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The Full Tide

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The Full Tide

The chance in a wider field came in 1866. Edmundson wrote to a lawyer in Council Bluffs, D. C. Bloomer, husband of Mrs. Bloomer of dress-reform fame, proposing a partnership. Bloomer answered that he had been thinking of the same thing. And so in April '66 Edmundson was off from Glenwood by lumber wagon for Council Bluffs, and the firm letterhead soon read "Bloomer & Edmundson, Attorneys at Law Real Estate and Insurance Agents". The junior partner, who had a passion for correct English, was disturbed by the wording of the letterhead, but he was highly pleased with his new associations.

Edmundson roomed with the Bloomers. Curiously enough, back in the little school in Oskaloosa in '55 or '56, James had impersonated the husband of Mrs. Bloomer in a school play and was made the subject of this doggerel:

Mr. Bloomer says in his own language
That he is henpecked to the soul
Because he's been lately brought under
Proud woman's domestic control.

Now, ten years later, by a curious turn of Fate the boy had become a partner of Bloomer and was

living in his home. For Mrs. Bloomer, who was a devoted follower and friend of Susan B. Anthony and Mrs. Elizabeth C. Stanton, he formed a high regard.

In 1866 Council Bluffs was thrilled by the prospect of the coming of the Iron Horse. What are now the North Western, the Rock Island, and the C. B. & Q. railroads were racing for the Big Muddy, with Council Bluffs to be the river terminal. In the heart of the nation, potentially the distributing point for the vast plains country, certain to be on the line of the first transcontinental road, Edmundson had wisely chosen his location. With little liking for the rough and tumble practice of the law which marked the period, he was by nature a financier. A keen student of men, careful as a dealer, a good judge of values, he was quickly busy not only with the law but as an investor.

The North Western Railway came in '67, the Q. and Rock Island in '68. The Union Pacific spanned the continent in '69. Land values were low but advancing. Edmundson's first purchase was a tract of one hundred and sixty acres for \$250. Soon he sold one forty of it for \$200. The rich lands of the Nishnabotna valleys were selling at five dollars and less. He and another bought a fine Mills County quarter section for three dollars

per acre, selling soon at ten dollars. Stirring times!

The steamers came puffing up the river and there was insurance to be written. This became an important line. In 1870, quitting the firm of Bloomer & Edmundson, he started a bank, but retained that connection only a few months. Completion of the first bridge over the Missouri at Council Bluffs in 1873 contributed to the importance of the city as an outfitting point for the great freight trains across the plains. Having purchased a list of non-resident owners of land in Pottawattamie County from the County Treasurer, Edmundson wrote letters to them all. At once he became busy selling, leasing, paying taxes, and acting as legal representative. He prepared maps with every owner's name indorsed across his land.

Those were active and profitable days. Many people found their way to his door. And no wonder. Here was a useful man, young, alert, honest, acquainted with values, reliable. In 1882 he was instrumental in organizing the Citizens State Bank of Council Bluffs and became its president. Occasionally there were trips to Des Moines, in behalf of his varied enterprises. His interests soon overstepped home county lines — on up into Harrison, Plymouth, Sioux, and Lyon and down

into Mills. And in the midst of all this activity, he found time to establish a household. It was in 1871 that he married Miss Jennie Way Hart.

Indicative of his keen sense of financial opportunity was an episode in 1881. Business had taken him to Duluth. Though he spent but one day in the city, he purchased two lots that day for \$2100. Five or six years later he sold them for \$37,000, including principal and interest.

The cruel blow of Mrs. Edmundson's death came in 1890. In her memory he became interested in the Women's Christian Association Hospital, the name of which was changed to the Jennie Edmundson Memorial Hospital, to which, a recent article in the press states, he has given about \$265,000. It is near to his heart. Mrs. Emma Lucas Louie, who has served the hospital association for forty-seven years and is still its president, is a sister of the late Senator Shirley Gilliland. Years that have mounted to four score and eyes that can no longer catch the light of sunset or evening star — lit only by "the light that never was on land or sea" — have brought no lessening of either the skill or devotion of this remarkable woman in her precious task. Mrs. Louie, through the long years of her service, has kept the institution fully abreast of the demands of twentieth century hospital standards. Of this

fine hospital Dr. M. T. MacEachern, then President of the American Hospital Association, embracing all hospitals of the United States and Canada, and Associate Director of the American College of Surgeons for Canadian activities, gave high praise, in a letter to Mr. Edmundson on March 1, 1923.

“Some weeks ago, while attending the American College of Surgeons Sectional meeting in Council Bluffs, I had the extreme pleasure, through Col. Macrae’s kindness, of making a thorough inspection of the Jennie Edmundson Memorial Hospital. It was indeed the greatest pleasure to me to know of the splendid work being done in this admirable institution, so well constructed, planned and efficiently equipped. All this, with excellent professional, nursing and business organization, demonstrated to us an example of what a hospital should be. I do not know any finer objective that you could have directed your interests to than a hospital of this type, an institution which will save many lives, not only from suffering and misery, but from death. I congratulate you most sincerely and tell you that all of us who are interested in hospital work and development thoroughly appreciate people like you who accomplish such wonderful things. When I went thru the institution I felt I would like to write

and give you my own personal opinion of your magnificent work, and let me say it was also the opinion of all the group who were associated with me in this meeting."

Mr. Edmundson's answer is characteristic of his innate self-effacement. I give it here.

"My dear Dr. MacEachern:

"I thank you most heartily for your letter of the 1st inst., and for the complimentary things you say about what I have done toward the erection and support of the Jennie Edmundson hospital at Council Bluffs.

"The success of the hospital, however, is due more to Mrs. Louie, President of the Association, than to any one else. She is a woman of great versatility of talent, and excels as an administrative and executive officer, besides having the faculty of making friends readily and winning the confidence of the community.

"Without claiming anything for what I have done, I feel that by giving support to hospitals and kindred institutions, one can do more for the benefit of suffering humanity than in any other way. I sometimes wonder that our men of great wealth do not do more in this line of work.

"Receipt of your letter would have been acknowledged sooner, had I not been detained from my office most of the time since its receipt with a

slight illness, from which I have, however, fully recovered.

“Again thanking you for your kind words of commendation, and wishing you all success in your great work, I remain

Sincerely yours,
James D. Edmundson”

Among Mr. Edmundson's contemporaries and associates in Council Bluffs may be mentioned General Grenville M. Dodge, the bankers Thomas Officer and W. H. M. Pusey, Caleb Baldwin, Horace Everett, and the Tinleys — Matt, Emmet, and Dr. Mary. General Matt Tinley is still often a visitor at the Edmundson home in Des Moines.

In 1894 Mr. Edmundson was married to Mrs. Laura Barclay Kirby of Council Bluffs, a lady of unusual culture and personal charm. After his second marriage Mr. and Mrs. Edmundson travelled extensively in America and abroad. The entire year of 1898 was spent in Europe. Meanwhile, in 1897, he purchased a controlling interest in the First National Bank of Council Bluffs and became its President. His Citizens State Bank went into voluntary liquidation, paying its liabilities in full.

In November, 1900, Mr. and Mrs. Edmundson removed to Des Moines, purchasing the fine

Bentley home at 3333 Grand Avenue, where he still lives. This home, in which Mrs. Edmundson died on November 16, 1908, is replete with mementos of their extensive travels together and reflects the passionate quest of lives rich in sympathy and helpfulness and in devotion to the finest cultural standards.

In what I have said here of a life filled to the brim with business activity and material success, I have given scarcely a hint of the master intellectual passion of a remarkable man. I have reserved that phase of the story for a place by itself, which it deserves as a tale of the major interests of a mind whose intellectual enthusiasms ninety-four years find to-day undimmed, passionate enthusiasms literally as keen now as in any year of a life journey that hastens to round out a century.

JAMES B. WEAVER