

**CLEVELAND MAYOR RALPH J. PERK:
STRONG LEADERSHIP
DURING TROUBLED TIMES**

FRONT MATTER

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FOREWORD

The idea behind *Cleveland Mayor Ralph J. Perk Strong Leadership During Troubled Times* originated in the 1990s. Being a close friend of the mayor and Director of the Department of Human Resources and Economic Development during his administration, I convinced Mayor Perk to offer a special non-credit course as part of the Elder's Program at Cuyahoga Community College. Based on my syllabus, this oral history course tapped into Mayor Perk's tremendous memory. It proved to be a great success. The class videotaped the course and donated it to the Western Reserve Historical Society. Mayor Perk wrote his own thirty-page paper based on this course.

A group close to the Perk Administration held several informal conversations following his death in April 1999. Believing that the public underestimated the many important contributions made by Perk and his administration, they decided that a scholarly analysis of his major accomplishments was in order. A search led by Judge Ralph J. Perk, Jr., Mr. Vincent Campanella, former Cuyahoga County Commissioner and Dr. Vladimir Rus former Slavic Languages Professor at Case Western Reserve University for an appropriate scholar identified Dr. Richard Klein of Cleveland State University. Dr. Klein accepted the task with great enthusiasm. Mayor Perk's family, colleagues and friends gratefully congratulate Dr. Klein on his very successful effort. His writing provides a balanced evaluation of Mayor Ralph J. Perk's many contributions to the City of Cleveland and Northeast Ohio.

Vladimir J. Rus, Ph.D

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is a tribute to one of Cleveland's greatest leaders. Ralph J. Perk embodied the quintessential 20th century politician. A dedicated administrator with both insight and foresight, he dedicated nearly fifty years to public service. During his six-year tenure as mayor, Cleveland went through extraordinary economic, political and social changes. The citizenry demanded strong leadership and Ralph Perk provided it. An optimistic leader with strong moral and religious convictions, he never walked away from a challenge.

Many Clevelanders are unaware of the important role Mayor Perk played in leading this city through very difficult times. A modest man, he rarely took credit for his successes. On this, the 40th anniversary of his tenure as mayor, it is very fitting to look back at his many accomplishments. His actions as mayor made Cleveland a better place to live and work. He was a man of the people, he was Cleveland's own.

I would like to dedicate this writing to the Cleveland Nationalities Movement and its President Judge Ralph J. Perk Jr. I would also like to recognize that organization's past President Ms. Irene Morrow for her keen insight on both Mayor Perk and his administration. Special thanks to Mr. Vincent Campanella for his encouragement and guidance.

I also appreciate the many helpful suggestions made by my CSU colleague Professor William Bowen. Special thanks to Ms. Suzanne Pokorny and Ms. Valerie Hicks both of CSU for their assistance and encouragement and Mr. Anurag Saxena for his research help. I wish also to thank the Secretary of the Cleveland

Nationalities Movement Ms. Valarie Blazey for providing me valuable personal insight on Mayor Perk. I am especially indebted to the Perk Family who so graciously allowed me access to the mayor's personal archives.

I extend my personal thanks to my longtime friend and mentor Dr. Vladimir J. Rus. Dr. Rus not only furnished primary materials for this writing, but also, provided me with a behind the scenes look at the Perk Administration. He also critiqued my manuscript at various stages. Others I am indebted to include Mr. Richard Boylan, Director Impact Cities Crime Fighting Program for supplying me with his program files and Mr. Richard Horvath, Chief Corporate Counsel City of Cleveland for compiling the legal documents pertaining to the establishment of the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority.

I wish to thank Mr. Michael Ruffing, Manager Cleveland Public Library-Public Administration Library and Ms. Elaine Herron, Subject Department Librarian at the Cleveland Public Library-Public Administration Library for directing me to important city records. I also appreciate the assistance of my colleague and friend Mr. Martin Hauserman Chief City Archivist, Cleveland City Council. His special insight regarding the achievements of the Perk Administration proved invaluable.

This new on-line archival service featuring Mayor Perk would not have occurred without the dedication of my CSU colleagues. I am particularly indebted to Ms. Glenda Thornton, Director of the Michael Schwartz Library for her enthusiastic support. I especially wish to thank my friends and colleagues Mr.

William C. Barrow Special Collections Librarian and Ms. Lynn Duchez Bycko Special Collections Associate for their thoughtful comments and suggestions.

I also want to thank Mr. Bruce Jeppersen, Director, Center for Instructional Technology and Distance Learning, Mr. David Lodwick Coordinator, Library Systems and Ms. Joanne Cornelius Digital Production Coordinator. Special thanks to Mr. Allen Nozak Video-Audio Specialist for his many hours of assistance throughout this project. I am also indebted to Ms. Lauren Felder Website Specialist and Mr. Vern Morrison Library Media Technical Assistant for their help. Their commitment to this project led to the development of the first on-line archives at the CSU Michael Schwartz Library dedicated to a Cleveland mayor. Lastly, special thanks to my wife Jo Ann who offered encouragement and worthwhile suggestions throughout this endeavor.

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INTRODUCTION

Many modern politicians eager to resolve economic, political and social issues rarely utilize a valuable resource at their disposal. Institutional memory in the form of city archival records represents a hidden gem. It enables leaders to review past political decisions and incorporate successful legislation into their own resolutions.

This case study of Cleveland's 52nd Mayor Ralph J. Perk, derived in part from institutional memory, demonstrates how a highly competent municipal leader with a dedicated staff successfully initiated three nationally acclaimed programs. However, this study is much more than an analysis of these programs. It affords some valuable examples of government efficiency worth emulating in today's world where self-interest may take precedent over the common good.