



How I Came To Go Into Newspaper Work

(Article begins on page 2 below.)

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HOW I CAME TO GO INTO NEWSPAPER WORK

By VICTOR ROSEWATER

(Reprint of autobiographical article in the Quarter Centennial Testimonial issue of the Omaha **Sunday Bee**, June 23, 1918.)

It just happened that the **Bee** and I made our advent in Omaha at almost the same time. I was born in February and the **Bee's** first issue came in June in the year 1871. The **Bee**, as is well known, was originally designed to be only a temporary institution when it showed that it was responding to a real demand of the community.

As the oldest son in a family of five children, it simply was taken for granted that I would follow in the footsteps of my father and eventually help relieve him in the publication of the **Bee**. My education, without any discussion, directed itself toward that goal.

My First Job Folding Papers

The **Bee** in those days was not the big paper it is today any more than Omaha was the big city it is today, and a lot of little things paved the way to my journalistic career which perhaps would not now be considered at all by anyone aiming to become a newspaper man.



Victor Rosewater

My very first job on the **Bee** consisted in folding papers. We then lived in a cottage that stood where the **Bee** building is today. The **Bee** office was then located on Farnam, between Ninth and Tenth streets. The papers were produced on presses that printed but one side at a time, so that each copy had to go through twice. There were no automatic folders. When our morning paper was first issued, I used to go down to the **Bee** office about five o'clock every morning and help at folding papers for about an hour, for which I was paid sixty cents a week.

A little later, when the **Bee** was having some trouble because its competitors were subsidizing the newsboys not to handle the **Bee**, I sold papers on the streets. Those were days of 5-cent newspapers and I would sell from twenty to fifty a day, giving me quite a little money to show for the work. This was in the summer of 1881, which I remember particularly because it was the time when President Garfield was shot and lay for weeks between life and death. I recall being awakened earlier than usual one September morning with

the admonition to hurry because the president had died, and exclaiming boy-like to my brother, "Gee, won't papers sell this morning!"

Learning to "Stick Type"

Another vacation season a year or two afterwards was given over to learning to set type. This was before the invention of the type-setting machine—and each word was composed by hand from its separate letters. Like all beginners, I was first given the "pi" box, and permitted to sort out and distribute the contents. I quickly learned the case and worked half time for several months. I was so small that I had to perch myself on a high stool to reach the boxes, and my thumb was so short that I had to fill out the "stick" with blank rules in order to hold the type, being thus required to "dump" with the stick only about two-thirds full each time. Before I quit the job I could "stick type" at about half speed, and "lift" without "pi-ing", and what has proved more useful, because not lost by the innovation of typesetting machines, I acquired the ability to read type almost as easily as reading the print from it.

Whether I would ever be able to write anything readable was still to be seen. With the other boys, I caught the postage stamp collecting fever, and this opened the door for my first efforts at literary composition. I wrote quite a few articles for the stamp magazines of those days, which were accepted and printed, and some of them paid for—in postage stamps.

First Ventures into Journalism

While I was in the Omaha High School, in association with James Wallace Broatch and Herbert J. Taylor, we founded the **High School Register**, published as a bi-weekly four-paged paper during its first year, 1886-1887.¹ The next volume I issued myself, as editor, in conjunction with Howard Clark as business manager, first converting it into a monthly, in which form it has ever since appeared. The following winter at Washington, serving as a page in the United States Senate, I sent correspondence to the **High School Register** and also wrote a few letters that were printed in the **Bee**.

During the years I attended college, Johns Hopkins in Baltimore and Columbia in New York, I did quite a lot of newspaper work—letters to the **Bee**, to the Omaha **Excelsior**, reporting for the Baltimore **Sun**, the Baltimore **American**, the New York **Evening Post**

¹Editor's note:—J. G. Masters, Principal of Omaha Central High School writes that they have the first copy of the **Register**. The editorial staff, listed in the first issue: J. W. Broatch, '87, V. Rosewater, '87, H. Clarke, '89, Miss S. M'Clintock, '90, Miss J. Wallace, —H. B. Taylor, Publisher.

Elsewhere in this issue will be found a reprint from the **High School Register** giving a sketch of Omaha Central High School in 1871.

and the New York **Sun**, and wrote my first more pretentious articles for the New York **Independent**. One or two of the summers I put in with the **Bee** in various capacities.

College Day Magazine Articles

My reward for successful graduation in 1891 was a four-month's trip to Europe in company with my father, each of us writing frequent letters home for publication in the **Bee**, giving our observations and experiences. When I took up graduate work at Columbia, specializing in history, finance and economics, I found many outlets for what I might be able to write on these subjects in my spare time. These articles, largely of a scientific character, were printed in the **Political Science Quarterly**, the **Quarterly Journal of Economics**, the **American Statistical Quarterly**, the **Charities Review**, the **Columbia Law Times**, the **New York Independent**. Most of my time, however, was devoted to my thesis on "Special Assessments," which became one of the first numbers of the Columbia University series of monographs, and I contributed the subject, "**Laissez-faire** in America," to Inglis-Palgrave's **Dictionary of Political Economy**, which is the standard English work. Before the day of commencement, when I was awarded my final degree, I managed also to devote three weeks' time to a practical news laboratory, compiling and editing the New York state report for the United Press, whose headquarters were located in the newly erected **World** building, which privilege was accorded me by the chief manager and head officer, Walter P. Phillips, once a fellow telegraph operator with my father.

Cub Reporter On the Police Run

This finished my scholastic preparation for the workaday business of life. The actual buckling down to a job on the **Bee** came more suddenly than was anticipated. I graduated from Columbia the middle of June and had planned on my way home to stop a week or two in Chicago for the Columbian World's Fair, but was summoned back by news of the dangerous illness of my sister. Arriving in Omaha, I took in the situation at a glance, decided there was nothing to be gained by waiting around doing nothing and consequently jumped right in as a reporter. And, to show that no favorites were being played, I was handed the police run.

Brief as was my sojourn at the police station, it was at least varied and interesting. The big news of the time I was there was an attempted holdup of a Missouri Pacific train in the yards right in the city limits and the catching of the train robber, whom I interviewed. If I recollect rightly, he later drew fifteen years in the penitentiary, against which he had nothing to show except the fascinating free publicity we gave him in the papers.

In Control for Six Weeks

What might have been the making of a brilliant police reporter was cut short in two weeks by the death of my sister. The loss cast a gloom over all of us and was taken greatly to heart by my father, who was almost prostrated. The family felt a rest absolutely necessary for him and finally persuaded him to go with my mother and brother on an excursion to Alaska that would consume about six weeks. I dropped police reporting at once and started in writing editorials and on my father's departure was left in responsible control of the **Bee**. I managed to maintain the standard of the paper and keep out of serious trouble, so that he seemed well satisfied on his return and never afterwards did he hesitate to go away out of apprehension of the work in his absence.

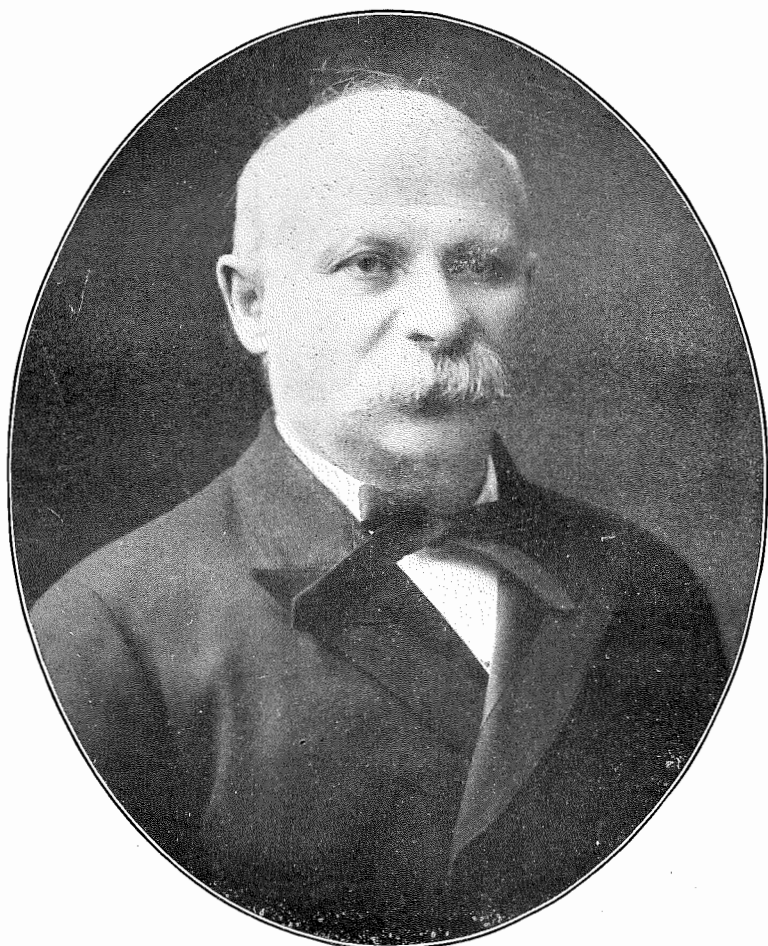
During the two years following I did editorial writing and general utility service. The position of managing editor was held by James B. Haynes and that of city editor by Harry Hunter and W. D. Percival. In the spring of 1895 I took a vacation, spending the time with the Chicago **Tribune**, still personally edited by Joseph Medill, but under the immediate direction of his managing editor, William Van Benthuyzen, and with the St. Louis **Globe Democrat**, directed by Joseph B. McCullagh. All these veteran newspaper men, being close friends of my father, showed me great kindness in giving me an insight into the organization and methods of those great papers.

Even Managing Editor's Desk

Both my father and I naturally looked forward to my eventually taking on more and more responsibility in the management of the **Bee**, but no immediate moves had been contemplated.

"Mr. Haynes has tendered his resignation to take effect immediately," my father told me on my return from this trip. "He has gotten the notion that your work in Chicago and St. Louis is with a view to supplanting him as managing editor. You have to take control here someday, so you may as well begin now."

I was twenty-four years old when I was installed as managing editor the following week. In 1905 I was given the title of general manager with supervision of all departments of the paper. In February, 1906, before my father left on his trip to Europe to attend the World's Postal Congress at Rome as the delegate from the United States, he resigned as an officer of the Bee Publishing Company and I was chosen president, which office carries with it the position of editor of the **Bee**, so that no change was made in this respect when he died six months later. When my brother severed his connections with the **Bee**, the organization was modified to impose on me the duties of publisher in addition to those of editor.



Edward Rosewater

Many Public Activities Outside

It goes without saying that no one could be connected with the conduct of an important newspaper like the **Bee** for twenty-five years without serving in many public activities. By appointment of Governor Holcomb I filled out the unexpired term of the late Henry B. Estabrook as a member of the board of regents at the University of Nebraska. For nearly a dozen years I was a member of the Omaha Public Library board and was chiefly responsible, I may say, for the Library Congress held here so successfully in conjunction with the Trans-Mississippi Exposition, for which exposi-

tion I also served as judge of awards. One year I was impressed into the work, as chairman of the board of review, revising the unequal assessments for taxation from which Omaha was then grievously suffering. By appointment of Governor Aldrich I was member of the Nebraska Workmen's Compensation Commission. I have served on all sorts of reception committees, money collecting committees, charity boards, political committees, convention delegation, the home rule charter convention, special missions to Washington and other cities for the Commercial Club, not to mention others.

Changes of Twenty-five Years

When I became one of the regular staff in 1893 the **Bee** was already a great metropolitan newspaper, but, of course, as nothing contrasted with what it is today. The type was all set by hand, a twelve-page paper was the maximum capacity of its presses. There were no pictures or illustrations except in rare special editions. The total circulation was 23,641 as compared with the present daily average of 69,841. The editorial department all told included nineteen salaried editors and reporters as against thirty-seven today and the same ratio holds practically in the business office, the advertising department, circulation department and all the mechanical subdivisions.

In these twenty-five years we have gone through many fierce political fights. We have engaged in six presidential campaigns, the most hard-contested being the first of the six, in which Bryan lost his "First Battle" to McKinley. I "covered" the Chicago convention, in which Bryan won his nomination by his famous cross-of-gold speech. I "covered" the Kansas City convention, in which Bryan was renominated in the face of a hopeless prospect, made more hopeless by his insisting on a re-declaration for 16 to 1. I "covered" the St. Louis convention, turned topsy-turvy by the Parker "gold telegram", making complete the assurance of Roosevelt's triumphant election. I was one of Nebraska's delegates-at-large to the 1908 Republican convention, in which Taft was nominated, and had charge of the publicity work for the twenty-six western and south-western states in that successful campaign. I was in the midst of the turmoil when the Republican party split asunder in 1912, and again in 1916, when the reunion was effected.

Saw Hot Political Fights

The first hot political fight in which I had a part was the state campaign of 1894, in which the refusal of my father and the **Bee** to support Majors brought about the election of Governor Holcomb. The next year saw the bitter A. P. A. municipal contest and after that the successive Moores' campaigns. The senatorial contests in

these years have also found the **Bee** a potent factor. The **Bee** was one among the earliest champions of the election of United States Senators by direct vote of the people. The **Bee** was one of the original advocates of the direct primary and I personally assisted in drafting Nebraska's first primary law. Many measures conducing to the public welfare of relief of the people from abuses, now accepted as matters of course, were secured only by laborious effort in which the **Bee** was a main help; a partial enumeration will include the railway commission law, the railway rate regulation laws, the reform of our revenue and taxation laws, the taxation of railway terminals, the child labor law, the workmen's compensation law, the home rule amendment to the constitution, the adoption by Omaha of the commission plan of city government, the annexation of South Omaha and other suburbs, for which, by the way, the insurmountable obstacle was removed when I procured at Washington the order merging the Omaha and South Omaha postoffices.

In Forefront of Community Service

For community undertakings the **Bee** has been in the forefront every minute of these twenty-five years. The Trans-Mississippi Exposition grew out of a proposal by my father as editor of the **Bee**. The **Bee** was instrumental in developing South Omaha as a live stock market, in establishing Omaha as a grain market, in securing the railway mail division, the balloon school, the branch federal reserve bank and the farm loan bank, in building our new court house and our new high school, in perfecting our system of parks and boulevards, in promoting public improvements generally. The **Bee** held a laboring oar in the work of tornado relief.

Above all, the **Bee** has been on the firing line for preparedness against the menace of war and in all the numerous patriotic activities for financing the war's prosecution, for adding to the comfort of the boys who are to do the fighting, for relief of the suffering of war victims, both at home and abroad. The **Bee** has not been a fifty-fifty American at any turn of the road, but is now and will continue to do its utmost to help win the war and hold the fruits of victory for the people when won.