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Article Summary: In the spring of 1921 Omahans returned James Dahlman to the mayor's office, replacing Edward P Smith. One particular event convinced Omaha voters that Smith and his divided commissioners must go in order to recapture the stability enjoyed under political boss Tom "the Old Man" Dennison and the Dahlman administration. The role of Dennison and his men in the riot of September 26, 1919, remains equivocal so far as Will Brown's arrest and murder. However, Dennison and the *Bee* helped create conditions ripe for the outbreak of racial violence.

Errata (if any)

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Photographs / Images: Rioters on the south side of the Douglas County Courthouse, September 28, 1919; Tom Dennison; Edward Rosewater; James C "Cowboy Jim" Dahlman; political cartoon, *Omaha Bee*, May 18, 1918; J Dean Ringer; Edward P Smith; Riot damage to the courthouse interior; county clerk's office inside the courthouse after the riot; burning of Will Brown's body; *Omaha World-Herald* headlines, September 29, 1918



Rioters on the south side of the Douglas County Courthouse, September 28, 1919.

TOM DENNISON, THE OMAHA BEE, AND THE 1919 OMAHA RACE RIOT

By Orville D. Menard

In the spring of 1921 Omahans returned James Dahlman to the mayor's office they had denied him three years earlier. Dahlman's streak of four consecutive City Hall victories had been broken in 1918 by the reform ticket headed by Edward P. Smith. Now the colorful "Cowboy Jim" once again displayed his winning ways as voters registered their disillusionment with Smith and his colleagues.

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Internal differences and squabbles that had marred the Smith administration, plus dissatisfaction with law enforcement under Police Commissioner J. Dean Ringer, fueled by the influential *Bee* newspaper, were significant factors in the reformers' defeat.¹ But one event in particular convinced Omaha voters that Smith and his divided commissioners must go in order to recapture the stability enjoyed under political boss Tom "the Old Man" Dennison and the Dahlman administration.

For several hours on September 28, 1919, the Douglas County Courthouse

was besieged by a rioting mob; its determined members set the building ablaze and cut to pieces hoses unrolled by firemen to fight the flames. Policemen and deputies were verbally and physically attacked, the mayor almost killed, and the rioters eventually realized their central purpose — the lynching of black Will Brown, accused of raping a white woman. "The results of the riot were far-reaching. Omaha's reform administration," Louise Rickard concluded, "already under attack before the disorder, was now thoroughly discredited."²

Dennison's political machine and the

1919 Omaha Riot

Dahlman slate were the beneficiaries of the Courthouse Riot. However, the riot was not merely a spontaneous reaction to racial tensions that had been building through the summer of 1919 in Omaha and other American cities. In Omaha an orchestration of racism was conducted and a campaign waged to exacerbate an already volatile situation, setting the stage for an outburst demonstrating the incompetence of City Hall's incumbents. The sequence of events from Brown's accusation to his death cannot be attributed directly to Dennison and his machine. However, there is little doubt they helped create a climate ripe for mob action, thereby realizing the goal of discrediting Smith and recapturing control of city government in the next election.

In the months preceding the riot, Omahans read in the *Bee* recurrent attacks on Ringer, and they were informed that because of him, ineffectiveness and brutality were rampant in the police department. During the summer and fall of 1919 the *Bee* stressed the baneful consequences of Smith/Ringer misgovernment and provided sensational and lurid coverage of assaults by black men on white women in Omaha and of racial strife elsewhere. A longstanding alliance between Omaha's political boss and a major newspaper of the community was once again in view.

Tom Dennison was a political boss in the classical mold, a man with little formal education but one with considerable experience in dealing with people. A professional gambler whose skills were honed in the gold and silver boom towns of the West, he came to Omaha in 1892 from Denver. To be a gambler where the games were illegal required political influence, and Dennison turned his formidable abilities to gaining access to city decisionmakers. Within five years his political talents were apparent, and his powerful role in Omaha life was well underway.³

Dennison was keenly aware of the essence of power, the capacity to



Tom Dennison, Omaha political boss.

reward and punish, and like bosses in other cities, took advantage of the numerous opportunities to be benevolent or cruel as loyal followers or the unfaithful deserved. Obedience, however, was dependent upon accommodations with other powerful figures, for a political boss was not an isolated autocrat. Tom Dennison accordingly developed a host of allies and alliances, but in his early Omaha years one name stands out prominently as his partner in seeking to dominate Omaha's political life — Edward Rosewater, publisher of the *Omaha Bee*.

Dennison was a gambler, a man whose base of operations was in downtown's third ward, which included the heart of Omaha's gambling and prostitution. His office was in the rear of

the "Budweiser" bar. His lack of education and social standing necessitated a contact within Omaha's establishment to facilitate the necessary exchange of monies (campaign contributions) and instructions between the organization and its upperworld clientele.⁴

Dennison's conduit to men and organizations far removed from the lower reaches of the third ward became Rosewater, who needed the votes the political boss came to have at his command. Edward Rosewater had lived in Omaha for almost three decades by the time of Dennison's arrival and his *Bee* newspaper was twenty-one years old. A leading Republican, editor, and a man of wealth and power, Rosewater nevertheless recognized the importance of allying with a man capable of producing votes.

Rosewater's opinions, channeled through his newspaper, were influential but insufficient by themselves to alter or direct city decision making. The editor's ambitions and considered courses of action needed electoral support to be transformed from Rosewater policy to public policy. To that end Rosewater and men like him in other cities sought out a political boss, a man able to deliver an election. Differing in class standing and profession, inhabiting different worlds, business boss and political boss united in their common desire to manipulate political power to their mutual advantage. And the key was America's mass male electorate at the turn of the century, amenable to benefits such as jobs and welfare, which the political machine was prompt to provide in exchange for a vote.

Rosewater was a political fighter, once described as "the best practical politician in Nebraska," a man "who knew the Omaha battlefield better than any living man. He knew its underworld and its upperworld, its captains, its lieutenants, its rank and file."⁵ When and how the relationship between Rosewater and Dennison was initiated is unknown, but its reality is well established. As early as the 1897 city

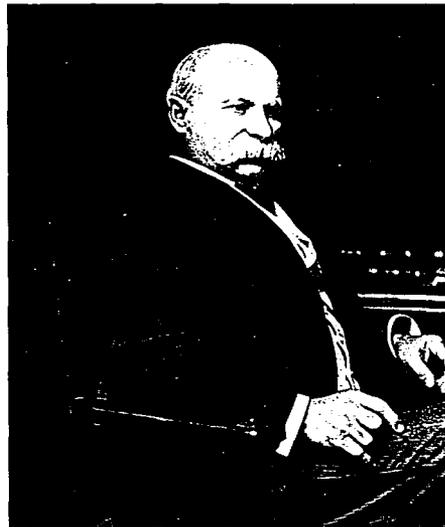
election the *World-Herald* was scoring the *Bee* for shielding Dennison, the "policy shop king," asserting that the gambler was right-hand man to Rosewater, furnishing money and serving as the editor's chief lieutenant.⁶

That refrain became a common one in the local elections three years later as the Rosewater-Moores-Dennison Republican combination became the theme for many an opposition article.⁷ (Frank E. Moores was the mayor from 1897 until his death in office in 1906.) "Tom Dennison," Omahans were informed in March 1900, "notorious and desperate, is the premier of the kitchen cabinet that is engineering the fortunes of the Rosewater-Moores-Dennison ticket."⁸ During that fall's school board campaign, the *Daily News* warned that the Republican ticket had been dictated by the triad in an attempt to bring even the schools under their machine for personal ends.⁹ A deputy county attorney, complaining of the difficulty in securing evidence in Omaha through the police department, referred to the "Dennisonwater" organ of the machine, "formerly known in its more lucid moments as the *Omaha Bee*."¹⁰

During a 1905 trial in Red Oak, Iowa, in which Dennison was charged with possession of stolen goods (he was found not guilty), the Dennison-Rosewater connection became part of the proceedings on two occasions, once directly, once inadvertently. Witness Frank Shercliffe recalled that Elmer Thomas, a determined Dennison opponent instrumental in bringing about the trial, had confided to him that by means of the courtroom Thomas wanted to show what a thief and gambler Dennison was, and thereby reveal "what kind of man the mayor, chief of police, and Edward Rosewater were associated with."¹¹ And when Dennison was on the stand, his attorney, W.J. Connell, after reeling off a number of facts, asked his client, in a remarkable slip of the tongue: "Now isn't that so, Mr. Rosewater?"¹² Dennison denied any such alias and the reference to

"Rosewater" was stricken from the record.

In what proved to be Rosewater's last campaign, he and Dennison disagreed in 1906 over the candidate for mayor. While the Democrats fairly easily settled on James Dahlman as their champion in his first race for mayor of Omaha, the Republicans fought an internecine war that divided the party and facilitated Dahlman's way into City Hall. A three way contest developed in the party for the mayoral



Edward Rosewater, editor of the Omaha Bee.

nomination, revealing not only party splits but placing Dennison and Rosewater behind opposing aspirants.

Erastus A. Benson was the early choice of the Fontenelle Club, an organization of elite Republicans opposed by Rosewater. He decided to back Gus Hennings, but an ailing Mayor Moores, physically unable to campaign for a fourth term, refused to endorse Rosewater's selection, revealing a rift in the triad's ranks. Moores instead came out for William J. Broatch and Dennison followed, taking with him the bulk of saloon keepers and gam-

blers, important sources of campaign financing.¹³ When primary day arrived, Benson won the nomination with Broatch running third, carrying only two wards, Dennison's third and tenth machine stalwarts.¹⁴

The split in Republican ranks was not healed after the primary — in fact it became worse. Certain businessmen and the "liberal element" (saloon keepers and gamblers) saw in Benson a threat to their livelihood, fearing that if he became mayor a prohibition campaign was in the offing. Therefore, prominent Republican businessmen with interests in breweries and third ward real estate spread the word that a Dahlman win was necessary. Likewise, saloon keepers and gamblers who had supported Republicans Moores and Broatch now turned to Democrat Dahlman in response to Benson's potential for damage.¹⁵

Edward Rosewater, unable to make the switch to support a Democrat, gave Benson a lukewarm endorsement.¹⁶ Dennison, who also was a Republican, turned political pragmatist on behalf of the "sporting district" and threw his weight behind the effort to secure the tolerant Dahlman's election. On election day the third ward gave Dahlman his highest ward total (in the core second precinct Dahlman had 420 votes to Benson's 22), and the highest total voter turnout of any ward in the city. Benson carried half of the twelve wards, but he was unable to overcome Dahlman's lopsided victories in the wards delivered by "Old Man" Tom Dennison.¹⁷

Henceforth Dennison and Dahlman were electoral allies, the pragmatic Republican political boss helping sustain in office the popular and reliable Democrat. But Edward Rosewater was unable to alter his party allegiance, and his son Victor followed his father's example in elections to come, consistently placing the *Bee* in opposition to "Cowboy Jim." However, on several other issues, the *Bee*/Dennison relationship remained intact, the son's inherited newspaper and the Boss's

machine lining up in common cause.

Years after Edward Rosewater's 1906 death brought his relationship with Tom Dennison to a close,¹⁸ a visitor to the "Old Man's" office could still see Rosewater's portrait on the wall and be reminded of the alliance forged so many years before.¹⁹ Victor Rosewater and Dennison continued the compact, although Democrat Dahlman remained unacceptable in the *Bee* pages. Edward Rosewater had been dead for seven years when a private investigator from Kansas City, brought into Omaha by the *Daily News* to probe corruption, reported that Victor and his newspaper were "subservient to and part of the [Dennison's] system."²⁰

Newspaper and machine sometimes divided along party lines over candidates for public office. But when substantive issues came along, the relationship revealed itself as voters behaved as the Rosewater/Dennison forces directed. Two water works bond votes in 1911, for example, demonstrated the connection as Dennison delivered the third ward for Victor Rosewater's negative preference one month and registered his acquiescence the next. Since the turn of the century Omaha city officials and the privately owned American Water Company had been battling over a proposed city takeover. The *Bee* counseled compromise, delay until legal appeals ran their course (over the appraisal process and the amount of interest due since the initial estimate of the value of the water works), and financial prudence. Immediate public ownership was advocated by the *World-Herald* and the *Daily News*.²¹

An effort to secure a bond issue for city purchase of the water works and to meet additional costs of litigation and plant improvements was doomed in June 1911 by third ward "nos." A two-thirds majority was necessary for approval, and Rosewater's ally, Tom Dennison, brought in an overwhelming negative vote in his territory to deny passage. The election was charac-



James C. (Cowboy Jim) Dahlman, whose years in office earned him the nickname "the perpetual mayor of Omaha."

terized by a light vote except in the third ward, which produced more voters in one precinct than entire wards were able to muster elsewhere in the city. The *World-Herald* attributed the bond defeat to Dennison and Rosewater in a story headlined "Omaha Bee's Influence in Red Light District the Main Factor."²² It was "redlight government," agreed the *Daily News*.²³

Another effort to pass the bonds only two months later was successful, registering Rosewater's acceptance of the bond issue in the face of general support for it among the business community and public reaction against the

third ward's June tactics.²⁴ Rosewater's turnabout by August was apparent in his response to a letter questioning where the editor of the *Bee* now stood on the bond issue. Having previously said little on the impending balloting, Rosewater responded mildly that the bonds were likely to pass with minimal opposition, suggesting none from him would be forthcoming.²⁵

Now it was the third ward's turn to register a low turnout as Dennison's forces obligingly joined in ally Rosewater's retreat. Whereas in June, 747 voters cast a "no" ballot in the third ward and only ninety-four said "yes," in August just 327 of them bothered to go to the polls to cast a majority vote in favor of the bonds. The dutiful second precinct, which voted 349 "no" to five "yes" in June, reported its forty-five returns ten minutes after balloting ended.²⁶ While the third ward voters mostly avoided polling places in the August election, in the rest of the city the turnout was twice as great as two months before and the bond issue easily passed.

Dennison's capacity to swing third ward votes "in accordance with the Rosewater wish" also was demonstrated in the election for members of a home-rule city charter commission in February 1913.²⁷ In November 1912 Nebraska voters had approved a constitutional amendment granting Omahans the right to create their own framework of governance, a task structural reformer Victor Rosewater by background and education was eager to direct.²⁸ Also attractive to him was the opportunity to have a major influence in shaping the configuration of government in his city.²⁹

To assure that Rosewater and his associates dominated commission proceedings, third ward forces under Dennison's leadership secured heavy majorities for his allies. In both the February primary and March runoff elections, the third ward led the city in turnout, its voters marking their ballots more often for Rosewater than for anyone else. There were forty-two can-

Almost a Clean Sweep!



This political cartoon (Omaha Bee, May 18, 1918) applauded the outcome of Omaha's 1918 municipal elections.

didates in the primary and thirty in the runoff with fifteen elected. The *Bee's* editor became president of the charter commission, secure in the knowledge that every candidate who carried Dennison's third ward in the runoff was elected.³⁰ Only in the third ward did any candidate in the runoff election receive over 600 votes and in the third it happened fifteen times — the fifteen men who were elected to the charter commission thanks to their solid support in Dennison territory. The most votes any other candidates garnered in the third ward was ninety-one.³¹ Dennison had prevailed on behalf of his Rosewater ally, but a year later when the commission's work was presented to the voters for their approval, it went down to an overwhelming defeat. Only in the third ward was the city charter drafted by Rosewater's commission approved and even there in a very light voter turnout.³²

Widespread opposition to the charter was nurtured by the *World-Herald*, which saw threats to honest elections and the influence of corrupt machine politics in Rosewater's product.³³ The second water bond election had passed in 1911, thanks largely to third ward inactivity given the community's obvious consensus for approval by election day. Confronted in 1914 with the certainty of defeat on the charter commission plan, Dennison's third ward again acknowledged its limitations and its obedient voters stayed away from the polls in large numbers.

The *World-Herald* remarked on the third ward's absence of interest: no cars bringing voters to the polls, no ward heelers bringing in the vote. "We aren't interested," tersely explained 'Boob' Milder [at that time a Dennison lieutenant]. "I guess that tells the whole story."³⁴ Dennison, the political pragmatist, well realized that his third ward, even with help from the tenth, was unable to prevail against determined city-wide opposition. Moreover, considering already enacted changes in city governance he had good reason to be confident that his support would

1919 Omaha Riot

continue to be crucial whatever structure city fathers might design. His confidence was well founded for his power was equally apparent under the mayor-council form of his earlier political years and the commission plan, which had replaced it in May 1912.

In electoral politics, from 1906 the Republican *Bee* and the pragmatic Dennison took opposite sides on "Cowboy Jim" and 1918 was no exception. True to form, the *Bee* was unable to abide Democrat Dahlman, but its endorsement of the reform slate was lukewarm. It editorially suggested, in a largely passive electoral atmosphere, that the "anti's" platform as a whole deserved "careful attention." Ringer, a Republican, was endorsed by the *Bee*, but not the ticket's leader, Democrat Ed Smith.³⁵ (Omaha's city commissioners were officially nonpartisan, but political affiliations nonetheless continued to loom large in campaigns.)

Electoral endorsements belied the much deeper relationship that existed on substantive issues between Dennison and the newspaper. An indication of its strength was demonstrated to a young reporter upon his return to Omaha after the war. Recently hired by the *Bee* the cub newsman was summoned by the superior and instructed to go to Frank Johnson's office and take down whatever was dictated by Johnson, president of the Omaha Printing Company and successor to Edward Rosewater as Omaha's "business boss." The reporter was told not to bother with checking facts or talking with anyone else — just write down exactly what was said. "Mr. Dennison is interested in this story," he was informed, "and it is the policy of this paper to print whatever Mr. Dennison and Mr. Johnson want."³⁶

The reform slate's victory did not shield a deep rift in its ranks. One group, represented by new Mayor Smith, supported structural change to produce efficient, businesslike methods in government. Rosewater was also a moderate "structural" reform-

er, but his strong Republicanism alienated him from Democrat Smith. He was also unwilling to give strong support to moral reformers like Ringer who saw their task as the regeneration and purification of a sinful city.³⁷

Following its defeat in the 1918 election, the Dennison machine took steps to ensure that the victors would not long dwell in City Hall. A part of the strategy was to stress "Lily White" Ringer's incapacity to protect the people of Omaha and the steady breakdown of law and order in the city. An important role in spreading the message fell upon the press. The task was made easier by Ringer's zealous attempts to "clean up" Omaha. The *Bee's* antipathy toward radical reform and its effect on illicit activities in the third ward found strident voice when the new administration was barely a year old.

After World War I Omaha (like other cities) was experiencing the pangs of peacetime readjustment, including the accommodation of large scale immigration as the black population doubled between 1910 and 1920.³⁸ Returning white veterans discovered that the stockyards and other industries were hiring the black newcomers, creating a source of friction in the labor market and adding economic pressures to existing racial hostilities.³⁹

An already volatile situation was exacerbated by the coverage given racial incidents in the *Bee's* pages during the summer of 1919 as it published sensational stories of incidents both local and distant. Although there is no direct evidence to connect Dennison with the *Bee's* concentration upon these issues, his long relationship with the paper suggests his behind-the-scenes influence in furthering the harassment of the hardpressed reformers for political advantage.

From early June to late September twenty-one women reported assaults. All the victims but one were white and sixteen of the assailants were identified as black.⁴⁰ Comparison of stories from the *Bee* and the *World-Herald* about



J. Dean Ringer, Omaha police commissioner.

these and other incidents reflects the former's concentration on the racial issue. (Two other Omaha papers, the *Daily News* and the *Monitor*, a black community weekly, were similar to the *World-Herald* in their more subdued coverage.) In early June a *Bee* story related the robbing, throttling, and assault of a young girl by a black male in Council Bluffs; the *World-Herald* briefly noted that a Council Bluffs woman had escaped an attacking black man.⁴¹ Several days later the *Bee* reported that a woman had been attacked by a black or Mexican who dragged her into some weeds, tore off nearly all her clothes, then assaulted her. The same assault was mentioned in the *World-Herald* without reference to race.⁴²

Racial strife in Ellisville, Mississippi, was front page news in Omaha, and both newspapers reported the lynching and burning of a black man there. The *Bee's* coverage was similar to that of its competitor, but the *Bee* added the comment that authorities in Ellisville had characterized the lynching as having been carried out in a

“manner that was orderly.”⁴³ A few days later Omaha had what the *Bee* called a near riot at a ball park when a black player (on an all black team) hit a white player (on an all white team), and spectators of both races surged onto the field. Off-duty policemen present as fans were able to prevent the spread of violence. While the *Bee* carried the story on page one, the *World-Herald* placed it in the sports section on page six, captioned as “Free-for-All-Riot” and not until the eighth of its nine paragraph coverage was race mentioned.⁴⁴

Less than two weeks later the *Bee* reported that five blacks were lynched and burned in Long View, Texas, while the *World-Herald* confined itself to noting a clash there which resulted in four whites being wounded with no mention of lynching or burning.⁴⁵ Race rioting in Washington, D.C. in July provided a banner headline for the *Bee*, followed by stories of whites retaliating for recent attacks on white women by black men. Mobs of whites were killing blacks according to the *World-Herald's* more restrained assessment. A *Bee* editorial a few days afterward labeled the riots a national disgrace — understandable in light of the crimes that had been committed — but anger and race prejudice were not proper responses. Authorities in Washington were accused by the *Bee* of being lax and unable to handle a situation they should have seen coming, a message no doubt intended for Omaha's City Hall.⁴⁶ Race rioting followed in Chicago within a week, and the *Bee* headlined the fact that seven were killed and the black belt left in a shambles; the Chicago mayor's request for troops to help restore order was emphasized by the *World-Herald*.⁴⁷

Quickly the two papers returned to local news but differed in the way they reported the story of a black man rescued from a mob. According to the *Bee*, the crowd was infuriated and impelled to action by the accusation that the black, who allegedly was guilty of four previous attacks on girls aged from

nine to fourteen, had tried to assault a white woman. The incident was reported in the *World-Herald* without any mention of race.⁴⁸ Five days later *Bee* readers learned that a one-armed black man had criminally assaulted a twelve-year-old girl, first strapping his victim to her bed. A more restrained *World-Herald* carried a brief item about an assault by a one-armed man, identified as black, but with no reference to the victim's age or other circumstances.⁴⁹

During the summer, *Bee* editorials, sometimes carried on the first page, assailed Police Commissioner Ringer, called for his removal, and blasted the police department for tyranny and abuse. In late August, for example, the *Bee* scored Omaha law enforcement, complaining that “a carnival of crime” was being visited upon the city, with assaults, robbery, and violence the consequences of incompetent police unable to safeguard citizens.⁵⁰

Just a day after these scorching words race rioting broke out in Knoxville, Tennessee, and once more the *Bee* provided provocative coverage of violence and another banner headline. Whites had broken into nearby stores for arms and ammunition while attempting to take custody of a black man accused of murdering a white woman, the paper informed its audience. Subscribers to the *World-Herald* were told in a short story without headlines about a Tennessee mob gone wild.⁵¹

In early September the *Bee* resumed its attack on the city administration following the shooting of a young black bellboy during a police hotel raid. The youth's death was cast by the newspaper as the “crowning achievement” of the police department, reflecting its “disgraceful and incompetent management.”⁵² The opportunity to strike hard on the point was provided by a reported robbery and assault that came later in the month.

On Friday morning, September 26, *Bee* readers were shocked by the headline “Black Beast First Sticks-up Couple.” Then they were told, “The

most daring attack on a white woman ever perpetrated in Omaha occurred one block south of Bancroft street near Scenic avenue in Gibson last night.”⁵³ Phrasing by the *World-Herald* was less inflammatory: “Pretty little Agnes Loebeck . . . was assaulted . . . by an unidentified negro at twelve o'clock last night, while she was returning to her home in company with Millard [sic] Hoffman, a cripple.”⁵⁴

The evening following the reported attack the police took a suspect to the Loebeck home, where Milton and Agnes (they later married) identified black Will Brown as their assailant. A mob of 250 people gathered outside the house, cornering Brown and three police officers. After an hour's confrontation, police reinforcements arrived and Brown, who at one point had a noose around his neck, was spirited away by the officers, his clothes torn, head and hands bleeding. He was first taken to the police station but was soon moved to the jail in the fortress-like Douglas County Courthouse for better security. A contingent of officers was ordered to report at once to police headquarters in case of further trouble, and forty-six policemen and a detective were kept on duty well into the night.⁵⁵

On Sunday morning, September 28, word passed in the Gibson neighborhood to gather at Bancroft School early that afternoon for a march on the courthouse. About 300 people showed up, mostly young men and a few young women. Telephone calls from the vicinity soon began coming to police headquarters reporting that a mob was forming at the school “with the intention of hanging Will Brown.”⁵⁶ Milton Hoffman was there to take command. He led the youthful crowd downtown, picking up an additional 600 followers along the way, to be met by two dozen police officers at the courthouse.⁵⁷ Within two hours the mob had grown to about 4,000 confronting 100 policemen encircling the building.

The officers talked with members of the throng, who seemed in a mood

more bantering than dangerous, and word was sent to police headquarters that the situation did not appear threatening. Following receipt of the message, fifty officers held in reserve at the police station were sent home.⁵⁸ But the action proved to be a serious error in judgment. A close friend of Agnes Loebeck, William Francis, began riding around the courthouse lawn on a white horse, a rope over the saddle horn, exhorting the mob to do its duty.

As adults joined the melee, the crowd continued to grow, and urged on by Francis and others, its mood became ugly. Banter changed to verbal hostility, and about 5:00 p.m. a now aroused mob began physically attacking the police and storming the courthouse. An hour later Police Chief Eberstein arrived and tried to reason with the rioters, but he was shouted down. Thousands of people now surrounded the building as its windows were shattered and doors broken open. Retreating within the structure and joining County Sheriff Michael Clark and his deputies, the police hoped to save Brown by taking their stand on the fourth floor, while Clark and his other prisoners remained in the jail on the fifth.⁵⁹

The law officers underestimated the potential lynchers' fervor, and within an hour the courthouse was set on fire. Gunfire added to the din as pawnshops and hardware stores were looted and arms and ammunition taken for use at the battle site. Quickly the firearms took their toll as sixteen-year-old Louis Young, one of the mob's youthful leaders, was shot and killed while making a try for the elevator leading to the fifth floor. A block away from the pandemonium, thirty-four-year-old businessman James Hiykel fell fatally wounded, two bullets in his body.⁶⁰

Firemen rushed to the burning building, but the mob chopped their trailing hoses to pieces. Anyone attempting to help the authorities was chased down streets and alleys and beaten if caught. Old grudges were settled as several



Edward P. Smith, mayor of Omaha during the 1919 riot.

unpopular policemen were attacked and their badges and revolvers taken.

At 10:30 p.m. Mayor Smith, who had been on the scene for several hours, came out of the courthouse around which now swirled several thousand rioters and spectators. There are conflicting reports as to whether Smith walked out, gun in hand, or whether he was dragged out.⁶¹ Flames and gunshots had combined to drive the authorities back, replaced by rioters demanding that Brown be turned over to them. Mayor Smith attempted to reason with the now unreasonable throng, entreating them to forget about the prisoner and allow the firemen to put out the flames.

At that point, recalled the mayor, he was seized, thrown down, and dragged out the east doors by his heels. He managed to get to his feet and began struggling, then was knocked unconscious by a terrific blow to his head. The next thing he knew he was on Harney Street and one end of a rope was being flung over a lamp post, the other tightened around his neck. That was the last Smith remembered until he woke up in a hospital.⁶²

After being knocked unconscious Mayor Smith was dragged down Harney toward Sixteenth Street, and three times, said witnesses, a young man named Russell Norgaard took the noose from around Smith's neck as the mob surged down the street. Each time rioters put the rope back around the mayor's throat, but Norgaard kept hold of the noose and prevented it from being drawn tight. But when Smith was delivered to Sixteenth and Harney, the rope was thrown over the arm of a traffic signal tower, drawn tight, and the "Mayor swung clear of the ground."⁶³

What happened next is unclear because of varying accounts of the mayor's rescue. One version reported by the *World-Herald* credited the heroism of Detectives Charles Van Buren, A.C. Andersen, Lloyd Toland, and State Agent Benedict "Ben" Danbaum with saving Smith's life. The four officers were praised for having driven through the mob to the mayor, Danbaum at the wheel. "I drove the car right at the tower," Danbaum later explained, "Andersen stood up and cut the rope and pulled the mayor into the car. I gave her the gas and we drove out, knocking several men down."⁶⁴

Another story is that instead of Andersen cutting the rope, Norgaard untied the noose and led the semiconscious Smith to Danbaum's automobile. Norgaard's memory was of Smith having been dragged down Harney to Sixteenth, where the rope was thrown over the traffic tower and placed around his neck. His tormentors began pulling the mayor up and then letting him down; during one of these cycles Norgaard and another fellow managed to get their hands between the noose and the victim's neck. Smith collapsed and was unable to rise; the two young men helped him to his feet and walked him to the car Danbaum had driven to the scene.⁶⁵ Old-time machine worker William "Billy" Maher corroborated Norgaard's version with his recollection that it was not the police who cut Mayor Smith down, but Maher's friend Norgaard who freed

him. One of the original members of the Bancroft Gang, a neighborhood group, Norgaard knew the young men who were holding the rope and lifting and dropping Smith. "Give him to us and we'll take him down and throw him in the river," Norgaard is recalled to have said. They let him take the mayor, declared Maher, and Smith was then turned over to the police who were nearby.⁶⁶ Two months after the riot Norgaard was appointed to the police department as a chauffeur in recognition of his services in helping to save the mayor.⁶⁷

Interest in Smith waned as events up the street at the courthouse neared their climax, and his assailants were anxious to return to their original purpose. Smith was rushed to Ford's Hospital where he remained in serious condition for several days with severe head injuries. At the courthouse the flames were spreading and police officers, deputies, and prisoners all seemed des-

tinued for a similar fate. Sheriff Clark led his men and prisoners to the roof, and soon gunshots from higher neighboring buildings were added to the threats from below.

Finally the female prisoners were permitted to descend, and after allowing them to leave, rioters poured more gasoline on the flaming building. Under what circumstances Brown ended up in the hands of his enemies is unknown. Sheriff Clark reported that it was other prisoners who seized Brown and in the smoke and confusion of crowded stairways turned him over, passing him over their heads to the mob's eager hands. Once taken, Brown was beaten into unconsciousness and his clothes were torn off by the time he reached the building's doors. Then he was dragged to a lamp pole on the south side of the courthouse at Eighteenth and Harney, shortly before 11:00 p.m.⁶⁸

"Here he is, here he is," the mob

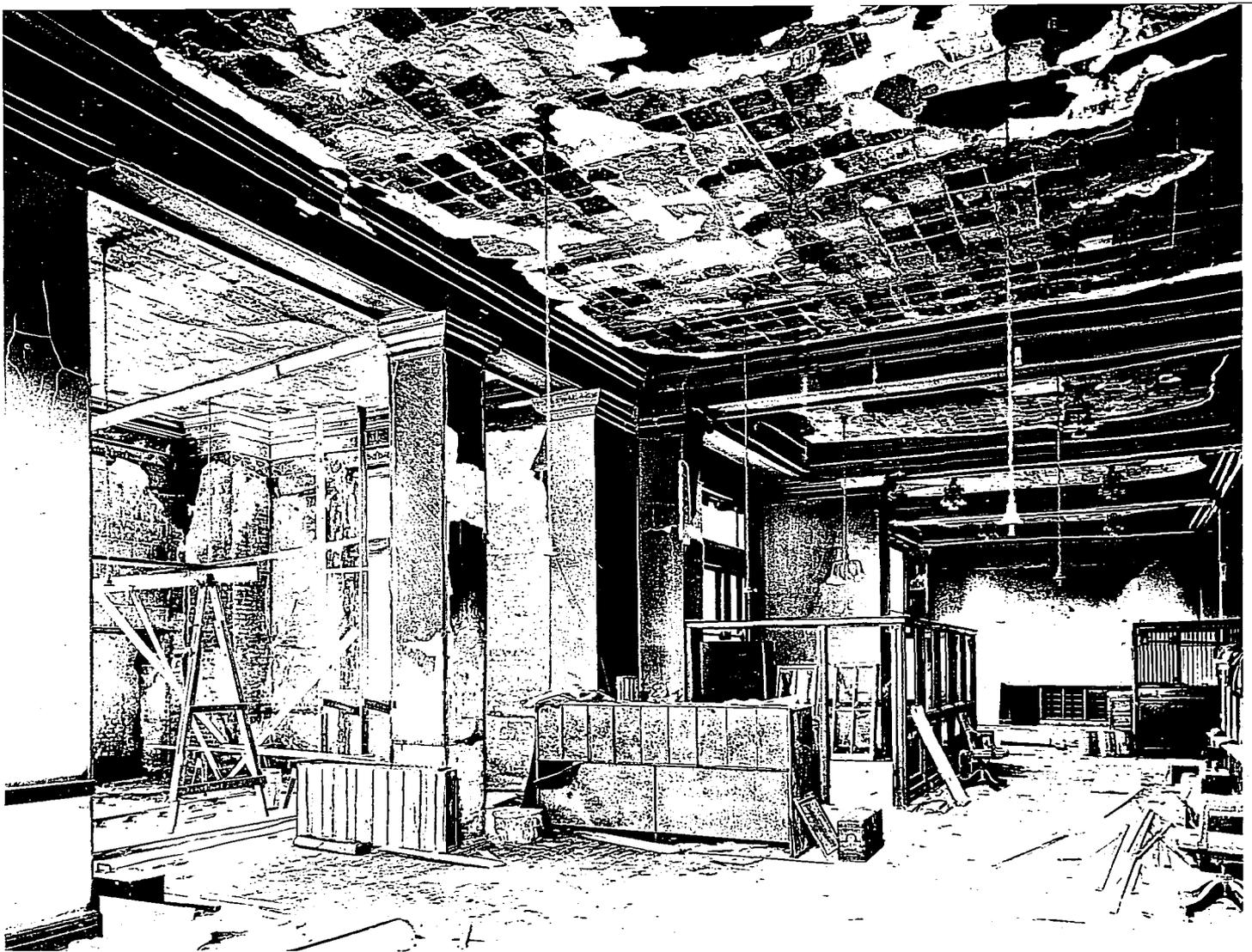
roared, and a rope was placed around his neck. Hoisted in the air, Brown's spinning body was riddled with bullets. When brought down, his shattered corpse was tied behind a car and towed to the intersection of Seventeenth and Dodge, four blocks away. There the body was cremated with fuel taken from nearby red danger lamps and fire truck lanterns, while bits of the lynch rope were sold for ten cents each. Later Brown's charred remains trailed behind an automobile driven through the city's downtown streets. Shortly before he ended up in the hands of the mob Brown had moaned to Sheriff Clark, "I am innocent, I never did it, my God, I am innocent."⁶⁹

By 3:00 a.m. army troops were patrolling the streets and uniformed men behind machine guns greeted Omahans the next morning. The riot had cost the lives of Brown and two others; thirty-one individuals were injured as of 2:00 a.m.; thousands of dollars in damages blemished a building that had been the pride of the city; and irreplaceable records were destroyed. Pondering the riot's effects, the *World-Herald* earned a Pulitzer Prize with its "Law and the Jungle" editorial, drawing attention to the city's disgrace, humiliation, and the consequences of inefficient government. Reliance on the authorities to maintain order had been misplaced, said the editorial, and Omahans would henceforth seek a stronger police force and more competent leadership.⁷⁰

The *Bee's* editorial page returned to the attack on police inefficiency and resulting lawlessness, observing that "ample warning was given of the approaching storm."⁷¹ Damage to the courthouse and the loss of records were deplored, but there was no mention of Will Brown — only a reference to "lives lost."⁷² In response to a question from a New York newspaper, Victor Rosewater returned to familiar themes to explain the riot's causes. Among them, said Rosewater, were resentment at the failure of authorities to punish blacks who had assaulted women, the

Riot damage to the courthouse interior was extensive.





The county clerk's office inside the courthouse after the riot. Windows were shattered, doors broken open, and furniture destroyed. Irreplaceable records were damaged or destroyed by fire and smoke.

atmosphere of lawlessness which had settled over the city, the lack of leadership in the police department, and lastly, social unrest in the aftermath of the war.⁷³

Thoroughly discredited by the lynching, the Smith administration was unable to recover from its effects although some effort was made to redress the situation. Four days after the riot the city commission voted to add 100 additional policemen and also ordered riot guns and machine guns for emergencies.⁷⁴ Efforts to punish an officer for gross neglect of duty and to provide for a special investigation of the police department failed to pass the beleaguered council.⁷⁵

A number of people were arrested immediately after the riot, but Milton Hoffman, a young man with long con-

nections with Dennison, was not among them despite his leading the march from Bancroft School. Nor was he indicted by the grand jury convened on October 8 to investigate the riot. Hoffman's first job had come through his cousin, Tony Hoffman, a ward worker for Dennison. The elder Hoffman introduced Milton to the "Old Man," who hired him when he learned the youth, a recent business school graduate, knew shorthand. Milton worked as Dennison's secretary for about a year and prospered. After traveling for a period of time, Milton returned to Omaha and helped Dennison during political campaigns, including casting votes before he was twenty-one.⁷⁶

Efforts to locate Hoffman after the riot, by the police and the sheriff, were to

no avail; he seemed to have disappeared. In the grand jury's letter of transmittal, foreman John W. Towle said, "we are at a loss to understand why Millard [sic] Hoffman has been carefully kept from us."⁷⁷ Hoffman had in fact left the city, sent to Denver by Dennison, according to Tom Crawford (a police officer who served as Dennison's secretary in the 1920s until they had a falling out), where Vaso L. Chucovich, gambler, political force, and longtime friend of Dennison, helped Hoffman find a job.⁷⁸ Seven years later Hoffman returned to Omaha, where he remained the rest of his life, never called to account for his role in helping to initiate the riot with the gathering at Bancroft School.

After a six week session the grand jury issued a report which strength-



Will Brown's body was burned during the aftermath of the riot.

ened the image of ineffective leadership in the city and of police incompetence during the events of September 28.⁷⁹ Absence of the police chief and the police commissioner at critical moments was deemed unfortunate by the jurors, and according to military witnesses, proper leadership on the scene could have dispersed the mob at any time between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m. without firing a shot. Setting the stage for the tumult were "unmentionable crimes and assaults upon women and girls," contempt for law and authority, plus, Omahans were assured, economic problems and social unrest.⁸⁰ The immediate and fundamental causes of the riot, the grand jury concluded, were the raping of

white women by blacks and "undue criticism given to courts, police and public officials by the press of the city."⁸¹

"The press of the city" was widely interpreted to mean the *Bee*, whose sensational reporting and attacks on the police department had elicited much comment well before the grand jury's report. A few days after the riot, the *Kansas City Star* pointed out that the *Bee* had been lambasting the city administration for six months, despite its support for the reformers in 1918.⁸² The Pastor of the First Christian Church, Reverend Charles E. Cobbey, said from his pulpit that "the yellow journalism of a certain Omaha newspaper" created the conditions for

an outbreak of violence. "It is the belief of many," asserted Cobbey, "that the entire responsibility for the outrage can be placed at the feet of a few men and one Omaha paper."⁸³ Another church leader, Reverend Titus Lowe, traced the riot to attacks on the city administration and exaggerated reports of crime "made by a local newspaper."⁸⁴

Police Commissioner Ringer issued a statement a week after the lynching in which he defended the police against the *Bee's* summer long campaign. "The crystallization of mob spirit," advised Ringer, "by vicious, unprincipled and false newspaper criticism of the police department" was a direct cause.⁸⁵ Omaha's Ministerial Union concurred

in a resolution adopted in late October, condemning the *Bee* for printing misleading and vicious statements regarding public officials. In the Ministerial Union's opinion, the riot was in large part "instigated and augmented by sensational, misleading and maliciously false statements published in the *Bee*."⁸⁶

Ringer's statement also included his opinion that Omaha's criminal elements (which had vowed, he said, to get Smith and himself) were gratified by the turn of events. He concluded that "the gang" had demonstrated on September 28 how far it was willing to go to return to power.⁸⁷ A *Monitor* editorial a week before Ringer's words appeared likewise mentioned political motivations behind the riot, referring to the "hidden, but not wholly concealed hand, of those who would go to any extreme to place themselves in power."⁸⁸

Direct responsibility for what followed the attack on Loebeck and Hoffman has often been attributed to the Dennison machine. In this view, the riot and lynching were consequences of a well planned "gang" activity, including organizing the march on the courthouse and providing manpower to impassion the crowd. Major General Leonard Wood, who took charge of the troops in Omaha on September 30, announced a few days after his arrival that the attack on the courthouse could be traced to the "old criminal gang" that once ruled Omaha, a fine city except for a few men and one newspaper. The *Bee* was not named but the general's target was clear.

The further his investigation probed, added the general, the more he was convinced of an organized effort, with alcohol distributed freely while "a regular taxi cab service was maintained to bring men to the scene of the riot."⁸⁹ Rumors later circulated about hoodlums having been imported from Chicago to assist in funneling the mob to its proper course.⁹⁰

Reverend Titus Lowe bluntly proclaimed the lynching was the result of

FRENZIED THOUSANDS JOIN IN ORGY OF BLOOD AND FIRE

Douglas County Court House Fearfully Damaged as Howling Avengers Storm Jail With Bullet and Flame—One Man Killed and Many Injured—Police Overwhelmed and Soldiers Summoned.

CROWDS SEARCH THROUGH STREETS, ATTACKING NEGROES EVERYWHERE

Headlines of the Omaha World-Herald, September 29, 1919.

calculated planning by politicians of the "old gang."⁹¹ Those calculations were understood to include the *Bee*'s campaign of sensationalism and attacks on the police department on behalf of the "outs," the newspaper's political allies.⁹² Rumors and charges of the Dennison organization's complicity in and responsibility for Brown's fate were unsubstantiated, but they circulated widely and surfaced in the next city election.

In 1921 the issue of the "gang's" role in the riot became a rallying point for the reform elements attempting to sustain control of City Hall. Large advertisements appeared, casting the "gang" as a culprit and the foreman of the investigating grand jury spoke out. At a meeting of the Omaha Women's Club, Towle charged that a "certain Omaha newspaper" had set out to discredit city government and the police department. Several reported assaults

on white women had actually been perpetrated by whites in blackface, he asserted, adding that a special reporter had been imported from Sioux City to write inflammatory articles on the attacks.⁹³

The riot was planned and launched by "the vice element of the city," Towle declared, and later he was quoted as saying, "I want to say to you that the riot... was not a casual affair; it was premeditated and planned by those secret and invisible forces that today are fighting you and the men who represent good government."⁹⁴ He was stating opinions formed during the investigations, Towle pointed out, no longer bound by secrecy two years after the event.⁹⁵

Yet others have different recollections and interpretations and deny Dennison and his organization had anything to do with the events of September 28, 1919. A member of the police

force at the time stated with conviction, "Dennison never had nothing to do with that riot. Positive of that. Just a bunch of punks got started down there on Sixteenth street and it kept growing and growing."⁹⁶ A nephew of the "Old Man" who served many years with the fire department maintained that the machine had no role in instigating the mob; it was kids who really were responsible for setting the affair in motion. "Maybe there was some help from the organization," he suggested, "but Tom didn't know about it."⁹⁷

When asked about Dennison's responsibility for the riot, William "Billy" Maher said with characteristic bluntness, "That's the silliest thing in the world, for anybody to ever dream that." Dennison was not behind it, claimed Maher, because the sheriff was one of his best friends and he would not have imperiled his life with the burnings and shootings. "Tom Dennison would have no more tolerated any of his outfit having anything to do with hurting Mike Clark than he would of putting a gun to his own head. There were no Dennison men up there," concluded Maher, "they were not leading anything."⁹⁸

Yet according to Tom Crawford, Dennison's organization deliberately poisoned Omaha's atmosphere, carefully setting the stage for an outbreak. Crawford recalled the "Old Man" himself boasting that most of the reported attacks on women were white Dennison men in blackface.⁹⁹ The notion of disguised whites appeared a month after the riot when a committee of black leaders met with city officials. They suggested that answers to three questions would shed light on the unprecedented outbreak of assaults the previous summer. Were blacks actually committing the alleged attacks? If so, was somebody paying them? Or were these crimes being committed by white men with blackened faces on someone's orders?¹⁰⁰ Public answers to these crucial questions were not forthcoming, but Crawford's recollections assert that at least some of the assaults may have been con-

cocted for political purposes.

Were Dennison and his men behind the 1919 Courthouse Riot? Hoffman's role and relationship with Dennison are intriguing, but the answer remains equivocal so far as Brown's arrest and murder are concerned. There is no firm evidence the Dennison machine actually instigated the particular events of September 26-28, 1919. What does seem evident, however, is that Dennison and the *Bee* helped create conditions ripe for the outbreak of racial violence. Will Brown was the victim of impersonal political machinations.

Billy Maher summarized Dennison's reaction to the riot itself. After again denying that Dennison had anything to do with the mob's actions, Maher added: "I don't say he didn't get a kick out of it, the way it ruined the administration, because naturally they were against him."¹⁰¹ In the next election "they" were voted out, largely as a result of the Courthouse Riot, and the "Old Man" for another decade was a central figure in Omaha political life.

NOTES

¹On the reform administration's difficulties see Louise E. Rickard, "The Politics of Reform in Omaha," *Nebraska History*, 53 (Winter, 1972), 419-45.

²*Ibid.*, 438.

³On Tom Dennison see John Kyle Davis, "The Gray Wolf: Tom Dennison of Omaha," *Nebraska History*, 58 (Spring 1977), 25-52; Orville D. Menard, "Tom Dennison, The Rogue Who Ruled Omaha," *Omaha*, 3 (March 1978), 13-16; Orville D. Menard, "The Man Who Ran Omaha," *Sunday World-Herald Magazine of the Midlands*, November 30, 1980, 11-13.

⁴On the "business boss"/"political boss" relationship see Lincoln Steffens, *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens* (Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1931), 596.

⁵Addison E. Sheldon, *Nebraska: The Land and the People*, 3 vols. (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1931), I, 748. On Edward Rosewater see Victor Rosewater, "Biography of Edward Rosewater," typescript, Rosewater Collection, Reel 1, Box 1818, Omaha Public Library; also Frank Santiago, "Fighting Editor, Rosewater," *Evening Omaha World-Herald*, August 6, 1975 (cited hereafter as EOW-H).

⁶EOW-H, April 16, 1897. Policy was a lottery type game, illegal under Nebraska and Omaha laws; see for example *The Revised Ordinances of the City of Omaha, Nebraska* (Omaha: Gibson, Miller & Richardson, 1890), 356-57.

⁷EOW-H, February 20, 21, 23, 26, 1900.

⁸*Ibid.*, March 1, 1900.

⁹*Omaha Daily News*, October 10, 1901 (cited hereafter as ODN).

¹⁰EOW-H, July 21, 1902.

¹¹*Ibid.*, May 25, 1905.

¹²*Ibid.*, June 2, 1905.

¹³On the rift and Dennison's siding with Moores see EOW-H, January 30, February 17, 1906; and the *Bee's* account that Dennison spread the story that he decided to back Broatch in response to pleas from the dying Moores. *Bee*, March 30, 1906.

¹⁴EOW-H, April 7, 1906.

¹⁵On fears of Benson as a crusader see EOW-H, April 25, 26, 1906.

¹⁶See the endorsing editorial in which Benson is noted as being "fairly well informed on city subjects." *Bee*, April 15, 1906. The *Bee* took little note of Dahlman until later in the campaign. See *Bee* April 24, 25, 27, 29, 1906.

¹⁷*City of Omaha Elections, 1893-1915*, Election Commissioner's Office, State of Nebraska, County of Douglas, May 1, 1906. As one Republican explained his Dahlman vote, sometimes it is necessary to do evil (vote for a Democrat) so that in the long term good might prevail. "We can stand the democrats for one term, but we can't afford to let this Benson bunch get such a grip they couldn't be pried loose for a dozen years." EOW-H, April 18, 1906. Dahlman went on to be elected eight times.

¹⁸Late in the evening of August 31, 1906, Edward Rosewater went to his beloved *Bee* Building to roam about, as he frequently did. The next morning Judge A.C. Troup opened his chambers in the building and found Rosewater lifeless on a bench in the courtroom. During his rounds, the *Bee's* founder had apparently entered the room, closed the door behind him, sat down, and there "his heart simply stopped," his Panama hat "resting lightly on his hand." Rosewater, "Biography of Edward Rosewater," 280.

¹⁹EOW-H, January 3, 1930.

²⁰"Special Report, Kansas City Investigator CFMP, December 20, 1913," Rosewater Collection, Reel 3, Box 1927, Omaha Public Library.

²¹On the *Bee* and water works struggle see William F. Schmidt, "Municipal Reform in Omaha from 1906 to 1914 as Seen Through the Eyes of the Omaha Press" (unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Omaha, Omaha, Nebraska, 1963), 6-36.

²²EOW-H, June 28, 1911.

²³ODN, June 28, 1911.

²⁴EOW-H, August 3, 1911.

²⁵*Bee*, August 2, 1911.

²⁶EOW-H, August 3, 1911, and *City of Omaha Elections, 1893-1915*, June 27, 1911 and August 2, 1911.

²⁷The quotation is from *Morning Omaha World-Herald*, April 7, 1913 (hereafter cited as MOW-H). A bill passed by the Nebraska State Legislature and signed into law by the governor in April 1911 authorized a commission form of government for Omaha. In a special election the following September, Omaha voters approved changing from their mayor-council form and went under the commission form in May 1912. Also in 1911 the legislature in March had passed a proposed constitutional amendment providing for home rule in Omaha. The amendment passed in November 1912 and the charter commission elections in February and March 1913 resulted. On

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the change to a commission form and the home rule movement see Schmidt, "Municipal Reform in Omaha," 37-59.

²⁸Victor Rosewater in addition to his schooling in local politics under his father also had a Ph.D. in political science from Columbia University.

²⁹On businessmen and reform movements see Samuel P. Hays, "The Politics of Reform in the Progressive Era," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, (October 1964), 157-69. Reprinted in Alexander B. Callow, Jr., ed., *America's Urban History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 434.

³⁰EOW-H, March 13, 1913. See also the list of preferred candidates, headed by Victor Rosewater, in the *Bee*, March 11, 1913.

³¹*City of Omaha Elections, 1893-1915*, March 11, 1913 and February 11, 1913 for election returns.

³²*Ibid.*, March 10, 1914. The proposed charter carried in the third ward by 142 to 136, EOW-H, March 11, 1914.

³³See EOW-H, March 9, 1914.

³⁴*Ibid.*, March 10, 1914 (source of the quote), and March 11, 1914.

³⁵*Bee*, April 22, 30, 1918.

³⁶Dick Irving, "Reliable Source," *Omaha*, 3 (April, 1978), 14. Irving's "reliable source" was Ned E. Williams. Interview with Ned E. Williams, by Orville D. Menard, October 1, 1979, Council Bluffs, Iowa, during which Williams confirmed the story. Dennison also had reporters who were friends of his working on the *Bee*. See letter, Tom Crawford to Roy N. Towl, May 18, 1932, Nebraska State Historical Society, Christian A. Sorensen papers, MS 2951, box 35, file 65, and letter, Tom Crawford to Irvin Stalmaster, September 13, 1932, *Ibid.*

³⁷See Rickard, "The Politics of Reform in Omaha," 420-436.

³⁸Lawrence H. Larsen and Barbara J. Cottrell, *The Gate City: A History of Omaha* (Boulder: Pruett Publishing Company, 1982), 168. See also Arthur Age, "The Omaha Riot of 1919" (unpublished Master's Thesis, Creighton University, Omaha, Nebraska, 1964), 6-7.

³⁹Age, "The Omaha Riot of 1919," 18; see also Dorothy Devereux Dustin, *Omaha and Douglas County: A Panoramic History* (Woodland Hills, CA: Windsor Publications, 1980), 99; Michael L. Lawson, "Omaha, A City in Ferment: Summer of 1919," *Nebraska History*, 58 (Fall, 1977), 395-418.

⁴⁰ODN, September 27, 1919; MOW-H, September 27, 1919.

⁴¹*Bee*, June 4, 1919; MOW-H, June 4, 1919.

⁴²*Bee*, June 20, 1919; MOW-H, June 20, 1919.

⁴³*Bee*, June 27, 1919; MOW-H, June 27, 1919.

⁴⁴*Bee*, June 30, 1919; MOW-H, June 30, 1919.

⁴⁵*Bee*, July 12, 1919; MOW-H, July 12, 1919.

⁴⁶*Bee*, July 22, 1919; MOW-H, July 22, 1919.

⁴⁷*Bee*, July 29, 1919; MOW-H, July 29, 1919.

⁴⁸*Bee*, August 12, 1919; MOW-H, August 12, 1919.

⁴⁹*Bee*, August 17, 1919; MOW-H, August 17, 1919.

⁵⁰*Bee*, August 19, 1919.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, August 31, 1919; MOW-H, August 31, 1919.

⁵²*Bee*, September 2, 1919.

⁵³*Ibid.*, September 26, 1919.

⁵⁴MOW-H, September 26, 1919. Hoffman's name was Milton not Millard, and he adamantly maintained throughout his life that he was not a cripple but instead suffered from a physical infirmity. When about three years old he broke his leg in a fall and was left with one limb shorter than the other, requiring him to wear a built-up shoe and heavy brace, causing a severe limp. Interview with Milton Hoffman by Orville D. Menard, November 14, 1979, Omaha, Nebraska.

⁵⁵MOW-H, September 27, 30, 1919; *Bee*, September 27, 1919.

⁵⁶Grand Jury Final Report, District Court Journal, No. 176, Douglas County, Nebraska, 287. See also *Bee*, September 29, 1919.

⁵⁷MOW-H, September 29, 1919; *Bee*, September 29, 1919.

⁵⁸"Omaha's Riot in Story and Pictures," Omaha: Omaha Educational Publishing Company, 1919, unpagged. See also Grand Jury Final Report, 287.

⁵⁹"Omaha's Riot in Story and Pictures."

⁶⁰*Ibid.*; *Bee*, October 1, 1919.

⁶¹According to Smith's own testimony, he had borrowed a revolver from a policeman after the crowd broke down the east side doors. *Bee*, December 16, 1919.

⁶²*Ibid.*

⁶³MOW-H, September 30, 1919.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, September 29, 1919.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, December 17, 1919.

⁶⁶Interview with William Maher by Orville D. Menard, October 30, 1979, Omaha, Nebraska.

⁶⁷*Bee*, November 23, 1919.

⁶⁸MOW-H, September 29, 30, 1919; see also "Omaha's Riot in Story and Pictures;" ODN, September 28, 1919; *Bee*, September 29, 1919; *Monitor*, October 2, 1919.

⁶⁹*Bee*, September 29, 1919; MOW-H, September 29, 1919. See also Criminal Appearance Docket No. 21, Douglas County, Nebraska, 64-65.

⁷⁰MOW-H, September 30, 1919, "Law and the Jungle."

⁷¹*Bee*, September 30, 1919.

⁷²*Ibid.*, and see Age, "The Omaha Riot of 1919," 68-70.

⁷³*Bee*, October 1, 1919.

⁷⁴City of Omaha, Council Chamber, Septem-

ber 11, 1919-December 1, 1919, A-115, October 2, 1919, #5456.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, #5686, #5900.

⁷⁶Hoffman interview, November 14, 1979.

⁷⁷ODN, November 20, 1919; see also ODN, October 1, 4, 1919, and EOW-H, October 4, 1919.

⁷⁸Letter, Murphy (Crawford's alias) to "Dear Friend Gene [O'Sullivan]," April 30, 1932, Sorensen papers. See also letter, Murphy to Roy N. Towl, April 18, 1932, which mentions the "cripple fellow" sent to Denver and Chucovich and concludes with "WILL THIS SHOW THE DENNISON HAND IN THE COURTHOUSE RIOT?" (caps in the original), *Ibid.* Also letter, Towl to Murphy, August 12, 1932, Nebraska State Historical Society, Roy Towl papers, MS 3354, box 1, folder 1932, June-July, City Hall.

⁷⁹*Bee*, November 20, 1919. See Grand Jury Final Report, 179-292.

⁸⁰*Bee*, April 23, 1919; Grand Jury Final Report, 287.

⁸¹Grand Jury Final Report, 285.

⁸²Reprinted in the *Bee*, October 2, 1919.

⁸³*Monitor*, October 9, 1919.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*

⁸⁵MOW-H, October 8, 1919.

⁸⁶*Bee*, October 21, 1919.

⁸⁷MOW-H, October 8, 1919.

⁸⁸*Monitor*, October 2, 1919.

⁸⁹ODN, October 5, 1919. See also Grand Jury Final Report and its comment it was unable to uncover any evidence of the source of the liquor, 280-81.

⁹⁰Interview with Jack D. Ringwalt by Orville D. Menard, August 7, 1979, Omaha, Nebraska. Ringwalt recalled his father talking about men brought in from Chicago to foment a riot in order to discredit the reform administration. Also interview with Frank Frost by Orville D. Menard, October 30, 1979, Omaha, Nebraska; and Santiago, "Fighting Editor, Rosewater," EOW-H, August 6, 1975.

⁹¹*Monitor*, October 10, 1919.

⁹²See Age, "The Omaha Riot of 1919," 119-20.

⁹³EOW-H, April 19, 1921.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, April 23, 1921.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, April 22, 1921.

⁹⁶Interview with Herman J. Creal by Orville D. Menard, August 9, 1979, Omaha, Nebraska.

⁹⁷Interview with Henry J. Walsh by Orville D. Menard, October 3, 1979, Omaha, Nebraska.

⁹⁸Maher interview, October 30, 1979.

⁹⁹Murphy to Roy Towl, August 16, 1932, Towl Papers, folder 1932, June-July, City Hall.

¹⁰⁰ODN, October 31, 1919.

¹⁰¹Maher interview, October 30, 1979.