1946 Arlington

The First Crack in the Byrd Machine

By Bill Fogarty

Arlington in 1946 was experiencing growing pains. The 1940s would be a decade of remarkable population growth—the largest increase by decade in the history of the County, in terms of pure numbers and percentage growth. From the beginning of the New Deal to the aftermath of World War II, the federal government was constantly expanding, and thousands of people from other parts of the country were coming to Washington, with many landing in Arlington. These newcomers brought new ideas and, more importantly, new expectations and perspectives.

After four years of a world war, the citizens of Arlington in 1946 focused on local challenges, highlighted in the fall by an aggressive County Board campaign from political newcomer Daniel Dugan. Dugan was the first candidate in Arlington to challenge the entrenched political system known as the Byrd Machine. Citizen dissatisfaction with local politics enabled the thirty-year-old Dugan to defeat a popular, two-term County Board incumbent in November, in the biggest upset in County Board history.

Dugan was able to put together an unlikely coalition consisting of Democrats and Republicans. His strongest support, however, came from parents who were unhappy with the school system. These parents were part of a "near riot" at a county meeting on May 27, an event that enhanced Dugan's run for office.[1]

The Byrd Machine

Local politics in Virginia at that time was controlled by a patronage system created by Democrats in the early twentieth century and perfected by Harry F. Byrd, who was a three-term US senator by 1946. Byrd and his allies controlled the state legislature, which in turn controlled local jurisdictions, including public education.

The formula for this control was simple: the state legislature appointed the county judges; each judge appointed three trustees to a county school electoral board; the trustees of the school electoral board then appointed the five members of the school board (subject to approval by the judge). Citizens had no meaningful engagement with the school system.

The Near Riot

Arlington schools were overcrowded; facilities were in terrible shape; teacher recruitment was abysmal; there was no kindergarten; and the first two grades were split into half-day programs. To improve school conditions, parents created a grass-roots organization called the Citizens Committee for School Improvement (CCSI). From its inception, the CCSI had a quickly growing, energetic membership that was ready to confront the local officials of the Byrd Machine.

On May 27, 1946, the three trustees of the Arlington School Electoral Board held a public hearing at the courthouse, for the purpose of naming a replacement for a school board member whose term was expiring. The CCSI packed the courtroom with its members, and together with other local groups, endorsed the Rev. Paul Hunter as their choice for the appointment. Rev. Hunter was the minister at Rock Spring Congregational Church and a well-known advocate for improved schools. A total of five people were listed as possible choices.

Citizens were permitted to provide comments before the vote was taken by the School Electoral Board. A former teacher at Washington-Lee High School, J. A. Rice, "threw a bombshell into the program" by asserting that a powerful clique controlled the school system. Speakers complained that the other potential candidates for the School Board position were "tools" of School Superintendent Fletcher Kemp, who had served in that position since 1916.[2] Many folks in the CCSI felt that Kemp was unqualified to lead such a growing school system.

At the conclusion of the public comments, Dr. E. L. Kirkpatrick, the chair of the School Electoral Board, nominated Harry Porter, a former school board member, for the vacant position. Porter was approved by a vote of 2 to 0, with Kirkpatrick abstaining.

Kirkpatrick then attempted to adjourn the meeting, but the citizens refused to leave, demanding to know why the Board passed

over Rev. Hunter, who had been endorsed by a clear majority of civic organizations.

Kirkpatrick told the crowd that written correspondence and petitions created a tally favorable to Porter. This statement drew challenges from those present. The chairmen of the various groups that endorsed Hunter demanded the correspondence be made public.

Kirkpatrick said that Dr. Oscar Lebeau, the chair of the CCSI, could look at the paperwork. Lebeau was given the opportunity to review the file, but he made no public comments concerning its contents. The crowd dispersed, but the damage to the reputation of the local Byrd Machine was evident.

The trustees of the School Electoral Board were unprepared for this citizen intrusion into their backroom process of making decisions (Fig. 1). The power brokers in Arlington would soon find out that this small crack in their Machine could not be easily patched.

Officials were not listening to citizen concerns about the school system: not the School Superintendent; not the School Board members; not the School Electoral Board trustees; and at the top of the Machine, not Circuit Court Judge Walter McCarthy, the most powerful person in the local Machine. Daniel Dugan was ready to take advantage of the citizen discontent.

Who Was Daniel Dugan?

Daniel Dugan was an employee of the US Civil Service Commission with deep roots in Virginia and Arlington. His ancestors fought in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, before settling in Arlington County.

Fig. 1: Citizen upset with School Board politics, as reported in this headline, sparked change in Arlington, The Sun*, May 31, 1946.*

Citizens Attack Action
On School Board Post

Dugan was born in 1916, and in his words, he grew up in "a farm community" in Arlington.[3] Dugan graduated from Washington-Lee High School and went to work for the US Postal Service. He served in the Navy in Europe before joining the US Civil Service Commission in 1946.

In 1946, Dugan was married, with a young infant. As a thirty-year-old, with no political experience and a conservative upbringing, Daniel Dugan would somehow become the figurehead of a new political party and spark a progressive political movement in Arlington that would last for decades.

Dugan's Campaign

Daniel Dugan capitalized on the discontent with the schools when he announced his run for the County Board in early May. As an employee of the federal government, Dugan was subject to the Hatch Act, which prohibited partisan electoral activities by federal employees. As a result, he ran for office as an independent on the ballot.

Dugan outlined a ten-point campaign that included "progressive educational methods in more and better equipped schools." He recommended a significant bond issue that would include new school buildings.[4]

Dugan took immediate advantage of the publicity surrounding the May 27 "near riot" by providing a press release to the newspapers with a stinging rebuke of the school system.[5]

As a first-grader, Dugan had attended the Ballston Elementary School in 1923, the same year that one of the incumbents of the electoral board took office. The classrooms were crowded, and the school day itself had been only three hours long. More than twenty years later, conditions had not changed.

Dugan took aim at the political establishment, alluding to advice from others to not criticize the school system. Dugan took a swipe at local Democrats by saying he was not a back-alley politician.

Dugan's campaign gained momentum when he named Harley Williams as his campaign manager. Williams was already known as an opponent of the local Machine, based on Williams's blistering response early in 1946 to the attempt by local officials to incorporate Arlington as a city.

Arlington's delegates had filed for legislation to change Arlington's form of government to a city charter, resulting from the work of a City Charter Commission that had been appointed by Judge McCarthy and supported by the County Board. The proposed legislation ran into opposition quickly.

At a Civic Federation meeting, Williams asserted that the proposed charter had been drawn up to meet personal whims instead of the wishes of the people. Williams criticized the "Judge-appointed commission which conducts public hearings in pious and hypocritical pretense of ascertaining and following the public will and then proceeds to hand out the decision already cooked up in advance by the tax-favored real estate-dominated County political machine."[6]

Requests for amendments to the legislation were made by various organizations. Suggestions were made by citizens for an elected school board, an increase in the number of County Board members to seven, the right to petition for referenda, and even the right to recall elected officials. The City Charter legislation was doomed and never made it to the voters. This attempted legislation revealed citizen unhappiness with the status quo, an unhappiness that Williams was ready to exploit.

Williams was an aggressive publicist, refining the anti-Machine message with many letters to the editor and press statements in support of Dugan.

The Next Battle: The School Electoral Board Trustees

The proposed City Charter legislation in the winter, and the controversial appointment of a School Board member at the "near riot" in May, set the table for the next conflict with the local Machine. As fate would have it, the terms of all three trustees of the School Electoral Board were set to expire as of June 30. The existing practice of the local Machine meant that Judge McCarthy would be expected to make appointments without any public input.

But the members of the CCSI were energized and ready to make their voices heard. They submitted the names of eight people for consideration by Judge McCarthy. The list included future state senator Harrison Mann and future School Board member Elizabeth Campbell.[7]

This submission was widely publicized in the local press. Within a few weeks, a total of twenty-four more names were proposed by others.

In early July, Judge McCarthy made his decision, appointing Harold Stone from the CCSI list, and two people, local Machine picks, who were not on any public list.

The CCSI was pleased with the vote for Stone but issued a statement that it "wished it could be as enthusiastic about the other two appointments." Despite the disappointment, the ability of the CCSI to have one of their endorsees appointed as a trustee of the School Electoral Board was a significant accomplishment. The crack in the Machine was getting a bit wider.

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Daniel Dugan commented on Judge McCarthy's choices, with a statement that the selection of the other two members was "undemocratic," creating a "rubber stamp" for the status quo.[8]

Summer 1946: School Issues Persist

The CCSI kept the pressure on the local Machine throughout the summer. It issued a four-point program in July, including a request to the School Board to submit a bond issue referendum to the voters in the November election. The CCSI provided a detailed bond proposal of $3,250,000 to the School Board.[9]

The CCSI had become a well-organized group of several hundred members, with more than twenty committees and subcommittees providing detailed analysis on the issues. They used dozens of "phone trees" for swift communication on the issues.

One hurdle for a bond referendum was the requirement to obtain 1,000 signatures from citizens. In August, the CCSI launched an intense two-week canvas campaign for signatures. Six women were named as district chairs, covering all the schools. The CCSI worked with Esther Irving Cooper of the NAACP, who took on the responsibility to connect with the three Black schools in Arlington (Hoffman-Boston, Kemper, and Langston). With their determined efforts, the six chairs of the CCSI collected over 5,000 signatures.

This successful petition drive was rejected by the School Board members, who refused to submit a school bond referendum for the November election. Once again, the CCSI members were

disappointed by the refusal of unelected school officials to take any action.

A Diverse Coalition Emerges

Meanwhile, the Republican party had a decision to make: should it nominate a candidate for the County Board election? By August, the Republican party declared it would not nominate a candidate and instead announced it would support Daniel Dugan. Their stated rationale included a recognition that "70 percent of the County's population is composed of Federal employees," with an implicit acknowledgement that such a substantial portion of the voters deserved representation.[10]

Criticism of the Byrd Machine came from all sides. Republican John Locke Green, at a meeting in July to elect delegates to the Republican state convention, accused Senator Harry Byrd of "owning, operating, and controlling" the Virginia press.[11]

Democrat Frank Ball Jr. created a stir in August when he was left off the delegate slate for the state Democrat convention, even though he had been the top vote-getter in the Ballston precinct. Ball noted that "the Machine in my estimation displayed a complete disregard of the voters."[12]

Local civic activist J. Elwood Clements went to the trouble of taking out an ad in *The Sun* newspaper, responding to "smears of Arlington citizens." With reference to a prior editorial by a "high-ranking lieutenant of Harry F. Byrd's political machine," Clements wrote that the editorial "revealed the contempt of the Machine for the citizens of Arlington County."[13]

The Machine Candidate: The Man Caught By An Octopus

One of the ironies of the 1946 election is that the County Board incumbent, Edmund Campbell, was the most progressive of the current five Board members. However, Edmund Campbell could not escape his association with the local Machine.

Campbell was a true-bred Virginian. His grandfather taught at Washington and Lee University in Lexington along with Robert E. Lee, and his father became the dean of the University.

Edmund graduated from Washington and Lee University as valedictorian, then served in the US Army in World War I. He obtained a

master's degree from Harvard University and eventually studied law at Washington and Lee Law School. Campbell started a law practice in Washington, DC, and settled in Arlington with his family in the 1930s.

Campbell was friendly with Hugh Reid, an influential member of the Byrd Machine. Reid was a delegate in the Virginia General Assembly in the 1930s and in the 1940s was appointed as a judge.

In 1939, Reid encouraged Campbell to run for the County Board and arranged for Campbell to receive the blessing of Harry Green, the Commissioner of Revenue since 1918 and the acknowledged head of the local Machine. Campbell easily won the election for a three-year term, and in 1942 was reelected with no opponent.

Campbell was smart, diplomatic, gracious, and a team player. Unfortunately for Campbell, by 1946 the voters were not happy with the team. In the campaign of 1946, Dugan described Campbell in an unflattering light at a debate in September:

> The truth is that whether Mr. Campbell is sincere or not in his lip service to the cause of progress, he is under control of a machine that does not believe in progress. He is, in fact, the principal window dressing of this machine. They allow him to sound off a few progressive notes and occasionally make a few concessions in his direction if public pressure is great enough, but he is as much in their toils as a man who has been caught by an octopus.[14]

In the final weeks of the campaign, there was a constant barrage of anti-Machine rhetoric from Dugan and his supporters. Harry Green and other members of the local Machine pushed back with their own series of letters to the editor. At one point Dugan was accused of being a Republican, but Dugan effectively countered this tactic with a strong statement to the press:

> I reiterate that the main issue in this election is whether the citizens of Arlington will succeed in establishing nonpartisan elections against the entrenched Machine that controls the Democratic party.[15]

November 1, 1946: The Election (Fig. 2)

Dugan defeated Campbell with 55 percent of the vote (5,790 to 4,742). The press expected a large turnout, predicting that 6,000 to 8,000 voters would show up at the polls. Remarkably, more than 10,000 citizens voted, more than double the turnout in the 1945 County Board election. The 1946 election was the first big crack in the local Machine's control of Arlington politics.

Daniel Dugan effectively tapped into the discontent that had been boiling under the surface. A post-election analysis in an editorial by *The Sun* newspaper provided a laundry list of problems with the status quo in Arlington, with a litany of complaints.[16]

In a 1991 interview, Campbell described the source of the tension between the local Machine and the "newcomers":

> The old Virginians resented the influx of newcomers with different ideas. Damn Yankees. Had no feeling for the old Virginia and were much more interested in good streets and good schools than they were in holding taxes down to a minimum. And they were not concerned with the traditions of old Virginia.[17]

The Legacy of 1946

In early 1947 the CCSI went right to work. Petitions were obtained for a school referendum. In May, voters approved the right to have the first elected school board in Virginia history.

In November of 1947, the CCSI endorsed a slate of five candidates for the school board. All their candidates were elected, defeating the five incumbent school board members.

It should be noted that the CCSI nominating committee was chaired by none other than Edmund Campbell. As Campbell remarked in his interview, "If you can't beat them, join them."

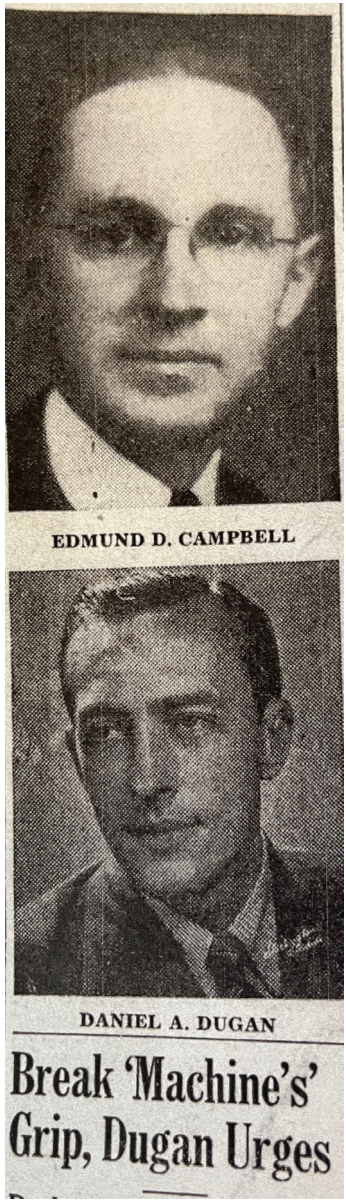
Campbell, the Byrd Machine politician "caught by an octopus" in 1946, would go on to be instrumental in progressive matters in the years that followed. Meanwhile, Dugan had a successful four years as a County Board member, promoting progressive issues with some success, though hampered by the reality that other County Board members were Machine politicians. At one Board meeting Dugan

made a motion to get rid of segregated bathrooms in the Courthouse building; unfortunately, he could not even get a second for his motion to be voted upon.

Daniel Dugan ran for reelection in 1950 and easily won a second term. By 1952, two fellow independents had been elected to the County Board.

However, the road ahead was bumpy for County Board progressives. In 1952, members of the old guard filed a lawsuit to remove the three independents from the County Board. In a remarkably bizarre legal opinion, based on an obscure statute from the eighteenth century and an unpublished opinion found not by the lawyers but by the judge himself, Dugan and his two fellow independents were tossed off the County Board in 1952 (Fig. 3). Who issued the opinion? Judge Walter McCarthy. Who appointed the new members of the County Board? Judge Walter McCarthy. The local Byrd Machine was alive and well, and continued to assert its powers in the 1950s.

Ongoing conflicts with "Old Virginia" of the Byrd Machine in the mid-1950s led to the creation of a new political machine in Arlington, called the Arlingtonians for a Better County (better known as ABC). Two of the main organizers working together for ABC were the 1946 adversaries, Edmund Campbell and


EDMUND D. CAMPBELL

DANIEL A. DUGAN

Break 'Machine's' Grip, Dugan Urges

Fig. 2: Edmund Campbell and Daniel Dugan were opponents in the 1946 County Board election, The Sun*, November 1, 1946.*

CALL THE RED CROSS:
The need is urgent; the cause is worthy. In no other way can you do so much to save a life than to give a pint of blood to the Red Cross. The need today is you. Will you be the one to say no? Will you be a quitter? Knew or it may be the other man down.
Let's Do It Today.
The Daily Sun
"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."—John 8:32
VOL. XVII—NO. 64
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 1952
FIVE CENTS
3 COUNTY BOARD MEMBERS LOSE JOBS

Fig. 3: Despite progressive change, the Byrd machine was behind the removal of three County Board members in 1952, Daily Sun, *September 5, 1952.*

Daniel Dugan. The ABC would last for decades, into the 1980s, exerting significant control by that time (when it ultimately was folded back into the Democratic party).

About the Author

Bill Fogarty, a retired real estate attorney and 43-year resident of Arlington, has been using his free time in retirement to research, write, and teach about local history matters in Arlington. He currently is writing a weekly "Our Man In Arlington" column for the Falls Church News Press. Bill is a member of the Arlington Historical Society Advisory Board.

Endnotes

1. "Citizens Protest Naming Porter to School Board," *Arlington Daily*, May 28, 1946, 1.
2. Ibid.
3. Interview with Daniel Dugan, June 15, 1976, Arlington County Library—Zonta Oral History Project, p. 4.
4. "Dan Dugan In Race for County Board," *The Sun*, May 3, 1946, 1.
5. "Better Schools His Aim, Dugan Says," *The Sun*, June 7, 1946, 4. In the article, Dugan was quoted, "The Arlington school system is by no means a good one and can easily stand considerable improvement. The entire system used in the selection of school board members is as outdated as button shoes. When members of the electoral board can be perpetuated in office for two decades it is time for a change."
6. "Fight On Charter Will Be Carried Before Assembly," *Arlington Daily*, February 15, 1946, 1.

7. "Group Suggests 8 For Consideration as School Trustees," *The Sun*, June 14, 1946, 6.
8. "School Trustee Naming Stirs Criticism," *Washington Post,* July 12, 1946, 10.
9. "Citizens To Urge 3.25 Million Bonds to Improve Schools," *The Sun*, July 5, 1946, 1.
10. G.O.P. Endorses Dugan for Board," *The Sun*, August 9, 1946, 1.
11. "Green Lashes Out at Graft, Inertia," *The Sun*, July 26, 1946, 1.
12. "Machine Rapped on Delegate Slate," *The Sun*, August 16, 1946, 1.
13. "A Native Arlingtonian's Reply," *The Sun*, July 26, 1946, 6.
14. "Candidates Clash in Talks Before Women Voters," *The Sun*, September 27, 1946, 1.
15. "Dugan Denies He Is G.O.P. Candidate," *The Sun*, October 4, 1946, 1.
16. Editorial, "A Change in the Picture," *The Sun*, November 8, 1946, 4. A post-election analysis in an editorial by *The Sun* newspaper provided a laundry list of problems with the status quo in Arlington including: (1) storm drainage damages many homes and properties, (2) garbage and trash collections are often delayed, (3) Arlington schools do not have kindergartens, (4) many street pavements are rough and broken, (5) registration to vote has been difficult in many cases, and (6) buck-passing is a fine art at the Court House.
17. Interview With Edmund D. Campbell, April 12, 1991, Arlington County Library Oral History Project, p. 23.