

# LEONARD MULLAN

Planning Commissioner - Councilor - Mayor - Manager | 1948 to 1963

A Milwaukie native, Leonard B. Mullan was born on September 28, 1897, in an era when the pioneer community was giving way to the incorporated town that came to be in 1903. His father, Isaac Mullan, had arrived on the banks of the Willamette River in 1884, while his mother, Elizabeth Hoesly Mullan, was a Milwaukian by birth and was the daughter of Sam Hoesly, a one-time owner of the Standard Mill which sat on Milwaukie Bay for decades before collapsing in 1901. Growing-up as the community grew-up, Leonard attended the original Milwaukie School, which sat on the site of present-day City Hall, and was a member of the fraternal organization the "Woodmen of the World" which was active in Milwaukie at the dawn of the twentieth century.



As a young man Leonard studied mechanics and by age 18 was working for the automaker Mitchell-Lewis in Portland. It wasn't long before he owned and operated his own garages, first in Yakima, Washington, and then by 1930 in Chehalis, Washington, where he met Emma Kepper. Leonard and Emma were married in 1931 and soon relocated to Milwaukie, where they enjoyed a long marriage and had three children. On November 8, 1937, Leonard took control of the former Portland Railway, Light & Power Company building which sat between Jackson and Harrison Streets just west of City Hall. After extensive remodeling and upgrades the structure known as the "car barn" for the trolley trains once housed there, and which had hosted prize-fights featuring the likes of Jack Dempsey, went to work as an automotive garage. Leonard operated "Mullan's Milwaukie Garage" for twenty years, before retiring as a mechanic in 1957.

It was as the proprietor of the former "car barn" that he first came to the attention of city leaders. According to a later newspaper account Leonard "was still working at his garage in the 1950's when the mayor asked him to serve on council. Mullan, who was doing some work for the city at the time, balked at the idea, but was driven to the post by friendly persuasion on the part of City Council"<sup>1</sup>. He had been appointed to the Planning Commission in 1948, which had come in the wake of his other civic service with the volunteer fire department, Kiwanis, Elks Club, Masonic Lodge, community club, and Willamette Savings and Loan. Leonard would serve just two years as a Councilor before being asked to "fill in" for Mayor Fred Sperr, who had been named City Manager, and he was reportedly "shocked" when he was appointed interim City Manager when Sperr passed away in 1955<sup>2</sup>. As Mayor for seven years and City Manager for four, Leonard played an active role in the development of Milwaukie during the mid-century boom years; of his time as a city leader he said "I had a real good crew behind me, and when something went wrong, we went out and fixed it"<sup>3</sup>. He was a tireless community promoter, working through the Milwaukie Chamber of Commerce, organizing community celebrations, hosting governors and dignitaries, and encouraging the development of the city's industrial areas.



Mayor Leonard Mullan



Mayor Bill Hupp presents a plaque to former Mayor Mullan (circa 1977)

City Manager Mullan retired from public service in 1963 and enjoyed an active retirement before passing away on March 3, 1983, in a Milwaukie hospital. In honor of his public service, the Mullan family presented a plaque listing all the Mayors of Milwaukie to the City and to this day it hangs in the Council Chambers at City Hall. Describing himself, he said he "didn't want to be a leader... I work, I did a lot of things, but when it came to making speeches I got tongue-tied... I said what I had to say, and that was about it"<sup>4</sup>. Leonard Mullan was born in an era of early development in his hometown and presided over an era of terrific growth in his city. He led his community with his determined work ethic and he strived to make Milwaukie the great place it is today.

<sup>1</sup> Undated article, circa 1970s, by Carole Jacobs, retrieved from the Milwaukie Museum, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.