

# THE GIBSONVILLE MUSEUM AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

VOL. 9 NO. 2 ~ SPRING / SUMMER 2019

## A Chronicle of Town Leadership

Per Melvin Wyrick's *History of the Town of Gibsonville* (1971), the "original Town Charter provided for a magistrate, three commissioners, and a constable to govern the newly created Town. The first election was held by the Sheriff of Guilford County, but no records are available to show who these first elected officials were." The town was chartered in 1871.

- 1883 - 1885: "Around the year 1883, Mr. Henry W. Steele came to Gibsonville... Finding the charter of the town lost and the town government not functioning, he secured another charter and an election was held. He was elected the first Magistrate or Mayor after the town was reorganized," per Wyrick. Mr. Steele reigned in a salon driven town by immediately taxing alcohol related businesses out of city limits.
- 1885 - 1905: Other known Magistrates were Charles Bradshaw, Berry Davidson, and John Paylor. The years these individuals and others served is not known.

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Photograph of the Town's centennial celebration in 1971 including (from left to right): Town Manager Melvin Wyrick (1929 - 1972), Ralph Foster (Mayor from 1971 - 1973), then Mayor Melvin Randolph (1961 - 1971), Alderman Paul Walker, Harold Younger (Mayor from 1973 - 1975), and Alderman Hal Laughlin

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# A Chronicle of Town Leadership

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“The Town Charter was amended in the year 1905, provided that a Mayor and five Aldermen would constitute the governing body.” Gibsonville’s Mayors since the role’s 1905 creation include:

- *1905 – 1907: John L. Whitesell.* One term. Mayor Whitesell and his wife ‘Belle’ Smith lived at 314 Springwood Avenue and then at a house which stood where Fidelity Bank is now.
- *1907 – 1911: Berry Davidson.* One+ term. Berry Davidson also served as Magistrate before the 1905 change to this office. For more information on the Davidson family, see Newsletters V5. N2 (2014), V8. N1 (2017), or the plaque on Little Avenue behind 305 Church Street.
- *1911 – 1913: W. A. White.* One term.
- *1913 – 1933: Dwight (D. M.) Davidson, Sr.* Twenty years in office or ten terms. D. M. ran against his father in his 1913 initial win for Mayor. After his election, D. M. guided Gibsonville through World War I (1914 – 1918), the town’s tremendous growth in the 1920’s, cultural changes like women’s first opportunity to vote (1920), construction of Highway 70 taking statewide traffic away from downtown Gibsonville (1931), and the start of the Great Depression (1929 – 1939).
- *1933 – 1937: J. G(arland). Steele.* Four years and two terms. Mayor Steele held the helm during much of the Great Depression (1929 – 1939).
- *1937 – 1939: Dr. P. T. Garrison.* One term.
- *1939 – 1941: J. G. Steele.* Six years in office and three total terms. Mr. Steel was Mayor at the start of World War II (1939 – 1945). Locally both father Henry and his son J.G. Steele’s family business was Steele Hardware (hardware, furnishing, and general goods). This was a retail store open until the early 1960’s and located at 120 Lewis Street in downtown Gibsonville. At 225 Lewis Street, you can see the Steele Hardware sign painted on the front of what was a warehouse for this business. This retail owner also owned a Ford Dealership in immediate proximity to their hardware store. Mr. J. G. Steele and later his son Garland F. Steele both lived at 313 Alamance Street. Steele Street is named after this Mayor, who owned property along this roadway. By 1940, Gibsonville has a total of 1,753 persons in the city.
- *1941 – 1945: R. A. Thomas.* Four years and two terms.
- *1945 – 1955: W. G. Boone.* Ten years and five terms. Gibsonville’s large train accident (Sept 1950) and the Textile Workers Union of America strike at Cone Mills (1951) both happened during Mayor Boone’s tenure.
- *1955 – 1961: Paul W. Edwards.* Six years or three terms. Mayor Edwards owned and ran a grocery store at 108 Minneola Street. His family lived on Springwood Avenue until they left Gibsonville in the 1960’s.
- *1961 – 1971: Melvin Randolph.* Ten years in office or five terms. Professionally Mayor Randolph was an insurance salesman.
- *1971 – 1973: Ralph C. Foster.* One term. Per the US census, the town has 2,024 persons in 1970 when Mayor Foster starts his term.
- *1973 – 1975: Harold G. Younger.* One term. Mayor Younger graduated from the Gibsonville High School and Elon College. He worked at Lucent Technologies for 36 years as an engineer. After retirement, he was both an Alderman and Mayor (serving Gibsonville for 13 years total). Mayor Younger lived on East Joyner Street.
- *1975 – 1984: John O. Harper.* Eight years in office or three terms (two 2 year terms and one 4 year term). Mayor Harper owned a jewelry store on Main Street and passed before his term was over. Gibsonville’s Senior Center at 400 Steele Street is named after Mayor Harper.
- *1984: Ginger Jarrett.* Mayor Jarrett finished out Mayor Harper’s final term.

According to the Town Charter, Article III, 3.1 (b), the term of mayor went from two years to four years after 1979.

- *1984 – 2000: William F. Moricle, Sr.* Sixteen years in office or four terms. Per his obituary in the News & Record, “As mayor of Gibsonville, he spearheaded capital projects for a[n expanded] town hall, fire station and recreational park [the Moricle Recreational Complex behind the Gibsonville Elementary School]” The 2000 census reports 4,073 persons in Gibsonville.
- *2000 - 2001: Sandra Moulton.* Mayor Moricle died in March 4, 2000 (age 68) and Alderman Sandi Moulton served as an interim mayor for a portion of his term. Mayor Moulton is today on the Board of Directors for the GMHSI.
- *2001 – 2003: Lenny Williams.* Mayor Williams served out the remaining portion of Mayor Moricle’s term before winning his own election in 2003.
- *2003 – 2019: Lenny Williams.* Eighteen years in office as Mayor and running for another term. As of 2019, Mayor Williams will have 26 years of public service to Gibsonville, having also served as an Alderman since 1993. The census estimates 7,257 persons in Gibsonville in 2018; Mayor Williams has guided Gibsonville through an almost doubled population size over his term and the largest growth period in town history.

Notable facts about this position:

- Recognition of our longer serving and more influential mayors are on the walls of City Hall. They are honored with a photograph and short description of their contributions. Prior mayors not yet recognized on City’s Hall’s walls are Mayors White, J. G. Steele, Garrison, Thomas, Boone, Edwards, and Foster.
- There are two cases of Gibsonville having a father - son combination in its highest elected leadership position. Berry Davidson (1907 - 1911) and D. M. Davidson (1913 - 1933) as well as Henry W. Steele (1883 – 1885) and J. Garland Steele (1933 – 1937 as well as 1939 – 1941).
- Gibsonville has long periods of stability with its leaders. Mayors who have served 10 or more years include D. M Davidson (20 years), Lenny Williams (18 years and running for another four year term), William Moricle (16 years), W. G. Boone (10 years), and Melvin Randolph (10 years). If Mayor Williams wins this years election, he will become the longest serving Mayor in the town’s history.
- These long periods of stability have also had other consequences. Two of Gibsonville’s Mayors have died while in office: Mayor Harper and Mayor Moricle. This has allowed Gibsonville to have three temporary Mayors: Ginger Jarrett, Sandra Moulton, and Lenny Williams. Mayor Jarrett and Mayor Moulton are Gibsonville’s only female Mayors. In more recent years, Gibsonville has had a Mayor Pro-Temp. This is a designated individual whom can take over the top leadership role as needed. Mark Shepherd has been the Mayor Pro-Temp continuously since 1995 (or 24 years).
- Our public officials are generous individuals serving to aid their community. As of the 2019 election, Aldermen are paid \$2,700 / year, the Mayor Pro-Temp \$3,000 / year, and the Mayor \$3,400 / year. These are small sums to pay town leaders. Effectively our cities leadership positions are civic participation and done for no real financial gain.

## **Thanks & Further Efforts**

We have not recognized Alderman, staff, and other town leaders in above. This does not mean their contributions go unnoticed. The GMHSI thanks all of these individuals for their leadership and contributions.

Also the GMHSI has continued interest in information on town leaders. Should you have information to add or artifacts you would like to contribute, please email us at [info@gmhsi.org](mailto:info@gmhsi.org).

# 2020 Calendar Photography Contest

By Karen York

The Gibsonville Museum and Historical Society is seeking photographs for the 2020 Historic Preservation Calendar Contest. The calendar's theme is Curb Appeal and its title is "Welcome to Gibsonville, Welcome Home". The GMHSI is looking for people to capture the diverse curb appeal seen throughout our lovely town. Submitted photographs will be considered for the GMHSI's second edition of a Historic Calendar and as a depiction of Gibsonville's treasured historic resources.

*Contest Theme:* Curb appeal is an important part of our history, our culture, and a physical feature that defines our town daily. Examples of curb appeal can be elements like doors, entry ways, porches, yards, or sidewalks. These can be in front of residences and/or commercial buildings. These can also be small details such as flowers on a fence, a doorway, the windows of a church, a gate, entryway, path, monument, and/or historic sign. Curb appeal can define an entire building or be a site element.

*Contest Details:* Photographs must be high resolution quality. Vertical or horizontal photographs are acceptable. Photographs must be taken within the township of Gibsonville. Contestants may submit up to three photographs. Photographs are voted on by the public, who will decide on top candidates. Submitted photographs become the property of the Gibsonville Museum and Historical Society for use in the annual calendar competition and associated promotions.

*Contest Submission:* Photos must be submitted by Sept 30th, 2019 @ 5 p.m. Photographs must be submitted to [my.360photocontest.com/gmhsicontest](http://my.360photocontest.com/gmhsicontest), and include fully completed entry forms. Each submission should be labeled with your name, daytime telephone number, e-mail address and the address of the subject photograph. Photos not labeled with a site address will be disqualified. (Please remember to be respectful of people and their property.)

*Prizes:* A \$100 honorarium will be awarded to the cover winner photographer whose picture is selected for the 2020 Historic Preservation Board Calendar. A \$25 honorarium will be awarded to eleven (11) other winners for the calendar.

*Questions:* Should you have any photography questions, contact Karen York at 336-449-7101.

For additional details on this calendar, advertising opportunities, or its purchase, see [www.gmhsi.org/calendar](http://www.gmhsi.org/calendar).

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**Gibsonville Museum and Historical Society Inc.**

P. O. Box 283  
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