

FIRST DRAFT

1st Grand Junction City Charter led nation in voting innovation

There is an effort nationwide now, and in the Colorado Legislature this year, to adopt a system called "ranked-choice voting" in local elections.

Grand Junction adopted that system more than 110 years ago, when its first city charter was approved in September 1909.

The Daily Sentinel, with Walter Walker as editor, was ambivalent about the new system prior to the September vote. But two months later, when the first candidates were elected under the charter, and a Socialist won the mayor's spot, the newspaper declared the new voting system was the "Offspring of (a) Bone Head."

The man who drafted the charter — the one the Sentinel called a bonehead — was local attorney James W. Bucklin. He included the ranked-choice voting system, which he called preferential voting, as part of the charter.

Bucklin later became Grand Junction's city attorney, and in 1911 he penned an article for a national publication in which he said preferential voting, "is a plan to restore majority elections and true representative government."

He also claimed the preferential voting system originated here. It was "first formulated in the Grand Junction charter," he wrote.

Preferential voting, or ranked-choice voting, allows each voter to choose his or her No. 1 choice for a particular office, followed by a No. 2 choice and a No. 3 choice (usually no more than three).

If no candidate wins more than 50% of the vote, the numbers of second-choice votes each candidate received are added to the total.

If no one has a majority of votes after that, the third-choice votes are added to the count. Then, the candidate with the most total votes — first, second and third choice — wins.

There are a number of variations on how this might be accomplished, and the bill now in the Colorado Legislature leaves the details to cities and towns. That bill, HB-1071, has passed out of two committees and was awaiting action in the House Appropriations Committee as of April 1.

Currently, Telluride and Basalt use ranked-choice voting, and several other Colorado cities are considering it.

Nationwide, Maine was the first state to adopt ranked-choice voting for state and presidential primary elections, Alaska approved a statewide ballot measure for the system in 2020, and New York City will begin using ranked-choice voting this year for primary and special elections, according to the website Ballotpedia.

When Grand Junction adopted ranked-choice or preferential voting with its 1909 city charter, political machines affiliated with political parties ran many municipalities. But there was a nationwide effort to curb their powers.

Bucklin, writing for "The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science" in November, 1911, made it clear that was the intent of the 1909 Grand Junction City Charter.

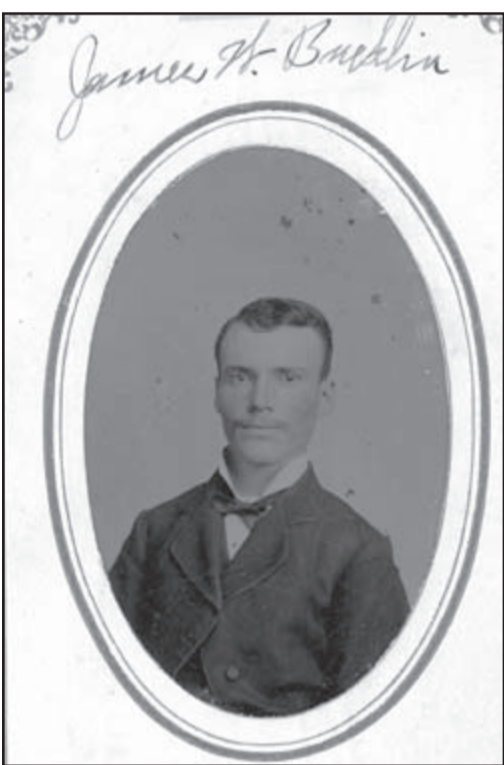
"Political machines are only able to control by minority government. Minority government is bad government," Bucklin wrote. "If then we are to establish good government, we must enact some electoral system that will destroy political machines, and prevent the election of officials by minorities."

He added, "Every effort was made by its authors to make our charter democratic, the most democratic in America."



COURTESY OF CITY OF GRAND JUNCTION

This view of downtown Grand Junction was one of several photos included in the 1909 City Charter.



COURTESY OF MUSEUMS OF WESTERN COLORADO, DAILY SENTINEL COLLECTION

James W. Bucklin, who drafted the 1909 Grand Junction City Charter, and later became city attorney.

It wasn't just ranked-choice voting that made the 1909 city charter different. It also established new rules for how franchises were to be granted to break what Bucklin described as a racket operated by special interests.

Additionally, the new city charter outlawed the numerous saloons in the city to reduce crime. In fact, according to reports in the Sentinel, the anti-saloon faction, also called the church faction, was the driving force behind the charter.

Liquor would remain largely prohibited within the Grand Junction city limits for the next 24 years, until Prohibition was repealed nationwide in 1933.

In addition to the changes mentioned, the 1909 charter established a system of five elected city commissioners, each overseeing a different aspect of municipal operations.

The Commissioner of Public Affairs also served as the mayor, but he was not the "boss" of the other commissioners, Bucklin wrote.

In addition, there was a Commissioner of Water and Sewers; Commissioner of Finance and Supplies; Commissioner of Highways; and a Commissioner of Health and Civic Beauty.

That cumbersome system was overturned in 1921, when the City Charter was amended to establish the city manager form of government now used by the city. At the same election, ranked-choice voting was eliminated.

Still, the original charter and its goals were intriguing for the time, said current City Attorney John Shaver.

"One of the things I was struck by in (reading Bucklin's article) is the vision," Shaver said. "It's a vision that looks to the future, not just the pres-

ent ... It's government by and for the people."

Shaver also noted that Grand Junction is one of four communities named in the Colorado Constitution in 1913 as the founding fathers of home rule. The others are Denver, Colorado Springs and Pueblo.

Prior to the September 1909 election that approved the charter, the Sentinel's main concerns were whether three city commissioners would be more efficient than five, and whether the new charter would affect the city's ability to bond.

But after the November 1909 election in which the mayor and others were elected, the Sentinel objected to the fact that the charter allowed a candidate who wasn't the voters' first choice, or even second choice, to become mayor.

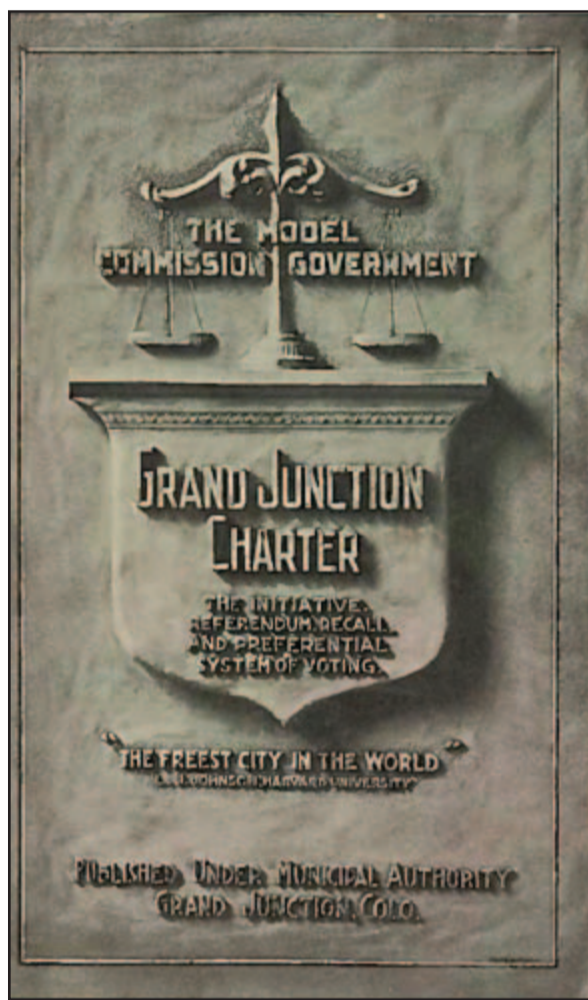
There were five candidates for mayor in November 1909, including William H. Bannister, who founded the Bannister Furniture store that operated for 102 years in Grand Junction.

Bannister "led all other candidates for first choice in the number of votes received," the Sentinel noted.

He also led when second-choice votes were added, but he still didn't have a majority of total votes cast.

Therefore, "it was necessary, according to the new system of voting, to add the third-choice votes to secure the election of a candidate," the Sentinel said.

The victorious candidate was Socialist Thomas H. Todd, and that surprised nearly everyone, according to the Sentinel. "It's a sure bet that the 'father of the charter' (Bucklin) never



COURTESY OF CITY OF GRAND JUNCTION

The cover of the city charter that was adopted by voters in September 1909.

anticipated (nor did the church contingent) that Thomas Todd would be elected mayor."

Bucklin offered a considerably different view two years later, when he wrote his article for the political science magazine:

"For mayor, Mr. Bannister received a plurality of first choice votes, although (he was) an anti-charter candidate, and under the old method of plurality election, would have been elected mayor, although three other candidates received more (total) votes than he," Bucklin wrote.

"Under the old plan he would thus have beaten the majority, defeated the will of the electors, and would have represented not the majority, but only a reactionary minority," Bucklin added. "The superiority of the Grand Junction system of preferential voting was thus absolutely and clearly demonstrated."

Despite the Sentinel's objections, Todd was installed as mayor. He survived a recall election and served until 1914. I'll have more about him in a future column.

Sources: "The Grand Junction of City Government and Its Results," by James W. Bucklin, "The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science," November, 1911, through www.jstor.org; 1909 editions of *The Daily Sentinel* through www.newspapers.com; interview with John Shaver; www.ballotpedia.org.

Bob Silbernagel's email is bohsilbernagel@gmail.com.

2021 THIS WEEK IN THE LEGISLATURE

DENVER — This week, state lawmakers are expected to begin debating the proposed state budget for the 2021-22 fiscal year, which begins July 1. That budget is expected to reflect about \$5.3 billion in additional money, some of which carries over from the current fiscal year. That budget also is to include a 3% pay raise for state workers, and restoring cuts made to K-12 spending and higher education.

■ **Monday:** The Senate Business, Labor and Technology Committee is expected to vote on SB186, Sen. Kerry Donovan's bill to alter the state's Broadband Development Board to have a greater focus on rural and hard-to-reach areas of the state.

■ **Tuesday:** The Senate State, Veterans and Military Affairs Committee is to hear HB1119, a measure that broadens the state's priorities on suicide prevention and intervention. The bill is sponsored in the Senate by Donovan, D-Vail, and Sen. Don Coram, R-Montrose. It was partly introduced

in the House, which gave it bipartisan approval last week, by Rep. Janice Rich, R-Grand Junction.

■ **Wednesday:** The House Health and Insurance Committee is to discuss HB1232, a controversial measure designed to create a state public health care option, but only if hospitals and insurance companies can't greatly reduce premiums by 2024.

■ **Thursday:** The House State, Civic, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee is to debate HB1150, a bill to create the Colorado Office of New Americans.

■ **Next week:** Once the Colorado Senate completes its work on next year's spending plan, the so-called Long Bill, the measure will head to the House.

All floor action and committees can be watched or heard on the Colorado Legislature's website at lege.colorado.gov. Check that website to see which measures are available for remote testimony, and how to register to speak.

— Charles Ashby

13 have perished since 2000 on Zion's Angels Landing trail

By NATE CARLISLE
FOX 13

SALT LAKE CITY — Corbin McMillen liked hiking in Zion National Park and its most infamous trail — the summit to Angels Landing.

"I think he liked Angels Landing," said Margie Barron, McMillen's mother, "because it was... it gave him some adrenaline."

Thirteen hikers have fallen and died from Angels Landing, or the trail to it, since 2000. The tally includes two Utah men who have died in the last month.

Yet the trail remains open to anyone who passes through Zion's gates. No permits or special instruction is required. Rangers do not routinely patrol the trail.

"If it's not the most dangerous trail in America, it's one of the top five," said Travis Heggie, an associate professor at Bowling Green State University who studies deaths in the national park system. He also used to work in risk management for the National Park Service.

By hiking standards, the trail to Angels Landing isn't that long or steep. Most hikers take a route that's a 5-mile roundtrip with a 1,500-foot elevation gain. The highlight is the Angels Landing — an overlook with views of the park's red rock pillars and the peaks and valleys of southwest Utah.

"Angels Landing is one of those 'Bucket List' hikes that folks want to do," said Jeff Rose, a professor of outdoor recreation studies at the University of Utah.

About the last third of the trail has steep drops on the sides.

"You are winding," Heggie

said. "You're going back and forth. You're zigzagging. You're climbing over some difficult rock."

Death investigation reports from the National Park Service and the Washington County Sheriff's Office revealed some interesting trends.

The trail's best-known stretch is a narrow section where the park service has installed a chain handrail. But that's not where hikers are dying.

"Folks were falling either before the chained section or after the chained section," Rose said, who noted some hikers fell from Angels Landing itself.

He said the data indicates hikers are getting too close to the edges.

Rose pointed to an investigation report from 2010 where witnesses said a woman had been seated on the edge of the trail. She stood, then fell over the edge, witnesses told rangers.

"Don't get within 6 feet of the edge where you can fall and potentially lose life and limb," Rose said.

Heggie noticed many of the people who fell where hiking alone or, like a 13-year-old girl from Colorado City, Arizona, who died in 2018, got separated from their group.

Heggie suggests people hike in groups of three or more and stay together.

"Don't leave children alone on that trail," Heggie said.

Of the thirteen people who have fallen to their deaths from Angels Landing since 2000, most were men, and most were visiting from outside Utah, including one man from Germany.

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