

Henry Francis McElroy

City Manager
1865-1939

by Nancy J. Hulston

Henry F. McElroy was hand picked in 1926 by boss Thomas J. Pendergast to be Kansas City's first city manager. This gave Pendergast complete control over Kansas City.

McElroy was born in Amboy, Illinois, in 1865. He moved to Kansas City in 1895, and entered the real estate business. A Pendergast-machine Democrat, McElroy was elected judge of the Jackson County Court, western division, in 1922, working closely with Harry S. Truman.

Upon entering office, McElroy immediately moved into the large, elaborately decorated mayor's office on the 26th floor of city hall, and forced the mayor, Albert I. Beach, to take a small office elsewhere.

McElroy held the position of city manager for thirteen years of the most corrupt politics that Kansas City has ever seen. He met frequently with Pendergast to discuss the general policy and administration of the city, and during this time, McElroy was considered the genius behind the Pendergast machine. He held restrictions on his office that were dictated by the city charter in contempt, and actively opposed any organized attempts to end illegal gambling in Kansas City.

Under McElroy's administration Municipal Auditorium, City Hall, and the Jackson County Courthouse were built, with construction contracts going to Pendergast's companies and other political cronies.

On April 14, 1939, one week after Pendergast was indicted for tax evasion, McElroy resigned as city manager. Shortly afterwards, a discovery was made that millions of dollars of city funds were missing. On June 29, 1939, McElroy was indicted by a county grand jury for embezzlement and fraud.

After the indictment, McElroy's health quickly failed. Soon, federal agents were investigating his tax returns. He became reclusive,



even avoiding friends and political allies. On September 15, 1939, broken in spirit and facing a federal trial for tax evasion, McElroy died at home, with his son and daughter at his side.

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