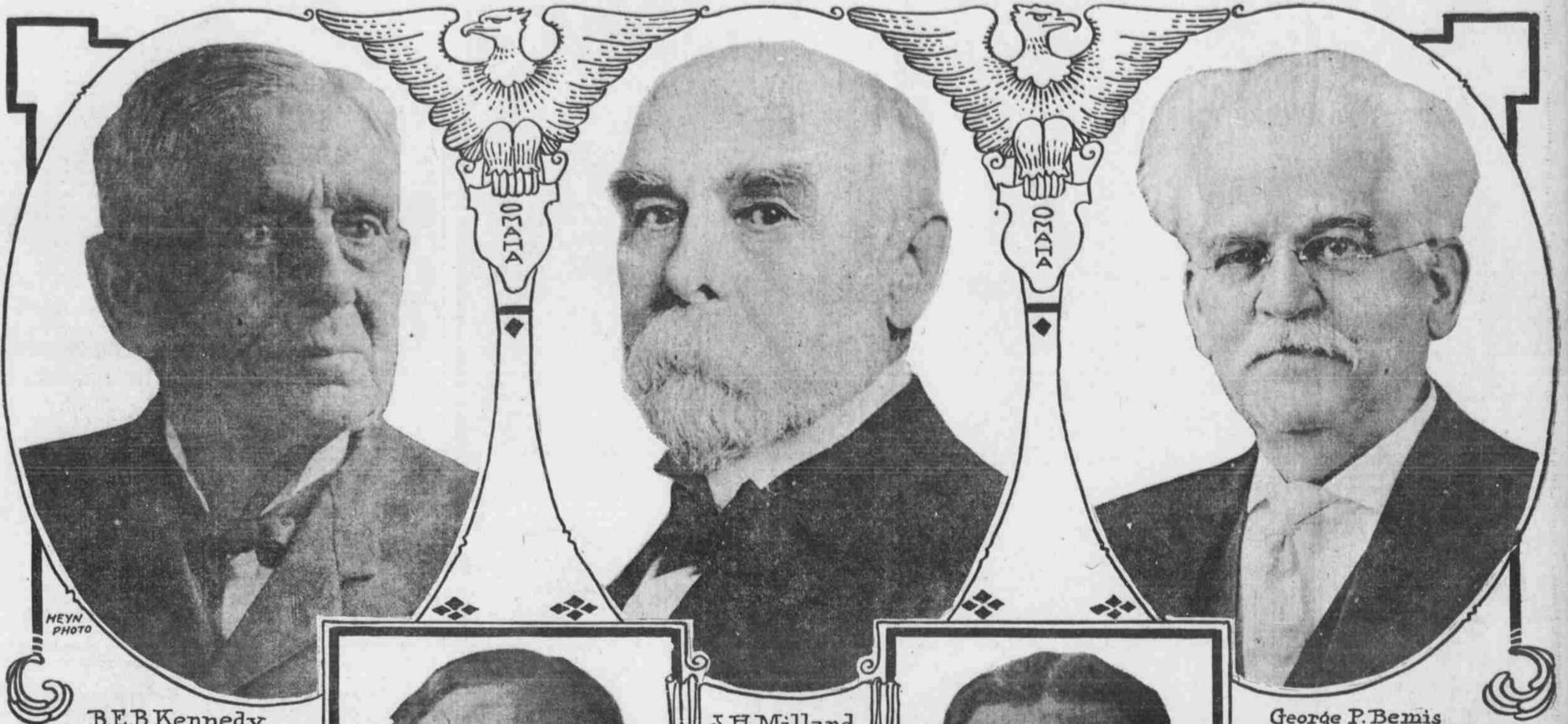


Five Living Ex-Mayors of Omaha Talk of the Office



B.E.B. Kennedy

J.H. Millard

George P. Bemis

W.J. Broatch

Harry B. Zimman

FIVE living ex-mayors of Omaha—Benjamin Eli Barnett Kennedy, William James Broatch, George Pickering Bemis, Joseph H. Millard and Harry B. Zimman—the first of whom sat in the chair of the city's chief executive before the majority of modern political bloods were born, believe with unanimity surprising in five men of such strong and diverse views that Omaha is the Mecca of the world weary.

Penniless and unknown, these men came to Omaha—a mere village back in the days when the country was in the throes of civil war—and laying hold of the task of making a living, they grew wealthy, famous and happy. Two have retired from business; one spent his million dollars and is back at work; a fourth is a financial power and the fifth riseth by leaps and bounds, being a young and energetic man.

Romance was the side partner of the older of these living ex-mayors; the career of one of them reads like an old fairy tale of knights and fair ladies and much tainted gold. The lives of them all are typical of the American qualities of pluck and everlasting perseverance.

Bemis and Kennedy are growing old, but Bemis refuses to admit it. He believes he will live to be 150 years old and says he will "slip a cog" if he should succumb to mortal ailment before he has passed his 148th birthday.

Defies Time and His Scythe

"Look at me!" he commanded. "See what preservation! For a boy between 95 and 100 there are few to equal me. And I feel fine and work hard and enjoy life. There is nothing I care for especially, except the children. And I love the children—the sunshine and flowers and the happy people who surround me."

Bemis is 75 years old, ruddy of face, with soft white hair, a bristling gray mustache and quick, flashing black eyes. He is full of whims and is even now making his own plans for forty years hence, for he is gifted with a vivid imagination, which was one of the traits of his brilliant uncle, George Francis Train, with whom he was closely associated for many years, during the height of Citizen Train's popularity and activity. Bemis has taken up the New Thought and attributes his optimism largely to it.

"I love children even better than Mr. Train did," Bemis said in retrospect. "When Train lost his money and his daughter was giving him \$13 a week, which was all he wanted, he would wander around in Central park, New York, playing with children. The kids would clamor all over him. They were all he needed—this man who had played with millions of dollars and had builded cities and helped make republics."

Bemis, who was born in Boston March 15, 1838, and began the accumulation of a million and a quarter dollars by sweeping out a little store on Eighth avenue, New York, for \$2.50 a week, believes he is the most adventurous man in Omaha.

"I have certainly lived a strange, eventful life," he soliloquized. "And I will have gotten out of it, when I am ready to leave, what the rest of you get—bread, butter and clothes. Money has flowed through my fingers and I have showered it right and left. In my later years I find I am a little pinched, but it does not matter. I have no regrets."

Around the World With Train.

Bemis' career began to be "eventful" the day he quit his store-sweeping job to accept a position as shipping clerk and continued to grow more eventful through his service in the civil war, his trip around the world with Train when that erratic citizen was stirring up discord and organizing corporations, installing street railway systems and lecturing on immigration or any other question,

through his journalistic life in London down to his fight for mayor of Omaha.

"I always looked up to Train," Bemis said, diverging from his subject. "He was my ideal and I believe he was 200 years ahead of his time. He was bright, capable and generous to a fault. Money meant nothing to him. In his later life domestic troubles almost wrecked his reason, but until he retired he was a marvel."

Bemis entered the real estate and loan business in Omaha. Much of his time was spent in those days—shortly after he had toured the world with Train in 1870—walking to the postoffice, then a building twenty-two feet wide, where he read over the eastern newspapers and discussed the latest politics. In 1891 the republicans nominated him for mayor, and he was elected by the biggest majority any candidate had received up to that time. In 1896 he went out of office and since then has lived continuously at his home, 2303 Douglas street, taking little part in politics.

"While I have not been very active in politics, I have kept in close touch with the situation at all times," he said, as he picked up a newspaper. "I can't get over the habits of the newspaper man. I read the newspapers avidly. My eyes are clear and give me no trouble and often I read until I o'clock in the morning."

Something of a Veto Artist.

During his administration Mayor Bemis set the record for vetoes. He vetoed nearly 500 measures. "About three a week," he said. "A lot of things were slipped through which I knew nothing about until they came to my office. There they met their fate."

"I have been accused of being unsympathetic toward the poor, but no man ever fought harder fights for the plain people than I have. I love them and their interests are my own. I believe in fair play and I gave the poor and the friendless more than their due when I could."

"I do not say this boastfully, but I have been a philanthropist in my time. John A. Creighton used to say that we two were the real philanthropists of this town, for we would get together and discuss how we could spend money for the benefit of others. And we spent it, too. That was when I had money to spend, and spent it with a lavish hand. I had great schemes in mind then and if they had gone through I probably would have been

a wealthy man. I conceived the idea of Bemis park at a time that was probably not opportune. I made the park and the park unmade me.

Since I have been watching instead of marching with the political procession I have seen great improvements take place in the city government. The machinery is much easier to handle and the servants of the people are nearer their masters. All we need is to have the right kind of men in office."

Mayor Fifty Years Ago.

First of all living ex-mayors comes B. E. B. Kennedy, who was mayor from 1862 to 1864. He was born April 20, 1827, at Bolton, Vt., and was the son of a veteran of the war of 1812, who went back to the farm after the war and was elected to the legislature and later held the office of judge of the nisi prius court of his county. Mr. Kennedy is now the oldest living member of the Omaha bar, of which he was a leader until a few months ago, when ill health drove him from active practice, although he claims to be good for a number of long years.

"I have been a little feeble of late," said Mr. Kennedy, "and have lost interest in politics. I do not care to hear politics discussed now."

Until he was of age Kennedy worked on his father's farm-attending district school in winter and securing one term of academic education. He studied law in Richmond, Vt., with a law firm in 1853, and was admitted to the bar. He married in 1858 and came to Omaha, was elected solicitor, served as mayor and for three years was a member of the territorial legislature. While in the legislature he was chairman of the judiciary committee and of the joint committee on the revision of the statutes. In 1866 he was nominated by the democratic party for judge of the supreme court, but was defeated by a small majority. In 1879 Mr. Kennedy was chosen school director of the public schools of Omaha and this office he held for eight consecutive years. During this period the first school buildings in the city were erected.

Way back in 1848 Mr. Kennedy took the freeman's oath and cast his first ballot for Lewis Cass. Twice he voted for Grover Cleveland, once in 1888, and again in 1892.

"My chief pastime in the days of reorganization was hunting," said Mr. Kennedy, who became known as a great lover of all outdoor sports. Applying himself assiduously to his law work, he

built up a large practice and became one of the best lawyers of the local bar as well as a prominent figure in affairs of the state.

In Office During Stormy Times.

William J. Broatch, born at Middleton, Conn., July 31, 1841, won honor in the civil war and later came to Omaha and lost some of his laurels while holding the office of mayor, a position he occupied from 1887 to 1890.

Since retiring from active politics Captain Broatch has now and again been stirred by national issues. When Roosevelt came forth as a bull moose Mr. Broatch lent him aid and was prominent in local political gatherings until the figure of the bull moose faded from the horizon.

Mr. Broatch, too, was a farmer until seventeen years old, when he became clerk in a hardware store. After coming to Omaha he engaged in the heavy hardware business. In 1881 he was elected to the legislature. He was a member of the Omaha Board of Trade the year the board was organized.

"I conceived the idea of fighting in the union army, being an ardent abolitionist," said Mr. Broatch, referring to his war record, "and in order to accustom myself to the rigors of campaigning I forsook my bed and slept on the hard oak floor." He was in several of the big battles of the war.

Served in Early Seventies.

Joseph H. Millard, now president of the Omaha National bank, was mayor in 1872 and 1873. He was born in Hamilton, Canada, in 1886, and came to Omaha in 1856, where he became a real estate dealer. Senator Millard's life in Omaha has been a series of financial successes, dating from the day he became a member of the banking firm of Barrows, Millard & Co. He was also an organizer of note and assisted in organization of the Omaha & Council Bluffs Street Railway and Bridge company in 1887; was one of the incorporators of the Omaha & Southwestern and also the Omaha & Northwestern Railroad companies. Later he became one of a syndicate which purchased the stock of the Omaha Motor Railway company. He was a member of the first board of directors of the Omaha Loan and Trust company savings bank. Senator Millard was sent to the United States senate by the legislature of 1901 and served one term there being succeeded by Senator Norris Brown. He is enjoying fine health, works as lustily as his most

energetic clerk and spends his vacations in Europe. Last of the line of living ex-mayors is Harry B. Zimman, who filled out the unexpired term of Hon. Frank E. Moores, who died in office. Mr. Zimman was a militant president of the council at the time of Mayor Moores' death. He assumed the office of mayor when grave questions had thrown the city into a turmoil and the council was squirming under a plethora of hard work and a regular riot of discussions.

"Those were stormy times," Mr. Zimman said, "and I have a hobby which did not tend to pour oil on the troubled waters. My hobby was—and I have it yet—that public service corporations ought to be run by private individuals and controlled absolutely by the city officials. In those good old days patience was a virtue, but virtue was not its own reward. This hobby was a pretty dangerous thing for me to carry around."

As president of the council Mr. Zimman was minority leader in several hair-raising disputes. He tells with bated breath of one particular scrap in which he fought with the minority under a considerable handicap. The fight was over the letting of a certain contract.

"Here's where my hobby hurt again," Mr. Zimman recalled. "The city councils in the days of Mayor James C. Dahlgren have indulged in bitter verbal arguments and have passed hot epithets across the table, but the council chamber has never since echoed with such sounds of grievous struggle as on the memorable day when this contract came up for action."

Story of a Hot Fight

"With the minority of the council I had gone to my office that day and intended to stay there, so that a quorum would not be present when the contract came up. When the council convened and found us absent there was a wild protest and threats to bring us in by police force. Hearing this, we marched into the council chamber, and the minute we were in there the doors were barricaded by policemen and plainclothes men took their seats beside each minority member."

"Naturally, I relinquished the chair to the vice chairman so I could handle the minority's fight from the floor. Well, without going into tedious detail, let me tell you there was a regular rough house there before the session was ended. One member of the council, I remember, spent a considerable portion of his time struggling in a corner of the room with a big policeman, who sat on him to keep him quiet."

The fact that he lost this fight Mr. Zimman attributes to no lack of managerial ability nor to cowardice of his supporters, for he says they fought like Trojans under the eye of the police—and frequently with the bluecoats.

When Mr. Zimman became mayor the San Francisco earthquake tended to relieve the local tension of discord, and he led the campaign to help the sufferers. Many tents were pitched and 5,000 regiments were harbored here, hundreds being sent on to other cities where they had relatives or friends. Omaha sent the first trainload of provisions to the stricken city, smoking in ruins at the Golden Gate.

Mr. Zimman wound up his career as mayor and settled down to his private business, but the lure of the city hall and the interest he maintained in the issues fought out and settled there has brought him back to the council chamber many times since, and his "hobby" has compelled him to do battle before the city commission frequently.

"I believe the city ought to be in partnership with the public service corporations," Mr. Zimman said. "And the council ought to have absolute control over these corporations. I have fought for this nearly all my life and intend to keep right on fighting. I do not believe in municipal ownership, but I do believe in more thorough municipal control, and if I can get it, we're going to have it."