

Street Sweeper

With all the sand spread on the streets of Iowa City this winter, it won't be long before residents will start seeing street sweepers slowly making their way along the city's streets cleaning up the winter's grime. According to the City of Iowa City's website, Iowa City currently has two street sweepers that traverse the over 300 miles of city streets.

While the piece of equipment in the photograph pictured here doesn't look like the street sweepers of today, the brushes at the back and on the side indicate that it is a street sweeper but from an earlier era. Posed next to the sweeper are nine men all with hats fixed on top of their heads, another indication that this photograph wasn't taken recently. The names of five of the nine men in the photograph are scrawled on the back. They are Leo Kohl, Jacob Van der Zee, Karl Kaufman, Leroy Mercer, and W.L. Bywater all members of the Iowa City Council between 1929 and 1931. The arches in the building behind the men show that the photograph was taken outside of the Iowa City Hall which at the time stood at the corner of Washington and Linn Streets. The large open doors shown in the photograph where a vehicle, perhaps a fire truck, is just visible inside were located on the Linn Street side of the building.

Why was such a photograph taken? Likely, this shot was set up to commemorate the purchase of a new street sweeper by the City and based on all the fuss made of the purchase, this is possibly the first motorized street sweeper owned by the City. The Iowa City Council was pitched the idea of buying a motorized street sweeper as early as 1923. According to the September 15, 1923 Iowa City Press-Citizen, a representative of the Elgin Street Sweeper Company addressed the council during a regular meeting on the previous night. "He lauded his firm's sweeper, which combines the virtues of a sweeper and a flusher...working...as well as a woman's broom. He predicted that the City could save the price of a sweeper in a year and a half, by its economical service," reported the paper. It seems that the council didn't jump to buy a sweeper right away and may have taken the salesman's advice to drive to Muscatine to see a test of the machine purchased by that city. We don't know for sure which year this sweeper was purchased but City Council minutes from an April 4, 1930 meeting show that an expenditure of \$6,500 was made for the purchase and maintenance of street cleaning equipment which coincidentally

was the price of a sweeper quoted by the Elgin salesman 7 years before so it's possible this sweeper was purchased in 1930.

Do you have more information about this photograph or Iowa City's first street sweeper? If so, send us a note at JCHS, PO Box 5081, Coralville, IA, 52241 or e-mail us at leighann@johnsoncountyhistory.org.