

More than a part of city's past...

Sentenced to hang forever on the walls of city hall, all the dead mayors wait eternally for a motion to adjourn.

By MARK SCARBOROUGH
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They stare down forlornly, as they have for a couple of decades, as current movers and shakers scramble to their seats at Wisconsin Rapids City Hall council chambers.

Politicians all, they have hung around all that time without a word.

Not that they've had much choice in the matter. After all, most of them are dead.

The faces of these quiet Wisconsin Rapids mayors line the chamber walls, with a few more scattered outside the chamber in a nearby hall, and these venerable pioneers all have stories worth telling, even if they have been largely forgotten.

It just takes a little historical detective work — digging through death certificates at the Wood County Register of Deeds office, then searching for obituaries on rolls of slippery microfilm at McMillan Memorial Library — to resurrect flickering images from years past.

When each died, family members were sure to stress the mayoral connection in their final press releases. The capsule biographies contained in their obituaries and death certificates also shine some light on what happened to them before they served and after they left office.

So, here's a random sampling, selected for no particular reason and illustrated with their portraits from city hall, of some of this city's past mayors.

Bernard R. Goggins

Mayor of the newly "married" Grand Rapids and Centralia (the two river cities that became all Grand Rapids in 1900), Goggins served 1900-1901. Born June 17, 1858, he was 79 years two months and twenty-one days old when he died on Sept. 2, 1937. An attorney in general practice, he had followed that profession all his life, retiring from day-to-day law at Goggins, Brazeau and Graves in April 1936.

Goggins had secured his high school, normal school and law school education "by diligence, self-sacrifice and only after overcoming severe obstacles



Bernard Goggins

without financial assistance," according to his Sept. 3, 1937, Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune obituary.

"His labors whereby to earn money to continue his education from time to time found him variously in the role of a railroad laborer, farmer and school teacher in the states of Wisconsin, Minnesota and the territory of South Dakota."

In addition to his mayoral term, Goggins had served as first principal of the Grand Rapids High School (beginning in November 1894) and Wood County district attorney (with his one term starting in November 1892).

He graduated from the law school at Madison's University of Wisconsin in 1890, opening a solo law office in Centralia. By 1900, he had become partner with T.W. Brazeau, taking on another partner, R.B. Graves, in 1923.

From June 1916 to June 1917, Goggins was president of the Wisconsin State Bar Association. From 1917 to 1918, he was special assistant to Wisconsin's attorney general.

"Mr. Goggins' splendid professional career of more than 46 years in the active practice of the law in all state and federal courts is an enviable accomplishment and a shining example to younger practitioners, exemplifying and emphasizing studiousness, unusual intellect, marvelous memory and ceaseless diligence," the Tribune reported at his death.

"His work was his profession and his recreation. He was thoroughly grounded in the principles of fundamental law. He was untiring in his zeal and would never yield in the matter



Lawrence Nash

of principle for any possible advantage."

Lawrence M. Nash

Mayor of Grand Rapids from 1904 to 1906, L.M. Nash was born Jan. 28, 1854, and was 82 years, one month and 23 days old when he died March 21, 1936. He had previously served as a city alderman and mayor of Centralia. A county supervisor for 21 years, he had also been a school board member for six.

He had been active in his hardware and farm implement business, Nash Hardware, up to two weeks before his fatal heart attack. "Mr. Nash was one of Wisconsin Rapids' oldest merchants," his March 23, 1936, Tribune obituary noted. "In addition, he was owner of several farms in Wood County, and was connected with many other ventures."

An enthusiastic sportsman, Nash never ("even in advancing years") failed to open the bird

season by a personal trip afield.

However, when he was 73 years old in 1927, Nash fell down an elevator shaft in his store. He "suffered a severely broken foot, which laid him up for several months," but the break mended and the industrialist was able to continue with his business, in good health.

In his younger days, Nash showed a healthy interest in splendid horseflesh and racing and "had a fine reputation as a hunter, fisherman, trapper and all-around sportsman." Near the end of his years, he was elected a life-time member of the Wood County Conservation League.

All his life, Nash was an ardent Democrat, once hosting the Great Commoner, 1896 presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan, at his Grand Rapids home. Serving for many years as chairman of the Wood County Democratic Party, Nash cast his last presidential ballot for Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932, later attending FDR's inaugural festivities in Washington, D.C. Nash had attended the Democratic National Convention that nominated the New York governor for the presidency.

After early stints as a farm laborer and store clerk, Nash began his earning life working for the railroads.

In 1870, he got a job at Fond du Lac, where his brother, T.E. Nash, was a railroad station agent. There, under his brother's instruction, L.M. Nash learned telegraphy, allowing him (in swift succession) to become a railroad station agent in Moose Lake, Minn., as well as Random Lake and Grand Rapids in Wisconsin. Along the way, he dabbled in sidelines, including ship-

ping eggs, butter and vegetables to Milwaukee; selling lime and cement by the carload; and contracting for wood tiles and pilings for the railroads.

By 1878, Nash had left the railroads, opening a general store at Junction City, then moving in 1880 to Centralia to go into the hardware business with W.T. Jones. In 1888, when the bridge over the Wisconsin River was washed out, Nash (in partnership with William H. Cochran and W.T. Jones) built a ferry and put it into operation in less than a week.

Nash and other partners also were responsible for starting up the first cheese factories in central Wisconsin, located at Rudolph and Sigel; creating the Wood County Agricultural Association; and establishing the Nash Bros. cranberry marshes, which were destroyed by fire in 1892.

He also carried on extensive lumbering operations in Marathon, Lincoln and Wood counties, employing as many as 200 men at one time, and served as president of the Grand Rapids Street Railway Co., which operated a trolley between Wisconsin Rapids and Neokosa from 1910 to 1931.

Francis Xavier Pomainville

Mayor of Grand Rapids from 1908 to 1910, Dr. F.X.

Pomainville was born Aug. 11, 1871, and died Sept. 1, 1958, aged 87 years. At the time of his death, he was one of the state's oldest practicing physicians.

He had graduated from Howe High School here in 1889, then attended Madison's University of Wisconsin for three years before going on to medical

school. Pomainville served as city health officer almost continuously from 1900 to 1958, except for his mayoral term and his army service.

Entering the U.S. Army on June 4, 1917, Pomainville was



Francis Xavier Pomainville

the first doctor from Wisconsin to go overseas during World War I. Arriving in France two months after his enlistment, he was assigned to the 42nd (or Rainbow) Division, and was discharged from the Army on April 22, 1919, with the rank of major.

In addition to his city service, Pomainville also served on the school board for several years, including a term as president.

At various times during his career, which started after his May 1899 graduation from Rush Medical College in Chicago, Pomainville served as chief of staff at Riverview Hospital, attending physician at the Wood

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