

Conrad Mann

Civic Leader and City Builder
1871-1943

by Janice Lee

Between 1910 to 1939, nearly every major civic improvement in Kansas City bore the mark of Conrad Mann. This massive, bear-like man with a brusque, unpolished manner was a uniquely talented leader who knew how to “get things done.”

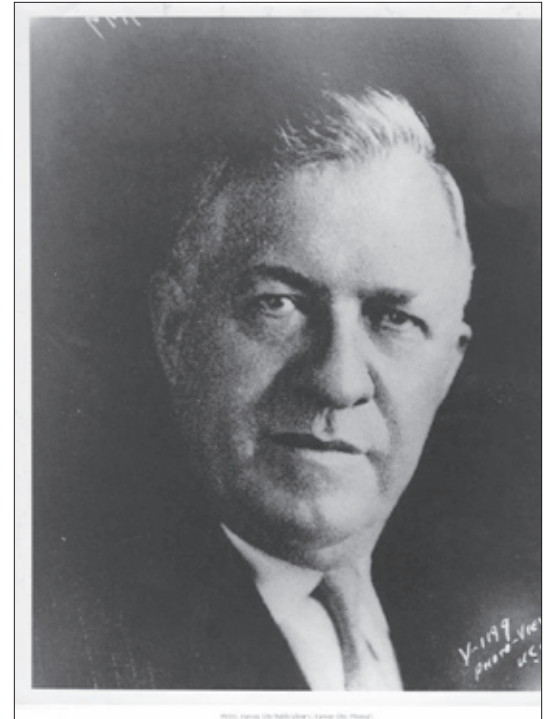
This former Iowa farm boy came to Kansas City by way of Milwaukee in 1907. As president of the Fraternal Order of Eagles, his job was to move the national headquarters to Kansas City. He immediately embraced his new home and began a long career of working for civic progress.

Mann channeled much of his drive and authority into what became his biggest accomplishment, the Ten Year plan. He organized and supervised a committee of 1,000 that drew up the largest local bond program the city had every seen. Among the 20 projects completed were the construction of Municipal Auditorium, City Hall, the county courthouse, and the improvement of parks, playgrounds, and boulevards. The plan also provided desperately needed employment in the early years of the Great Depression.

Mann’s management style was both unique and effective. To jumpstart a project, he called together leading citizens around a dinner table. After a certain amount of table pounding and “rough language,” he assigned each a job and asked for enough contributions to get the task done. How did he win such cooperation? Citizens recognized his judgment as sound and knew that Mann gave generously of his own time and money.

Other civic accomplishments included serving as president of the Chamber of Commerce from 1928 to 1933 and chairing the committee that persuaded the Republican Convention to meet in Kansas City in 1928. He also was responsible for the creation of the Philharmonic Orchestra (today’s Kansas City Symphony).

Upon his death from pneumonia in 1943, a lifelong secret was revealed: Mann was actually a German citizen. His failure to attain American citizenship remains a mystery, but his renown as a



leading citizen of Kansas City remains for all to see.

Sources

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