Reminiscences of Old-Time Hustlers for The Bee

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A REQUEST from the managing editor of The Bee for a reminiscent article of an early period of the writer's service on The Bee brings back thronging memories of from fifteen to eighteen years ago. Omaha had a live, hustling set of local newsgatherers then, each with one great ambition and that to scoop "the other fellow." In those days there were the Evening and Morning Bee, the Herald and the Republican, the Evening Dispatch and later the World, and among the boys who gathered up the local news the writer recalls Fred R. Giles (who died three or four years ago in a New York hospital after an eventful career in Chicago and New York journalism), Frank Allen, Joe Ryan, Ed O'Brien, Lee Helsley, W. T. Jackman, poor old Joe Hammill, Harry Hunter, A. R. Fenwick, W. C. Pomeroy, "Pope" Gregory, "Billy" Kent, later of Laramie Boomerang memory, and, of course, "Sandy" Woodbridge, the noblest Roman of them all, and the only survivor, in the present Omaha newspaper world, of that ancient band of item chasers—not a few of whom are now in a land where scoops are presumably an unknown quantity.

Those were days of fierce competition in pursuit of newspaper stories, and each reporter carried his tomahawk and scalping knife ready to lift the topknot of his rival, as it were. The writer recollects one rather funny affair which illustrates this point. "Billy" Kent was doing the local on the Morning Bee, single-handed. Giles and a young cub reporter were gathering up city intelligence for the long-since defunct Morning Republican. Now Fred R., although a first-class newsgatherer and a remarkably fine writer, had one fault—he was somewhat addicted to boasting. One evening in the presence of a number of reporters he made the emphatic assertion that on the following morning the Republican would scoop its loathesome contemporaries by publishing the "biggest news sensation of the year." Kent quietly separated himself from the group and at once started out to puncture the scoop by locating the sensation. He carefully canvassed every news center, big and little, visiting every place which he thought by any possibility might afford him a clew. Supper time came and no result. With his evening meal disposed of and a few minor news items turned into copy, Billy started out on the warpath once more. This time he was rewarded, for late in the evening he ran across Captain Jim Neligh, who for many years conducted a private detective agency in Omaha. The captain gave him a quiet tip in regard to a singularly daring diamond robbery that had been committed that very evening and which had just been reported to the police. The details were soon secured, although the authorities made a strong effort to suppress the matter, and the next morning The Bee came out with one of the best police stories that had been published in many a long day. The Republican sensation, on the other hand, fell flat. It proved to be a story of an alleged crime of poisoning and was wholly unwarranted by the facts presented—a case of "going off half-cocked." The Republican was promptly sued for libel, although the suit was withdrawn later, after an humble apology had been published. It was a long time before Kent finished chuckling over the amusing sequel to that idle boast of a rival reporter.

A laughable event of Omaha newspaper history that occurred about this time was the first—and for aught I know last—reporters' bicycle race that ever occurred in the city. Along in '85 or '86 Jack Prince, Tom Eck and several others of the old-time racing men landed in Omaha and began to stir up interest in wheeling matters. A well-constructed, eight-lap track was built in the old exposition building on Capitol avenue and a series of racing tournaments was inaugurated. Prince conceived the idea of getting up a reporters' bicycle race as the central feature of one of these evening programs. Those were the days of the old high wheels and not a single reporter in Omaha knew the first thing about riding one of the machines. However, considerable enthusiasm was aroused over the event and several newspaper men went into training. Every spare moment was utilized and the result was that when the eventful evening came off three contestants faced the starter, Harry Hunter of the Morning Bee, Pomeroy of the Herald and the writer of the Evening Bee. The building was jammed with spectators, for a varied and exciting program had been provided. Pomeroy had made up his mind to get the medal and when the starter's pistol popped he shot out ahead, pumping away for dear life. The three contestants strung out and kept up a pretty even pace for the first two laps. On one of the turns of the third lap the hind wheels of the bicycles pedaled by Hunter and the writer collided and both riders were thrown ten or twelve feet with terrific force. Both machines were irretrievably damaged and each contestant was thoroughly hors du combat. Hunter, indeed, was rather seriously injured, having been violently hurled against a steam radiator. That broke up the race, of course, but the funny feature of it was that Pomeroy, who still had that gold medal glittering before his eyes, kept pumping away. He knew nothing of the accident and merely supposed that he had gained a comfortable lead and he didn't propose to lose it. The crowd yelled for him to stop, but he, thinking that the cries were those of encouragement, redoubled his efforts. The Herald representative was a much disappointed man when the situation finally dawned upon him and he slowed down his wheel. It is needless to say that this event effectually dampened the ardor of the newspaper racing enthusiasts.

Omaha was a good field for news in those days. Among other matters the writer recalls the trial and conviction of City Marshal Guthrie for accepting bribes from the gamblers, the famous John Lauer murder case, in both trials of which John M. Thurston and General John Cowin were pitted against each other, the building of the first packing houses in South Omaha and the development of that market as a stock center; the facts of the famous Omaha boom, which at that time was at its height, and numerous other affairs, among which, by the way, let us not forget Marshal Tom Cummings' famous ukase against the wearing on the street of the Mother Hubbard gown, a subject which was handled by newspaper paragraphers from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Taken all in all, those were busy days in the Omaha journalistic world, as anyone who participated in the scramble for news at that time can well attest.

Fort Smith, Ark. A. J. KENDRICK.

The Bee Building--Magnificent Home of The Bee

STAIRCASE PARAPET.

THE finest newspaper building in the country" is the general verdict passed on the home of The Bee. Some of the largest American cities have newspaper buildings that cost more money and are more ornate in design than The Bee building, but none surpass it in real beauty, solidity and adaptability to purpose.

In this era of architectural triumph there are perhaps a score or more of large, magnificent and costly newspaper buildings in the United States and among the number The Bee building stands as the pioneer. When construction was begun in 1887 Omaha took the lead of even the imperial city of New York, for at that time the golden-domed house of the World and the great granite structure of the Times were not in existence. When The Bee building was completed and for several years thereafter it was the largest, handsomest and best arranged newspaper house in the world and today it still holds its place in the very front rank.

Thirty years ago The Bee was born in a rough, unpainted two-story frame house at the corner of Twelfth and Dodge streets, then the business center of the city. In this building the printers who did the work on the first floor by day lodged on the second floor by night, it being a sort of combination print shop and boarding house. Indeed, it was an humble birthplace, but The Bee in its infancy was not a very pretentious newspaper.

When The Bee had attained the age of three months and given some promise of becoming a permanent institution it leased a new home—another frame building on Twelfth street, just to the south of its birthplace. This second home of The Bee was totally destroyed by an incendiary fire on the night of June 11, 1872.

Without any interruption to its regular appearance The Bee was moved into a two-story and basement brick building on Farnam street, between Ninth and Tenth streets, which had been erected by Mr. Rosewater in 1869. In this house, remodeled and enlarged from time to time as was necessary, The Bee lived for sixteen years and grew to a great metropolitan newspaper.

For some time prior to 1887 Mr. Rosewater had contemplated the erection of a newspaper building in Omaha that would not only provide every facility for the publication of a modern journal, but would stand as one of the lasting architectural triumphs of a growing city. In June of that year he engaged S. S. Beman of Chicago, famous as a designer of large office buildings, to prepare the plans. While the genius and technical skill of Mr. Beman evolved the plans in detail, the general scheme of construction was suggested by Mr. Rosewater. Work on the building commenced in the fall of 1887 and it was pushed rapidly to conclusion.

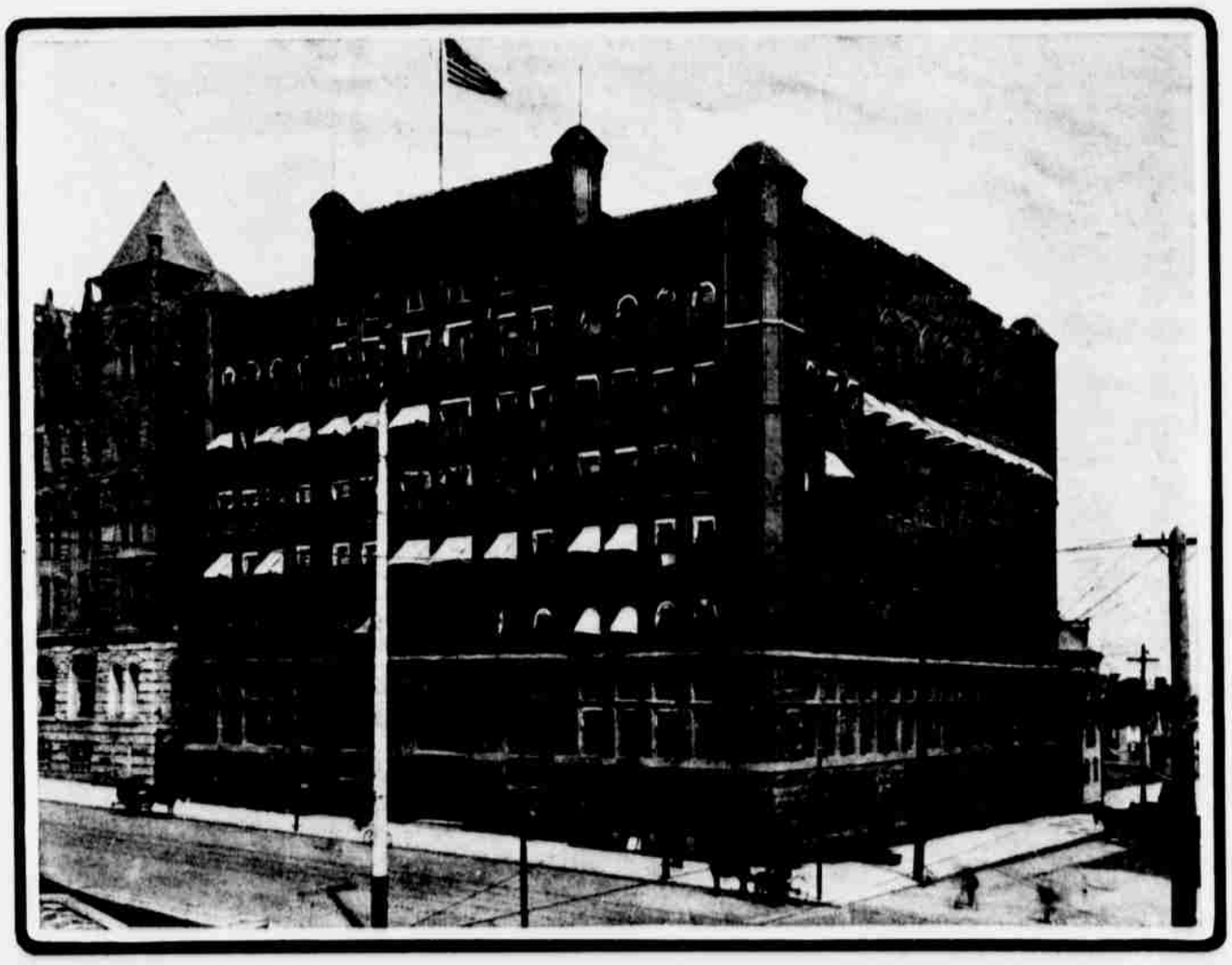
As the great structure of granite, iron and marble rose from its foundations no detail was so small that it was overlooked, and as the work progressed many changes to add to the beauty and solidity of the building were made from the original plans, regardless of the extra expense incurred.

The Bee building occupies one-fourth of an entire city block, with a frontage of 132 feet on Farnam street and the same on Seventeenth street. Its distinguishing feature is its impressive appearance of solidity and durability. Its beauty is in its imposing walls of granite and brick, the massiveness of its richly colored columns and the absence of frivolous ornamentation in its exterior finish.

The building rests on an impregnable foundation, five feet thick at the base, with assisting piers eight feet thick. From their base the walls taper to a thickness of twenty inches at the parapet. Their strength is augmented by iron columns, inclosed in the brick piers above the first story. The walls of the basement and first story are of rock faced granite from Waupaca, Wis., considered fully equal in color and textile qualities to the famous Scottish granite. The granite is buttressed at the corners of the building, and above each a beehive is suggestively carved in the pilasters. The main front on Farnam street is supported by eleven polished pillars of the same material.

Beginning at the second story the granite gives way to brown obsidian pressed brick, trimmed with terra cotta of a similar color and brown stone. Moulded brick and carved terra cotta relieve the monotony of the vast stretch of masonry. On the Farnam street side an eighth story extends for sixty feet along the center of the building and serves to break the effect of the long lines of windows which stretch across the main wall. Above the eighth story two small turrets rise to a height of 115 feet above the sidewalk, and between them the inscription, "The Bee Building," in plain Roman letters, graces a terra cotta panel.

Passing into the building under the immense granite arch that gives ingress from Farnam street, the visitor finds himself



THE BEE BUILDING—Photo by Heyn.

THE MARBLE ARCH.