

Sunday, April 17th is Founders Day in the City of Norwich, celebrating the incorporation as a village on April 17, 1816. At a special village election held on January 27, 1914, the village of Norwich voted to become the City of Norwich with 833 Ayes and 732 Nays and formally became a City on March 12, 1914.

What is Founders Day and why should we recognize it? Founders Day is a chance to reflect on the past of our beautiful little city. As people pass through the generations, some of our younger community members may not know much about how our city came to be. Those who have come from other parts to make Norwich their new home may also like to know the history that now belongs to them and that they are now a part of. Founders Day can be a time to reflect on the past and to celebrate achievements, but also a way to look to the future. As it has been said most recently by our current Mayor, Brian Doliver, “You have to know where you’ve been to see where you need to go.”

As part of our City’s past it is interesting to look at previous Mayors and how the City was shaped during their administrations. Here is a comprehensive list of past Mayors of the City of Norwich:

1915 through 1918 --	Fred McMullen
1919 through 1926 --	Linn Babcock
1927 through 1929 --	Deville Curnalia
1930 through 1943 --	Frank Zuber
1944 through 1948 --	James W. Flanagan
1949 through 1951 --	J. Frederic Benedict
1952 through 1955 --	Joseph J. Letson
1956 through Nov 1956 --	Frank Portelli
1957 through Jun 1959 --	Adelbert Button
Aug 1959 through 1967 --	Dr. J. Leo Weiler
1968 --	Melvin Osborne
1969 through 1973 --	George Carnrike
1974 through 1981 --	Frederick B. Mirabito
1982 through 1989 --	Kermit C. (Casey) Jones
1990 through 1993 --	Marjorie Chomyszak
1994 through 1997 --	Joseph Biviano
1998 through 2001 --	Robert C. Raphael
2002 through 2003 --	Mary Lou Stewart
2004 through 2006 --	Robert C. Raphael
2006 through 2015 -	Joseph Maiurano
2016 through 2019 --	Christine Carnrike
2020 through 2021 -	Shawn Sastri
2022 through present -	Brian Doliver

It would be a very long article if I addressed every Mayor, so I would like to address a few that were notable.

The first Mayor for the City of Norwich: Although the vote to become a City was held in January of 1914, the transition didn't become final until March 12, 1914 when Norwich was declared a City. Silas Berry was the elected President of the village at the March 4, 1912 election and was subsequently re-elected for one-year terms including the election held on March 2, 1914. The first Common Council meeting as the City of Norwich on March 24, 1914 was the first reference to Berry as Mayor. Fred McMullen takes the position as first Mayor that was on the ballot and elected to the City of Norwich, beginning his term on January 1, 1915.

Longest running Mayor: Frank Zuber takes the spot of the longest running Mayor with 14 years of service with an additional 12 years preceding that as an Alderman. Mr. Zuber was a true "rags to riches" story. As an immigrant from Bavaria he became extremely successful in the coal, oil and gasoline industries, owning 50 gas stations and a trucking company. He was Chairman, President or Trustee of a great number of companies and organizations, most of them local, prior to his becoming Mayor. Because Zuber was so successful, when becoming Mayor he reportedly donated his salary to charity. A biography of Frank Zuber entitled "His Honor, The Mayor" by H.C. Hardy reports that Zuber did not accept a salary for 16 years and as such made it into a Ripley's Believe It or Not column. Visit Guernsey Memorial Library to read the biography of Mr. Zuber to learn more.

"Doc" as Mayor: Dr. John Leo Weiler was born in Sherburne, received his degree in dentistry in Pennsylvania, and in 1913 moved to Norwich to open his dentistry practice until retiring in 1954. After the resignation of Mayor Button in June of 1959, Dr. Weiler was appointed as Mayor until winning a special general election three months later. He went on to be elected to five terms of office. One week after being sworn in to his fifth term, Mayor Weiler worked on City business right up to the day of his passing on January 8, 1968. On June 1, 1965, Dr. Weiler was named "Citizen of the Years". During his Mayorship, some of the accomplishments were new street construction including Midland Drive, Ridgeland Road and Eric Street, construction of a sewage treatment plant, flood controls and creation of a City Planning Committee. On February 13, 1979 the Common Council renamed the ongoing creation of North Entrance Park on Borden Avenue (made possible by the donation of 15 acres by Mr. Eli Goldberg) to the J. Leo Weiler Memorial Park in his honor.

First woman Mayor: Although not the first woman to run for Mayor, Marjorie Chomyszak made the history books as the first woman elected to the office for the City of Norwich, beating out the eight-year incumbent Kermit (Casey) Jones. At Chomyszak's passing in 2006, former Mayor MaryLou Stewart credited her for paving the way for other women in politics. She was also instrumental in the Norfolk, England and Norwich, New York reunions known as "Reunion of the 100 Norwiches" and worked hard to establish our City as one of the places on the tour.

Father/Daughter Mayors: We have also had a father and daughter each become Mayor – those being Mayor George Carnrike Sr. and Mayor Christine Carnrike. Mr. Carnrike and his wife Alice were both life-long Norwichians and high school sweethearts, raising a family of eight children. He was witness to his youngest, Christine, being sworn into the office of Mayor 47 years after he himself first took the oath. Ms. Carnrike is quoted in 2016 as saying "It was the proudest moment of my life, not only to succeed my father serving the City of Norwich, but to have him present for the ceremony."

The City is not just an entity, but perhaps a living thing as it is made up of people who live here, people who work here, people who learn here, people who love it here, people who govern here, people who try to make life better here. This is what Founders Day is about – those people, both past and present. Someday we will all be part of the past and hopefully our legacy will be one of betterment for the future.

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