Virgil Harms has called roughly 600 meetings of the Paoli Town Board to order. That has to be a far-reaching record.

He was 34 years old when he became the mayor of Paoli. Five decades later, he's still in charge of the gavel at the monthly meetings of the seven-member town board.

Town Clerk Marilyn Miller planned a surprise party of celebration last Saturday, Dec. 3, when Harms was applauded for his 50 years of service.

Thinking he was going to a Paoli community party, Harms was truly surprised to find the gathering was in his honor.

Cheering him on was a crowd of about 40 including his three children and five of his grandchildren and two great-grands.

Harms humbly accepted the plaque of service which recognized his 50-year contribution as mayor.

Paoli was incorporated Aug. 6, 1930, so Harms has presided as mayor for 62 percent of the town's existence as an incorporated community.



Mayor Virgil Harms and his wife Eloise hold a large photo of early-day Paoli and a
smaller more recent picture of the town Virgil has served as mayor for 50 years.
□—Enterprise photo

It's not a position he campaigned for, but rather one he rotated to when Mayor Oscar Lohn died. Harms, as mayor pro-tem, moved into the big chair in November of 1961.

Harms recalls the reason he was mayor pro-tem is because Mayor Lohn did not want to sign liquor licenses for the town's recreation place/pool hall. "I was young and foolish enough, so I agreed," said Harms, who began his service on the Town Board in 1954.

When the recreation place closed in the early 1970s, the Paoli Town Board no longer had liquor license renewals on their agendas.

As the fourth smallest incorporated community in the State of Colorado, Paoli's population exceeds the size of only Bonanza, Lakeside and Sawpit, according to 2000 statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau.

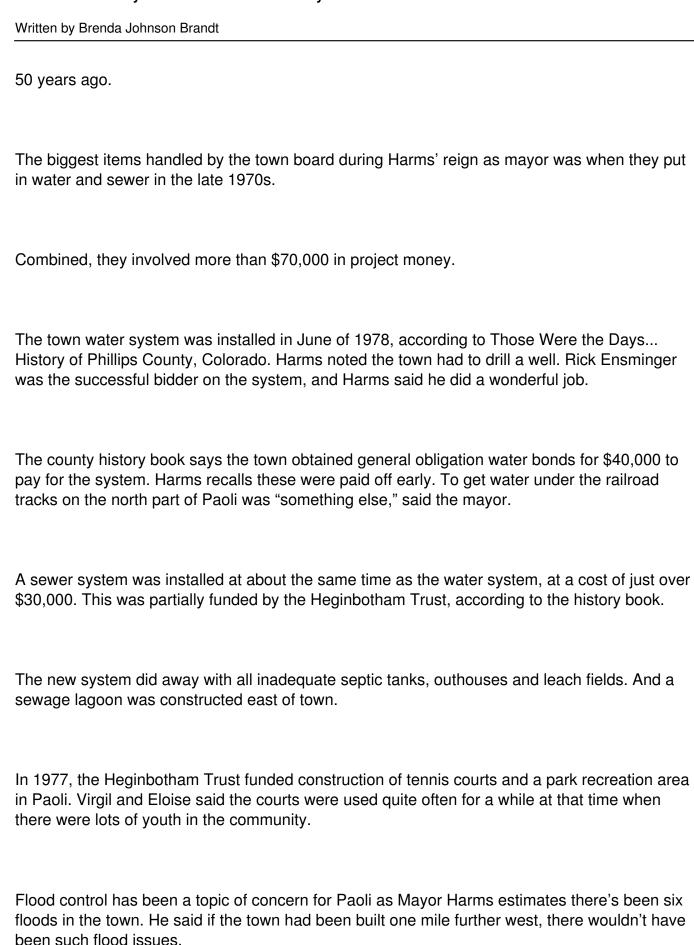
The official population of Paoli in 1990 was 29. In 2000, it grew to 42, then dropped to 34 in 2010.

But Mayor Harms and his wife Eloise are quick to say the population is now 46. The Kains are returning, so every house in town will be full except for the old Methodist church, they reported.

The 1980 population was recorded as 81, and the Harmses explain there were just more kids in town.

Records show the Town of Paoli had a cash balance of \$3,294 when Harms took over as mayor

Harms marks 50 years as Town of Paoli mayor



Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt

In 1991, the town was in a flood plain/flood control project. It helped immensely when the Highway 6 bridge was completed 10 years ago, in 2001.

Harms said they're still working on getting the railroad bridge longer. He explained there's not enough capacity for the water to go through and thus flooding concerns exist. He said the county put in a bridge north of Paoli that's big enough to take all the water, but it doesn't get there as it gets caught in the railroad bridge.

Since Harms has served as mayor, animal ordinances have been on the agenda.

Virgil and Eloise recall when the community had a cage layer house, housing 2,200 hens. The Harmses also housed 3,000 hens, selling 1,500 dozen eggs a week to Safeway in Denver. They quit that business venture in 1957.

After chickens, they raised hogs right there in town. Eloise said they couldn't keep a cow there, as it would "go up town and get on the highway."

Animal ordinances no longer allow such business ventures in Paoli.

Oiling streets is a costly venture that Paoli has opted not to do. Mayor Harms said in 1955 they put in 2.2 miles of oil and it cost \$2,900.

In 2005, Harms researched the cost to reoil that same amount and it would have been \$87,000. "We left it as gravel," he said quickly.



Serving as mayor for 50 years has its advantages when it comes to naming the streets, as Mayor Virgil Harms and his wife w live on Harms Way. They joke about it being "In Harms Way."

—Enterprise photo

Paoli was a thriving metropolis when Harms was growing up. He said on Saturday nights, there would be 30-40 kids to play with at the grocery store.

The town housed three filling stations at one time. History shows there was once a hotel, an auto dealership, hardware store, creamery, land office, three grocery stores, a lumber yard, cafe, barber shop, bank and school.

Paoli Farmers Co-op Elevator, Tri County Ag, Fryrear Seed, Harms Trailer Sales and the Paoli Post Office are now the only major businesses in the town.

A 1930 photo in the co-op elevator office shows a huge baseball event that reportedly attracted 5,000 people. Three airplanes are pictured, two full rows of cars surround the field and it was clearly the place to be that day.

Annexation was on the town board agenda just last year. Harms said the school wasn't in the town proper, so the land was annexed last year so the schoolhouse resident could get water and sewer to the house.

Election? "What's that?" Harms would say.

There have been elections held when there were more interested candidates than positions open. However, elections are expensive, so the mayor appoints town board members when the number of positions is the same as the number of candidates.

Harms said he believes he has appointed all of the current board members including mayor pro-tem Jim McBee, Bud Whiteis, Mary Carlsen, Grady Groshans, Heath Weiss and Dennis Hamaker.

Town board members meet on the third Wednesday of each month in the Paoli Town Hall, located on Highway 6 and Lohn Avenue.

Budgets are the responsibility of Town Clerk Marilyn Miller, who has served in that position since January of 1976, taking over for Eloise Harms.

Miller, who is also the Paoli Postmaster, handles secretary/treasurer duties as the town clerk, and Mayor Harms is quick to say she does a terrific job.

McBee handles snow removal on the streets of Paoli, but there are no official paid employees, said Harms.

He recalls years back, probably in the 1950s and before, when there was a police magistrate. At that time there were lots of wild dogs around, and the police magistrate got paid \$5 a dog to shoot them. He also took care of the mules, said Harms.

Recalling town business through the years, Harms chuckled when he said sometimes fishing and pheasant hunting even made the discussion list. The minutes once reported, "Fish aren't biting at McConaughy!"

Virgil and Eloise have extended their dedication of Paoli to visit the communities of Paoli (sometimes spelled Paola) in several states, including Kansas and Oklahoma.

Harms never dreamed he would serve as mayor for 50 years. But at this point he plans to

Harms marks 50 years as Town of Paoli mayor Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt continue as long as he can. Holyoke Enterprise December 8, 2011