

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

*Growing Up
in St. Paul
My Family and La Nuova Vita*

Eugene A. Rancone
—Page 10

Fall 2013

Volume 48, Number 3

Five Firemen Buried Under Falling Walls

Remembering Heroes: The Midway Transfer Fire of 1900

Patrick L. Shannon

Page 3



The Firefighters' Memorial, Oakland Cemetery, St. Paul, on a cloudy October day. This is where three of the five firefighters who died in the Midway fire of 1900 are buried. In 1868 the Firemen's Association purchased six lots at Oakland Cemetery for the burial of members who were killed while fighting fires. Later more lots were added. Then in 1890 identical bronze memorials designed by William A. Van Slyke were installed at Oakland and Calvary cemeteries to honor these heroes. For more on the Midway fire and the men who died fighting it, see page 3. Photo courtesy of Patrick L. Shannon.

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RAMSEY COUNTY History

Volume 48, Number 3

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THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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The Ramsey County Historical Society inspires current and future generations
to learn from and value their history by engaging in a diverse program
of presenting, publishing and preserving.

CONTENTS

- 3 *Five Firemen Buried Under Falling Walls*
Remembering Heroes: The Midway Transfer Fire of 1900
Patrick L. Shannon
- 10 *Growing Up in St. Paul*
My Family and *La Nuova Vita*
Eugene A. Rancone
- 21 *Present at the Creation*
The Turbulent Sixties and Seventies in St. Paul Politics
Ruby M. Hunt

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and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon*

A Message from the Editorial Board

Sometimes, history reminds us that we are fortunate to live in a later age. In this issue, Patrick Shannon's story of the great Midway fire of 1900 recounts how five firemen perished in the blaze that consumed the wooden interior of the McCormick Harvester Building. No smoke alarms or sprinkler systems were present, and the ill-placed hydrants lacked enough water to adequately supply the horse-drawn hose wagons. On the other hand, some stories are timeless. Gene Rancone's tale of growing up in St. Paul in a strong Italian family stresses the hard work and family bonds that can still strengthen the resolve of a young person finding his way in the world. And, of course, politics is always with us. Ruby Hunt, an articulate former St. Paul City Council member, gives us an insider's view of the infamous Rosalie Butler–Milton Rosen feud that made newspaper headlines in the 1960s and '70s. Maybe those times were not "the thrilling days of yesteryear," as the Lone Ranger might have it, but their stories make for a lively read today.

If you value *Ramsey County History* and want to ensure it continues to publish interesting and colorful stories of the people and events that have shaped our community's history, then please make a contribution to the Ramsey County Historical Society's Annual Appeal. You can either send your gift to RCHS at 323 Landmark Center, 75 Fifth Street West, St. Paul, MN 55102 or call RCHS at (651) 222-0701. We appreciate your help.

Anne Cowie,
Chair, Editorial Board

Present at the Creation

The Turbulent Sixties and Seventies in St. Paul Politics

Ruby M. Hunt

The sixties and seventies were turbulent times in St. Paul politics. Two flamboyant people played dominant roles in the business of the City Council and the contests for mayor. One was Rosalie Butler, who drew standing-room-only attendance at City Council meetings with her charges of corruption against a seated council member. The other was Charlie McCarty, who sued the city and won his case with the Minnesota Supreme Court. Both took the time to study the city's budget and finances. Both were often viewed as persistent gadflies, especially when questions arose over how tax dollars were spent. One political activist, Todd Lefko, said this of Rosalie: "She was loved, respected, hated, loathed and feared. There were no neutral observers of Rosalie Butler."¹

I was an observer and participant in this exciting period of St. Paul politics.

The tempestuous times all started in the mid-sixties on Summit Avenue, that stately thoroughfare in St. Paul stretching from St. Thomas University on the western edge of the city to the Cathedral on the east. The governor's mansion is on this avenue and Karl Rolvaag was then the governor. His long-time political ally and DFL (Democratic Farmer Labor) crony, Walter Butler, a wealthy contractor, bought the house next door to the governor's residence and moved in with his second wife, Rosalie. Because Rosalie had a distinct affinity for the color white, naturally their stately brick home was also painted white.

Another significant resident of Summit Avenue was Milton Rosen, owner of a tire store and 28-year-member of the St. Paul City Council. Rosen was a popular member of the Council. He belonged to many community organizations and attended many neighborhood meetings. At elections when voters were to select six Council members, he was always the top vote getter.

While driving to work one snowy morning, Rosen noticed that the snowplow cleaning the governor's sidewalk had also plowed the Butlers' sidewalk. Rosen,



Rosalie Butler. Photo courtesy of the St. Paul Pioneer Press, September 1, 1970.

seasoned politician that he was, decided this was a great opportunity for some publicity for himself. So, a newspaper story appeared the next day reporting on this probable misuse of government equipment and the governor's favoritism shown to a political buddy.

Walter Butler, not to be outdone, did a little research with some of his political cronies and found, allegedly, that Rosen had had his car repaired in the Public Works garage. Rosen happened to be in charge of that department. Under the commission form of government that was then the law in St. Paul, every member of the City Council also headed a department (Public Works, Education, Public Safety, and so on) and had complete control of its operation. It was the Council member's own fiefdom, so to speak.²

This is when Rosalie Butler emerged. To the best of my knowledge, no one in St. Paul had ever heard of her before. Some believed that she had come from

Florida. We soon found that Rosalie was charismatic, intelligent, good looking, and wore very stylish clothes. She donned her white fur coat and attractive white fur pillbox hat and marched down to City Hall to appear before the City Council with the damning information that Rosen had had his car repaired in the Public Works garage. Of course, husband Walter had alerted members of the press and they were all there.

After a little flurry of excitement, not much seemed to come of either event at that time, but Rosalie had found her niche. She had a commanding presence when entering a room. Everyone turned to look at her and there were usually several reporters following her. She became a regular attendee at City Council meetings and a watchdog and critic of city government, particularly its budgeting and spending practices.

Rosalie's name appeared regularly in the newspapers where she was always referred to as Mrs. Walter Butler. (According to the Associated Press Style Book at that time, all married women were referred to by their husband's first names.) As a consequence, her name soon became well known and she developed a corps of loyal supporters. Unfazed by her celebrity, Rosalie used every opportunity she had to criticize Rosen, and she and Walter said that their goal was to get him out of public office. This continued with a bitter feud, a war of words, recriminations, and lawsuits.

In the meantime, the Minnesota state accounting office determined that the sidewalk on the other side of the governor's mansion was also being plowed. It was on the property of the American Association of University Women. The plowing had been done on all three sidewalks to make it easier for people going to meetings or gatherings at the

governor's mansion to get there. The extra cost to the state was minimal, so the accounting office decided to charge each property owner 25 cents.³

Newspaper stories about Rosalie appeared on a regular basis. A *Pioneer Press* reporter wrote, "A well-worn phrase 'you can't fight city hall' fell apart Monday as a St. Paul housewife dug deep into city records. She was escorted to the basement to a cubicle bound by steel wire. Mrs. Butler was followed by a dozen or more news writers and TV cameramen. She examined many books with little success. TV men with cameras aimed at her fur trimmed hat, alabaster knit wool suit, and smiling face, (she had discarded her black leather gloves) and took foot after foot of film, some silent, some on sound."⁴ While this extensive description of a woman's clothing in a news story would be frowned upon today, at that time it was part of Rosalie's persona.

Another story reported that Rosalie had appeared before the City Council charging that Rosen had been engaged in extortion and shakedown. She also claimed that contractors had been required to buy tires from the Rosen firm in order to get city jobs.⁵

St. Paul readers followed every detail of the conflict. There were boos and applause at a Council session as Rosalie and Rosen exchanged words with a show of hot temper and accusations. However, no progress was made in settling the conflict because the Council suddenly adjourned and left Rosalie standing at the podium.⁶

One day in a conversation with a TV reporter, Rosalie complained that Rosen had used city employees to paint his home on Summit Avenue. "That's absolutely not true," Rosen said. "I have had my house painted in and out by one firm, Shelgren and Co."⁷ Rosalie also pointed out that Rosen and other Council members had had poinsettia plants sent to their friends at Christmas at the city's expense. Apparently a number of city employees were bringing information to Butler that she found helpful in her efforts to discredit Rosen.

The saga in the press continued. At one session, the Council chamber was like a movie or TV studio with many TV



St. Paul City Council Member Milton Rosen at his desk in the 1960s. Photo courtesy of the Milton Rosen Photo Collection, Ramsey County Historical Society.

cameras on tripods competing for space while busy newspaper photographers aimed their cameras and bright lights at the City Council. The atmosphere in the room became so charged at times that some people involved in the actions were considering insurance to protect themselves from possible lawsuits.⁸

In her next move, Rosalie bought a copy of the city charter and went to see William Randall, Ramsey County Attorney, to learn the correct procedures for pressing charges.⁹ She then went to the City Council and, citing Rosen's misuse of government facilities, asked that he be removed from office according to Section 55 of the city charter.

Mayor George J. Vavoulis, who had been a local florist before his election as mayor in 1960, told Rosalie she had to put her charges in writing and that he would not consider hearsay. Before submitting written information, Rosalie asked for assurance from the mayor and Rosen that employees would be protected from harassment or discharge if they testified. They both agreed.¹⁰

Steven Maxwell, who was then the attorney for the city (his official title in the charter was "Corporation Counsel"), said the City Council chamber is not a place for a hearing for removal, but that evidence should first go to the mayor, who in turn would refer it to the city attorney. The city attorney would then determine if the matter should proceed under Section

59 of the city charter or go to the grand jury. Rosalie said she did not want the matter to go to the grand jury since the grand jury operates in secret, and she wanted this matter out in the open.¹¹

At her next appearance before the City Council, Butler presented an envelope containing a picture of a car on a hoist with its muffler and tailpipe on the floor. She charged that Rosen had city employees in the Public Works garage replace the muffler and tailpipe on his personal auto. Rosen maintained the car was only there for evaluation, that he took it to a private garage for repairs and produced a receipt marked "paid." Rosen then said he would sue Mrs. Butler for slander and defamation of character.¹² Rosalie Butler wasted no time in responding to Mayor Vavoulis's request to put her charges against Rosen in writing.

After considering the documents she submitted, Mayor Vavoulis reported to the City Council that he was not impressed with Butler's charges or her witnesses. One of Rosalie's witnesses was Mike McLaughlin, who had allegedly taken photos of Rosen's car in the Public Works garage. McLaughlin was by far the most visible DFL activist in the city. He had been the manager of the Byrne campaign when Thomas R. Byrne ran for mayor against Vavoulis in the most recent election. Byrne had lost that 1964 contest by 173 votes, and was now running against Vavoulis again in the election

to be held April 28th. The two Public Works department employees, named by Rosalie, said they did not agree to appear as witnesses.¹³

A day later Mayor Vavoulis said, "There will be no more Butler-Rosen squabbles in the City Council chambers. I'm going to put a stop to it." Rosalie was home ill with a fever, but her husband, Walter, appeared in the City Council chambers and made no comment. When asked by a reporter how long the controversy would go on, Butler said, "As my wife has said before, until she gets Rosen out of office."¹⁴

The Rosalie-Rosen feud provided many columns of copy for the local newspapers. Donald Geise of the *Pioneer Press* reported, "A verbal slugfest between Mrs. Butler and Milton Rosen moved to the Athletic Club. 'She called me a degenerate, rotten, dirty old man,' Rosen said. Butler said it was the result of evil remarks he made and threatened to punch him in the nose. Then Rosen thumbed his nose at her and left."¹⁵

A few days later, City Attorney Stephen Maxwell issued his legal opinion saying there was no proof of Rosen's wrongdoing and Butler's charges against Rosen were not substantiated. He also found that a local contractor, Andrew Tschida, who, Rosalie claimed, had had to buy \$95,000 to \$100,000 worth of tires to get city contracts, would not provide a sworn statement.¹⁶

Undeterred, Rosalie came up with a new tactic. She invited local businessmen to join her at the Athletic Club for information about her campaign against Rosen. There were widespread rumors about businesses having to buy their tires from Rosen if they wanted to do business with the city. About 38 businessmen attended, many of whom refused to identify themselves to the press.¹⁷ Many observers were impressed that so many businessmen would attend and felt Rosalie must have some very compelling evidence even though she could not get sworn statements from the individuals she named.

The feud continued with a startling new development. George McCormick, of the *Pioneer Press*, wrote, "Rosen is suing Butler for damages, \$150,000, for slander and defamation of character. It was filed

a day after his appearance at a Kiwanis Club meeting. There he launched a tirade against Butler and her husband. He used unprintable words and terms witnesses said."¹⁸ In another news account a few months later, Jim McCartney, *Pioneer Press* reporter, wrote that at the Kiwanis meeting, Rosen had called Rosalie "a two-bit whore from Miami."¹⁹

The next day Rosen's deputy, William Behrens Jr., appeared before the Council and apologized for Rosen's outburst. He said Rosen was ill and in Midway hospital for an indefinite period of rest and treatment.²⁰ A few days later Rosalie went to St. Joseph's Hospital for treatment for what her husband described as a "blocked kidney."²¹

Butler, however, soon returned to the fray and took action to sue. Her lawsuit was for a million dollars against Rosen for remarks he allegedly made at a recent meeting of the Kiwanis Club. The lawsuit was in the form of an answer and counterclaim to a slander suit that had been started earlier by Rosen. In the latter, Rosen had charged Rosalie with calling

him a "phony, old hypocrite." His suit sought damages of \$150,000. Also mentioned in the lawsuit was the meeting between the two in the Athletic Club lobby where Rosen claimed Rosalie told him he had a "dirty, rotten, degenerate mind." Rosalie, never at a loss for words, did not hesitate to use colorful, pithy language.²²

Now it was time for the city election on April 28. Mayor Vavoulis, Rosen, and the Council members all filed for reelection in 1966. Twelve candidates were running at large for the City Council, with the top six to be elected. When the votes were counted, Rosen came in last. In the race for mayor, Tom Byrne defeated George Vavoulis. Vavoulis and Rosen ran as Independents (Republicans always ran as Independents because St. Paul was a predominantly DFL town). Since Tom Byrne was a DFLer, and Rosalie, though fiercely independent, considered herself a DFLer, party politics undoubtedly played a role in the election. With the help of St. Paul voters, Butler achieved her goal of getting Rosen out of office.

Having been on the City Council for



Mayor George Vavoulis, left, and Milton Rosen, who headed St. Paul's Public Works Department, at the April 1963 dedication of a plaque near the entrance to Fountain Cave on the bluffs of the Mississippi River between downtown and Fort Snelling. The jug that the mayor is holding was alleged to have contained whiskey sold by Pierre "Pig's Eye" Parrant when he lived at Fountain Cave in 1838. Photo courtesy of the Milton Rosen Photo Collection, Ramsey County Historical Society.

twenty-eight years and now upon leaving office with more time to spend in his tire business, Rosen made his last pitch to the public and ran the following ad in the newspaper:

YOU RETIRED ME,
LET ME RE-TIRE YOU.

Soon after leaving office, Rosen began suffering from failing health. He was in the hospital for several weeks with a circulatory problem which led to surgery to amputate both legs. He died September 1, 1970.²³ Butler subsequently withdrew her lawsuit against Rosen and when asked why, she said, "The greatest jury in the world gave its verdict last spring."²⁴ Her fearless, feisty participation in public life was not, however, over.

Rosalie Runs for Mayor

Butler was ready for a new challenge. She had developed a keen grasp of the city budget and an in-depth knowledge of city government. She was often seen pouring over the city's records in the archives of the Minnesota Historical Society. Because Rosalie had a loyal following and a lot of visibility as a consequence of her lengthy, contentious battle with Milton Rosen, she decided to run for mayor against Tom Byrne, the incumbent, in the 1968 election.

There was, however, another citizen on the scene who also understood the city budget better than many. That was Charles P. (Charlie) McCarty. He would play a pivotal role in the election. Charlie was a real estate broker and also a critic and gadfly of city government. He appeared before the council almost daily and initiated what became to be known as the "snow suit." In his study of the city budget, McCarty found no money had been allocated in the budget for snow plowing. Instead the City Council would declare an emergency and pay for snow plowing from a separate emergency fund that was available.

McCarty maintained that everyone knows it snows in Minnesota in the winter, so it's not an emergency, and money should be put in the budget for snow plowing. The City Council refused to listen to Charlie; so he decided to sue. Since he was not a man of means, he convinced two attorney friends, Jim Miley and Terry



Mayor Charles P. McCarty.
Photo courtesy of the
Minneapolis Tribune,
November 26, 1970.

O'Toole, to represent him pro bono. Charlie won his case in Ramsey County District Court. The City Council decided to appeal the ruling, but the Minnesota Supreme Court dismissed the appeal. As a result, Charlie won both the initial case and the subsequent appeal, which forced the city to change the way it budgeted for snow plowing.²⁵ Hence, Charlie, too, made quite a name for himself and developed many followers.

This set the stage for an exciting time in St. Paul politics with two very well-known characters and critics of local government playing key roles in the race for mayor. Tom Byrne, a former public school administrator, was running for reelection to his second term as mayor and had the endorsement of the DFL. Butler was running as an Independent.

When filing for public office, it is customary to list one's qualifications. One of Rosalie's qualifications was that she graduated from high school in Indianapolis, Indiana. Charlie with his ongoing interest in local politics, and with some encouragement from the Byrne campaign, decided to check out Rosalie's background in Indianapolis, where she was raised, and in Miami, where she lived prior to moving to St. Paul.²⁶

When Charlie returned from his investigation on a Sunday night in early 1968, he called me and asked to come over to my house and show me the results of his research. The record showed that Rosalie had attended, but did not graduate, from high school. Since I was the chair of the Women for Tom Byrne campaign, Charlie wanted me to release this information to the press.

In hardball politics this is known as "doing a hatchet job." While I thoroughly enjoyed politics, and did not hesitate to play hardball when necessary, this did not fit my persona; so I declined. Since I was

not going to use the information, I did not look at the documents Charlie had with him. Others who did look at them later said that in addition to not graduating from high school, Butler was once picked up for loitering on a public beach and at another time charged with disturbing the peace as a result of domestic spats.²⁷

Charlie then found Jerry Isaacs, a political ally of Tom Byrne, to take this information to the press. The information was circulated among reporters and political activists, but the editor of the *Pioneer Press*, John Finnegan, chose not print it unless it came up at a public meeting. That opportunity arose when Minnesota Public Television had the candidates and press representatives meet in an hour-long program.

Don Boxmeyer, a *Pioneer Press* reporter and panelist that night, asked Rosalie about her high school record. Caught by surprise, Rosalie gave a flustered non-answer. No one remembers what Rosalie said, but many remember what Tom Byrne said, "It doesn't matter that my opponent didn't graduate from high school; many people haven't graduated from high school. What does matter is did she tell the truth?"

Had Rosalie been prepared with an answer for the high school question on the TV program, she could have pointed out that she left high school and went to business school. I can attest to that since we were both proficient in shorthand. As far as I can determine, nothing ever appeared in the newspaper about Rosalie's loitering and other charges in Miami until after her death.

After a spirited primary campaign, Rosalie received over 3,000 more votes than Tom Byrne did. This concerned Byrne's campaign and he made a major effort to overcome her lead. This led to more visible and widespread support for his candidacy from the St. Paul establishment.

Ron Bacigalupo, a fan of Rosalie's, was the obstreperous editor of the *Downtowner*, a biweekly newspaper that circulated in the downtown area with a heavy dose of local, colorful, sometimes caustic, comments on politics. He reported that in the campaign Republicans, the DFL party, labor unions and the Catholic church rallied in support of

Tom Byrne. According to Bacigalupo, Archbishop Leo Binz had even signed his name to a full-page ad on behalf of Byrne. Byrne supporters resurrected the rumors about Rosalie and Miami, Florida. Bacigalupo also maintained that the rumors about Rosalie had been checked out and found to be untrue.²⁸ Bacigalupo implied in his writing that the folks were all ganging up on Rosalie because they were worried about the power she was gaining.

Given this was the 1960s, we need to keep in mind that women had rarely held elective political office in St. Paul. In 1946 Elizabeth DeCourcy had been the first woman to be elected to the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners and in 1956 she established another first when she was elected to the St. Paul City Council. Thus any woman running for mayor, even one whose visibility was as high as Butler's, was going to have a hard time mustering enough votes to win.

According to George Beran, former reporter for the *Pioneer Press*, he and Paul Presbrey, reporter for the *Minneapolis Star*, were engaged in a friendly conversation with Rosalie when she admitted that the charges were generally true. Unfortunately, as the campaign continued, Butler's kidney disease grew more serious, and she underwent a transplant with a kidney donated by an adult son. Rosalie carried on valiantly but lost the election. Tom Byrne won by a two to one margin.

Rosalie's Unintended Legacy

While Rosalie Butler was carrying on her crusade against Milton Rosen, she was unaware that she was exposing the weaknesses and shortcomings in St. Paul's commission form of government. That was her unintended legacy. St. Paul had adopted this form of government in 1912. It was a weak-mayor system with each Council member in total charge of a city department. This power included its hiring, firing, and routine day-to-day operation. The mayor was a member of the City Council and presided at its meetings. The budget, however, was not prepared by the mayor, as is the practice today. Instead the city's comptroller, an elected official, prepared and submitted

it to the City Council. He was by far the most powerful elected official in St. Paul government.

By law, the City Council could only increase or decrease the budget by three percent. Hence there was little, if any, way to establish priorities. No City Council member wanted to take his department's money and give it to another department. There was little accountability, and the system made it possible for unlimited patronage and spoils.

Another problem was the fact that there was no separation of powers. The mayor and City Council members sat as



Rosalie Butler in 1974 when she ran against the incumbent mayor, Lawrence Cohen. Photo courtesy of the St. Paul Dispatch, August 3, 1979.

legislators and passed the laws and then went back to their offices and administered them.

Although the commission system had once been a popular form of local government, by the 1960s more and more cities were abandoning this form of government because it could not meet the needs of a modern city. Cities were growing larger, their transportation needs were often not being addressed, and they needed to improve their planning and development functions to guide future growth.

While a number of insiders had knowledge of the patronage deals that were going on, whistleblowing had not yet come of age. So, when fearless Rosalie had the courage to point out questionable behavior and demand action, many in and

out of government came to her with their grievances. Unfortunately, not one of these insiders was willing to testify for fear of losing his or her job. The same was true of those who had a cozy relationship with a council member and were the recipients of favorable treatment or patronage.

Nevertheless, there was a growing awareness among many associated with the government of the city that something should be done about the structure of government. Two studies had been made recommending changes, but no action had been taken until the St. Paul League of Women Voters served as the catalyst to make something happen. In mid-1966 the League completed a study of St. Paul government led by Beverly Vavoulis and Katie McWatt. The League reached the consensus that a completely new charter was needed.

They proposed that the City Council members should serve as the legislative branch and no longer be in charge of a city department. In addition, the League's plan recommended that the mayor should head the administrative branch of city government and manage all city departments. Professionals should be appointed to head the departments, and the mayor should prepare the budget for approval by the City Council. All this, the League report argued, could be achieved with a strong-mayor form of government.

As president of the League, I presented our recommendation to the Charter Commission, where it was well received. The Charter Commission was composed of fifteen registered voters appointed by the district court judges for four-year terms. Under authority of the home rule amendment to the state constitution, a Charter Commission has the responsibility to propose new charters or amendments deemed necessary for the improvement or structure of local government. The charter is the constitution for the city, listing the city's elected officials and their duties as well as the rights of citizens.

Adelaide Enright, who was then a member of the Commission, went to the district court judges, the appointing body, and said she wanted to resign and would they please appoint me to her seat on the Charter Commission so I could have a hand in drafting a new charter. Shortly

thereafter they also appointed Frances Boyden, the new League president, to the Charter Commission. Eleanor Weber, a League member and an experienced writer and researcher, then was hired by the Commission to work with city staff, headed by Tom Kelley, to draft a new charter incorporating a strong-mayor form of government.

When terms of Charter Commission incumbents expired, the district judges appointed new members of the Commission from the business and labor community as well as academia and prominent civic groups. Thus the Commission members were publicly perceived as representative of a wide range of constituencies within the city. Confident of their mandate, the Commission members drafted a new charter and readied it for presentation to the voters.

The proposed new charter had widespread support throughout the community. The incumbent mayor, Tom Byrne, and the five living former mayors, George Vavoulis, John Daubney, Joseph Dillon, Edward Delaney, and John McDonough, all supported the adoption of the new charter. City Council members, on the other hand, sat quietly by and had little comment on the question because they were reluctant to give up their departments.

Although all the members of the Charter Commission took part in carrying the message to their constituencies, Howard Guthmann, a member of the Commission, did the yeoman's job of meeting with dozens of community groups to explain the proposed charter and why voters needed to support it.

In an early December 1966 editorial, the *Minneapolis Tribune* said, "We look with envy at the proposed new St. Paul City Charter that goes to the voters December 5. It does most of the things that Minneapolis good government groups have been trying to do the past many years. . . . Well, we'll make the best of what we have for now and wish St. Paul the best of luck in the upcoming charter election."²⁹

Unfortunately, Rosalie seized upon the opportunity to lead a crusade against the charter as a way to further her own political ambitions. She had an innate ability to appeal to people's emotions, fears, and biases. She maintained the new char-

ter would give a blank check to officials to raise taxes, and there would be no limit on the number of departments that would be established with high salaries for all the department heads. She complained that the mayor and council members would have four-year terms rather than two, thus giving them too much power.

Then Charlie McCarty entered the fray. Because he was so knowledgeable of city government, he joined the campaign in support of the new charter. From then on, Rosalie and Charlie, of course, got equal billing at all the community meetings that had been arranged by the charter campaign committee. These two were quite a draw. They also appeared together on a TV program sponsored by KSTP television, but no one from the charter campaign committee was asked to take part. Rosalie and Charlie carried on a lively, at times hilarious, discussion with their usual gusto. Neither of them shed much light on the subject, and most viewers referred to it as what one observer called "a knee-slapping event."

Much to my disappointment and to the disappointment of all who supported the proposed plan, voters overwhelmingly defeated the new charter. The Charter

The 1970 City Election

While the Charter Commission continued with the drafting of a revised charter, a city election took place that had significant consequences. In 1970 Charlie McCarty was elected mayor, Rosalie Butler was elected to the City Council, and Lou McKenna was elected to the position of comptroller, running on a platform that the position of comptroller should be abolished.

McKenna replaced Joe Mitchell, who had held the office for twenty-eight years. McKenna had sought election with DFL endorsement and had mounted a vigorous campaign winning in 164 of 169 precincts, certainly a sign that citizens were ready for a change in their government.

McKenna's major in school had been local government and he had an astute grasp of city finances. Prior to the election, McKenna had been a deputy to James Dalglish, a City Council member who headed the Finance Department under the weak-mayor system. The main duty of the Finance office was to send out notices for assessments for sidewalk construction, street and alley improvements, and certain financial duties in connection with bond issues. Their offices were located directly across the hall from the



Jerry Fearing's editorial cartoon depicting Charlie McCarty as SuperMayor meeting Rosalie Butler, who was then a member of the St. Paul City Council. In this cartoon, Fearing successfully captured Butler's larger-than-life image. Cartoon courtesy of the St. Paul Dispatch, August 3, 1979.

Commission, however, was not about to accept that outcome. Howard Guthmann suggested that because of the criticisms that were raised, we should keep everything from the old charter in place and just change the form of government to a strong-mayor system. The commission agreed and proceeded to draft a new charter incorporating that change.

comptroller; so McKenna was very familiar with activities of that department.

Some members of the business community liked the power of the comptroller as it was spelled out in the old charter and they had a close working relationship over the years with Mitchell. At some time during Mitchell's long tenure, they had established an office called the

Municipal Research Bureau, staffed it with three people, and arranged for it to be funded by the business community. Their goal was to keep taxes low through the power of the budget.

Mitchell had made it convenient for the Bureau staff to have a presence in the city offices by providing a desk and coat rack in his office. From there, Bureau staffers could sit down with the accountants and proceed to assist in the preparation of the city budget each year. Mitchell, the man in charge of the budget, was known to go to the Athletic Club for lunch frequently and then stay on to play cards with his business friends.

This all ended when McKenna took over. He removed the desk and coat rack from the comptroller's office. According to McKenna, another step he took upon taking office was to see that the city's banking business was fairly distributed to all the large banks in the city. Up to this time almost all of the city's banking business had been done with the First National Bank.

Epilogue

In the next election in 1972, Charlie McCarty appeared to have worn out his welcome with the voters due to his unpredictable behavior while in office. During his brief time leading St. Paul, he became known as SuperMayor and his car as SuperCar. It was equipped with a police radio and he went around town at night following police calls and making citizen arrests. A comic strip by Jerry Fearing in the *Dispatch* featured him as he went about his flamboyant activities.

McCarty made the 10 Best Dressed Mayors list in the country and because of his notoriety appeared on the *Today* show. He often insulted citizens who appeared before the City Council and lacked the decorum expected of a mayor. Some of the council meetings were so hectic WCCO television would close its news program with a Looney Tunes cartoon and "That's all folks." As a result, Charlie didn't survive the primary and in the 1972 general election was succeeded by Lawrence D. Cohen, a lawyer.

After serving out his term as comptroller, McKenna moved on to Ramsey County government. There he became

the Director of Taxation and played a role in transforming county government. This, too, was a sign of government modernizing itself and simplifying the ballot.

After Rosalie got elected to the City Council, she found it impossible to affect changes in the finances of the city because of the power of the comptroller. Hence, she raised no objection when a new charter was again submitted to the voters. This time it passed with an overwhelming vote of support and went into effect in 1972. Two years later, Rosalie made another unsuccessful attempt to run for mayor, this time against Larry Cohen.

While the voters did not want to see her as their mayor, they loved having her on the City Council. Each of the four times she ran for City Council, she was the top vote getter. She courageously fought and lost her battle with kidney disease and died on August 3, 1979. Rosalie was the second woman to be elected to the City Council. Thus she and Elizabeth DeCourcy helped pave the way for numerous women who would later serve on the City Council and Ramsey County Board.³⁰

In Rosalie Butler and Charlie McCarty, St. Paul had two citizens who loved their city, loved politics, and in their unique, inimitable way wanted to do what they could to improve their city. While at times governing the city seemed like a soap opera, both raised public awareness of their government and showed that citizens could also have a voice in how it was governed.

A life-long resident of the city and former president of the St. Paul League of Women Voters, Ruby M. Hunt served on the St. Paul City Council between 1972 and 1982 and on the Ramsey County Board of Commissioners between 1983 and 1995. She thanks Billie Young for her friendship and service as a writing mentor; Roger Barr for his help as a teacher and mentor; Eileen McCormack for research help on this article; Howard Guthmann, for his work on the Charter Commission; Lou McKenna, former comptroller and colleague, for his expertise; Margaret Jacobs for her critique of this manuscript; and Storyweavers, a writing group, at the Episcopal Homes for their support for Ruby's writing.

Endnotes

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The sculpture La Nuova Vita (the New Life) by Estanulos Contrares stands outside the entrance to the Amhoist (now Landmark) Tower at the corner of Fourth and St. Peter streets. Gene Rancone led the development of this mixed-use office and residential building in the early 1980s and commissioned this statue to honor the legacy of his grandparents, who came to St. Paul from Italy to begin a new life in America. For more on Gene Rancone, see page 10. Photo courtesy of Eugene A. Rancone.