



# Bill Hupp

Milwaukie's Maverick Mayor

Photographer, family man, community booster, elected official, reserve officer, activist and one of the nation's "cleverest motorcycle clowns". There was no shortage of opinions about him, "some called him a maverick, a trouble maker, a fighting tiger... a person who has no qualms about being a minority of one... he was what you saw and never pretended to be anything else"<sup>1</sup>. This was Milwaukie's Bill Hupp.

William Elbert Hupp was born on July 14, 1912 in Fayette, Missouri. By his twentieth birthday he had relocated to Portland, Oregon, and graduated from Simon Benson Polytechnic High School, where he was active in student government, clubs, musical ensembles, and was creator of the "Hupp Mobile" which featured a working engine but no body.



The "Hupp Mobile" (circa 1932)

After high school his interests in photography and motorcycles dominated much of his time, but because he had worked on radios in school the JK Gill Company of Portland, who had hired him as a salesman, proclaimed him to be "a thoroughly grounded radio man and an expert in the field". Bill went on to hold many jobs including usher at the Orpheum theater, elevator operator, part "shagging" at a Chevy dealership, installing sprinklers in Salem, hawking papers in Sellwood, refurbishing gas engines, and repairing motorcycles. Seeking adventure, in August 1936 Bill and four hundred others ascended the snow-covered peak of Mount

Hood and seeking recreation at Oaks Park, Bill met Ann Wagner "the girl of his dreams", who he married in August 1940. Their happy marriage sustained a professional partnership and produced two children.

As the world marched off to World War II, Bill went to work on Boeing aircraft parts at the Iron Firemen Manufacturing Company and became a Portland Police Reserve Officer and charter member of the Police Motorcycle Stunt and Drill Team, earning the nickname "Wobbly Weary Willie" as a popular motorcycle clown. But it was a trip to the Chicago World's Fair in 1933 that began Bill's professional career as a photographer. Returning home with 17 rolls of film, he promptly had them developed, only to discover that the \$2 in his pocket would not cover the cost of processing his pictures. Luckily, the photo shop manager realized his customer could not pay and offered Bill a job, launching a 45 year career. While pursuing his two-wheeled interests and courting Ann, Bill worked in several photo stores and labs in Portland and Seattle, and in 1947 he purchased the Hardy Photo Studio in the Liberty Theater building in Oregon City next to the Clackamas County Courthouse. Operating as Bill Hupp Photo Studios, one of his clients was the Sherriff's Office, for which he served as photographer and is credited with installing the first "mug" room in the courthouse. He served as a Reserve Sheriff's Deputy and often gave expert testimony relative to photos and photography in Clackamas County court rooms.

In 1958 fire ravaged the Liberty Theater building and Bill took the opportunity to move his studio to a store front on Washington Street in downtown Milwaukie. By this point, the studio was a family affair with Ann working alongside Bill, hand painting photos like the famous picture of the Milwaukie Dogwood tree. Their studio, "the oldest such business in the county", would be a part of daily life until 1979, when they retired and sold the business.



Hupp Photo Studio, Milwaukie (1958)

<sup>1</sup> Prepared remarks read by Ed Zumwalt at Bill Hupp's memorial service 12/1/2004, courtesy of the *The Bill & Ann Hupp Collection* at the Milwaukie Historical Society.



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Upon moving to Milwaukie, Bill joined the Lions Club, Chamber of Commerce, and the Elks Lodge where he became the photographer and newsletter editor. Never shy about sharing his opinions, he wrote a weekly column for several local newspapers titled "Rebel Ramblings", "Milwaukie Montage", and finally "Hupps It's & Bit's." His style was direct and often chatty, usually discussing local topics, it never bothered him that his readers loved or loathed him, he just wanted people to think and take action. Beginning in 1961, his public expressions were also heard via a makeshift speaker mounted on his car that played Christmas music in spite of an ordinance prohibiting similar activities; eventually the law would be waived just for him. Bill's civic profile continued to rise as he successfully "shamed the Southern Pacific [rail road] into improving all of the city's rail road crossings", convinced the City Council to install the first public address system in the Council Chambers, personally purchased a tape recorder to record City Council proceedings, and worked through the downtown booster club to install litter bins.



Mayor Hupp  
(1975-1979)

Bill's official public service began in 1964 when he was appointed to the City's Budget Committee, and four years later, in 1968, he won election to the City Council. In 1974, Bill Hupp was elected Mayor running as a "champion of the people, a staunch conservative when it came to government spending". He served two consecutive terms as Mayor, being re-elected in 1976 and retiring in 1979. His accomplishments in office include the establishment of a Traffic Safety Commission, the development of North Clackamas Park, and additional public parking downtown. He crusaded for transparency and accountability in government, campaigning for stronger open meeting laws and for a City Charter revision that clarified that the City Attorney served the City Council and not the City Manager. He served continuously as Councilor and Mayor for ten years, missing less than a dozen meetings over his twenty years of involvement at City Hall.

In the 1980's, following his official retirement from civic and professional life, former Mayor Hupp maintained a prominent profile in the community through a cable access talk show he co-hosted with two other former mayors and through his active involvement at the Milwaukie Center. He also started several weekly charitable routines addressing waste and serving those in need, delivering day-old baked goods from local grocery stores and "scrap wood" from Milwaukie Lumber to several churches, the Head Start program, the Annie Ross House, and low income families and seniors.

At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Bill became locally famous for riding his scooter all over Milwaukie, only occasionally driving himself into locations where he would get stuck, notably at City Hall. He remained actively involved with the North Clackamas Park Board and Milwaukie Historical Society, his ability to remain mobile becoming critically important as he remained a constant presence in the civic life of his community. Two years after celebrating his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday at City Hall, he passed away on November 17, 2004, and his City paused to remember one of its most vocal and constant defenders and promoters.

*"That I can take justifiable pride in my years of "official" city service... my interest, concern and dedication [has been] to good government in Milwaukie" – Bill Hupp*

*Special thanks to the Milwaukie Historical Society for access to the Bill and Ann Hupp Collection.*