

[Barnum, Ezra Smith]

EZRA SMITH BARNUM

His Life, Service and Death

Suddenly, at last but not unexpectedly, the venerable Ezra S. Barnum has passed away. He died at his residence on Broad street at 5:20 a.m. yesterday. The previous day, for the first time since his confinement to the house, he was able to lie down and sleep. He rested well during the day and up to the last hour. Tuesday evening his pulse was regular though weak, and it was thought the end was yet in the distance. Just before his death he asked to be raised up and permitted to sit on the edge of the bed. The request was granted. He sat a moment supported by his attendant, then dropped his head on the latter's shoulder and died—without struggle or movement, or evidence of pain.

Mr. Barnum has been confined to his house less than two months. He attended the funeral of the late Dr. G. A. Foster, since which time he has not been out of doors. A short time previous to that date he was present at the annual communication of Utica Lodge F. and A. M., and in asking his brethren to excuse him from further official service said he felt that to be the last time he should ever meet with them. He felt that his strength was failing him and he must soon go. He told the lodge that his executors would be directed to present to it his Masonic library and, for himself, he would then present his thanks for all the kindness and honors shown him by his brethren. His words were listened to with deep feeling, and carried to the hearts of all the conviction of the speaker that they were the last in that place. He was persuaded to withdraw his request to be released from office, the members insisting that while life lasted he should be an officer in the lodge of which he was one of the earliest members. During his illness, Mr. Barnum has always been cheerful, certain that his last illness was upon him, ready to go, and glad at all times to see his friends. The tender hands of children gave every attention to his wants that warm hearts could suggest, and hosts of friends were anxious to help, if [unreadable two sons, Stephen O. Barnum of Buffalo, and Samuel Barnum, of Chicago, and two daughters, Mrs. I. C. McIntosh and Miss Mary Barnum, of this city.

MR. BARNUM'S BUSY LIFE

A year ago a representative of the HERALD obtained of Mr. Barnum, and from records to which he referred, a condensed history of his life, embodying recollections of early Utica, its people and points of interest, his connection with its affairs and his Masonic record. Before publishing, the record was submitted to Mr. Barnum and pronounced correct. We can therefore do no better than to reproduce it at this time:

[from the *Utica Morning Herald*, February 23, 1877.]

BIRTH AND EARLY DAYS

Ezra Smith Barnum was born in Danbury, Conn., June 21, 1792, and there resided until 1809. As a boy his health was not good, and he tells us his "schooling" in Danbury was obtained at odd spells at a woman's school, and his "education was completed in Utica in 1809 by attending for one quarter the evening school kept by old Master William Hayes." While in his native place he was

[Barnum, Ezra Smith]

indentured as an apprentice to his brother-in-law, Levi Comstock, at the shoemaking, tanning and currier business. With this brother-in-law, he left Danbury, June 8, 1809, in a lumber wagon for Utica. The journey occupied eight days, over roads often difficult of travel and in this State, new. The party reached its destination June 16. Utica was then a small village, the first census subsequently taken giving it a population of 1,500 people. Its streets then laid out were Main, Whitesboro, Division, Hotel, Washington and Broadway, the last three to a line now marked by the canal. Broad, Catharine, Jay, and Bleecker streets were laid out from the east line of the Bleecker property to the west line, but not to Genesee street till later. Mr. Comstock went to work for David P. Hoyt in a store where now stands lower store of the Marble Block. Mr. Hoyt subsequently erected a place for business where now stands the Globe Hotel. Adjoining his store "Sam" Stocking erected, over stream of water, a shop for carrying on the business of bleaching hats. The stream and the bleachery have passed away. Mr. Barnum continued with him till 1812, when his apprenticeship expired. While learning his trade he was allowed \$35 a year for clothes and spending money. He does not remember that he laid by a great deal of money at that period, in fact he is quite clear that financially the balance was against him when he began life as a master workman.

The year previous he paid a visit to his parents at Danbury, and what is now a trip of little more than half a day consumed then 14 days. He went down the Mohawk in a Durham boat to Schenectady, making the distance in two and one-half days, thence across the "sand plains" to Albany, where he embarked on a sloop for New York. Calms and contrary breezes made the voyage unusually long, The trip down the Hudson taking five days. From New York he went by the East river and the Sound to Norwalk, and thence by stage to his native place, where he arrived at the end of the 14th day from Utica.

During his apprentice days he first became acquainted with the late A. G. Dauby—who came to Utica a year later than Mr. Barnum—who was at the same time learning the printer's trade. The late Alrick Hubbell was also one of his earliest acquaintances. As boys they were friends and for 66 years they continued such, being frequently, an often closely, associated in business and social affairs. Another friend of those olden days was T. S. Faxton, who came to Utica not long after Mr. Barnum.

In 1812, full master of the leather business, Mr. Barnum struck out for himself. He went to Buffalo, then a small village, traveling by stage. The journey consumed five days, it being spring and the roads bad. There he worked at his trade but for a short time. The war with Great Britain was opened and in response to a call for minute men he volunteered and was at the first taking of Fort Erie. Subsequently he kept a boot and shoe store at Fort George a short time. Being taken ill he returned to Utica soon after, and while here Buffalo was burned by the British and he did not go back. The muster roll of the company in which he served is supposed to have been lost in the fire as it has never since been seen nor, in consequence, the 160 acres of land to which each member of the company was entitled. The next year Mr. Barnum formed a partnership with his former master for the manufacture and sale of boots and shoes.

[Barnum, Ezra Smith]

In 1811, May 5, he was united in marriage with Miss Mary Ostrom, and together they made the journey of life till July [2], 1875, when the beloved companion entered into [unreadable line] he took charge [unreadable line]. During this period, about 1822, he turned his hand to farming, hoping thereby to improve his health, which was far from rugged. He purchased a farm of sixty seven acres in the vicinity of what is now East street. He next engaged in the grocery and confectionery business, succeeding Everson & Bryant, on the corner of Genesee and Catharine streets. In 1849 he first visited Europe, for health and business purposes, and while there instituted an importing business, which is still carried on by his sons, S. O. Barnum, of Buffalo, and Samuel Barnum, of Chicago. A second visit to Europe was made in 1852, in company with Hon. T. S. Faxton and friends. Mr. Barnum recalls that in all his business connections, transactions and settlements he experienced trouble with only one partner.

CONNECTION WITH MUNICIPAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Barnum has borne an important part in public affairs during his sixty-eight years in Utica, and in every position has discharged his duty with ability and painstaking fidelity. He was first elected to office in 1817, and put into tripple [sic] harness as it were, being elected constable, collector and coroner. While holding these offices he was appointed under sheriff and without his knowledge, justice of the peace. Concerning this appointment Mr. Barnum is wont to say he never has been able to find out who was so kind as to recommend him to Governor Yates for the office. The newspapers of the day facetiously remarked regarding the appointment that Utica had an officer possessing rare powers as well as qualifications; he could issue his warrant as justice, serve it as constable, try the prisoner as judge, hang him as sheriff, hold an inquest on his remains as coroner, and sell his clothes for taxes as collector. If he had been an undertaker he could have finished the job. Of course the other offices had to be laid down on accepting the justiceship.

Mr. Barnum undertook the business of justice with many misgivings as to questions of law. He told his friends he had laid little claim to education and none to law, but he had an idea of justice. He qualified, and so satisfactory was his administration that he was re-elected term after term, till at the end of 17 years of service he absolutely declined to be a candidate. How well he did, notwithstanding his ignorance of law at the start, may be inferred from the fact that during his justiceship of 17 years only two cases were appealed from his decision. One of these was reversed by the County Court, but on being carried to the Supreme Court the judgment of the County Court was reversed and Justice Barnum's affirmed. (See Johnson's Reports.) The second case was never tried on appeal...

On retiring from the justiceship in 1835, Mr. Barnum was appointed deputy United States Marshall and commissioner of deeds. In one or other of these various offices he served over thirty years. In 1832 he was elected to the board of aldermen, and was several times re-elected. At the organization of the Oneida Bank, in 1836, Mr. Barnum was chosen one of the directors. He is to-day the only member of the original board still in service... Mr. Barnum has served two years as vice president and one year as president of the board. He has attended about 4,000 meetings of the directors. He has been for 42 years a member of the Mechanics'

[Barnum, Ezra Smith]

Association, and was one of the [?] to the old [?] fund. He has held the presidency of that association, and for a long time has been one of its trustees. He was one of the original subscribers to the Clinton Liberal Institute fund, and was elected a member of the first Board of Trustees. He has been re-elected every year since, a period of 45 years, and is still a trustee and the only one left of the original board. He has attended nearly every meeting of the board, often making the journey to Clinton under difficulties which are strangers to these latter days. He was also one of the original subscribers to the Utica Academy fund. In his earlier days he "ran with the machine," his name appearing on the roll of one of the first tire companies formed in Utica. When Utica was set off from Whitestown, Mr. Barnum assisted Hon. Morris S. Miller, Charles C. Broadhead, Ezra S. Crozier and William Jones in running out and establishing the boundaries of the village. The line on what is now Kimball street was run through a forest so dense that a path had to be cleared with the axe to enable the signal flag to be seen at the distance of half a chain. The obstructions elsewhere were not so difficult to overcome.

Mr. Barnum has always adhered to the democratic party. During General Lafayette's triumphal tour through this country in 1824-5 Mr. Barnum was a member of the Utica committee sent out to Whitesboro to meet the committee from the West, having General LaFayette and son (George Washington LaFayette) in charge. In speaking of this incident Mr. Barnum says: " We brought the party to Utica through a new street just opened, which, in honor of the general was called Fayette street. Twenty-five years later he met George Washington LaFayette in Paris, presented him with the plans of the Washington monument and visited General LaFayette's monument in the cemetery of Pippus.

MR. BARNUM'S MASONIC RECORD [abridged]

We have seen that the 84 years of our esteemed townsman have been full of stirring life, business activity and success, and honorable public service. But there remains to add a chapter of long and eminent service and high honors in the order of Free and Accepted Masons. Few living Masons have been so long connected with the order. Fewer, if any, have been so highly honored by the order. None have been truer to its principles, or cherish its tenets and associations with warmer appreciation. From Masonic records which we have been permitted to examine, aided by Mr. Barnum's recollection we are able to compile this imperfect statement of his Masonic career. He was elected a member of Utica Lodge No. 47, F. and A. M., in January, 1817. The following March, Oneida Chapter No. 57 of Royal Arch Masons, was chartered and Brother Barnum was one of the first to take the four chapter degrees....

He joined Utica Council, No. 28, of Royal and Select Masters soon after its organization. In February, 1823, Utica Encampment, No. 7, (now Utica Commandery, No. 3.) of Knights Templar, was chartered... The first conclave was held February 17 and among those elected to membership then was Ezra S. Barnum. In the bodies named he was early inducted into official position. The year of his initiation the chapter elected him Royal Arch captain. And we may here say that from that day to this Ezra S. Barnum has not been permitted to put off official Masonic harness. He is now trustee of the Masonic fund and an officer in Utica Lodge. He was first elected to office in Utica Lodge in 1819. At the first election

[Barnum, Ezra Smith]

following his initiation into the commandery he was made standard bearer. In each of these bodies he was promoted from year to year till the highest honor in its gift was bestowed on him. . He served as master of the lodge three years, high priest of the chapter ten years, and commander of the commandery, five years of which record is made and several years of which no records have been preserved, in all probably twelve. Progressing rapidly he was elected successively junior and senior warden and deputy grand master of the Grand Lodge of the State. The last named office he was obliged to decline both on account of ill health and a projected trip abroad [several unreadable words] several offices in the old Grand Council of High Priests. In 1838 Mr. Barnum's Masonic merits were further recognized by his election to the office of very eminent grand sword bearer in the General Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States... This office he filled for six years, when he was advanced to junior warden. At the next encampment, 1847, he was elected senior warden, and in 1853 he was elected very eminent grand captain general... Also, in 1838, Mr. Barnum was elected an officer in the General Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of the United States, and for 21 years served in one office or another in that body. For many years he was an officer in the Grand Council of Royal and Select Masters, and continued in office in that body so late as 1873. During one year he held nine different offices in Masonic organizations...

In all these positions it is recorded that Mr. Barnum served with distinguished ability and fidelity. Medals, certificates, and complimentary resolutions in his possession testify to the appreciation of his services by the various bodies. Each testifies to the esteem in which the faithful worker and counselor was held. In the troublous anti-Masonic or "Morgan" period, Ezra S. Barnum was one who recanted nothing but held to the principles of the order, and labored to keep alive the organizations in Utica. He went about personally to members who stood firm, but were almost persuaded to give up their charters and wait for fairer skies, and by unwavering zeal and earnest representations, was always able to get a quorum together in an emergency. Expenses were light, but with no money in the treasury, they were too heavy for it, and private offerings were made to meet obligations to the grand bodies. Those who know say E. S. Barnum paid these several times out of his own pocket during that period...

...Though now almost 85 years of age, he is a quite regular attendant at the meetings of the Masonic bodies in this city, and an equally faithful attendant at the sessions of the grand bodies. Of Masonic meetings of all kinds, he has attended probably 7,000.

Mr. Barnum has occupied his present residence on Broad street forty (one) years. He is now in the enjoyment of good health, and takes an earnest though quiet interest in affairs. His church connections have always been and are with the Universalist denomination.

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Transcribed on 22 Jul 2008 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY