of which the Director was to become a member. New duties were added to the Salary Standardization Ordinance in 1945, where the Director was to receive copies or recommendations from the Civil Service Commissioners to the City Council. The Director's staff researched the recommendations and reported to Council, as well as any other assignments given by the legislative body.

During that decade other additional duties for the Director included making "an annual survey of salaries and wages paid in a representative sample of business establishments and governmental agencies in the Los Angeles...area" that had comparable positions. Also, an "amendment required requests for new or additional positions to be referred to the Director for report[s] and recommendation[s] to the Personnel Committee of the Council." Other amendments to fine-tune

the Director's involvement with the Salary Standardization Ordinance and the needs of the City Council continued.



Samuel Leask Jr., the City's first Chief Accounting Officer.

But the new decade, the 1950s, abolished the Director position. May 29, 1951, a Charter amendment created the position of the City Administrative Officer. The position duties were elevated to having "administrative and executive ability demonstrated by five years of experience at that level of employment within ten years immediately preceding his appointment." The

City Administrative Officer was appointed by the Mayor subject to the approval of the Council. The duties of the new position were monumental and ever changing. Samuel J. Leask Jr. became the first City Administrative Officer.

When appointed to the new post of City Administrative Officer (CAO) March 14, 1951, by Mayor Fletcher Bowron, Samuel Leask Jr. had accrued a formidable background as a government administrator and business executive prior to his new position. He officially became CAO June 15, 1951, and served in that position until June 30, 1961. His past responsibilities included being Vice President of the May Department Stores from 1938-42; he held the same position for the J.W. Robinson Stores from 1942-51. During that time he was also President of the California Retailers Association. His government involvement included a state appointment to the new Unemployment Insurance Program and a federal position in the Advisory Council of the U.S. Employment Service in the 1930s, and during World War II he was the Southern California Director of Price Administration.

Sam Leask Jr. was born March 5, 1894, in Santa Cruz, Calif. He grew up in a family of retail merchants. His father, Samuel Leask Sr., born in Scotland, was a tradesman in the wool and garment business. Sam Jr. worked for his father from the time he left grammar school in 1908. Leask Sr., who owned a Santa Cruz department store, the Seaside Store, gave Sam Jr. the impetus for his understanding of sustained, proper management skills. The store was so viable it remained in business for 81 years.

Young Sam, under the tutelage of his father and other staff members, was trained to learn the trade of merchandising. From Sam Jr.'s book, *The Work of a Lifetime*, he notes, "In line with his viewpoint on career development, my father decided that it would be good for me to pursue my store training for two or three years before going to high school...he [then] installed me as a Buyer for Linens and White Goods at age fourteen." In 1911, his formal high school education continued at the famed Harvard Prep School in Los Angeles.

After graduation from Harvard School, he attended school in Brussels, Belgium. Then with his dad and brother, Haswell, he toured Europe. The trip was cut short because of the onset of World War I. Upon returning home, Sam Jr. went to San Francisco to train at an upscale store for women. Once again, his mentors provided him with excellent practical knowledge of the trade and management skills. Sam remained at the quality store until his father called him home to solve executive staff issues that were causing major problems in the Santa Cruz operation. Sam Jr., much younger than the staff, was able to ameliorate the problems. Samuel J. Leask Jr. was on his management way. He then entered World War I where he served as a lieutenant in the United States Cavalry.

When Samuel J. Leask Jr. entered the world of Los Angeles city government as the first CAO, he brought varied and extensive management skills that offered the municipal organization new and profound skills to this monumental position.

centralized direction and coordination...necessary to secure upper limit of efficiency and economy of operation." He continued, "Some mechanism had to be devised which would bring the operating departments more fully under central control."

Sam Leask Jr. maintained he was no politician. His primary concern was devoted to providing more efficiency as to more service for less money for the City of Los Angeles and its citizens. With all this in mind, he also claimed that it was imperative "that one cannot ignore the individuals in an organization in an all-out drive for efficiency." He continued that it was necessary for employees to participate in the new provisions. One of his first recommendations was to increase the salaries of policemen and firemen to that of other employee groups within City government.

He also believed in realigning the City's budget system from a "line budget" to that of a "functional budget." The functional budget was broad-based. It would look at similar functions found throughout the City.

For example, swimming pools, where better budget control and planning would become more efficient.

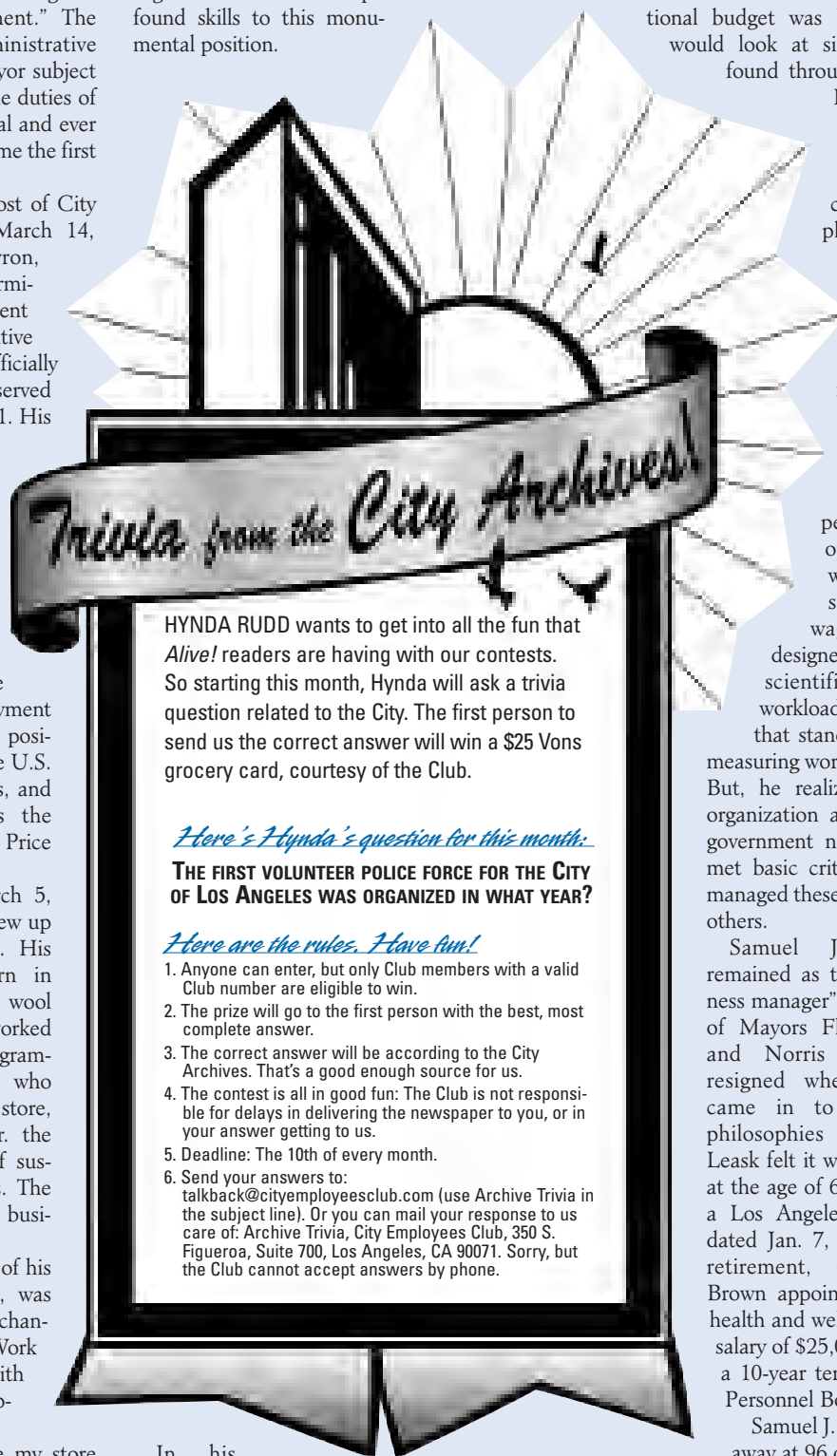
One of the most important issues he dealt with was employee salaries. At that time, 85 percent of the operating budget was dedicated to salaries and wages.

He designed a program of scientific appraisal of workloads. He claimed that standards be set for measuring work accomplished. But, he realized that in an organization as large as City government not all functions met basic criterion. He, too, managed these issues as he did others.

Samuel J. Leask Jr. remained as the City's "business manager" under the aegis of Mayors Fletcher Bowron and Norris Poulson. He resigned when Sam Yorty came in to office. Their philosophies differed, and Leask felt it was time to leave at the age of 67. According to a Los Angeles Times article dated Jan. 7, 1963, upon his retirement, Governor Pat Brown appointed Leask to a health and welfare post with a salary of \$25,000, and then to a 10-year term on the State Personnel Board.

Samuel J. Leask Jr. passed away at 96 on May 8, 1990.

He had hoped he would live as long as his father, who passed away at 102. In his obituary it was noted that his proudest accomplishment was helping to bring the Brooklyn Dodgers to the City of Los Angeles.



HYNDA RUDD wants to get into all the fun that *Alive!* readers are having with our contests. So starting this month, Hynda will ask a trivia question related to the City. The first person to send us the correct answer will win a \$25 Vons grocery card, courtesy of the Club.

Here's Hynda's question for this month:

THE FIRST VOLUNTEER POLICE FORCE FOR THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES WAS ORGANIZED IN WHAT YEAR?

Here are the rules. Have fun!

1. Anyone can enter, but only Club members with a valid Club number are eligible to win.
2. The prize will go to the first person with the best, most complete answer.
3. The correct answer will be according to the City Archives. That's a good enough source for us.
4. The contest is all in good fun: The Club is not responsible for delays in delivering the newspaper to you, or in your answer getting to us.
5. Deadline: The 10th of every month.
6. Send your answers to: talkback@cityemployeesclub.com (use Archive Trivia in the subject line). Or you can mail your response to us care of: Archive Trivia, City Employees Club, 350 S. Figueroa, Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90071. Sorry, but the Club cannot accept answers by phone.

In his book, *Leask Jr.* made the observation about his impending responsibilities as CAO. He concluded that City administration had the same problems he witnessed when he joined the J.W. Robinson Company. Both suffered from "less