

Henry Lee Jost

Mayor

1873-1950

by Susan Jezak Ford

Henry Jost was a respected lawyer and made savvy political connections, but it may have been his status as an orphan that won him the position of Kansas City's mayor in 1912.

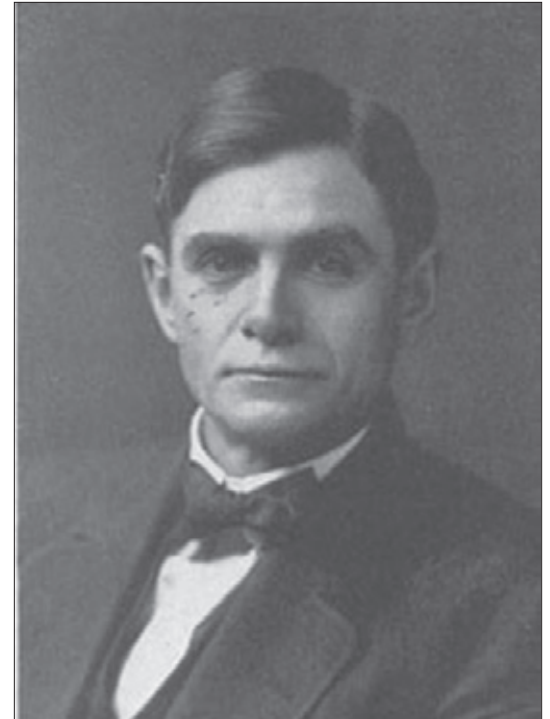
Little is known of Jost's early childhood. He was brought to an East Side orphanage in New York City at an early age—as an infant, toddler, or five-year-old, depending on the source. By most accounts, his mother had died, and his poor, ailing father could no longer care for him. He stayed in the Five Points Mission for Homeless Children until he was sent on a train westward with other children from the orphanage. He found a home in Nodaway County, Missouri.

Jost graduated from the Kansas City Law School in 1898 and began working for the Jackson County prosecuting attorney's office in 1909. When the Democrats, backed by Tom Pendergast, were looking for a mayoral candidate to support, Pendergast ally Joe Shannon identified Jost. The two men became close friends, and Jost was associated from then on with Shannon's "rabbit" faction of city politics.

Jost easily won the 1912 mayoral election and was reelected in 1914, known as the "orphan boy" mayor. Although Pendergast's support undoubtedly helped his campaign, the *Literary Digest* suggested, "They nominated Jost and elected him. And the waif story had a lot to do with the result."

During his second term, Kansas City was made the 10th Reserve Bank District, and voters approved a \$4 million bond issue for public works. Union Station was dedicated during his tenure, and he was credited with establishing an efficient city government. He sought a third mayoral term but lost the election.

Henry Jost married Minnie Hanks in 1911 and followed his mayoral terms with a 1922 term in Congress. He was unhappy with the Republican-dominated Congress and did not seek a second term. He returned home to continue practicing law until he retired to



Belton, Missouri.

Sources

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"A Story That Helped." *Literary Digest*, 20 July 1912.

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