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Article Summary: Few individuals have had as strong and lasting influence on the history of Omaha as Tom Dennison. During his nearly 40 years as "boss" of the city's 3rd Ward, his power was felt in Omaha and, to some extent, throughout Nebraska. Dennison's legacy is one of legend and hearsay, as well as history.

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Photographs / Images: Tom Dennison; Edward Rosewater, Charles C Rosewater, Victor Rosewater, about 1894; 1907 cartoon, *Omaha Daily News*; 1906 *Morning World-Herald* cartoon; 1906 *Evening World Herald* cartoon; Tom Dennison about 1932; Omaha from 15th and Douglas, about 1910

THE GRAY WOLF: TOM DENNISON OF OMAHA

By John Kyle Davis

Of the many individuals whose contributions have formed the history of Omaha, few have had as strong and lasting influence as Tom Dennison. During the nearly 40 years he spent as "boss" of the city's 3rd Ward, his power was felt not only in Omaha, but to some extent throughout Nebraska. Yet, today Dennison remains a shadowy and enigmatic figure, cloaked by legend and hearsay.

Thomas Dennison was born near Delhi, Iowa, on October 26, 1858, the third of eight children of Irish immigrants John and Anna (McConnell) Dennison. In 1860 the Dennisons moved to a farm near Franklin (now Jackson), in Dakota County, Nebraska. Rich soil and a high percentage of Irish-born residents in the area attracted the elder Dennison, who remained there the rest of his life.¹ During that time he took an active part in the life of his community, owning a modest but successful farm and serving in several minor elective posts.² Beyond this little is known of the Dennison family or of Tom until he left home at the age of 15 and returned to Iowa. Following his departure from home in 1873, Dennison spent six years as a farm laborer in Monona and Mills counties. There he once won a county cornhusking championship, an accomplishment that he later would recall with great pride.³

In 1879 Dennison left Iowa and sought adventure farther west. He worked at blacksmithing in Kansas, prospecting in Colorado, and railroading in New Mexico. While living at the Kokomo, Colorado, mining camp, he allegedly shot and wounded a man.⁴ He then moved to Leadville and became a floorwalker at the

Texas, the town's largest and most notorious "gambling hell."⁵ During this period Dennison showed a knack for taking advantage of business opportunities and within a short time rose from bouncer to owner of a quarter interest in the Texas. He then sold it, using his profits to purchase part ownership in Leadville's Opera House. With Charley Pierson as a partner, he started the Old Arcade in Denver, the first of a chain of gambling houses left in his wake as he coursed the Rocky Mountain area. In 1892 he settled in Omaha after having briefly visited the city two years earlier.

Thirty-four years of flamboyant frontier living had created in Dennison an imposing figure. Standing 6 feet tall with 200 pounds proportionately spread over a large-boned frame, immaculately dressed and usually wearing large, flawless diamonds, Dennison reflected power. Though he was taciturn and impassive by nature, his emotions were expressed on occasion by hearty laughter or angry outbursts. Photographs of Dennison show a man with cold, penetrating eyes who often had a wry smile playing at the corners of his mouth. He had a deep voice, flawed by a slight impediment noticeable only during infrequent periods of tenseness.⁶

There has been some speculation as to why Tom Dennison decided to settle in Omaha. Former *Harper's* editor George Leighton believed Dennison came as a representative of a gambling syndicate to consolidate vice activities.⁷ The editor gave no documentation to support his claim, and no evidence appears to exist which could lend credence to his statement.

By the 1890's Omaha had reached the peak of an economic boom which transformed it from a small river town into one of the leading agricultural, railroad, and meat-packing centers of the Midwest. Grain production for the country tributary to Omaha in 1889 was valued at \$181,642,000; ten railroads passed through the city; and the Union Stockyards, non-existent in 1880, had made South Omaha the third largest packing center in the country.⁸ The 1890 population of 102,430, an increase of 233 per cent over a decade, also reflected the boom.⁹ Even the economic slump of the 1890's failed to completely dampen the confidence of many Omahans. However, the city had a seamy side not mentioned in the booster pamphlets of the period. This activity was centered in the 3rd Ward and was responsible for the city being called the "wickedest city in the United States," and a "wide open town."¹⁰

The 3rd Ward, sandwiched between the Missouri River and the commercial-retail district, gained notoriety through its saloons, gambling dens, street games, and brothels. Drifters, swindlers, gamblers, prostitutes, and criminals comprised a significant segment of its population, though exact figures are not readily available. The police, with the exception of rare, obligatory crackdowns, generally ignored the district's activities; city fathers often looked upon the area as a necessary evil.¹¹ The Slocumb Law, enacted by the state Legislature in 1881 to control saloons, was mainly disregarded, as were the various laws and ordinances which attempted to regulate gambling and prostitution.¹² "As goes the 3rd Ward, so goes the city" referred to the substantial majorities it gave to "machine" candidates, an advantage other candidates were often unable to surmount with majorities from other precincts of the city.¹³ Dennison came into this setting to build on previously laid foundations. He only needed to further consolidate and organize the ward and its sundry activities under his control to make himself supreme.

From April until November of 1892, Dennison appeared to have no source of income nor any desire to find one, spending most of his time in the lobby of the hotel where he lived or in Joe Sonnenberg's pawnshop.¹⁴ After November, though, he became a whirlwind of activity. He first established a gambling house in an alley near 14th and Dodge, from which he ran a "policy game," an illegal form of lottery popular among low-income classes.¹⁵ The game proved profitable for the gambler, and within a few years he and his brother John had opened branch shops in South Omaha and across the state line in East Omaha, Iowa.¹⁶ Near the turn of the century these three "dens" formed the most successful enterprises of their kind in the city.¹⁷ During this period Dennison formed connections, often through silent partnerships, with other saloon-casinos: the Denver, owned by Dennison's old Colorado partner, Charley Pierson, and managed by Tom's brother Patrick; the Diamond, also run by Pat; and a place called Cliff Cole's.¹⁸ Eventually Cole's saloon was bought by Billy Nesselhaus, who had Dennison's backing, and was renamed the Budweiser. It served for many years as Dennison headquarters.¹⁹

In the early 1890's the 3rd Ward had been controlled by a group known as the "Big Four": Charles D. Bibbins, Hiram B. Kennedy, Charles White, and Jack Morrison. When they

suddenly and mysteriously left town following a routine police crackdown, a power vacuum was created in the district.²⁰ Dennison took advantage of it to further establish his power. He became the new middleman between saloon owners and gamblers on one hand, and police and key politicians on the other. Helping to cement this relationship was the appointment of Dennison's brother-in-law, James Wilson, to the police force in 1898. Wilson's beat was the 3rd Ward.²¹ Such was the growing strength of Dennison's connections that by the late 1890's, both Police Chief Martin White and Mayor Frank Moores gained tainted reputations by allegations that they were the gambler's allies.²² They were not the last high officials so charged.²³ Dennison used his growing influence to solidify his hold on the 3rd Ward, an operation in which police officials proved valuable confederates.

A prominent attorney, Richard Cowan, wondered why many small saloons were closed by the police, often for minor violations, while Dennison's gambling concern was allowed to operate in definite violation of the law within just a few blocks of the police station.²⁴ The *World-Herald* suggested that Police Chief White's "policy seems to have been to drive all the gambling business into the hands of Tom Dennison."²⁵ At least one owner found his saloon-gambling hall closed by the police because of "fear that a smallpox epidemic had broken out there." The owner had announced he would not be subject to Dennison's wishes when he opened his doors for business a few days previously.²⁶ In 1907 during a libel suit involving Dennison and the *Daily News*, a former employee of the gambler's testified as to some of his methods. Several years before, Vic Walker was given a sum of money by Dennison and told to buy out the owner of the Midway, a man who the gambler felt had "crossed him." Walker did so and became a trusted lieutenant until 1901. In that year, he testified, he refused to follow one of Dennison's orders and was beaten up in the presence of the ward boss and a policeman. Walker soon afterward left town.²⁷

In January, 1899, a campaign against vice by the *World-Herald* pointed to Dennison, and raids were made on his policy shops by Deputy Sheriff Henry S. McDonald acting in concert with the county attorney. The *World-Herald* gleefully recorded the events while chastising Mayor Moores and Police Chief White for failing to do their duty,²⁸ but it soon discovered



Tom Dennison, probably during World War I era.

that the gambler's powers had reached the point where any action taken against him caused an inevitable reaction. Through orders issued by Moores, pressure was placed on the saloonkeepers and wholesale liquor dealer Walter Moise, a prominent businessman, to use their influence to have the charges against Dennison dropped.²⁹ To a certain extent the plan worked. A reporter summed up one owner's concern when the latter was asked why he didn't resist:

"The trouble is . . . that the saloonkeepers have been laying themselves liable by infringements upon the Slocumb Law and they are not in condition to make a fight upon anyone. It is not Dennison they are afraid of so much as some of the men who are acknowledged to be behind him. Then there is the mayor and the fire and police commission, and finally the chief of police. No saloonkeeper can afford to fight them."³⁰

However, the influential Moise refused to be intimidated and was threatened with a revocation of his license. The dealer stood firm and was saved from further harassment by a restraining order placed on Moores and White.³¹ A year after his arrest, though, a court ordered all charges against Dennison dropped on a legal technicality.³²

By the early 1900's Dennison had established his ward machine. The key lieutenant, Billy Nesselhous, became the "business brains" of the organization and coordinated various vice activities from the Budweiser.³³ Nesselhous, a former jockey and coal-hauler, made his start in Omaha as a street gambler. In many respects he was the opposite of Dennison, though their differences actually complemented each other. Small and bespectacled, Nesselhous enjoyed the company of beautiful women and a fast night life. A friend of actresses, prostitutes, con men, professional men, and businessmen, he was more able to adapt himself to different types of people than was Dennison. He provided the boss valuable connections with the more influential elements of the community and was willing to be the scapegoat when things went wrong.³⁴

There were other key members of the organization, including Negroes and members from other racial and ethnic groups. Prior to World War I, the city was less intolerant toward some minority groups.³⁵ Dennison, recognizing the importance of minority support, made sure these groups had representatives within the machine. For instance, he financed the previously mentioned Vic Walker, a Negro, in the purchase of the Midway, a resort in the heart of the red-light district. In return for police

protection, Walker was placed in charge of the district and acted as liaison between the black community and the boss.³⁶ When Walker and Dennison disagreed following an argument during the elections of 1901, the lieutenant was replaced by Jack Broomfield, another Negro. He was to be a loyal subordinate for many years.³⁷

As the machine rose in power, there was a corresponding increase in vice. Both anti-Dennison newspapers frequently were aroused by the situation. The *Daily News* commented, "Liberal government is fine for thugs and lawbreakers—how do you like it?"³⁸ and the *World-Herald* editorialized:

"The policy of our police department is bearing legitimate fruit. A gang of desperadoes has been encouraged to make Omaha its haven of refuge and it has educated a lot of young men in the ways of crime. The doctrine that when permitted to live in Omaha they commit all their misdeeds outside the city is almost as false as it is immoral."³⁹

Among the rogues frequently reported to be in the city were the John C. Mabray gang, a group of Iowa swindlers; Patrick Crowe, train robber and kidnapper; and "Fainting Bertha" Liebke, whose gambit was swooning in front of her unsuspecting victims and then picking their pockets when they came to her aid.

Gambling, although outlawed, became stronger than ever, and the number of saloons grew. Between 1905 and 1915 Omaha had the greatest increase in drinking establishments of any city in the nation.⁴⁰ Attempts to control public drinking, mainly through the 8 p.m. closing law passed in 1908, were, like the Slocumb Law, mainly ineffective. The greatest increase of all, however, came in the area of prostitution. By 1910 there were an estimated one hundred brothels and 2,500 prostitutes in the city.⁴¹ It was estimated that from 1905 to 1911 the average yearly income from the houses, including their accompanying liquor business, was \$17,760,000.⁴²

As long as the bordello owners maintained amicable relations with the administration and saw that their inmates regularly visited the doctor, the police made little attempt to enforce the prostitution statutes.⁴³ Even the closing of M. F. Martin's Arcade, literally a small village of 132 brick and tarpaper cribs covering four blocks, and the passage by the state Legislature of the tough Albert Law, had little effect upon prostitution.⁴⁴ On the same day in 1914 that a grand jury reported finding no examples of harlotry in the city, a streetwalker was quoted by the *Daily News* as saying, "It's a poor girl on the street who can't make at least five dollars a night in Omaha."⁴⁵

As Dennison's control of vice increased, he sensed that he needed more than the support of a few police and city officials in order to remain in business. The 1899 raid on his shops, handled completely by county agents, emphasized this need. Thus, by 1900 the "policy king" began to take a more active part in politics. Dennison has been described as both a Republican and a Democrat.⁴⁶ In fact he was neither but was apolitical, preferring to back the party or candidates who could serve his needs best. He originally worked within a local Republican group, but before his career was over he had supported several Democrats.⁴⁷

In the late 1890's Dennison associated himself with the local Republican "machine" controlled by Edward Rosewater and his newspaper the *Omaha Bee*. A feisty Bohemian immigrant, Rosewater had built his newspaper from a small political flyer into one of the most prestigious papers in the Midwest; and he had built a reputation as a man who would fight rival editors both physically and verbally.⁴⁸ Throughout the latter part of his life Rosewater aspired to be a U.S. senator. He failed twice, in 1901 and 1906, to achieve this goal because he lacked state-wide support in the Legislature, which at that time elected senators.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, during this period he was able to gain control of a large faction of the local Republican Party.

When and how the gambler and the editor formed their alliance is not known. There were reports of the two men being connected in the late 1890's,⁵⁰ but it was not until the early 1900's that the *Daily News* and the *World-Herald* started referring to a Rosewater-Dennison machine. Dennison first appeared to exert some authority in the fall elections of 1900, openly campaigning for the re-election of Congressman David Mercer. Mercer had allegedly been useful politically to Dennison.⁵¹ That election was followed by one the next year which was even more essential to his bid for political control.

The autumn election of 1901 has been called one of the hardest fought in Omaha's history.⁵² This was particularly true in the race for county judge. The incumbent, Duncan M. Vinsohaler, had alienated both Dennison and Rosewater during his previous term. The judge, ironically a staunch Republican, had refused to support the editor in his bid for a Senate seat, and he had issued the warrants against Dennison and his policy game. Rosewater in retaliation began a series of editorial attacks



Edward Rosewater (left), publisher of the Omaha Bee, Charles C. Rosewater, Victor Rosewater, taken about 1894.

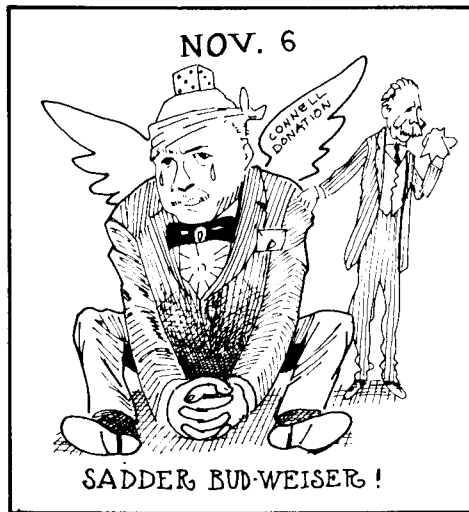
which aroused much comment. The *Journal* at Lincoln said: "He [Rosewater] is so far ahead of the *World-Herald* in the intensity of his opposition to Judge Vinsohaler that he is dissatisfied with the mildness of its criticisms of that Republican official."⁵³

The *Omaha Daily News* claimed that although "it appears Rosewater is supporting Vinsohaler, he is against him," and that Dennison was helping the newspaperman behind the scenes by the use of fraudulent election tactics.⁵⁴ A third paper, the weekly *Examiner*, contended that "Rosewater's function in the election seemed to have been that of furnishing ammunition to the opposition."⁵⁵ It also suggested that Tom Dennison stay out of politics lest he receive the same fate as the Big Four.⁵⁶ (Allegedly, these four gamblers who controlled 3rd Ward vice and politics in the early 1890's had been forced to leave town when they tried to spread their political influence.)⁵⁷ Despite Rosewater's editorializing and Dennison's efforts, Vinsohaler won by gaining majorities in all areas except the Dennison strongholds and South Omaha.⁵⁸ However, in subsequent elections 3rd Ward forces were often the deciding factor, and until 1918 Dennison was a strong influence in both city and county elections and appointments.

Although the boss never gained a foothold in the important office of county attorney, he was believed to have gained entry to other areas. At times between 1901 and 1918 office holders in the judiciary, Congress, the Omaha city council (later commission), and the fire and police departments were linked with Dennison. There were even attempts at one time to tie in reform-oriented Governor George L. Sheldon with Dennison.⁵⁹

Charges of fraudulent practices in connection with 3rd Ward elections became more common. Included among the accusations were ballot-box stuffing, false registrations, the use of illegal voters, and intimidation. Even minority and majority reports of a state Legislature committee investigating these malpractices totally agreed that they existed. Their only difference of opinion was the extent to which they were carried out.⁶⁰ Strangely, despite his increase in political power, both the *Daily News* and the *World-Herald* regarded Dennison as being politically dead between 1905 and 1910, although they still acknowledged his control of vice in the city. There were several reasons why the papers developed this inaccurate attitude at the time the ward boss was actually reaching his zenith politically.

*November 10, 1907, Omaha
Daily News caricature of
Dennison's unsuccessful
election efforts.*



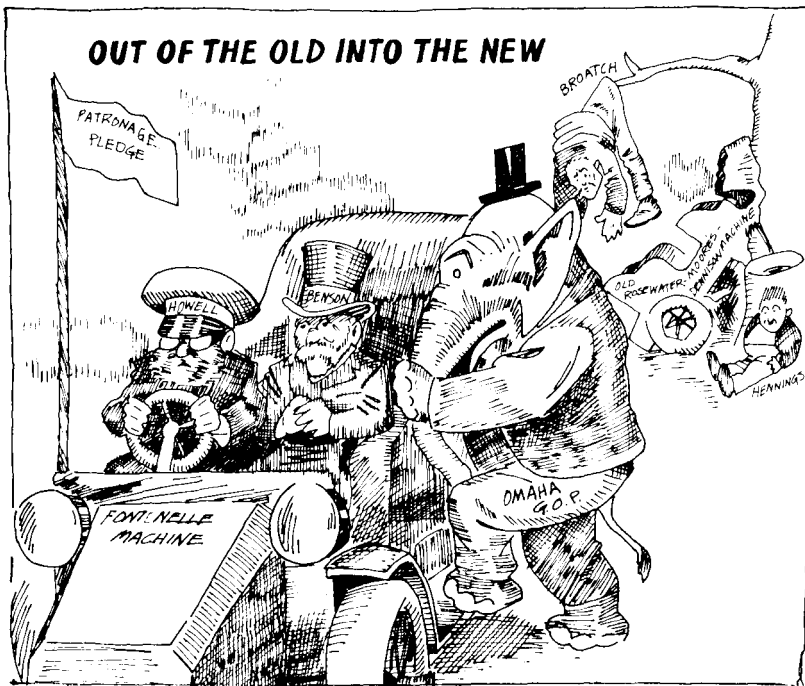
In 1904 Dennison was indicted for a jewel robbery which occurred 12 years previously on a train outside Missouri Valley, Iowa, and resulted in the loss of \$15,000 in diamonds.⁶¹ Shortly afterwards, a man known as Frank Shercliffe (born Sherman Morris) was convicted of the crime. After his release from the Iowa Penitentiary, Shercliffe announced that he had committed the crime, but that Tom Dennison had been the mastermind. Based on Shercliffe's declaration, Dennison was charged with complicity in the crime.⁶² Dennison failed in his attempt to prevent extradition to Iowa, and trial began in Red Oak, Iowa, in 1905.⁶³ The case against Dennison appeared strong: the gambler had known Shercliffe in his Utah days; the two men were seen talking in Sonnenberg's pawnshop the day before the robbery; shortly after the robbery, Dennison suddenly had enough money to open his policy shop; letters and ledgers, believed to be in Dennison's handwriting, indicated that he had gone to great lengths (including his use of several politicians) to gain the robber's pardon; and for a brief period after Shercliffe's release, the ex-convict lived in the Dennison home.⁶⁴

Opponents of Dennison were wrong in their assumption that the trial would result in a prison sentence for him. The prosecution's case was based almost solely upon the testimony of Frank Shercliffe; a letter written by Dennison to Homer Morris, Shercliffe's brother; and an 1892 Iowa hotel register which bore the name Tom Dennison. This last evidence was used to show that the gambler had met with the robber five days after the crime.⁶⁵ The most that could be proved was that Dennison had known Shercliffe, had talked to him prior to the robbery, had provided money for his defense, and had worked to secure his pardon.

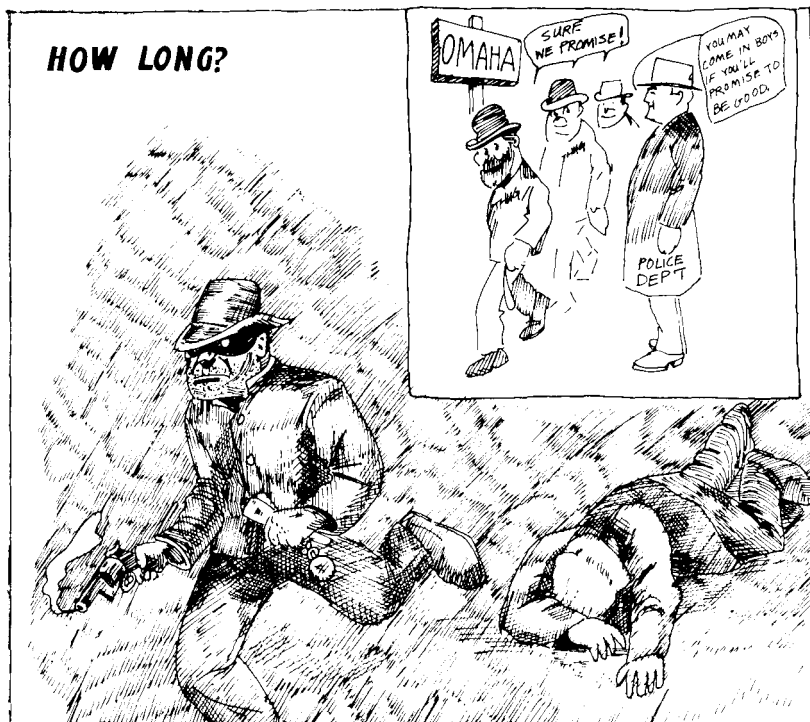
The defense, led by prominent attorney W. J. Connell, contended that Dennison was framed. The lawyer argued that a group of men headed by lawyer Elmer E. Thomas, the Jeweler's Protective Association, and the anti-Dennison Civic Federation had "bought" Shercliffe.⁶⁶ Most of the defense centered upon impeaching his testimony⁶⁷ and showing Dennison's high standing in Omaha. Several prominent businessmen and politicians, including Mayor Moores and Chief of Police John Donahue (Martin White's successor), testified to Dennison's "good character."⁶⁸ Furthermore, an incident which occurred six months prior to the trial had left some people wondering to what extent Dennison's foes would go to rid the city of him.

In November, 1904, the home of Elmer Thomas had been damaged by a dynamite bomb. Thomas had been a bitter foe of the gamblers since the late 1890's and had been instrumental in bringing Dennison to trial.⁶⁹ Stimulated by news stories in the *Daily News* and *World-Herald*, and manipulated by Thomas himself, public opinion first condemned Dennison's forces for the bombing. It was thought by many people that Thomas "needed" to be kept quiet by the machine either through death or fear, depending on how people wished to interpret the intent of the bombing. Opinion shifted, however, as doubts arose about the incident and incongruities were noted. Some persons began to wonder if the bomb might not have been planted by Thomas sympathizers in an effort to discredit Dennison, and if the tactics of those who opposed Dennison were not as unscrupulous as those of the boss.⁷⁰

The incident may have still been in the minds of some of the jurors, or they may have felt the evidence against him was too circumstantial. Dennison was acquitted, but the indictment and trial appeared to constitute a costly blow to his forces.⁷¹ The year after Dennison's acquittal, 1906, Mayor Frank Moores and editor Edward Rosewater both died. Rosewater's son and successor, Victor, inherited a strong role in Republican politics and continued the *Bee* policy of rarely mentioning Dennison's name in print. Although attempts were made to associate Dennison with Victor Rosewater, they usually proved fruitless. Furthermore, W. J. Broatch, the machine candidate to replace Moores as mayor, lost in his bid for the Republican nomination to that office. Thus, it appeared that part of Dennison's power base had disappeared. In truth, it had only shifted.



Morning World-Herald, April 6, 1906. Both the World-Herald and Daily News incorrectly saw the Republican primaries as the death blow to the Rosewater-Dennison-Moore machine. . . (Below) Evening World-Herald, March 9, 1906. Both newspapers accused the police department of allowing undesirables to enter Omaha.



Dennison's pretended retreat into the shadows of Omaha politics, while he actually gained strength, was accompanied by a decrease in negative publicity of the two anti-Dennison newspapers. Starting with the defeat of Broatch and the subsequent 1906 city elections, Democratic candidates backed by the *World-Herald*, the *News*, and anti-machine Republicans began to gain more elective posts. For the two newspapers to have continued their allegations of corruption in the city administration would have been damaging to apparently unsullied men who were supported by the two dailies. In continuing to attack only vice and the police department, both papers were guilty of believing, or pretending to believe, that only Rosewater Republicans could be Dennison allies.

Nepotism by Dennison-backed men administering crucial offices eventually became commonplace in both city and county government. In 1904 John Dennison was appointed sidewalk inspector and eight years later his brother Pat took the coveted post of street department foreman.⁷² Within a few more years Pat's son became a police officer and Billy Nesselhous' step-brother a city commissioner.⁷³ In 1909 Louis Burmeister, a 3rd Ward saloonkeeper and ally of Dennison's, was selected president of the city council. The following year Johnny Lynch, boss of the 10th Ward and Dennison's most important ally next to Nesselhous, was elected to the county commission and shortly thereafter became chairman. Lynch's election was important to Dennison. First, it gave him a powerful connection in county government; second, it gave him control over grand and petit juries. Within a few years an unusually high number of names on the annual jury lists issued by Lynch were drawn from the 3rd and 10th Wards, and the same names appeared again on subsequent lists.⁷⁴

The importance of jury tampering cannot be underestimated. It helped to keep many of Dennison's activities thriving. For example, in January, 1912, the sheriff raided the Midway and arrested its owner, Dennison crony Jack Broomfield. The *World-Herald* praised the sheriff for eliminating "the . . . most vicious [of gambling and liquor] joints to be found in this or any other city" and chastised the police for having allowed it to operate.⁷⁵ Broomfield's four trials were held in county court, and all of them ended in hung juries. During one trial a juror failed to show up, and a replacement was found in the crowd. By

the sheerest of coincidences, the substitute, who was the only member to vote for acquittal, lived in the same house as Johnny Lynch.⁷⁶ After a grand jury ordered the case moved to district court, two more trials ended in deadlock and an exasperated judge ordered the case dismissed.⁷⁷

Besides his gains in political and judicial influence, strong relations developed between Dennison and elements of the business community. Saloonkeepers and brothel owners were required to buy merchandise from specified department and furniture stores, liquor dealers, breweries, groceries, dairies, and coal yards.⁷⁸ Important city contracts for paving, building, printing, and city supplies also went to favored businesses.⁷⁹ Even more important were the connections between the Dennison clique and the public service corporations—private companies which supplied public transportation, gas, water, and electricity through franchises granted by the city.

At least two of these franchises were controlled by large eastern companies who as absentee landlords needed a strong local business agent.⁸⁰ Even those locally controlled found the boss useful. Court cases involving the corporations were common, and sympathetic judges and juries were needed. Franchises periodically were renewed and reviewed and city councilmen favorable to the machine were needed. Demands by users for better service and lower rates were continually being made but were postponed with the connivance of elected officials. Among the character witnesses who had testified at Dennison's trial in 1905 were two employees of the utility companies.⁸¹ His defense attorney in that and future court cases was William J. Connell, who served over 30 years as a lawyer for service corporations in the city and for the *Omaha Bee*.⁸²

At a city council meeting in 1905, Mayor Moores and the pro-corporation element forced the rest of the council to accept a new gas street-lighting contract. Four policemen refused to allow spectators to enter or leave the chambers during the "debate." The *World-Herald* believed the contract was not the vital issue, although it meant more profit for the gas company. It compared Moore's machinations to those of a South American dictatorship.⁸³ Not until seven years later was a more reasonable contract worked out.⁸⁴

The Dennison forces aided the service corporations in their fight against a trend towards municipal ownership of public

utilities. In June of 1911 a bond issue faced Omaha's electorate, and its passage, assuring the purchase of the water works by the city, seemed inevitable, climaxing a ten-year struggle by the reformists.⁸⁵ Instead, the bond issue was defeated by a narrow margin when the reformists failed by one hundred votes to get the two-thirds majority needed.⁸⁶ The *Bee* first editorialized that the defeat was due to the "gradual awakening of the people to the enormity of the bunco game that the [reformers] had been playing," and later blamed public apathy.⁸⁷ However, there were more significant reasons for the defeat. The bonds had passed by wide margins in all the wards but two, the Dennison controlled 3rd and 10th Wards, where the results showed an 80 percent anti-bond vote.⁸⁸ In the second precinct of the 3rd Ward, which voted 349 to 5 against the bonds, the 354 ballots cast were a greater number than the totals in the entire 1st, 4th, and 8th Wards.⁸⁹ Although the bonds eventually passed a few months later, the election pointed up the relationship between Dennison's organization and private business.

After 1906 Dennison found an ally in James C. (Cowboy Jim) Dahlman, a Texan recently arrived from Chadron, where he had been sheriff and mayor. His 20-plus years in office eventually earned him the nickname "the perpetual mayor of Omaha." Flamboyant and colorful, Dahlman reflected a grass roots hominess in his attitudes which endeared him to many citizens, particularly to Tom Dennison. Ironically, Democrat Dahlman was supported by the *World-Herald* and at least tolerated by the *Daily News* during most of his political career in Omaha. The exact Dahlman-Dennison relationship is not entirely clear even today.

The mayor was not Dennison's tool in the sense that some politicians were. There is even evidence that during Dahlman's first election campaign in 1906 the Dennison organization worked against him.⁹⁰ (In later years Dennison stated that he had always supported the mayor.⁹¹) Nor did the Texan's friendship with Dennison lead him into venality. Following Dahlman's death in 1930 the boss said of him, "I have known the mayor for thirty years, and I never knew him to do a dishonorable act or make a mistake He was conscientiously honest. He was never for sale. I never asked Dahlman to do a thing that was wrong."⁹² This is one of the few instances where statements directly attributed to Dennison can be taken without question.



*Tom Dennison in his last years,
probably about 1932.*

Even Dahlman's strongest critics have agreed that the mayor was personally an honest man, supported by Dennison because of his administrative qualifications.

Dahlman was elected mayor in 1906 as a moderate reformer but by no means as a moral crusader. In regard to saloons, gambling, and prostitution (the major sources of Dennison's income), the mayor adopted a hands-off policy. The mayor and many other Omahans saw no problem as long as these vices remained isolated in the 3rd Ward.⁹³ Although Dahlman was an advocate of municipally owned utilities during the campaign of 1906, he was slow in using his influence to obtain reform. The water works did not become a municipal corporation until 1912 and the gas works not until the 1920's. Thus, Dahlman proved satisfactory to the machine and its businessmen supporters because he was not a disturber. Dahlman's philosophy was described in these words by one contemporary:

"Toward big business and organized vice he has adapted a laissez-faire policy. . . . Rather he has allowed business interests to have what they wanted and has hoaxed some of the people into believing that the public got what it wanted."⁹⁴

With the support of business and an amiable mayor, Dennison reached his peak of power in 1914. However, over the next four years a series of adversities struck the boss and his organization. During 1914 the *Daily News* started a series of attacks on Johnny Lynch. Often resorting to sensational tactics, the newspaper brought out the irregularities in jury lists, and private detectives were hired to investigate the county government.⁹⁵ Lynch

declared that one of the detectives, using a false identity, had tried to trap him with the offer of a bribe. The commissioner by his own account refused it.⁹⁶ The feud between Lynch and the *News* became so heated that when a reporter, Charles Driscoll, was beaten by thugs, there was suspicion that the commissioner may have been responsible.⁹⁷

Even more damaging to Lynch was the mysterious murder of three men, including a former city councilman, in July of 1914, since Lynch's brother, Humphrey, had been seen arguing with two of the victims shortly before their murders. Furthermore, the same two men were rumored to be enemies of Lynch. Adding to the mystery was the statement that the wife of one of the victims was told by the police not to discuss the murders. No connections were ever proved, but the police and the Lynches were regarded with suspicion by the *News*.⁹⁸ A month after the crime Humphrey was fired from his job as county plumber.⁹⁹ With his name frequently connected with such activities, Lynch became a political liability to Tom Dennison. More seriously, by late 1916 and early 1917 Humphrey had become an untrustworthy lieutenant. During the winter Lynch attempted to unseat his leader as city boss.¹⁰⁰

An investigation into the county government brought allegations of malfeasance in office under Lynch and resulted in an ouster suit brought against him. Much of the interest centered around a room in the courthouse, ostensibly used as a gymnasium, but alleged to be a site of soirees planned by Lynch. Whether or not this investigation was ordered by Dennison is unknown, but in the resulting ouster trial one of the key witnesses against Lynch was Tom Dennison. In his testimony he freely told of the various vice activities in which he and the commissioner had been involved.¹⁰¹ Lynch was forced from office and soon after left town, but in the process Dennison had admitted to many shady dealings which he had previously denied.

Other factors damaged the Dennison organization. First, a strong registration and election law passed by the state Legislature in 1915 put a crimp in two of the machine's election tricks: fraudulent registration and repeat voting.¹⁰² Second, during World War I the 3rd Ward vice district was declared off-limits to servicemen from nearby military installations. This, and the entry of many young Omahans into the armed services, curtailed a potent source of revenue for the organization.

Compounding this problem was the passage of a state prohibition law which forced the saloons and gambling dens underground. Third, and most damaging of all, was the 1918 city election in which five of the seven city commissioners, including Mayor Dahlman, were voted out of office.

A strong reform movement appeared to be responsible for the change in city government. Capitalizing on the prohibition movement, the scandal in county government, the revelation of corrupt practices in the police department, and the letting of city contracts, the reformists rode a public backlash to victory.¹⁰³ It was the most serious defeat in Dennison's career. Hampered severely by the new election law, his candidates lost at the polls. The *Daily News* was elated at the results:

The electorate's action is a milepost in the city's history . . . it does not pay to let the vice interests run their tentacles into the city hall, nor permit corporation influences to have a hand in the management of our affairs . . . the people picked the right men to inaugurate the new regime.¹⁰⁴

In the weeks following the victory it seemed that a new era was starting for Omaha. Edward P. Smith, a successful lawyer, was chosen by his fellow commissioners to be the new mayor. John Ringer was selected police commissioner and was given the unenviable task of cleansing the police department and putting a tight reign on the city's vice. After having made those admirable appointments the reformers agreed on little else.

The term reformer in Omaha was a misnomer and suggested a unity which was never present among the commissioners. The five newly elected men and the two incumbents ranged from moderate progressives like Smith to radicals like Ringer, who saw his election as a call for a moral crusade.¹⁰⁵ Unable to agree on the methods of carrying out reforms, the seven officials began to fight among themselves.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, conditions in the police department did not improve in spite of Ringer's hopes. Early in 1919 it was disclosed that several policemen were involved in an auto theft ring.¹⁰⁷ While serious misfortune plagued the department, Ringer pursued such quixotic ideas as an automatic gate on the Douglas Street bridge to catch bootleggers.¹⁰⁸

The most damaging blow to the reform administration was the courthouse riot in September, 1919, a year of unrest in Omaha. Aside from problems within city hall and the police department, the community was feeling the effect of social unrest. Servicemen

returning from the war were unable to find jobs, inflation was high, labor was restless, and Omaha was threatened by a series of strikes. Although strikes were averted, rumor had it that should they occur Negroes would be brought in as strikebreakers. These stories enraged many Omahans who already believed that the growing Negro population was a problem of major concern. Omaha's newspapers, particularly the *Bee* and the *Daily News*, had filled the first nine months with inflammatory stories of local crimes committed by blacks, including alleged attacks upon white women. It did not matter that many of these "attacks" proved to be unfounded or grossly exaggerated.

On the night of September 25, a young woman, Agnes Loebeck, and her escort, Milton Hoffman, were accosted by a man.¹⁰⁹ Hoffman, a cripple, was robbed and Miss Loebeck allegedly raped. Will Brown, a Negro, was arrested and charged with the crime and lodged in the Douglas County jail on the third floor of the courthouse. On September 28 he was taken from the jail by a mob, shot, hanged, and burned. The courthouse sustained an estimated \$1 million fire damage during the raid. Mayor Smith, who tried to stall the vigilantes, was strung up for his trouble. Two officials rescued him before he strangled. Two other men were killed and 50 injured in the melee.

It cannot be proven what part, if any, the Dennison organization played in the disorder (Tom himself was out of town during the period). However, the riot was a boon to that group and a bane for an already shaky city administration. The next 19 months saw the reformists become completely ineffective. In the city elections of 1921, Dennison-supported candidates led by Dahlman were returned to city hall.

During the 1920's Dennison's power re-emerged as strong as it had been from 1905 to 1914. His control of the police department was such that a policeman acting as a liaison could often be found at Dennison's headquarters in the Karbach building, while other officers acted as his personal chauffeurs.¹¹⁰ In elections the organization was dominant, though the days of extreme fraud had passed. Dennison candidates no longer won by gaining unbelievable majorities in the 3rd Ward, but they continued to win until 1933.

The city's vice activities produced as much revenue as ever. Drinking and gambling, forced underground by the 18th Amendment and reformist attitudes, were never far from the

surface. Speakeasies were not hard to find and roadhouses lined the outskirts of the city. Opposition to Dennison and the "city hall gang" began to take on a different tone. The *Daily News* continued its opposition, even after its merger with the *Bee* in 1927, but it began to treat the organization as a political anachronism. The *World-Herald* had stopped its vehement attacks upon the boss and treated him with more moderation. Still concerned with good city government and an honest police department, the paper also began to regard Dennison as the last of a fast-dying breed.

Legends about Dennison emerged. He was spoken of as a man who was true to his friends, a man of his word, and a kindly benefactor who would use his own money to help a down-and-outer or family in need.¹¹¹ The story was told of how he once sent an asthmatic ward-heeler to Arizona to recover his health. Allegedly, the man never found out who his benefactor was.¹¹² To some supporters Dennison even became known affectionately as the "Old Man."¹¹³ To a certain extent the boss had changed. Although he continued to be the kingpin through the 1920's and into the 1930's, much of his interest in politics waned. On occasion he stated that he had never really loved politics but had been forced into it to protect his gambling interests and had often thought of retiring completely.¹¹⁴ Work and responsibilities were delegated to underlings, while Dennison spent more time racing horses and raising wire-haired terriers at his country home near 72nd and Military.¹¹⁵

The death of his wife Ada in 1922 affected Dennison immensely. She had been one of the few people for whom he had strong personal feelings, and he had worked hard to protect her from the seamy aspects of his life.¹¹⁶ After her death he began to devote more time to his only surviving child, Frances, and to his two grandsons.¹¹⁷ Still, Dennison remained to his foes the "Gray Wolf," who was, in the words of one long-time newspaperman, "not a very nice man."¹¹⁸

In the late winter of 1932, Dennison and 58 other persons were charged by a federal grand jury with conspiracy to violate the prohibition laws. Among those indicted were Billy Nesselhaus, three prominent policemen, and a city prosecutor. The charges had been the result of investigations by federal agents.¹¹⁹ The trial began in October of 1932 with the prosecution facing a formidable task. Proving that the defendants were involved in a



Omaha from 15th and Douglas Streets, about 1910.

conspiracy led by Dennison was difficult, even though there was strong evidence of illegal liquor traffic, police department cooperation, and the use of gangland tactics to discourage opposition.¹²⁰ Other charges were weak. Attempts to tie the alleged syndicate to the murder of Harry Lapidus, a civic crusader, were based almost exclusively on hearsay and the testimony of Tom Crawford, a former policeman and Dennison supporter.¹²¹ Both prosecution and defense agreed it would be hard to prove.¹²² Even weaker was the attempt to prove that Dennison had met with Al Capone in Chicago to study that underworld figure's organization and tactics. The defense quickly pointed out that at the time of the supposed meeting Capone was serving a prison sentence in Philadelphia.¹²³ By December the charges against 43 of the men, most of them minor figures, had been dropped.

The trial had a noticeable physical effect upon Dennison. A *New York Times* reporter described the aging boss as a "hard-boiled, sophisticated, and palsied old man racked by a long series of illnesses from which he has not yet recovered."¹²⁴ These lingering effects, the strain of the trial, and concern over his grandson's emergency surgery (which resulted in an all night vigil for him), proved too much even for Dennison's physical toughness, and near the trial's end he collapsed. His weakened condition led to pneumonia, and he lingered near death for several days before recovering.¹²⁵

By December 13, after the jury was unable to reach a decision, a mistrial was declared.¹²⁶ Most of the jurors had voted for conviction, believing that a conspiracy had existed.¹²⁷ However, the testimony of key witness Tom Crawford was questioned by some jurors. Having been booted from the Dennison organization, Crawford's statements to the jurors had seemed colored with malice.¹²⁸ The government promised a second trial but finally dropped all charges against Dennison in April, 1933.¹²⁹

It did not really matter. A *Times* reporter believed the real purpose of the trial was to break Dennison's political power.¹³⁰ If so, it succeeded. The "Old Man" was ill; his reputation had been blackened by trial publicity; and he had lost a valuable political ally in the death of Mayor Dahlman in 1930. The city elections of 1933 saw a near sweep by the anti-Dennison Independent Voters' League.¹³¹ The night before the election, league campaign workers had sung "The Old Gray Wolf, He

Ain't What He Used To Be," and the number was carried in one of Omaha's first remote radio broadcasts.¹³²

Dennison went to San Diego, California, to visit friends and to recuperate from his illness. On January 27, 1934, he was injured when an automobile in which he was a passenger was involved in an accident. He died on February 14 following a cerebral hemorrhage.¹³³ When Dennison was buried at Forest Lawn in Omaha, the funeral attracted more than 1,000 people, including most of the city's prominent political, judicial, and police officials. Among the telegrams of condolence was one from Tom Pendergast, the czar of the Kansas City machine. Life-long foes of Dennison spoke of him with grudging admiration, for he had been a fascinating man. Perhaps the reason for this fascination was best summed up by the *World-Herald*:

There were quite the makings of another sort of man . . . in Tom Dennison . . . He had courage. . . . He had . . . the qualities of natural leadership, of the fighter, and he was industrious and persevering. . . . Suppose he had been directed into a better path for a better end . . . Our guess is that he would have gone far and won for himself a deservedly honored name.¹³⁴

NOTES

1. *North Nebraska Eagle* (Dakota City), April 27, 1905; Addison E. Sheldon, *Nebraska: The Land and the People* (3 vols., Chicago, 1931), II, 183 (hereafter cited as *Nebraska*); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census Schedule, Dakota County, Nebraska, 1860* (microfilm, Omaha Public Library). Most sources give Dennison's birthdate as 1859; however, his death certificate and tombstone at Forest Lawn Cemetery in Omaha, give 1858. The 1860 census indicates 1858 is correct since Tom's age is given as 18 months.

2. Sheldon, *Nebraska*, II, 183; M. M. Warner, *History of Dakota County, Nebraska* (Dakota City, Nebraska: Lyons Mirror Job Office, 1893), 136, 138, 143, 366.

3. *Evening World-Herald*, February 16, 1934.

4. *Evening World-Herald*, April 16, 1907; *Omaha Daily News*, April 18, 1907.

5. Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration, comp., *Colorado: A Guide to the Highest State* (New York: Hastings House, 1941), 263.

6. *Omaha Daily News*, May 25, 1905; *Evening World-Herald*, April 17, 1907; *Lincoln State Journal*, February 15, 1934.

7. George R. Leighton, *Five Cities: The Story of Their Youth and Old Age* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1939), 194 (hereafter cited as *Five Cities*).

8. *Pen and Sunlight Sketches of Omaha and its Environs* (Chicago: Phoenix Publishing Company, 1892), 41, 61-69, 74 (hereafter cited as *Sketches of Omaha*).

9. The 1890 U.S. Census gave Omaha a population of 140,452. It has been proven that this figure was grossly padded. See Edgar Z. Palmer, "The Correctness of the 1890 Census of Population for Nebraska Cities," *Nebraska History*, XXXII (December, 1951), 259-267.

10. Editorial, "The Truth About Omaha," *Morning World-Herald*, May 10, 1909; Alfred Sorenson, *The Story of Omaha from the Pioneer Days to the Present* (Omaha: National Printing Company, Third Edition, 1923), 471-483 (hereafter cited as *Story of Omaha*).

11. *Ibid.*, 471-483; *Evening World-Herald*, March 3, 1893; *Evening World-Herald*, January 28, 1895.

12. Albert Watkins, *History of Nebraska* (3 vols., Lincoln: Western Publishing Co., 1913), III, 201-202; James W. Savage and John T. Bell, *History of the City of Omaha, Nebraska* (New York: Munsel and Co., 1894), 176-177; Sorenson, *Story of Omaha*, 482-483.

13. *Ibid.*, 481-482. During the period Sorenson was referring to, the 3rd Ward was called the 1st.

14. Sonnenberg has been described as both a successful and honest businessman, and as a "fence." See *Sketches of Omaha*, 143; *Omaha Daily News*, June 13, 1904.

15. Herbert Asbury, *Sucker's Progress* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1938), 88-94. A later, simplified form of policy was the numbers game.

16. *Evening World-Herald*, October 4, 1899.

17. *Ibid.*, January 31, 1899.

18. *Ibid.*, February 28, 1894; *Omaha Daily News*, June 22, 26, 1902; *Morning World-Herald*, April 11, 1904.

19. Leighton, *Five Cities*, 195; *Sunday World-herald*, May 9, 1965.

20. *Evening World-Herald*, February 28, 1894; Sorenson, *Story of Omaha*, 479.

21. *Evening World Herald*, March 30, 1909; January 10, 1912.

22. *Evening World-Herald*, January 13, 27, 1899; February 1, 2, 1899; *Omaha Daily News*, November 4, 1901; February 8, 1902; April 10, 1905.

23. Among others, the more prominent were William J. Broatch, who served in various political positions, and Moores' and White's successors as mayor and police chief, James Dahlman and John Donahue, respectively. See *Morning World-Herald*, April 6, 1906; *Evening World-Herald*, October 28, 1901; Leighton, *Five Cities*, 195-196.

24. *Evening World-Herald*, January 13, 1899.

25. Editorial, "Shield's Good Work," *Evening World-Herald*, January 27, 1899.

26. *Omaha Daily News*, January 11, 23, 24, 25, 1902.

27. *Omaha Daily News*, April 24, 1907.

28. *Evening World-Herald*, January 27, 1899.

29. *Ibid.*, January 28, 29, 30, 1899.

30. *Ibid.*, January 31, 1899.

31. *Ibid.*, January 30, 31, 1899.

32. *Ibid.*, October 4, 1899; *Omaha Daily News*, November 23, 1899.

33. *Sunday World-Herald*, January 3, 1937.

34. *Ibid.*, January 3, 1937; *Omaha Bee-News* (morning), January 3, 1937; Edward Morrow, "Reminiscences," *Sunday World-Herald*, June 23, 1968.

35. Howard P. Chudacoff, *Mobile Americans: Residential and Social Mobility in Omaha, 1880-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 22, 154-156 (hereafter cited as *Mobile Americans*).

36. *Omaha Daily News*, April 24, 25, 1907; *Evening World-Herald*, April 24, 1907.

37. *Ibid.*, September 8, 1927; *Omaha Evening Bee*, September 8, 1927.

38. *Omaha Daily News*, March 9, 1906.

39. Editorial, "Raise the Reward Money," *Evening World-Herald*, March 9, 1906.

40. Chudacoff, *Mobile Americans*, 20. Chudacoff used as his source, U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Report of the Financial Statistics of Cities Having a Population of Over 30,000: 1915* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1916), 37.

41. Leighton, *Five Cities*, 196.

42. *Ibid.*, 198.

43. Interview with W. H. Cummings, *Sun* newspapers (Omaha), date unknown. Article can be found in the newspaper clippings file at the Omaha Public Library.

44. Edward F. Morearty, *Omaha Memories: Recollections of Events, Men and Affairs in Omaha, Nebraska, from 1879 to 1917* (Omaha: Swartz Printing Company, 1917), 71 (hereafter cited as *Memories*); *Sunday World-Herald*, December 1, 1907; *Evening World-Herald*, December 14, 1907; *Omaha Daily News*, December 14, 1907.

45. *Ibid.*, March 14, 1914.
46. Sheldon, *Nebraska*, II, 183-184; Chudacoff, *Mobile Americans*, 20-21; *Evening State Journal* (Lincoln), May 8, 1918.
47. *Ibid.*
48. Sorenson, *Story of Omaha*, 438-441.
49. *Evening World-Herald*, August 31, 1906.
50. *Evening World-Herald*, October 6, 24, 1899.
51. *Omaha Daily News*, April 24, 1907.
52. Morearty, *Memories*, 63.
53. *Nebraska State Journal*, October 26, 1901.
54. *Omaha Daily News*, October 30, November 4, 1901.
55. *Omaha Examiner*, October 19, November 2, 1901.
56. *Ibid.*
57. William J. Connell, *Autobiography* (Omaha: privately printed, 1923), unnumbered page. The only known copy of this book is in the Byron Reed collection of the Omaha Public Library.
58. *Evening World-Herald*, November 6, 1901.
59. *Evening World-Herald*, May 28, 1906; November 2, 1908; November 9, 1910; August 18, 1911; December 14, 1912; *Omaha Daily News*, November 3, 1907; November 1, 1908.
60. Nebraska, *Senate Journal of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska, Thirty Second Session* (Lincoln: n.p., 1911), 521-529.
61. *Morning World-Herald*, April 21, 1904; James Horan, *The Pinkerton Story* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1951), 173. Also gives account of the Pollack robbery, 171-174.
62. *Morning World-Herald*, April 21, 1904.
63. *Omaha Daily News*, July 2, 1904; May 23, 1905.
64. *Ibid.*, May 25, 26, 27, 1905.
65. *Ibid.*; *Evening World-Herald*, May 25, 26, 27, 1905.
66. Connell, *Autobiography*, unnumbered page; *Sunday World-Herald*, April 24, 1904; *Morning World-Herald*, May 24, 1905.
67. *Omaha Daily News*, May 28, 30, June 1, 1905.
68. *Ibid.*, June 2, 3, 1905.
69. Thomas also had been assistant county attorney at the time of Dennison's gambling arrest in 1899, and as such played an active part in the ensuing legal battles. A moral reformer and prohibitionist, he crusaded against Dennison until the latter's death in 1934.
70. Morearty, *Memories*, 66-67; *Examiner*, November 26, December 3, 10, 17, 24, 31, 1904. In 1907 Dennison sued the *Daily News* for libel for reporting a speech by Thomas in which the lawyer said Dennison was responsible for the bombing. Although the same speech was reported by the *Bee* and the *World-Herald*, Dennison won his suit. On three more occasions he sued the *News* and won. See Sheldon, *Nebraska*, II, 184.
71. *Ibid.*, June 6, 1905.
72. *McAvoy's Omaha City Directory for 1905*, XXXI (Omaha Directory Co., 1905), 232; *Evening World-Herald*, August 23, 1912. Pat had been living in Salt Lake and returned specifically for the job.
73. John (Dynamo) Dennison eventually became a fingerprint expert and a sports promoter. Now in his 80's, Dennison declined to be interviewed. Following the death of Nesselhaus's father, Mrs. Nesselhaus married into the Withnell family. One of her step-sons, Charles H. Withnell, was involved in local politics. As city commissioner he received strong support from the 3rd Ward, but there is no evidence he was tied to the Dennison organization.
74. *Omaha Daily News*, January 11, April 4, September 20, 23, October 15, 23, November 24, 1914.
75. Editorial, "The Midway Raid," *Evening World-Herald*, January 9, 1912.

76. *Evening World-Herald*, February 3, 1912.
77. *Ibid.*, February 13, April 4, 1912.
78. Leighton, *Five Cities*, 197-198.
79. *Ibid.*, 196.
80. *Ibid.*, 195; William F. Schmidt, "Municipal Reform in Omaha from 1906 to 1914 as Seen Through the Eyes of the Omaha Press" (Master's thesis, Municipal University of Omaha, 1963), 6-8 (hereafter cited as "Municipal Reform").
81. *Evening World-Herald*, June 7, 1905.
82. Connell, *Autobiography*, unnumbered page.
83. *Evening World-Herald*, October 11, 1905; *Omaha Daily News*, October 11, 1905; Editorial, "Revolutionary City Government," *Evening World-Herald*, October 12, 1905.
84. *Evening World-Herald*, June 15, August 13, 1912.
85. Schmidt, "Municipal Reform," 18, 20-22, 27-31.
86. *Evening World-Herald*, June 28, 1911.
87. *Omaha Morning Bee*, June 28, 30, 1911.
88. *Evening World-Herald*, June 28, 1911.
89. *Ibid.*, June 28, 1911.
90. *Evening World-Herald*, April 20, 1906.
91. *Morning World-Herald*, November 17, 1932.
92. *Morning Bee*, January 23, 1930.
93. On occasion some Omaha businessmen and state politicians expressed the opinion that vice activities were needed in order to attract visitors. In 1912 Governor Chester H. Aldrich stated that if Omaha, despite the Albert Law, wanted a red-light district, there would be little the state could do to stop it. See *Evening World-Herald*, June 15, 1912.
94. John F. Showalter, "James C. Dahlman, Mayor of Omaha," *National Municipal Review*, XVI, 1927, 117.
95. *Omaha Daily News*, June 2, 3, 1914.
96. *Evening World-Herald*, July 17, 1914; *Omaha Daily News*, August 6, 1914.
97. *Omaha Daily News*, August 19, 22, 1914.
98. The *Daily News* which, despite the lack of anything but circumstantial evidence, used the incident to attack the Lynches and scold the police. The *World-Herald* was less vitriolic but noted that a coroner's jury was suspicious of police theories. See *Omaha Daily News*, July 19 through July 31, 1914; *Evening World-Herald*, July 31, 1914.
99. *Omaha Daily News*, July 31, 1914; *Evening World-Herald*, August 1, 1914. Courthouse Superintendent Joseph Calabria emphasized that the firing was for economic reasons.
100. *Morning Bee-News*, February 15, 1934; *Evening World-Herald*, February 15, 1918, March 10, 1917.
101. *Evening World-Herald*, February 14, 16, 1918; *Omaha Daily News*, February 16, 1918.
102. Joseph F. Harris, "Permanent Election Registration in Omaha," *National Municipal Review*, XV, 1926, 637-644.
103. Louise E. Rickard, "The Politics of Reform in Omaha," *Nebraska History*, 53, (Winter 1972), 421-423 (hereafter cited as "Reform in Omaha").
104. Editorial, "A Good Job Well Done," *Omaha Daily News*, May 8, 1918.
105. Rickard, *Reform in Omaha*, 426, 434.
106. *Ibid.*, 432-436.
107. *Evening World-Herald*, January 27, 1919.
108. *Evening World-Herald*, May 14, 1919.
109. The Loebeck girl's name has also been spelled Loeback. Also, all accounts of the riot, contemporary and later, have given Hoffman's first name as Millard; but, there are strong indications that it was Milton. The city directories for 1918 and 1920 do not list a Millard Hoffman, although they generally included everybody over 18. Both issues mention Milton Hoffman. Millard's address was given as 1923 S. 13th, an address both

directories indicate to be a vacant house or lot; Milton's address was 1952 S. 13th. Millard's age was given as 22 or 23, the same as Milton's. The contemporary newspapers give Millard's job as clerk for the Otis Elevator Company; both directories list Milton as clerk for the firm. Finally, a few years after the riot, Milton Hoffman was married to Agnes Loebeck. Hoffman became a city employee in the 1950's and 1960's. See *Omaha World-Herald*, May 2, 1966.

110. *Omaha World-Herald* (morning), October 12, 18, 1932; *Omaha Bee-News* (morning), October 18, 1932.

111. *Omaha Guide*, February 17, 1932; Sheldon, *Nebraska: The Land and the People*, II, 183-184; Morrow, "Reminiscences."

112. *Ibid.*

113. *Ibid.*; *Sunday World-Herald*, May 9, 1965.

114. *Ibid.*, May 9, 1965; *Morning World-Herald*, February 15, 1934; *Evening World-Herald*, December 11, 1923.

115. *Omaha Bee-News* (morning), November 17, 1932.

116. Born Ada Provost, Mrs. Dennison was the daughter of a prominent Iowa newspaperman. She married the gambler in either 1893 or 1897, probably the former. By all accounts she was an attractive, quiet woman who spent a great share of her time in charitable causes. See Sheldon, *Nebraska: The Land and the People*, II, 184; *Omaha Daily Bee*, January 24, 1922; *Evening World-Herald*, January 22, 1922. In 1930 Dennison attempted a second marriage to 17-year-old Nevajo Truman. The couple never actually lived together, and she divorced him in 1933.

117. Two sons, John (1895-1896) and Tom (1900-1901), failed to survive infancy and are buried in the family plot at Forest Lawn.

118. Morrow, "Reminiscences."

119. *Omaha Bee-News*, March 3, 1932.

120. *Omaha Bee-News*, October 28, November 1, 2, 3, 1932; *Omaha World-Herald*, October 28, 29, 31, November 1, 1932.

121. *Omaha World-Herald*, October 17, 18, November 2, 1932.

122. *Ibid.*, October 20, November 25, 1932.

123. *Omaha World-Herald* (morning), November 16, 17, 1932; *Omaha Bee-News* (morning), November 16, 1932.

124. *New York Times*, October 30, 1932.

125. *Omaha Bee-News* (morning), November 30, December 1, 1932.

126. *Ibid.*, December 13, 1932.

127. *Omaha World-Herald*, December 13, 1932.

128. *Ibid.*, December 13, 1932.

129. *Ibid.*, April 17, 1933.

130. *New York Times*, October 30, 1932.

131. *Omaha World-Herald*, May 3, 1933.

132. *Sunday World-Herald*, May 5, 1965.

133. State of California Department of Health, "Standard Certificate of Death, 34-010537." Photocopy in author's possession.

134. Editorial, "Tom Dennison," *Morning World-Herald*, February 16, 1934.