

## Francis Evans Cornish

### London's First Native Born Mayor



Municipal politics in London are often seen as a dull affair with our elected leaders efficiently tending to their civic duties. But in the days of Francis Evans "Frank" Cornish, London's first native born mayor, local politics were anything but boring.

Cornish was first elected mayor of London in 1861 and won the next three elections. He was the seventh mayor of the City of London. A fervent Orangeman and a notorious brawler, Frank Cornish captured the spirit of what was still a frontier town. Cornish regularly bought votes with booze and his fists were ready for responses to his numerous enemies.

In one incident when Mayor Cornish was drunk at a ball, he insulted the wife of a British officer. When the officer protested, Cornish smashed him in the face. On another occasion, Cornish was arrested for public drunkenness. Unlike today, mayors of the 1860s acted as local magistrates, and so Cornish brazenly tried himself following his arrest. The mayor removed the fine of four dollars from one pocket and then paid "the court" by putting the fine in his other pocket. Cornish gave himself a lecture on the evils of drink for good measure.

Eventually the people of London tired of Cornish's antics, and he lost the 1865 election to a more respectable candidate. But Cornish never lost his love for municipal politics. In 1872, he moved west to the new province of Manitoba, and two years later Frank Cornish was the first mayor of the City of Winnipeg!