

ALDERMAN JIM PENDERGAST

A THESIS IN  
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## ABSTRACT

James Pendergast came to Kansas City in 1876 from St. Joseph, Missouri. After working for several years as a laborer, Pendergast entered the saloonkeeping business in the West Bottoms, the heart of Kansas City's industrial and commercial district. He became interested in local politics soon after coming to Kansas City. An extremely generous man, Pendergast, who was always helping the needy, became popular with the Irish, Italian and native American laborers who inhabited the West Bottoms. In 1892, the working class dwellers in the First Ward, which encompassed the West Bottoms, elected James Pendergast to the lower house of the city council. Alderman Jim, as Pendergast became known, was re-elected eight times in succession to the lower house from the First Ward.

Between his first election in 1892, and his retirement from politics in 1910, Pendergast reigned supreme in the First Ward. His political power, however, transcended the boundaries of the First Ward which he represented in the city council. Alderman Jim's popularity and political adeptness helped him extend his political machine from its base in the West Bottoms, into the North end.

By the turn of the century, Jim Pendergast had

established himself as the boss of a large area of Kansas City. He sometimes used the large number of votes which he controlled to further his own interests. However, he often threw his political strength on the side of the reformers, to further the general interests of Kansas City. At times Pendergast's devotion to the general welfare of Kansas City was detrimental to his own financial interests, for he was no corrupt, self-seeking politician like so many bosses who wielded their power during the same period.

The significance of a study of James Pendergast lies in the fact that he does not fit the stereotype of the "typical" political boss that has been depicted by so many writers. Unlike many city bosses during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there is no evidence that Pendergast was ever in the ranks of the boodlers and grafters who sold their votes when the price was right. Likewise Pendergast was on the side of the reformers on many important municipal issues, not at loggerheads with them as the stereotype often portrays city bosses.

James Pendergast also merits study because of the extremely important role he played in putting his younger brother, Thomas J. Pendergast, on the road to political domination of Kansas City. Aldermen Jim was the most powerful boss in Kansas City between 1892 and 1910. During those years, the saloonkeeper put Tom Pendergast to work within the organization, and taught him every aspect of

managing a political machine. When Jim Pendergast retired from local politics in 1910, Tom Pendergast was well trained by his brother to assume the leadership of the Pendergast machine. From that base created by Alderman Jim, Tom Pendergast was able to build a larger organization, which ultimately enabled him to become as powerful in Kansas City as "Boss" Tweed had been in New York.

This abstract of about 500 words is approved as to form and content.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
 Chapter	
I. FROM WHENCE THE LEADER EMERGED . . . . .	7
II. KING OF THE FIRST . . . . .	19
III. BOSS OF THE WEST BOTTOMS AND NORTH END . . . . .	50
IV. THE TWILIGHT YEARS AND THE JAMES FENDERGAST LEGACY . . . . .	81
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	101

## INTRODUCTION

The mushrooming of American cities between 1870 and 1910, nurtured by increased immigration and rapid industrial development, opened the door to problems unprecedented in American history. The problems created out of the need for transportation facilities, sewage disposal, water supply, lighting, and a host of other similar needs, were soon tackled by the urban leaders. While many of the problems are still being worked on today, the progress made toward solutions was phenomenal in many respects.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the social problems which arose with the growth of American cities were not so quickly faced and ameliorated.

The labor market became glutted due to the increasing number of unskilled workers who were crowding the cities from the farms and Europe. By the late 1890's, and until the First World War, real wages dwindled for most laborers, and inexpensive housing became scarce.<sup>2</sup> The poorly paid workers packed their families into crowded tenements and shanties near their places of employment. The teeming masses lived in extremely crowded and unsanitary conditions, where crime

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<sup>1</sup>Arthur M. Schlesinger, The Rise of the City (New York: Macmillan Co., 1933), Chapter IV.

<sup>2</sup>Paul H. Douglas, Real Wages in the United States, 1890-1926 (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1930), pp. 174-184.

and disease became commonplace.

Working conditions were no better than the housing conditions which were provided for the laboring class. The homes of the immigrant and native American laborers were extremely unpleasant, but the factories and sweat shops were even less desirable. In the factories, which were poorly ventilated, as well as filthy and dangerous, men, women and even children toiled long hours for low wages. Not only without benefit of wage and hour legislation, the workers labored without unemployment compensation or disability insurance.<sup>3</sup>

Both at work and at home, the slum dwellers who kept the wheels of America's growing industries turning, found no helping hand for guidance, aid or protection. Social legislation was almost unheard of in the United States, which was caught up in the atmosphere of Social Darwinism. Convinced that God had ordained a "struggle for existence" and a "survival of the fittest," many business and government leaders were able to rationalize their lack of concern for the growing social problems.<sup>4</sup> The courts made matters even more difficult. The few attempts which were made to enact social legislation were attacked by the judiciary on the grounds that such legislation called for taking property without due

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<sup>3</sup>Ray Ginger, Altgeld's America (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1958).

<sup>4</sup>Richard Hofstadter, Social Darwinism in American Thought (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), Chapter II.



process of law, or that it was "class legislation."<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century the cities continued to multiply, the corporations grew larger, and the immigrants and farmers flocked into the cities to expand the impoverished working class. Such conditions stimulated the concern of an articulate group of middle class reformers who appeared on the horizon by the turn of the century. Afraid of the growing power of the giant financial and industrial monopolies on the right, and the increasing restlessness of the working class on the left, the reformers, who were generally referred to as Progressives, advocated economic and social legislation to check the power of the extreme right, and ameliorate the discontent on the left.<sup>6</sup>

Successful in some areas of reform by the First World War, the reformers were generally unsuccessful in aiding and gaining the support of the lower classes. The failure of many reformers was due not only to their lack of unity in purpose, but to their lack of knowledge and understanding of the problems that plagued the working class.<sup>7</sup>

Unable to find relief from the federal government or their employers, and finding the "visably, palpably,

<sup>5</sup>Harold U. Faulkner, The Quest for Social Justice, 1898-1914 (New York: Macmillan Co., 1931), p. 79.

<sup>6</sup>Richard Hofstadter, The Age of Reform (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), p. 238.

<sup>7</sup>Lathrop Stoddard, Master of Manhattan (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1931), p. 13.

[and] almost pathetically respectable"<sup>8</sup> reformers uncongenial, the laboring classes gladly responded to the overtures of the ward boss. Having climbed up the ladder of political success from the same status as the laborer in most cases, the political boss talked the same language and thoroughly understood the problems of the people whose support he was soliciting. Trading food, clothing and fuel, as well as employment and financial aid for votes, the ward boss could gather a dependable following by performing welfare services for the underprivileged.

It was in this same manner that James Pendergast became a powerful figure in Kansas City politics. Like so many other bosses during the same period, James Pendergast was of Irish decent, owned a saloon, gathered a political following by doing favors for people in his working class neighborhood, and was soon elected to the city council. In a short time Pendergast became the undisputed leader of his ward, and like many political bosses, gradually extended his circle of power as a result of deals which he contracted with other politicians, as well as by gradually moving in on new neighborhoods with his own lieutenants and heelers.<sup>9</sup>

The stereotype of the "typical" boss is often carried much farther than this by students of city politics,

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<sup>8</sup>Hofstadter, Age of Reform, p. 131.

<sup>9</sup>For sketches of several bosses with backgrounds similar to Pendergast's see Harold Zink, City Bosses in the United States (Durham: Duke U. Press, 1930).

but a study of the life of Alderman Jim Pendergast shows the weaknesses in some aspects of the "typical" boss idea. Most writers, for example, are agreed that a political machine, like a mechanical machine, needed fuel to run on. Instead of gasoline, however, the political machine operated on money and patronage. The money component of the fuel, as the stereotype goes, always came from graft.<sup>10</sup> James Pendergast, however, who was the most powerful boss in Kansas City between 1892 and 1910, was never found in the ranks of the "boodlers" or "grafters." In fact, after Pendergast's death the reform editor of a Kansas City newspaper, William Rockhill Nelson, who often criticized the boss, admitted that James Pendergast had never sold his vote in the council where he had served for eighteen years.<sup>11</sup>

The stereotype also depicts the "typical" boss at loggerheads with the reformers over almost every issue except such things as workmen's compensation which the boss supported because it would aid his constituents.<sup>12</sup> Again, however, we find that the stereotype does not hold up under close examination. Throughout his political career, James Pendergast went hand in hand with the reformers in support

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<sup>10</sup>This stereotype is found in older classics such as M. Ostrogorski, Democracy and the Party System (New York: Macmillan Co., 1910), pp. 256-257 and more recent studies such as Hofstadter, Age of Reform, p. 184.

<sup>11</sup>Kansas City Times, November 11, 1911, p. 2, col. 1.

<sup>12</sup>Hofstadter, in Age of Reform, pp. 184-186, follows this interpretation.

of many important local issues. Pendergast was for municipal ownership of some utilities in the days when bosses were supposed to support franchise monopolies, and only the reformers were speaking out for municipal ownership. Pendergast also supported public improvements. The cry of the progressives in Kansas City for parks, boulevards and shade trees to line many streets, was heard and supported by Pendergast. The Kansas City boss, although a saloonkeeper, also backed the Sunday closing of saloons, and he voted on several occasions for important issues which conflicted with his own financial interests, but which were necessary to enhance the general welfare of the city.

Jim Pendergast, however, did not stand with the progressives on all fundamental issues. He ardently fought the enactment of civil service, as well as home rule of the police which the reformers were attempting to inaugurate. Two reform charter proposals were also opposed by Pendergast. The boss was also an ardent opponent of the several attempts to increase the fines on gambling in Kansas City, for he was reaping profits from many of the illegal games.

A study of James Pendergast and his role in the politics of Kansas City will not only help modify some of the myths of the "typical" boss, it will also demonstrate the need for more research into the lives and activities of city politicians who wielded their power during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

CHAPTER I  
FROM WHENCE THE LEADER EMERGED

James Pendergast was born on the banks of the Ohio River in the little town of Gallipolis, Ohio on January 27, 1856. When young Pendergast was two years old, his Irish parents packed him up with the rest of the family possessions, and moved to St. Joseph, Missouri. The second of nine children, Jim Pendergast attended the public schools and Christian Brothers in St. Joseph. After his twentieth birthday, Pendergast left St. Joseph and came to Kansas City where the opportunities for a young man were much greater.<sup>1</sup>

Arriving in Kansas City in 1876, Jim Pendergast took up residence in the West Bottoms, and found his first employment in the packing houses. In a short time, however, the young man from St. Joseph left the packing houses, and took jobs in the D. M. Jarboe Foundry, the A. J. Kelly Foundry and the Keystone Iron Works.<sup>2</sup> The life of a puddler did not fulfill Jim Pendergast's ambitions any more than had the packing house work. Thus in 1881, after a horse named

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<sup>1</sup>Political History of Jackson County (Kansas City: Marshall & Morrison, 1902), p. 183.

Times, November 11, 1911, p. 1, col. 7.

<sup>2</sup>Political History of Jackson County, p. 183.

Climax had paid off well at the race track, the twenty-five year old foundry worker quit his job and purchased a combination hotel and saloon with his winnings. The Climax, as he named his saloon, was located at 1320-22 St. Louis Avenue in the heart of Kansas City's industrial West Bottoms.

In 1891 Pendergast closed his saloon on St. Louis Avenue, but he retained the hotel. He purchased a new saloon at 508 Main in the North end, and another saloon at 1715 West Ninth Street in the West Bottoms near the Kansas state line.<sup>3</sup> Thus Pendergast had embarked upon a lifelong career as a saloonkeeper, which was ultimately to be extremely advantageous in nurturing his future political career. Pendergast began his saloonkeeping and political careers in Kansas City, and he pursued them there until his death in 1911.

Kansas City, during the three and a half decades that Pendergast pursued his lifework there, was a spectacle of immense diversity. A year before he opened his saloon, the United States Census showed the population of Kansas City to be 55,785.<sup>4</sup> By 1910, just prior to the saloonkeeper's death, Kansas City's population had soared to over 248,000.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>William Reddig, Tom's Town, Kansas City and the Pendergast Legend (New York: Lippincott Co., 1947), pp. 25, 29.

<sup>4</sup>U.S., Department of Interior, Compendium of Tenth Census of the United States: 1880, Part I, p. 392.

<sup>5</sup>U.S., Bureau of the Census, Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910. Population, II.

This growing population, composed of both Negro and white native-born Americans as well as many German, Irish, Italian and other foreign-born persons, spread over the city which was made up of neighborhoods no less diverse than the peoples inhabiting them.

The West Bottoms, the neighborhood which Jim Pendergast represented in the city council for eighteen years, was bounded on the west by the state line, north by the river and railroad tracks, and on the east by exclusive Quality Hill. The bustling West Bottoms encompassed the packing houses, railroad yards, machine shops, factories and warehouses. In many respects this neighborhood changed very little during the years that Pendergast made his residence there. When he came to the West Bottoms in 1876, it was the heart of the city's industrial district, and it remained so until after his death. Likewise, before he came to Kansas City, the West Bottoms was suffering from poor streets, which in many places had no pavement at all.<sup>6</sup> Three decades later much of the neighborhood was still the same, with unpaved and unrepaired streets which produced dust and mud in almost intolerable quantities.<sup>7</sup>

The West Bottom's populace, which was composed mostly of a low class of Negroes living in the eastern part of the

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<sup>6</sup>Weekly Journal of Commerce (Kansas City), October 15, 1870, p. 2, col. 3.

<sup>7</sup>Kansas City Star, March 24, 1899, p. 4, col. 2.

neighborhood, and Irish, German and native laborers in the remaining portions,<sup>8</sup> did not change its character to any noticeable extent while the neighborhood was Pendergast's bailiwick. The ubiquitous junk shops and second hand stores on Ninth Street<sup>9</sup> were patronized by these low-income laborers, most of whom lived in overcrowded tenements and shanties.<sup>10</sup> The perennial problem of open sewers and gutters,<sup>11</sup> coupled with the overcrowded living conditions, constantly threatened these underprivileged West Bottomites with disease, and added to the unpleasantness of their undesirable environment.

Immediately adjacent to the West Bottoms on the northeast was the neighborhood known as the North end. In his early political career, "Big Jim" as Pendergast's friends called him, extended his political strength from its matrix in the West Bottoms to every corner of the North end. The North end was not nearly so industrialized as the West Bottoms, but in many other respects the two areas were very similar. The North end did not have as large a Negro population as the West Bottoms, but it was largely inhabited by

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<sup>8</sup>U.S., Department of Interior, Eleventh Census of the United States: 1890. Vital Statistics, IV, Part II, p. 245.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>An excellent example of the poor living conditions in the West Bottoms was given in the Times, April 13, 1880, p. 3, col. 2.

<sup>11</sup>Times, April 19, 1879, p. 8, col. 1.  
Star, March 24, 1899, p. 4, col. 2.  
Star, July 16, 1901, p. 10, col. 1.



a poor class of laborers who lived in dilapidated tenement houses. Most of the city's Italian citizens were housed in a North end district<sup>12</sup> which was usually referred to by Kansas Citizens as "Little Italy."

Most of the North end provided nothing better than crowded tenement housing for its inhabitants. A local newspaper, which was appalled by the deplorable living conditions in the North end, reported that

...for whole blocks of inhabited buildings there are no yards. Tired mothers sit on doorsteps with fretful babies in their arms and children swarm over the streets, dodging electric cars and other vehicles.<sup>13</sup>

The "dingy North end," as it was sometimes called,<sup>14</sup> was lined with old buildings used for small factories and tenements. Most of these four and five story buildings were nothing but decrepit firetraps, which would have collapsed immediately in the event of a fire.<sup>15</sup> It was here that the city's "red-light" districts flourished, and where most of the local underworld activities were born.<sup>16</sup>

Overlooking both the North end and the West Bottoms was the neighborhood called Quality Hill. During the Civil War era this neighborhood on the highest peak of the city's

<sup>12</sup>U.S., Eleventh Census, pp. 246, 248. Wards 2 and 6 made up the North end from 1886 to 1904.

<sup>13</sup>Star, July 29, 1905, p. 4, col. 3.

<sup>14</sup>Star, May 14, 1909, p. 8, col. 1.

<sup>15</sup>Star, March 16, 1905, p. 8, col. 1.

<sup>16</sup>Reddig, Tom's Town, pp. 68-69.

west bluffs began to be settled by Kansas City's elite. By the time Jim Pendergast came to Kansas City in the 1870's, Quality Hill was illuminated by gas street lights, while much of the West Bottoms and North end remained in darkness.<sup>17</sup> The glow of these lights displayed the pretentious brick homes that decorated Quality Hill, as well as the luxurious hotel called the Coates House, complete with its marble swimming pool and copper-roofed towers.<sup>18</sup> The passing years, however, brought marked changes to Quality Hill. The wealthy, social elite gradually moved to the southern and eastern portions of the growing city, to make room for the expanding commercial interests. By 1890 there were business houses dotting many parts of Quality Hill, and the best residential districts were to be found to the east and south.<sup>19</sup>

These diverse neighborhoods, with their motley populations, made up the Kansas City in which Jim Pendergast climbed the ladder of political success. When Pendergast first came to Kansas City in 1876, city politics reflected more chaos than organization. Between 1870 and 1889, none

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<sup>17</sup>Times, March 3, 1876, p. 2, col. 4.  
Times, October 3, 1877, p. 4, col. 2.

<sup>18</sup>Reddig, Tom's Town, pp. 26-27.

<sup>19</sup>U.S., Eleventh Census, pp. 245-250. Wards 3 and 4 made up most of Quality Hill, and the census shows that business houses were located there in many places by this time. Wards 8 and 9 were to the east of Quality Hill. Ward 9 was also south. Both wards had many good residences. Ward 8, the Census reported, encompassed the best residential neighborhood in the city.

of the wards or neighborhoods showed any sort of political consistency. An examination of the election returns for those two decades shows that neither the Democratic nor Republican parties had a ward or neighborhood that they could call their own.

The reasons for the political inconsistency were undoubtedly legion, but a marked lack of political leadership and organization played a very significant role. The Democratic Party for example, had no permanent Democratic club or organization to expand or perfect its machinery until 1890.<sup>20</sup> And the Republican Party was so dismembered by factional strife, that it could seldom work efficiently. Likewise neither party had more than one or two men for any period of time, other than immediately prior to an election, who devoted any appreciable amount of their time to city politics. Party leaders came and left with the annual city elections, because many of them were businessmen with only an incidental interest in local politics.

While Kansas City's political battlefield lacked the organization of "Boss" Tweed's New York, and Abraham Ruef's San Francisco, it did not lack the color. The city elections which were held each April were often preceded by gala events. A torchlight procession around the city's market square; a brass band playing; and men carrying pictures of the candidates or large signs bearing such mottos as "No Man

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<sup>20</sup>Times, March 29, 1890, p. 5, col. 2.

Owens the Irish Vote," and "We are Opposed to Rings and Cliques," were by no means unusual.<sup>21</sup> Pre-election rallies were sometimes called to order by the tune of a cornet, and crowds would gather in the streets to hear five or six speakers expound upon the virtues of their candidates.<sup>22</sup>

Jim Pendergast took his first active interest in the colorful milieu of Kansas City's politics in 1884. In March of that year, prior to the city election, Pendergast attended the Democratic primary in the West Bottoms' Sixth Ward. The "Bloody Sixth," as the ward was tagged because of the many fights there on election day,<sup>23</sup> held its primaries in the same manner that the other five wards did. "Mob" primaries, as those meetings were called, were merely an assemblage of the party's voters who met in mass and voted on delegates to represent them in the party's city convention. Jim Pendergast was one of the eleven delegates elected by the Democrats in the "Bloody Sixth" to represent them in the 1884 Democratic City Convention.<sup>24</sup>

For the next two years, the West Bottoms saloon-keeper was not openly active in either the primaries or the city convention. In 1887, however, Jim Pendergast was selected again to represent the West Bottoms in the city con-

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<sup>21</sup>Times, April 8, 1884, p. 5, col. 1.

<sup>22</sup>Times, April 4, 1879, p. 8, col. 1.

<sup>23</sup>Times, April 8, 1885, p. 2, cols. 1-2.

<sup>24</sup>Times, March 22, 1884, p. 5, cols. 1-3.

vention.<sup>25</sup> By this time, Pendergast was representing the First Ward. A change in the ward boundaries in 1886 had revamped the old "Bloody Sixth" so that it included virtually all of the West Bottoms, and was renamed the First Ward.<sup>26</sup>

In 1888 a significant move toward more centralization took place in the First Ward. Instead of the old "mob" primaries, the Democratic leaders decided that the mass of the voters should elect a chairman of the meeting. The chairman would then appoint a committee which would hand pick the delegates to the city convention. By rallying a simple majority to the lightly attended primary, a faction leader could get himself or one of his men elected chairman. By controlling the chair, a faction could control the delegates and have a solid block of votes for any of the candidates he might wish to support in the city convention.<sup>27</sup>

This change in the method of selecting delegates was not unique in the First Ward. In fact, it had been going on in the Democratic primaries in several other wards since 1885.<sup>28</sup> Just how much influence Jim Pendergast had in making this change is impossible to say. He was, however, selected to be on the committee which chose the delegates in 1888,

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<sup>25</sup>Times, March 25, 1887, p. 8, col. 1.

<sup>26</sup>Times, March 27, 1886, p. 8, cols. 2-3.

<sup>27</sup>Times, March 20, 1888, p. 8, cols. 1-3.

<sup>28</sup>Times, March 24, 1885, p. 8, cols. 1-3.

and again in 1889.<sup>29</sup> This demonstrates his growing influence in the politics of the West Bottoms.

Pendergast was by no means the commander of the First Ward Democracy at this time. That honor was being fought for by two First Ward factional leaders, Edward Kelly and John Grady. Ever since the mid-eighties, these two Irishmen had been struggling for control of the primaries, but they usually agreed to some sort of a compromise. On two occasions, however, they failed to compromise and fought it out in the primaries. The two struggles resulted in the election of two groups of delegates on one occasion, and a deadlocked primary which was forced to adjourn on the other. It was on those two occasions, 1886 and 1890, that the astute James Pendergast took no part in the First Ward primaries.<sup>30</sup>

Neither Kelly nor Grady ever managed to direct the Democratic politics of the First Ward single-handed. That was to be reserved for Jim Pendergast. While Ed Kelly, the First Ward member of the Democratic City Executive Committee, and John Grady, the twice elected councilman from the First Ward, both fought for control, Pendergast refused to take sides. He cooperated with both men. In 1890 Jim Pendergast threw open the doors of his hotel, Pendergast Hall, to Ed

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<sup>29</sup>Times, March 20, 1888, p. 8, cols. 1-3.  
Kansas City Journal, March 22, 1889, p. 3, cols. 1-5.

<sup>30</sup>Times, March 19, 1886, p. 8, cols. 1-3.  
Times, March 20, 1890, p. 3, cols. 1-2.

Kelly so that he could hold a campaign meeting for First Ward Democrats.<sup>31</sup> Pendergast had mustered the favor of John Grady too. For in March, 1892, Grady made it known that he wanted to retire from the council, if Jim Pendergast could be placed in his stead.<sup>32</sup>

Pendergast's sagacious aloofness from the First Ward faction troubles paid rich dividends. By 1892 he had earned the undivided support of the First Ward Democracy. For the first time in years the Kansas City Star, an independent local newspaper, could report that a Democrat had "a walk away for the [alderman] nomination" in the First Ward.<sup>33</sup>

The nominee for the First Ward's seat in the lower house of the city council had more than just party support, he had the support of the grass roots in the West Bottoms. A First Ward political rally just prior to the city election displayed "Big Jim's" popularity. A local newspaper reported that the meeting on Genesee Street, in the West Bottoms, was attended by

the hard handed men of the First Ward...in oily blue jumpers,...with packing house mud on their boots, switchmen, freight handlers, engineers. Lots of them too. There were not many silk hats in the crowd...<sup>34</sup>

One Democrat made a speech for Pendergast. After compli-

<sup>31</sup>Times, April 5, 1890, p. 5, col. 2.

<sup>32</sup>Times, March 1, 1892, p. 4, col. 5.

<sup>33</sup>Star, March 15, 1892, p. 2, col. 2.

<sup>34</sup>Times, March 26, 1892, p. 5, col. 1.

menting the First Ward Democrats for nominating Pendergast, he continued by saying that

"there is no kinder hearted or more sympathetic man in Kansas City than Jim Pendergast. He will go down in his pockets after his last cent to help a friend. No man is more easily moved to sympathy or good sense than Jim Pendergast."<sup>35</sup>

When the speech was finished, the laboringmen's applause produced "a prodigious noise" and then Pendergast entered.

"Terrific yells" ensued, and the saloonkeeper responded by saying "I never attempted a speech in all my life, but if you elect me I will do my duty."<sup>36</sup>

The election returns confirmed all reports of Jim Pendergast's popularity. He walked over his Republican opponent with a five-to-one majority.<sup>37</sup> From April, 1892, until April, 1910, "Alderman Jim" would direct the political destiny of the First Ward. The West Bottoms would no longer be without consistency in its political behavior, nor would it be torn asunder by factional strife. The political situation had changed. Pendergast was to be "King of the First."<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Star, April 6, 1892, p. 2, col. 1.

<sup>38</sup>The Star, June 28, 1898, p. 7, col. 3, stated that Pendergast was known as "King of the First" ever since he began representing that ward in the council.



## CHAPTER II

### KING OF THE FIRST

In April, 1892, Jim Pendergast took his seat in the lower house of Kansas City's common council. The Charter of 1889 had created a bicameral legislature for Kansas City, consisting of an upper and lower house. Each house consisted of as many members as there were wards. The upper house members were elected at large for a period of four years. The members of the lower house, on the other hand, were elected by the ward they represented for two years. Neither house wielded more strength than the other, for ordinances of any type could originate in either house. The proposed ordinances had to pass both houses before they were sent to the mayor for approval; and a two-third's majority of both houses was required to pass a bill over the mayor's veto.<sup>1</sup>

During his initial year in the First Ward's seat in the lower house, the inexperienced alderman, James Pendergast, did little officially to attract attention. His austere role as an alderman, however, was overshadowed by the spectacle of his physical greatness. The tall alderman loved

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<sup>1</sup>Kansas City, Missouri, Charter of 1889 (Kansas City: Lawton, Havens, and Burnap Stationers, 1889), Articles II, III.

to eat, and he had adorned himself with well over two hundred pounds. Overweight but extremely strong, "Big Jim" sported a black, Bismarck mustache, which somehow compensated for his receding hairline. His small bow tie made him appear more rotund than he really was, but his ornate watch fob, hanging through a buttonhole on his vest, added just the right touch of dignity to his handsome frame.<sup>2</sup>

After a few months of orientation though, the statesman from the West Bottoms threw himself into the limelight where he was to remain for many years to come. Some early light was thrown on Pendergast by the reform-bent editor of the Kansas City Star, William Rockhill Nelson. Baron Bill, as his enemies called him, believed that a municipal government should be run as 'a business affair.'<sup>3</sup> Using his newspaper to support and inaugurate many progressive projects in Kansas City, Nelson was first attracted to Alderman Pendergast because of his position on the appropriation of city funds for a garbage system. Pendergast, according to the Star, said that "There is nothing that this city needs more than a garbage system," as he pledged his support for a \$20,000 garbage fund.<sup>4</sup>

Alderman Jim also received early praise as a friend

<sup>2</sup>Interview with James M. Pendergast, nephew of Alderman Jim, March 15, 1961. Also see photo of Alderman Jim, Political History of Jackson County, p. 182.

<sup>3</sup>Reddig, Tom's Town, p. 38.

<sup>4</sup>Star, March 15, 1893, p. 1, col. 1.

of progress when he took a bold stand in the lower house against a "wide open [telephone] franchise" which might well have pushed the telephone rates much higher than they were at that time. Even in the face of increased pressure from the Telephone Company to change his position, Pendergast remained adamant and the company was forced to compromise.<sup>5</sup>

The First Ward alderman did not rally as much of the Star's support to his position on some of the early park and boulevard proposals as he did on the garbage fund and the telephone franchise. The big Irishman helped kill an ordinance providing for a levy of two and one half mills for boulevard and park purposes in the northeast part of the city, but he threw his full support to a proposal for constructing a park on the west bluffs which was immediately convenient to his constituency in the West Bottoms. Pendergast stated his position on both park proposals when he introduced and read a resolution which was unanimously adopted by the lower house. Pendergast pointed out that he was "strongly in favor of parks and boulevards," and that he was supporting the "adornment of the unsightly west bluffs." He did not, however, think that the lower house should advance proposals for parks and boulevards in areas such as the North Park district, where the city had not yet obtained the title to the land. The Star did not see things

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<sup>5</sup>Star, October 31, 1893, p. 1, col. 3.  
Star, November 2, 1893, p. 1, col. 3.

the way that the First Ward alderman did. It felt that the North Terrace Park, as well as the park on the west bluffs, deserved strong support.<sup>6</sup>

By supporting the proposal for a west bluffs park district, Pendergast had curried the favor of many West Bottoms' dwellers who were without such important facilities. This park resolution was only one thing that Pendergast did during his first term in the council to expand his support, and bolster the support which he already had.

Probably the most publicized fight that Pendergast led for the aid of the working class was the one over the firemen's salaries. In August, 1893, the City Comptroller, John F. Shannon, discovered that the Fire Department had overdrawn its budget for the year. Mayor Cowherd and Shannon decided that the salaries of all firemen had to be cut 15 per cent to make up the deficit. Both the mayor and the comptroller were Democrats, but they met the strongest opposition to their proposal from the Democratic Party. The two leaders of the North end Democracy, Martin Regan of the Sixth Ward, and Andy Foley of the Second, joined forces with Pendergast and the Fifth Ward Democrat, John Fitzpatrick, to fight the proposal. These four aldermen suggested that the city should tap the reserve fund for the water works or go into debt to meet the current expenses. As far as reduc-

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<sup>6</sup>Star, May 5, 1893, p. 4, col. 2.

Star, May 23, 1893, p. 1, col. 1.

Star, May 24, 1893, p. 7, col. 5.

ing the salaries of the already poorly paid firemen, Pendergast and his cohorts were determined to fight such a move.<sup>7</sup>

Fight is just what the "Big Four" (as the Star called them)<sup>8</sup> did when the ordinance to reduce the firemen's salaries passed the upper house. As the ordinance passed the upper house, a large gathering of laborers outside the hall yelled and hooted. They challenged the upper house to send the ordinance on to the lower house where the four friends of the low income workingmen resided.<sup>9</sup> The ordinance went to the lower house five nights later. And just as those laborers had known would happen, the friends of the low income working class, Pendergast, Regan, Foley and Fitzpatrick, who represented a majority of the aldermen present, buried the bill so deep that it was never to be resurrected.<sup>10</sup>

Alderman Jim was also taking care of his own people when he used his influence, coupled again with that of the North end's Regan and Foley, to rally enough support in the lower house to block a move to take the fire station out of the West Bottoms. The city council had placed the management of the Fire Department into the hands of the Board of Fire Insurance Underwriters. When the Board made a decision

<sup>7</sup>Star, August 9, 1893, p. 1, col. 1.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Star, August 24, 1893, p. 6, col. 3.

<sup>10</sup>Star, August 29, 1893, p. 6, col. 3.

to move the only fire station in the West Bottoms and place it on Quality Hill, Pendergast immediately rebelled. Pendergast and his North end friends, Regan and Foley, gathered enough support in the lower house to pass a bill which transferred the management of the Fire Department from the Board of Fire Insurance Underwriters to the city.<sup>11</sup> Thus the politicians could prevent the movement of the fire station from the West Bottoms, once the city controlled the Fire Department.

The editor of the Star was openly opposed to such a transfer because of the high rate of efficiency that the Fire Department realized under the aegis of the non-partisan board. The Star's own statements against the sponsors of the transfer were mild though, at least when compared with the vociferous attack led by one of the members of the fire board:

Why the city should want to take another department to maintain at a time when its finances are low and money is scarce is incomprehensible, except when it is understood who are backing the scheme--Pendergast, Foley and politicians of like caliber.<sup>12</sup>

The criticisms of, and the opposition to the transfer of the Fire Department to city control produced little

<sup>11</sup>The Charter of 1889 gave the city council the authority to provide for the city's fire protection. Thus the councilmen could remove the management of the Fire Department from the Board of Fire Insurance Underwriters if they so desired. See Charter of 1889, Article III, Section 1.

Star, January 16, 1894, p. 4, col. 4.

Star, January 17, 1894, p. 6, col. 3.

<sup>12</sup>Star, January 17, 1894, p. 6, col. 3.

effect. A spokesman for the Board of Fire Underwriters tried to sway the councilmen to his point of view saying that 'when a fire breaks out in the West Bottoms, a crew from the uptown patrol may be sent down,'<sup>13</sup> but it was to no avail. The upper house followed the example of the lower house, and voted for the transfer.<sup>14</sup>

The position taken in the council by Pendergast on the removal of the fire station from the West Bottoms undoubtedly produced a vote or two of confidence for him. The big saloonkeeper, however, did as much work outside of the council to strengthen his following during his first term in office as he did from within. When a dozen men were arrested for working bunco games at the race track, there was Alderman Jim in the Police Court to put up bond for several of them.<sup>15</sup> Although running to help a man arrested for working a bunco game would have been looked upon with disdain by the "silk-stockings" on Quality Hill, the rough and tumble laborers in the West Bottoms were more convinced than ever that Jim was their friend.

One did not have to be in trouble to get help from the First Ward Irishman, because every month for a long time Pendergast was a bank teller for many of the railroad and packinghouse workers in the West Bottoms. Greenbacks were

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Star, January 20, 1894, p. 4, col. 2.

<sup>15</sup>Star, October 17, 1893, p. 1, col. 3.

not easy to acquire in those days, so Jim kept the safe in his saloon full of paper and silver on payday in order to cash the checks of the workingmen. "They spent some of it across the bar" asserted William Reddig who knew personally some of Alderman Jim's close friends,

but Jim did not make that a requisite. Men learned that he had an interest in humanity outside of business and that he could be trusted, and they returned the favor by patronizing his saloon and giving him their confidence.<sup>16</sup>

During his first term in the lower house, Pendergast had done many things both in and out of the city council to strengthen his popularity with the First Ward voters. In other quarters though, Alderman Jim had mustered some loud opposition. We have already seen how William R. Nelson and his Star attacked the Irish saloonkeeper on occasion, especially when he stood in the way of the North Terrace Park levy; and also when he rallied strong opposition to the non-partisan Board of Fire Underwriters. The Star, however, was not alone in criticizing Pendergast and some of his fellow politicians. Kansas City's bosses could sympathize with New York City's "Big Tim" Sullivan and Richard Croker for they had their own counterpart of New York's Rev. Charles Parkhurst to contend with. The Rev. John Sewell, one of Kansas City's Congregational ministers, was an ardent reformer in the style of Parkhurst. Attempting to reform the city government as well as souls from his pulpit, Sewell was

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<sup>16</sup>Reddig, Tom's Town, p. 29.



hoping to purge Kansas City of all "dive keepers" and gamblers who were "professional politicians...who emerge from tending bar in some corner dram shop, [and] begin to rapidly climb the ladder of political influence."<sup>17</sup>

Kansas Citians did not have to look far to find out whom the Reverend Sewell was referring to. Only three city politicians, who had experienced meteoric rises in the past two years, were saloonkeepers. And all three, Pendergast, Regan and Foley, were representing the wards of the city's West Bottoms and North end where vice and gambling were not even considered to be in poor taste.

The multilateral opposition to Jim Pendergast was highly ineffective in the face of all that "Big Jim" had been doing for his West Bottoms' neighbors. When Jim decided to run for alderman again in spring, 1894, his popularity, which he had nurtured by his actions in the council, from behind the bar of his saloon, and by the little personal favors that he performed, was clearly displayed as it came to fruition in his re-election.

The significance of Pendergast's re-election in 1894 lay in the fact that the Republicans elected their whole ticket with the exception of two lower house candidates: Pendergast in the First Ward and Martin Regan in the Sixth Ward. Competing for twenty-five city offices, the

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<sup>17</sup>Star, December 11, 1893, p. 7, col. 5.

Republicans elected twenty-three of their candidates.<sup>18</sup>

There was really no doubt that Jim Pendergast was now "King of the First."

The extent of Pendergast's power in the First can only be appreciated when one views the opposition which he faced in the 1894 election. The most dynamic opposition that Pendergast faced according to the Democratic organ, the Kansas City Times, was "a new factor" which had just entered local politics. It was the American Protective Association. According to the Times, the A.P.A. had "but one plank in its platform, and that is opposition to Catholics."<sup>19</sup> The A.P.A. movement, which was strong in the Middle West at that time, had a sizeable influence on Kansas City politics. A.P.A. members managed to gain partial control of the Republican City Convention in 1894, and they succeeded in getting several of their candidates nominated, including Webster Davis, the candidate for mayor.<sup>20</sup>

Irish Catholic Pendergast not only had the A.P.A. dominated Republicans to face in the election of 1894, he had a newly formed Independent ticket to fight. The Independent Citizens ticket was headed by a Democrat, Frank Cooper, who was a partner in the live stock firm of Offut, Elmore & Cooper. This non-partisan ticket had well known

<sup>18</sup>Star, April 4, 1894, p. 1, cols. 5-6.

<sup>19</sup>Times, January 30, 1894, p. 5, col. 3.

<sup>20</sup>Star, March 9, 1894, p. 1.

Republicans and Democrats on it; all of whom were calling for a municipal government run on business principles, not political influence.<sup>21</sup> The independent Kansas City Star and the hitherto Democratic Times, both threw their support to the infant movement. The city's other leading newspaper, the Journal, as usual gave its unyielding support to the Republican ticket, and it did not even mention the A.P.A. issue.

The multilateral opposition to the straight Democratic ticket, and especially the anti-Catholic crusade of the A.P.A. Republicans, pushed Jim Pendergast into an alliance with another rising young Catholic politician, Joe Shannon. Having made his political debut about the same time that Pendergast did, Joe Shannon, with the help of his brother Frank, was trying to establish himself as a political power in the city's largest ward, the Ninth.<sup>22</sup>

Pendergast, Shannon, and some other regular Democrats put up a ticket with the labor leader Frank Johnson at the top.<sup>23</sup> But the wave of support rallied by the A.P.A. was too strong, and only Pendergast's First Ward gave Johnson a majority of its votes. Not one of the Independents sur-

<sup>21</sup>Times, March 4, 1894, p. 2, col. 3, p. 4, col. 2.  
Times, February 7, 1894, p. 4, col. 2.

<sup>22</sup>Charles P. Blackmore, "Joseph B. Shannon, Political Boss and Twentieth Century 'Jeffersonian'" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Dept. of Political Science, Columbia U., 1954), pp. 8, 9, 38.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

vived the onslaught, and only two Democrats, Pendergast and Regan, had been able to carry themselves through the holocaust. Actually, Pendergast was barely threatened. He had gathered 687 votes for himself, and the Republican nominee only obtained 212. The Independent candidate had hardly been in the First Ward race, finishing with only 137 votes.<sup>24</sup>

The election showed beyond a doubt that the only Democratic ward leader in the city who could deliver the votes when the chips were down was Jim Pendergast. Every ward in the city but two, including Regan's Sixth Ward and Shannon's Ninth Ward, gave a majority of its votes to Webster Davis, the A.P.A. Republican. While Andy Foley's old bailiwick, the Second Ward, did not go to Davis, it fell to the Independent candidate, Frank Cooper. And while Martin Regan had been able to get himself elected in the Sixth, he could not muster the votes for the rest of the Democratic ticket. Only Pendergast had produced majorities for himself and the Democratic ticket.<sup>25</sup>

The A.P.A. raised its ugly head immediately after the election to challenge the "King of the First" again. Since the anti-Catholic movement had not been able to strip Alderman Jim of his following in a fair election, it resorted to lies and slander. A member of the A.P.A., Harry Marks,

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<sup>24</sup>Star, April 4, 1894, p. 1, col. 6.

<sup>25</sup>See the election returns by wards: Star, April 4, 1894, pp. 1, 5.

reported to the court of Judge Willis in Westport that he had seen Jim Pendergast pay three men fifty cents each for voting for him in the city election on April 3. Pendergast was arrested and released on \$200 bond.<sup>26</sup>

Awaiting his trial, Pendergast told a reporter for a small circulation Scripps paper, the Kansas City World, that

"This is one of the dirtiest tricks on record, I never saw that man Marks in my life, and for him to say that I bought votes on election day is simply preposterous ...I spent the whole of election day riding around to the various precincts in my buggy. I was not inside any of the polling places except once, and that was when I voted in the South precinct in the morning."<sup>27</sup>

On the day that he was scheduled to appear in court, the angry Irishman was there to meet his prosecutors. But Marks, who worked for an A.P.A. newspaper, did not appear. The case against Pendergast was dropped, and the World reported that the charge had been "nothing but a bluff."<sup>28</sup>

There had been some vote fraud in the city election of 1894, but not in Pendergast's ward. The Shannons, who could not swing the Ninth Ward either legally or illegally, were involved in some crooked voting practices.<sup>29</sup> Investigations never produced any evidence of vote fraud in the First Ward as long as Pendergast was directing things. With

<sup>26</sup>Star, May 9, 1894, p. 1, col. 3.

<sup>27</sup>Kansas City World, May 10, 1894, p. 2, col. 3.

<sup>28</sup>World, May 23, 1894, p. 1, col. 2.

<sup>29</sup>Star, March 14, 1894, p. 2, col. 1.  
Star, April 9, 1894, p. 1, col. 1.

illegal voting practices being discovered in many other wards throughout the city during the years that Pendergast was a power in city politics, many people were amazed at the absence of fraud in the First. Alderman Jim had the answer. 'I never needed a crooked vote. All I want is a chance for my friends to get to the polls.'<sup>30</sup>

Although the First Ward Boss never broke the rules governing voting procedure, he did not consider the ordinances prohibiting gambling to be sacred--at least not during his early years as chief of the First Ward Democracy. By 1892, Jim had closed his saloon on St. Louis Avenue in the West Bottoms, but he retained the Pendergast Hotel. He had opened up a saloon in the North end's Second Ward, and another one at 1715 West Ninth Street in the West Bottoms' First Ward. Upstairs over both of these saloons, big dice games were being run during the summer of 1894. In August, 1894, thirty-eight men were arrested in a large game in the North end saloon at 508 Main.<sup>31</sup>

As long as Thomas M. Speers remained the Chief of Police in Kansas City, gamblers were under the constant threat of being arrested. As early as April, 1895, Marcy K. Brown, a factional leader in Jackson County politics, began pressuring Governor Stone to get rid of Speers.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup>Quoted by Reddig, Tom's Town, pp. 31-32.

<sup>31</sup>Star, July 15, 1894, p. 2, col. 1.

<sup>32</sup>Star, April 12, 1895, p. 1, col. 2.

Speers, who had been Chief of Police since 1874,<sup>33</sup> was ousted the following month. The control of the police was in the hands of the state at this time. The governor appointed a Board of Police Commissioners for the city, and this board had the power to remove and appoint the Chief of Police and all of the patrolmen. The board also established the salaries of all members of the police force.

In late April, 1895, Governor Stone appointed a new Board of Police Commissioners.<sup>34</sup> The new board soon dropped Speers as Chief of Police and put in his stead, L. E. Irwin.<sup>35</sup> Throughout the rest of the year, the gambling games over both of Pendergast's saloons, which were operated by the notorious gambler Ed Findley, ran wide open without police interference.<sup>36</sup>

This state of affairs caused the Star to begin a campaign against Chief Irwin and the "police-protected" games in the Alderman's saloons.<sup>37</sup> The increased pressure on Irwin to close down the illegal games by both the Star

<sup>33</sup>John B. Pew (ed.), The Charter and Revised Ordinances of Kansas City, Missouri, 1928 (Kansas City: Director of Finance, 1928), pp. 15-21.

<sup>34</sup>Star, April 29, 1895, p. 1, col. 3.

<sup>35</sup>Star, May 4, 1895, p. 1, cols. 5-7.

<sup>36</sup>Star, August 29, 1895, p. 1, col. 3.  
Star, December 8, 1895, p. 1, col. 3.

<sup>37</sup>Star, October 20, 1895, p. 2, col. 2.  
Star, January 2, 1896, p. 1, col. 1.

and a local reform organization, the Civic Federation,<sup>38</sup> forced the chief into some token action. He made several raids on the Pendergast saloons, but the gamblers were usually tipped off by the police beforehand, and there was plenty of time to clear out before the raiding parties arrived.<sup>39</sup>

The way Pendergast had rallied police protection for the illegal activities in his saloons is not difficult to ascertain. Marcy K. Brown, the influential county politician, had been the key figure in swinging Governor Stone's support to revamp the Board of Police Commissioners so that a Chief of Police sympathetic toward the gambling interests could be appointed.

During the Democratic County Convention in summer, 1894, before Brown had approached the governor to have Chief of Police Speers removed, Brown's faction had fallen in defeat. The big fight in the convention had been over the nomination for County Prosecuting Attorney. Marcy K. Brown was throwing all the strength he could muster behind his candidate, Frank G. Johnson. Jim Pendergast, however, joined forces with the Ninth Ward boss, Joe Shannon. Shannon and Pendergast gathered enough delegates to defeat Brown's man, and get their own candidate, J. H. Bremmerman, nomi-

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<sup>38</sup>Star, January 8, 1896, p. 1, col. 5.

<sup>39</sup>Star, November 8, 1895, p. 1, col. 1.  
Star, January 10, 1896, p. 1, col. 1.



nated.<sup>40</sup>

Marcy K. Brown, who had seldom found his power in the county so successfully challenged, realized that he must come to terms with at least one of the rising young bosses from Kansas City. Brown decided to try Pendergast, and he was successful in making a deal. Pendergast was to throw his support to Brown in the next county battle, and Brown was to use his influence to get the police force revamped. Pendergast would help select the new policemen, and Brown would use his influence in high appointments to get the gambling in Pendergast's two saloons protected. Thus, the next spring, less than four weeks after Brown began pressuring Governor Stone to have Chief Speers removed, Jim Pendergast had abandoned his alliance with Joe Shannon, and was supporting Marcy K. Brown for re-election to the chairmanship of the Democratic County Committee instead of Shannon's candidate, George Shelley.<sup>41</sup>

The Star hinted that Pendergast was unhappy with his new bedfellow, because Brown was not living up to all of his end of the bargain. Pendergast, according to a Star reporter, had been promised the right to appoint more of the members to the revamped police force than Brown ultimately allowed him to do.<sup>42</sup> Pendergast's gambling games were being

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<sup>40</sup>Star, September 15, 1894, p. 1, cols. 1-3.

<sup>41</sup>Star, May 8, 1895, p. 1, col. 1.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

protected by the police, however, and any hard feelings that existed over the patronage were gone by summer. The First Ward alderman and his new ally, Brown, fought side by side to prevent the election of George Shelley to the chair of the county committee. When Shelley was elected, Pendergast and Brown took their men and stormed out of the meeting.<sup>43</sup> The two bosses refused to abide by the decision to make Shelley the new chairman, and they kept the county Democracy torn asunder until almost Christmas. The refusal of Brown and Pendergast to support Shannon's candidate paid off. In December, Shelley resigned the chairmanship to which he had been fairly elected. A compromise candidate agreeable to both factions was soon selected.<sup>44</sup>

Pendergast's alliance with Brown had given him the green light on the saloon gambling games, with only a minimum of police interference. This freedom the big saloon-keeper had not enjoyed before. The cooperation of the police force, however, brought its problems too. The Kansas City Police Judge, James Jones, had openly voiced his opposition to the gambling in Kansas City.<sup>45</sup> The A.P.A. Republicans nominated Jones for mayor in 1896, and he ran on a platform which pledged to run Ed Findley, the gamekeeper at

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<sup>43</sup>Star, August 12, 1895, p. 1, col. 1.  
Star, August 17, 1895, p. 1, col. 1.

<sup>44</sup>Star, December 9, 1895, p. 1, col. 4.  
Star, December 14, 1895, p. 1, col. 3.

<sup>45</sup>Star, October 21, 1895, p. 1, col. 1.

Pendergast's two saloons, out of Kansas City.<sup>46</sup>

The 1896 election campaign, based on opposition to gambling which Pendergast had been associated with for the past two years, did not dampen the spirits of Alderman Jim. He ran for re-election anyway. The vociferous attacks on the police protected games in the big alderman's saloons did not hinder his success either. The A.P.A. controlled Republicans again swept the city election, leaving only five lower house posts to the Democrats.<sup>47</sup> Jim had taken one of the five seats for himself, as he trounced his A.P.A. opponent with 632 votes to 372.<sup>48</sup>

It was not at all surprising that "Big Jim" had breezed into office again, for even though he was busier than ever before, especially with his first active involvement in county politics, he still had time for his friends. The Negroes, for example, who populated a large portion of the First Ward, were undoubtedly impressed when Alderman Jim took the time and effort to put up bond for one of their colored brothers who had fallen into dispute with the law.<sup>49</sup>

While Pendergast looked out for the special interests of his people in the West Bottoms, he also continually worked for the general welfare of the city, and thus rallied

<sup>46</sup>Star, April 8, 1896, p. 1, col. 6.

<sup>47</sup>Star, April 8, 1896, p. 1.

<sup>48</sup>Journal, April 8, 1896, p. 1, col. 4.

<sup>49</sup>Star, February 22, 1896, p. 1, col. 2.

more support. We see this in 1895 when Kansas Citians were paying \$1.60 per 1000 cubic feet of gas to the Philadelphia Gas Company, which held the gas franchise.<sup>50</sup> The Philadelphia company thought it could count on Pendergast's vote when it was time for a franchise renewal. But Pendergast, according to the Star's bold headline, "STOOD BY THE CITY AT A CRITICAL MOMENT." With a picture of the big alderman on the front page, the Star praised Pendergast for voting against the "trust" and casting the deciding vote in favor of the Dollar Gas Company, which promised to deliver 1000 cubic feet of gas for \$1.00.<sup>51</sup> A savings such as this was not only important to hotel owners like Pendergast, it was important to home owners all over the city. The reduced gas rate was especially important in 1895, because the brunt of the nation-wide depression was still being felt.

During Pendergast's second term in the lower house, he also spoke out for such important issues as lower telephone rates, which were badly needed in Kansas City.<sup>52</sup> On another occasion, he voted for a resolution to appropriate \$25,000 to purchase a thirty-three acre estate for a park, which could have provided a relaxation spot for many. Although the resolution did not pass the lower house, Pendergast had put himself on record as a supporter of public

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<sup>50</sup>Star, February 5, 1895, p. 1, col. 1.

<sup>51</sup>Star, January 10, 1895, p. 1, col. 5.

<sup>52</sup>World, April 28, 1895, p. 1, col. 1.

improvements for Kansas City.<sup>53</sup>

Probably the most significant example of Pendergast's labors for the commonweal during his second term in office, concerned the passage of two charter amendments: one for the purchase of the water works plant, and the other for financing the construction of parks and boulevards. For years many leading citizens had been clamoring for parks and boulevards, as well as a municipally owned water works. These two issues were drawn up in the form of charter amendments and placed before the people for their adoption or rejection in a special election in June, 1895. Pendergast gave his full support to the amendments. In fact, he joined a group referred to as "the general committee of friends of the park and water works amendments."<sup>54</sup> After working ardently for the committee in his ward, Alderman Jim told a newspaper reporter that

nearly every voter in the ward is for the amendments. I think that the amendments will carry by an overwhelming majority. I can find scarcely anyone who is against them. I am in favor of them and have always been so, as my official acts in the city council show.<sup>55</sup>

No one could have known more about what the First Ward would do on election day than the "King of the First." Pendergast had been correct. The amendments were ratified

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<sup>53</sup>Star, December 27, 1894, p. 1, col. 2.

<sup>54</sup>Star, May 22, 1895, p. 1, col. 1.  
Star, May 23, 1895, p. 2, col. 3.

<sup>55</sup>Star, May 26, 1895, p. 2, col. 1.

in the First Ward by a six-to-one majority. Hardly anyone had opposed the issues that Jim Pendergast had requested them to support.<sup>56</sup> The way Alderman Jim had been able to bring the voters into line in the West Bottoms was almost phenomenal. The way he had gathered the support for these amendments which he was backing, and the way he had kept the Republican landslides in the past two city elections from touching his ward, were all amazing feats. However, the following description of the alderman, written by one of his contemporaries, helps one understand why he had the devoted support of his West Bottoms' neighbors:

He had a big heart, was charitable and liberal....No deserving man, woman or child that appealed to "Jim" Pendergast went away empty handed, and this is saying a great deal, as he was continually giving aid and help to the poor and unfortunate. The extent of his bounty was never known, as he made it an inviolable rule that no publicity should be given to his philanthropy. There never was a winter in the last twenty years that he did not circulate among the poor of the West Bottoms, ascertaining their needs, and after his visit there were no empty larders. Grocers, butchers, bakers and coal men had unlimited orders to see that there was no suffering among the poor of the West Bottoms, and to send the bills to "Jim" Pendergast.<sup>57</sup>

These personal favors that Pendergast performed for his constituents; his actions within the council chambers which benefited many of them; and the Police Department patronage which aided at least a few, all helped Alderman Jim solidify his strength in the First Ward. The big Irish-

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<sup>56</sup>World, June 7, 1895, p. 1, col. 1.

<sup>57</sup>Journal, November 11, 1911, p. 3, col. 2.

man, however, was not satisfied with being just the leader of the First Ward, He wanted to extend his power into the North end.

Throughout the years that Pendergast was establishing his supreme command in the West Bottoms, he was laying the groundwork for political control of the North end. The first inroad into North end politics came in 1891 when the alderman purchased a saloon at 508 Main. While still retaining a saloon and a hotel in the West Bottoms, Pendergast was now in business in the Second Ward, where he could make new contacts and friends. Only one block from the Court House and City Hall, the Main Street saloon soon became the headquarters for city officeholders, as well as lawyers and big time gamblers.<sup>58</sup>

The North end power elite was made up of the men who ran the liquor and gambling interests there. Pendergast quickly surrounded himself with these men, and by purchasing a North end saloon he early became associated with the liquor interests. Many of his friends came from this same circle. Martin Regan, for example, the North end alderman and saloonkeeper, became a close friend of Alderman Jim's; they even took a vacation together.<sup>59</sup> Likewise John Moran,

<sup>58</sup>Reddig, Tom's Town, p. 29.

<sup>59</sup>Star, January 24, 1894, p. 6, col. 2.  
Star, January 27, 1894, p. 1, col. 2. Regan and Pendergast took in the Corbett-Mitchell boxing match in Jacksonville, Florida together.

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another saloonkeeper and North end politician, became one of Jim's friends. It was Moran that Pendergast stood up for in the lower house when it was suggested by some of the members that he should be removed from office because he had been arrested for election fraud.<sup>60</sup>

Jim Pendergast's ties with the gambling interests were even stronger than with the liquor interests. As has already been pointed out, the gambler Ed Findley was operating large dice games from both of Jim's saloons. Although Findley made his headquarters at Jim's Main Street saloon, his gambling combine spread all over the North end. Billy Christie's North end saloon for example, was only one of several other locations for Findley's games.<sup>61</sup> It was Pendergast's alliance with Marcy K. Brown which brought police protection to the organized gambling in 1895. The Police Department also became a strong weapon for the gambling combine, "A free lance gambling house operator in the North end testified that Ed Findley had warned him to join the combine, or be raided by the police. The gambler refused to join Findley, and was soon raided."<sup>62</sup>

The gambling interests were not operating on a small scale in Kansas City. Pendergast's North end saloon had

<sup>60</sup>Star, April 11, 1895.

<sup>61</sup>Star, July 15, 1894, p. 2, col. 1.

<sup>62</sup>Star, November 2, 1895, p. 1, col. 7.

several tables and twenty-two men operating the games.<sup>63</sup> The Pendergast saloon in the West Bottoms had four dice tables and a large staff also.<sup>64</sup> Disturbed over the increase in gambling, the Kansas City Civic Federation had been gathering information about the gambling machine which had greatly expanded after Chief of Police Speers was ousted from office in 1895. Just how reliable the information gathered by this reform group's spies was, it is impossible to say. The group reported that almost \$800,000 annually was grossed by the combine. A spokesman for the Civic Federation said that their figures tallied with information obtained by "entirely different sources."<sup>65</sup>

In any case, the extent of the gambling was open enough and vast enough within a few months after Speers had been retired to produce quite a severe reaction from many quarters in Kansas City. Oddly enough, it was the reaction that set in against the gambling interests which played the key role in crystallizing Jim Pendergast's emergence as the political boss of the North end.

It all began in August, 1896, at the Democratic County Convention. Jim Pendergast was still allied with Marcy K. Brown. Joe Shannon, who had no interests whatever in the gambling combine, did not hesitate to ally himself

<sup>63</sup>Star, October 20, 1895, p. 2, col. 2.

<sup>64</sup>Star, January 2, 1896, p. 1, col. 1.

<sup>65</sup>Star, January 2, 1896, p. 1, col. 1.

with reform-bent Frank Lowe from the Tenth Ward. Lowe, a young Kansas City lawyer, had the delegates of the large Tenth Ward at his disposal. To get himself nominated for prosecuting attorney, Lowe was willing to support Shannon's ticket if Shannon would in turn support him. The trade was made and Shannon and Lowe were able to rally enough other support to nominate the entire ticket.<sup>66</sup>

Pendergast had been supporting James A. Reed, another young Kansas City attorney, for the nomination of prosecuting attorney. Pendergast had been able to deliver the First Ward delegates, but Marcy K. Brown just could not handle Shannon's opposition. It was a devastating blow to Marcy K. Brown, who at one time had been a powerful county boss. The Kansas City newspapers all celebrated Brown's fall from power, and heralded the rise of Joe Shannon.<sup>67</sup>

Frank M. Lowe, who with the help of Shannon had been nominated for prosecuting attorney, began his campaign immediately. The Mayor of Kansas City, James Jones, had been fighting a battle against the police-protected gambling at Pendergast's saloons and other places ever since his election in April, 1896.<sup>68</sup> Lowe promised his ardent support in helping to clean up Kansas City, by running the

<sup>66</sup>Blackmore, "Shannon," pp. 72-76.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Star, April 15, 1896, p. 1, col. 3.  
Star, May 19, 1896, p. 1, cols. 5-7.

gamblers out of town.<sup>69</sup>

Before Lowe took office January 1, 1897, the pressure had grown strong enough against Police Chief Irwin for refusing to bring a halt to the gambling, that he resigned in December, 1896. The Board of Police Commissioners appointed Henry S. Julian in Irwin's place. Julian, however, was a tool of the gamblers as well.<sup>70</sup> In fact, several days after his appointment, he approached prosecuting attorney-elect Lowe, and asked him to forget his promises of running the gamblers out of town. Julian offered to make a "deal" with Lowe, but the candidate for the prosecutor's office refused.<sup>71</sup>

Lowe not only refused to be bought off, he vigorously pursued his campaign promises. During his first month as prosecuting attorney, Lowe obtained fifty-seven indictments from the grand jury against gamblers that the police had been shielding. One of the fifty-seven was Ed Findley. Findley was charged with operating games in both of Pendergast's saloons. When he appeared in court, the judge set the bond at \$2,000. Jim Pendergast put up Findley's bond.<sup>72</sup>

Lowe's energetic prosecution of the gamblers stimulated an intense opposition in the saloon and gambling

<sup>69</sup>Frank M. Lowe, Jr., A Warrior Lawyer (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1942), p. 68.

<sup>70</sup>Star, December 21, 1896, p. 4, col. 2.

<sup>71</sup>Lowe, Warrior Lawyer, pp. 76-77.

<sup>72</sup>Blackmore "Shannon" p. 81.  
Lowe, Warrior Lawyer, pp. 81-82.

controlled North end. With Marcy K. Brown stripped of his power after the last county campaign, Jim Pendergast who had already displayed his ability to deliver the West Bottoms votes, rushed in to organize what was left of Brown's machine in the North end. Having become a part of the saloon and gambling interests in the North end himself, Pendergast had a great advantage in gathering support. The intense desire on the part of the North end leaders to defeat Shannon in the next convention, in order to get rid of reformer Lowe, helped Pendergast gain a following. It was clear that the West Bottoms delegation, plus that of the North end, would be a powerful combination to work with at the coming county convention.

William R. Nelson's Kansas City Star seldom missed anything significant that was going on in Kansas City. This occasion was no exception. Nearly a month before the Democratic primaries and county convention, the Star had discovered the rise of "A NEW DEMOCRATIC BOSS."<sup>73</sup> Pendergast had managed to gather the support of most all of the followers of Marcy K. Brown. Also, Alderman Jim had rallied to his support, John P. O'Neil, who commanded a large following in the Fifth and Tenth wards.<sup>74</sup> O'Neil was also valuable because he could help muster the support of the

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<sup>73</sup>Star, June 28, 1898, p. 7, col. 3.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

North end; like Pendergast, he had a business located there.<sup>75</sup>

The Star was correct. Pendergast had come to the front as a leader, which he aptly demonstrated in the Democratic County Convention in July, 1898. Pendergast met the Shannon faction under a big circus tent in Independence, Missouri. The Pendergast crowd proceeded to unseat Frank Lowe, and get James A. Reed nominated for prosecuting attorney in his stead.<sup>76</sup> Pendergast, who did some shrewd trading of votes with various county leaders, soundly defeated Joe Shannon and his candidate, Frank Lowe. According to one newspaper account, Lowe's defeat was due mainly "to the fact that he made vigorous prosecutions against the gamblers' combine."<sup>77</sup> Joe Shannon was asked the reason for his serious set back and he explained that "the defeat of Lowe is a hard blow but is easily explained. With the police machine, the brewers and the gamblers against him there was no chance for him."<sup>78</sup>

These assertions were largely correct. Pendergast had the support of the delegates from his own First Ward, but he had also been backed by the delegates in the Second

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<sup>75</sup>Kansas State Gazetteer and Business Directory: Including Kansas City, Missouri (Detroit: R. L. Polk & Co., 1891), Vol. VII, p. 536.

<sup>76</sup>Star, July 23, 1898, p. 1, col. 1.

<sup>77</sup>Star, July 24, 1898, p. 2, col. 3.

<sup>78</sup>Star, July 24, 1898, p. 2, col. 4.

and Sixth wards which made up the North end.<sup>79</sup> Pendergast's heelers who whipped the delegates in line were representatives of the gambling and saloon interests like Pinky Blitz, Ed Findley, and "Fighting Jim" Pryor.<sup>80</sup> Pinky Blitz was a notorious gambler and politician, who had just served out a two year term in the state prison.<sup>81</sup> "Fighting Jim" Pryor was a riotous saloonkeeper for whom Pendergast made bail on several occasions.<sup>82</sup> And Ed Findley of course, was the dean of the North end gamblers.

Thus by 1898, Alderman Jim Pendergast had extended his circle of power. He was still the undisputed boss of the First Ward, as he had demonstrated in his easily won, third re-election to the lower house.<sup>83</sup> Pendergast had extended his power beyond its old boundries though, as he rallied the North end under his leadership to put down the reform prosecuting attorney, Frank Lowe. Through his saloon and gambling interests in the North end, Pendergast had been grooming himself for this expansion of his political domain for several years. Once he had achieved success, Pendergast

<sup>79</sup>Lowe, Warrior Lawyer, p. 127.

<sup>80</sup>Star, July 24, 1898, p. 2, col. 4.

<sup>81</sup>Star, November 27, 1893, p. 1, col. 3.  
Star, November 28, 1893, p. 1, col. 5.

<sup>82</sup>One example was described in Star, May 3, 1894, p. 3, col. 4.

<sup>83</sup>Star, April 6, 1898, p. 1, col. 7.

did not let his new following slip away. He quickly enlarged and perfected his machine, which now encompassed the North end as well as the West Bottoms.



### CHAPTER III

#### BOSS OF THE WEST BOTTOMS AND NORTH END

Only six years after Jim Pendergast was first elected to the lower house from the First Ward, he had established himself as the boss of the West Bottoms and North end Democracy. The Kansas City Times asserted later that

Alderman Jim's political power was established by his generosity, his big heartedness, his readiness to do favors for the "boys," to "go to the front" for one who was in trouble, get jobs and do various little acts of kindness for those who were in need.<sup>1</sup>

Pendergast himself agreed, in retrospect, with this interpretation:

"I've been called a boss. All there is to it is having friends, doing things for people, and then later on they'll do things for you....You can't coerce people into doing things for you--you can't make them vote for you. I never coerced anybody in my life. Wherever you see a man bulldozing anybody he don't last long."<sup>2</sup>

An extremely important vehicle which was used by Jim Pendergast for making some of the friends he was talking about, and doing some of the favors that the Times referred to, was the Police Department. It has already been pointed out that the alderman's influence with the police brought him friends, for the police afforded protection to the North

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<sup>1</sup>Times, November 11, 1911, p. 2, col. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 1, col. 7, p. 2, col. 1.

end gambling interests, and made jobs available to his followers. Reformers in Kansas City were not oblivious to this source of Pendergast's strength; indeed, they tried to destroy it.

Soon after Pendergast had extended his circle of power into the North end, such outspoken opponents of his as Mayor Jones, the A.P.A. Republican who was re-elected in 1898, started a campaign for home rule of the Police Department.<sup>3</sup> It was clear that if the past was any guide for the future, as long as a Democrat was governor of Missouri, the most powerful Democrats in Kansas City would be given the control of the Police Department. Thus, Mayor Jones was sure that the only way to wrest the control of the Police Department from the big hands of Jim Pendergast was to enact municipal home rule of that department. The Missouri Constitution of 1875 had granted all cities with a population of over 100,000 the right to draw up their own charters, which could be enacted by a three-fifths majority vote.<sup>4</sup> Kansas City could take control over the Police Department simply by amending its home rule charter of 1889.

Mayor Jones was not alone in trying to destroy one of the buttresses of Pendergast's political power. Nelson

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<sup>3</sup>Star, September 2, 1898, p. 1, col. 1.

<sup>4</sup>James W. S. Peters, "Home Rule Charter Movements in Missouri With Special Reference to Kansas City," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, XXVII (January, 1906), p. 156.

Crews, a Republican who was a well-known leader of Kansas City's Negro community, also wanted to bring the Police Department under home rule.<sup>5</sup> Likewise William Rockhill Nelson, the editor of the Star, ardently supported the home rule movement through his newspaper.<sup>6</sup> These men were only part of the diverse elements which supported the movement for home rule, and which succeeded in placing a proposed amendment to the charter before the voters in September, 1898.

If anyone had doubted the strength of "Boss" Pendergast before this special election, they did not after it was over. When the election returns came in, every one of the city's fourteen wards but four voted in favor of home rule. The four wards that voted against the proposal were Pendergast's First Ward in the West Bottoms, and wards Two and Six which made up the North end. The Thirteenth Ward on the Southeast edge of the city limits cast only fourteen more votes against the amendment than it cast for it. The total number of votes cast in the Thirteenth, however, was very small and insignificant. In marked contrast, the three wards in Pendergast's bailiwick delivered three-to-one majorities against the amendment, and the city-wide three-fifths majority, necessary for passage, was not attained.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Star, August 31, 1898, p. 2, col. 3.

<sup>6</sup>Star, September 2, 1898, p. 6, col. 2.

<sup>7</sup>Star, September 7, 1898, p. 2, col. 5.

By rallying the voters in the river wards against the amendment, Pendergast had successfully crushed a movement which had challenged his control over an important segment of his political machine.

He had, however, to produce another show of strength in five or six weeks, because the reformers had not given up on attempting to destroy his political machine. After losing the battle over the control of the Police Department, the reform forces in Kansas City quickly mobilized for a new attack on a different front. The attack this time was on Pendergast's candidate for the judgeship of the Jackson County Criminal Court, Judge John W. Wofford. Wofford, who was running for re-election, had been an active worker for the Pendergast camp in the 1898 Democratic County Convention. In that convention, Pendergast defeated Shannon and succeeded in nominating most of his ticket, including John Wofford.<sup>8</sup>

A sixty-one year old ex-Confederate soldier,<sup>9</sup> Wofford was an extremely important part of Pendergast's organization. When any of the workers for the machine were arrested, they would often appeal their fines to the Criminal Court from the Police Court or a court of a Justice of the Peace. Once the case reached Wofford's court, the "boys" were assured of being let off easy. An example of Judge

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<sup>8</sup>Star, July 24, 1898, p. 2, col. 3.

<sup>9</sup>Political History of Jackson County, p. 17.

Wofford's patriarchal decisions involved a bartender in a North end saloon. The bartender, named Phil McCrory, who was a Pendergast heeler in the Second Ward,<sup>10</sup> beat up a policeman and was fined \$500 in the Police Court. McCrory appealed the fine and went to the County Criminal Court where Wofford presided. McCrory immediately pled guilty so that he could waive the trial by jury, and thus Judge Wofford would set the fine. Wofford fined McCrory only \$50, and he remitted \$40 of it shortly thereafter.<sup>11</sup>

Judge Wofford's courtroom decisions helped ease the impact of the law for workers in the machine, but his decisions also stimulated the reformers into action. Just prior to the general election in 1898, reformers from many directions urged the defeat of Judge Wofford. The Reverend Dr. Stephen Northrup, for example, preached against Wofford and his court to the congregation of Kansas City's First Baptist Church.<sup>12</sup> William R. Nelson's Star took up the crusade also, and hammered away at Wofford almost every day for over a week before the election.<sup>13</sup>

The effectiveness of the anti-Wofford campaign was

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<sup>10</sup>An example of McCrory's work for Pendergast's candidates is given in Star, November 10, 1898, p. 2, col. 1.

<sup>11</sup>Star, October 22, 1898, p. 1, col. 5.

<sup>12</sup>Star, October 31, 1898, p. 1, col. 2.

<sup>13</sup>See Star from October 22, 1898 to November 11, 1898 for articles criticizing Judge Wofford.

shown by the fact that the Judge ran far behind the rest of the Democratic ticket in most wards of the city. For example, Wofford received 1,213 fewer votes than the Democratic candidate for sheriff. In contrast, however, the strength of the Pendergast machine was demonstrated in the election too. Wofford lost every ward in the city except Ward One in the West Bottoms, and wards Two and Six in the North end. The majorities for the Georgia-born Judge in wards One and Two were almost three to one; and in the Sixth Ward his majority was slightly less than two to one. His big majorities in the river wards, coupled with his votes in the county, pulled Wofford through to victory. The Judge had received 1,110 more votes from wards One, Two and Six than his opponent did. But when the returns were tallied for the entire county, he had won by only 1,050 votes.<sup>14</sup> Thus it is clear that without Jim Pendergast's delivery of such large majorities from the river wards, Judge Wofford could not have been re-elected.

Alderman Jim had worked hard to deliver the votes, because Wofford's defeat would have seriously injured the machine. The Second Ward reflected the efficiency and coordination of Pendergast's organization, and helps explain the victory. In the Second Ward "Big Jim" not only had his usual Irish ward workers on the job such as John Pryor and

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<sup>14</sup>Star, November 9, 1898, p. 2, cols. 1-2.

Phil McCrory, he also had a Negro worker named Frank Amos, who was hustling out the Negro vote.<sup>15</sup> It was this kind of campaign management that helped Jim Pendergast meet this second big challenge to his newly consolidated power.

After defeating the reformers who had tried to inaugurate home rule of the Police Department, and had tried to disgrace his candidate for the Jackson County Criminal Court, Pendergast quickly moved, through his position in the lower house, to aid his constituents and thereby strengthen his support. With the help of his Democratic colleagues in the council, Pendergast was able to see through the council a \$100,000 appropriation for adding more policemen to the force. Even though it looked like it might take an increase in saloon license fees to pay for the appropriation, the patronage from this Pendergast victory was invaluable.<sup>16</sup>

Alderman Jim was likewise looking out for his followers when he opposed an anti-hitching proposal in the lower house. If adopted, the law would have cleared the busy districts of the North end of all standing horse teams. Pendergast, according to a news account, "was the chief opposer [of the bill]. He spoke earnestly against the bill on behalf of the North end."<sup>17</sup> Realizing how the law would

<sup>15</sup>Star, November 10, 1898, p. 2, col. 1.

<sup>16</sup>Star, June 8, 1899, p. 4, col. 2.

<sup>17</sup>Star, November 14, 1899, p. 7, col. 1.

hurt his North end friends who drove horse teams, Jim cried out 'That's just what I wanted,' when the bill failed to pass.<sup>18</sup>

Although Pendergast was constantly voting to protect and aid his flock in the West Bottoms and North end, he never lost sight of the importance of the broader issues which provided for the general welfare and beautification of Kansas City. Alderman Jim was right on the spot to support the appropriation of funds for the planting of trees on 386 blocks of the city.<sup>19</sup> Likewise when a proposed ordinance to revoke the licenses of sellers of impure milk came before the council, Pendergast announced emphatically, 'I want the amendment passed.'<sup>20</sup> The big saloonkeeper was thinking of the city's taxpayers when he refused to vote for the city to maintain a fire engine house which would have served only the Kansas City Stock Yards Company, and was, according to Pendergast, 'half in Kansas, anyway.' By forcing the Stock Yards Company to provide the funds for the fire station, Pendergast hoped to cut the city's expenditures.<sup>21</sup>

Pendergast's official labors for the general wel-

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Star, September 2, 1899, p. 8, col. 3.

<sup>20</sup>Star, April 15, 1899, p. 1, col. 1.

<sup>21</sup>Star, July 18, 1899, p. 7, col. 1.



fare of the city at large, when added to his special interest work in the council to strengthen his army of river ward followers, plus his two struggles with the reformers, kept him extremely busy during the first two years after he had extended his control from the West Bottoms into the North end. The years 1898 and 1899, however, merely previewed what was to follow in the ensuing years. Challenges to Boss Pendergast's power were to continue to come; he was going to continue his active support of programs for public improvements and the general welfare.

The year 1900 was one of the most significant that Pendergast ever experienced in perfecting his growing political organization. In February, preparations for the ensuing city election were being made by the leaders of the local Democracy. As had happened before, and would happen again in the future, Jim Pendergast and Joe Shannon began to struggle for power. Pendergast wanted to nominate the mayoralty candidate by ballot primary, but Shannon wanted the nomination to be made in the city convention.<sup>22</sup> It was clear that Pendergast would have the advantage in nominating his candidate for mayor in a primary, because he could count on so many votes in the river wards. Shannon on the other hand, had demonstrated that at times he could not even deliver the votes in his own Ninth Ward. There-

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<sup>22</sup>World, February 21, 1900, p. 2, col. 3.

fore Shannon knew that he would have a better chance of naming the candidate in a convention, where delegates could be traded and deals could be made.

When the problem of nominating the mayoralty candidate came before the meeting of the Democratic City Central Committee, to which Pendergast and Shannon both belonged, Alderman Jim won the fight. By drawing to his side the support of Bernard Corrigan, the wealthy president of the Metropolitan Street Railway Company, Pendergast was able to produce a majority vote for a ballot primary.<sup>23</sup> This early victory in the central committee was only the beginning of a triumphant year for Jim Pendergast.

For the Democratic primary election, Alderman Jim selected the thirty-eight year old James A. Reed to carry the Pendergast banner. Pendergast's successful candidate for prosecuting attorney in 1898, Reed held quite a reputation as an eloquent stump speaker.<sup>24</sup> Joe Shannon called upon George M. Shelley, twice elected mayor of Kansas City, to lead his faction's ticket. A third candidate, A. L. O. Schueler, entered the campaign with a battle cry that he was a tool of no boss.<sup>25</sup> When the smoke cleared from the field of battle, it was evident that of the two warring

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Political History of Jackson County, p. 55.

<sup>25</sup>Star, March 6, 1900, p. 7, col. 1.

faction leaders, Pendergast was much more powerful than Shannon in Kansas City. Reed carried every ward in the city except Shannon's Ninth Ward, and he only lost it by sixty-one votes out of almost 1,000 cast. Reed's biggest majorities were in Pendergast's river wards, where he carried the First Ward by a majority of twenty-five to one (440 to 18) and the Second Ward by a majority of ten to one (440 to 44). In the Sixth Ward Reed won 348 out of the 438 votes cast. The rest of the city's wards, however, did not give the young lawyer such large majorities.<sup>26</sup>

In the Democratic City Convention which followed the primary, the rest of the ticket was selected. Pendergast combined with Bernard Corrigan again, as well as Joe Heim who was one of the owners of the large Heim Brewery in Kansas City. These three men selected most of the ticket, but it was clear that Pendergast had the upper hand. When a dispute over an upper house candidate arose, Pendergast's preference was ultimately accepted. Alderman Jim allowed Heim and Corrigan to pick some of the upper house candidates, in return for their support on the remainder of the ticket.<sup>27</sup>

With the ticket nominated, "Big Jim" put his machine into action hoping to defeat the local Republicans who had dominated the mayoralty and a majority of the city council

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<sup>26</sup>Journal, March 9, 1900, p. 1, col. 7, p. 2, col. 2.

<sup>27</sup>Star, March 11, 1900, p. 1, col. 7.

seats for the past six years. Pendergast had hardly left a stone unturned in organizing his forces for the campaign. It was the first campaign that a major attempt to organize the Italians was publicized. Pendergast had Joe Damico, the "King of Little Italy," giving campaign speeches in Italian to the North end Italians.<sup>28</sup> Mike Heim, a brother of Pendergast's ally, Joe Heim, was busy serving free beer to the German voters all over the city.<sup>29</sup> The gambling element of the city's Negro population had been told that a vote for Reed meant less police interference with their illegal activities.<sup>30</sup> And ever since Bernard Corrigan entered the picture, Pendergast's campaign fund, according to a local newspaper, "had plenty of money and money is nowhere more useful than in politics."<sup>31</sup>

From his saloon at 508 Main, Jim Pendergast directed the motions of his expanding political organization. Just before the election of 1900, the Kansas City Star described "PENDERGAST AT HIS POST" in an editorial:

In these stirring times there is much activity at the Pendergast headquarters on lower Main street. The free lunch table shows unusual affluence and awakens special appreciation. The struggle for supremacy between the odor which arises from the onions and the garlic

<sup>28</sup>Star, March 29, 1900, p. 7, col. 2.

<sup>29</sup>Journal, April 3, 1900, p. 1, col. 2.

<sup>30</sup>Star, March 6, 1900, p. 7, col. 1.

<sup>31</sup>Star, March 29, 1900, p. 1, col. 1.

bolognas and the aroma which continually ascends from the bar is more than ordinarily acute.

In this pungent and vitalizing atmosphere, Pendergast stands and promulgates his wise counsel. What need, indeed, has he for halls or stages or rostrums? Here gather the candidates, to learn how the battle is waging. Here assemble the leaders to confer together. Here come the humble toilers in the Democratic vineyard to receive their instructions....

Pendergast is not seen going about much in the present campaign. That would be a needless waste of time. He would miss more Democrats by going away than he would see. It is not necessary for him to move out of his place to find anybody he can use or wants to help. They all go to him. The post of duty is the place for Pendergast. If his ward wants him it has but to call at the back or the front door and he is ready.<sup>32</sup>

Alderman Jim's direction of the 1900 campaign was nearing a climax on the eve of the election. Kansas City's Convention Hall was filled almost to capacity, with 10,000 men and women present for the final Democratic rally. The First Ward crowd, which had unanimously nominated "Big Jim" for the fifth time, came into the hall carrying two large banners. One banner was inscribed "We stand by honest Jim Pendergast," and the other one read "We are for the two Jims," meaning of course, Jim Pendergast and Jim Reed.<sup>33</sup> The local Republican newspaper, the Journal, looked upon the meeting with disdain. It was the largest Democratic meeting of the campaign, asserted the Journal, but only because "scores of Italians were herded by 'King Joe' Damico and the riff-raff of the North end swarmed into the hall."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Star, March 28, 1900, p. 4, col. 1.

<sup>33</sup>Star, April 3, 1900, p. 4, col. 1.

<sup>34</sup>Journal, April 3, 1900, p. 1, col. 3.

But to Alderman Jim, as William Reddig reminds us,

the inhabitants of the slums, the floaters in the flophouses, the shanty dwellers of the East Bottoms, the laboring men in the West Bottoms and the people of Little Italy were not the teeming masses so luridly described in the literature of the period as the flotsam and jetsam of society. They were personal friends of Alderman Jim Pendergast. He liked to listen to their stories and took a genuine interest in their problems. He got them jobs on the city or county payrolls or with business friends of the organization.<sup>35</sup>

These friends of Jim Pendergast's, whom he had been taking care of personally and through his organization, demonstrated their appreciation on election day. The West Bottoms' dwellers returned Alderman Jim to the lower house with the largest majority he had ever received.<sup>36</sup> And James A. Reed beat William Brown, his Republican opponent for mayor, in all but five of the city's fourteen wards. It was clear, though, that Reed owed his victory to Pendergast. For as the Star pointed out, "Reed's heaviest majorities came from the portion of the city that is in the West Bottoms and north of Eighth Street. Farther south the heads of the tickets divided the vote practically equally between them."<sup>37</sup>

Reed's victory was a tremendous boon for the Pendergast machine, for this was the first time that Jim Pendergast had had the pleasure of working with a Democratic mayor since he had become a power in Kansas City politics. Reed

<sup>35</sup>Reddig, Tom's Town, p. 71.

<sup>36</sup>Journal, April 4, 1900, p. 1, cols. 4-6.

<sup>37</sup>Star, April 4, 1900, p. 4, col. 3.

was Pendergast's man, and there was little reason to doubt it. Within a very short time, Mayor Reed began furnishing Jim Pendergast with some material to expand his machine. The material for expanding was patronage, and there was more of it than Jim Pendergast had ever seen before. Alderman Jim wanted and received the appointment of his younger brother, Tom Pendergast, to the position of Superintendent of Streets.<sup>38</sup> This was a coveted position because the Superintendent of Streets at that time handled more patronage than any city official other than the mayor. The Superintendent of Streets employed over two hundred men and thirty horse teams for street work.<sup>39</sup> But the Street Department was not all that Reed's victory had made available, the Fire Department fell to the spoils system too. Within a month after Reed took office, Republican appointed firemen were being removed to make room for loyal Democrats.<sup>40</sup>

There were many city hall jobs which fell under the aegis of the Pendergast machine, such as the position of deputy license inspector for Kansas City. That job went to one of Pendergast's ward heelers in the Second Ward, Charles Clark.<sup>41</sup> When all of the new patronage which came with the

<sup>38</sup>Star, April 10, 1900, p. 5, col. 1.  
<sup>38</sup>Star, June 5, 1900, p. 12, col. 1.

<sup>39</sup>Star, April 10, 1900, p. 5, col. 1.

<sup>40</sup>Star, May 24, 1900, p. 8, col. 1.

<sup>41</sup>Political History of Jackson County, p. 73.

Reed victory was placed at Pendergast's disposal, the scope of the machine was amazing. Not only did the Pendergast organization have the Street Department and the Fire Department jobs at its disposal by 1900, as well as many other city jobs, the machine also dominated the police force. Between 1900 and 1902, Jim Pendergast had appointed 123 out of the 173 patrolmen on the force.<sup>42</sup>

Thus Jim Pendergast, who had climbed far up the ladder of political success in just a few years, was the manager of a political machine which was more encompassing than anything Kansas City had seen before. It appeared in early 1900, that Jim Pendergast was well on his way to becoming the boss of Kansas City, with a powerful machine reaching into every corner of that growing metropolis. Alderman Jim, however, was in for some serious setbacks. These setbacks were to leave him at his retirement in 1910, the same as he had been just prior to the election of 1900: the boss of the West Bottoms and North end.

The first serious reversal that Pendergast experienced came in the fall of 1900 when he attempted to name the county ticket again, just as he had done in 1898 when he walked over Joe Shannon at the Democratic County Convention. The two years between conventions, however, had wrought some important changes. While Pendergast could swing much

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<sup>42</sup>Journal, July 26, 1902, p. 6, cols. 1-2.



of the city vote into line, he could no longer compete with Joe Shannon for the county vote. During the two years between the 1898 and 1900 Democratic County Conventions, Pendergast had been channeling his energies in the city campaigns. Shannon on the other hand, had been gathering a following on the county level. Several of Shannon's relatives held important county offices, and his followers had worked into thirty or forty positions in the county court house.<sup>43</sup>

Consequently, Joe Shannon, with his increasing influence, had packed the Democratic County Committee with a majority of his own supporters, and managed to elect the chairman, Frank P. Sebree.<sup>44</sup> The result of this Shannon victory was that the County Committee seated the Shannon delegates in the county convention from all of the wards which had contesting delegations. Pendergast's temper exploded when his delegates were pushed aside, and Shannon's delegates were seated. The big Irishman gathered his delegates together and they withdrew from the convention to nominate their own ticket.<sup>45</sup>

Many efforts were made to form a compromise between

<sup>43</sup>Blackmore, "Shannon," p. 137.

<sup>44</sup>Star, May 7, 1900, p. 2, col. 1.  
Star, July 26, 1900, p. 2, col. 3.

<sup>45</sup>Star, August 26, 1900, p. 1, cols. 5-7.

the Shannon and Pendergast factions, but success was never obtained. Therefore the Democratic State Central Committee came to Kansas City in an attempt to bind together the torn Jackson County Democracy. The Committee listened to both sides of the story and finally decided that a new primary election should be called, and a new convention held too. Shannon refused to follow the suggestions of the State Central Committee, and he refused to participate in the primary. Shannon asserted that his ticket was the legally elected one, so he carried the squabble to the Missouri Supreme Court. The court ruled in Shannon's favor, and awarded him the right to put his ticket in the field. According to the opinion of the court, the State Central Committee possessed only advisory powers, and was thus "without jurisdiction in the matter."<sup>46</sup> When the Supreme Court decision was announced, Jim Pendergast said he would abide by the decision, but that his faction would "keep their coats on and allow the other crowd to do the work."<sup>47</sup>

Pendergast's decision not to work for the Shannon nominees proved to be disastrous to the Democratic ticket. Instead of the river wards turning out their usual large majorities as they had been doing when Pendergast worked in an election, they were of little help at all. Pendergast's

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<sup>46</sup>The State ex rel. Yates et al. v. Crittenden, County Clerk, 164 Mo. 237 (1901).

<sup>47</sup>Star, October 24, 1900, p. 1, col. 1.

First Ward, which had produced large majorities since 1892, gave the Democratic ticket about a three-to-two majority. And the Second Ward, which Pendergast also controlled, split its votes evenly between the two parties.<sup>48</sup> Because the river wards did not deliver the usual majorities, the entire Jackson County Republican ticket was elected.<sup>49</sup> Thus, while Pendergast had been stopped by Shannon in his attempt to dominate the county convention again, Shannon could not get the ticket elected which he had successfully nominated, without Pendergast's support. Both bosses, therefore, were forced to make a compromise.

The Shannon-Pendergast split in 1900, which resulted in a Republican victory in Jackson County, led to the birth of the famous and long-lived Fifty-Fifty compromise. This compromise between the Shannon and Pendergast factions, while not observed in every city and county election, was accepted by both factions in many elections throughout the days of Jim Pendergast's reign. The agreement continued on into the era of Tom Pendergast, Jim's brother, who inherited the machine after the alderman's retirement in 1910. Fifty-Fifty was actually a setback for Alderman Jim. In 1898 he had been able to name almost the entire Democratic ticket, and he had left Shannon with hardly anything. By 1900,

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<sup>48</sup>Star, November 8, 1900, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup>Star, November 7, 1900, p. 1, col. 1.

however, when Pendergast had expanded and perfected his city machine, Shannon had grown in county-wide strength. Therefore Pendergast, who had walked over Shannon in 1898, was forced to give in after the county election in 1900, and accept the Fifty-Fifty compromise.

This was only the first reversal that Jim Pendergast experienced soon after expanding his power with the important city election victory in 1900. The defeat on the county ticket had cost Pendergast some valuable patronage, which he could have used to bolster his already strong position in the West Bottoms and North end, as well as expanding his power into other areas of the city or county. Added to this disappointment, came the loss of his supreme position over the Police Department. While William J. Stone from 1893 to 1897, and Lon V. Stephens from 1897 to 1901, were governors of Missouri,<sup>50</sup> Marcy K. Brown first, and later Jim Pendergast, dictated the selection of many members of the Board of Police Commissioners. As has already been shown, Pendergast virtually controlled the police force by 1900. When Alexander M. Dockery became governor in 1901, the situation took a marked turn. When Dockery entered the State House, Robert L. Gregory, James A. Reed, and Hugh C. Ward were the members of the Board of Police Commissioners.<sup>51</sup> All three

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<sup>50</sup>William Rufus Jackson, Missouri Democracy (St. Louis: Clarke Publishing Co., Inc., 1935), I, pp. 241,249.

<sup>51</sup>Pew, Charter and Ordinances, p. 23.

of these men were members of the Pendergast faction, and close friends of Jim Pendergast. As long as these men were on the Board, whatever Pendergast asked was done.<sup>52</sup> In 1902, the two year term of the Board had ended, and it was time for the governor to appoint two new members, the mayor always being the third member of the Board. So while Pendergast's man, Mayor Reed, would remain on the Board if he could be re-elected in 1902, Pendergast still needed to get at least one other friend of his on the Board to have a majority.

In January, 1902, Pendergast began pressuring Governor Dockery to re-appoint R. L. Gregory to the Police Board. Jim Reed even went personally to the state capitol in Jefferson City to put in a word for Gregory.<sup>53</sup> Governor Dockery came to Kansas City in late January to discuss the selection of the new appointees with the leaders of the local Democracy. As soon as he arrived in Kansas City, the governor was visited in his room at the Baltimore Hotel by Pendergast.<sup>54</sup> According to the Kansas City Star "The big boss of the North end ventured out in the snow to lay down his one proposition....He asks for Gregory...he has no second choice."<sup>55</sup> Dockery faced quite a dilemma. Shannon

<sup>52</sup>Journal, July 26, 1902, p. 6, cols. 1-2.

<sup>53</sup>Star, January 20, 1902, p. 1, col. 3.

<sup>54</sup>Star, January 29, 1902, p. 1, col. 1.

<sup>55</sup>Star, January 30, 1902, p. 1, col. 1.

was as ardently opposed to the appointment of Gregory, as Pendergast was for it.<sup>56</sup>

On February 10, the governor had made his choice. He appointed Frank Sebree and William T. Kemper to replace Hugh Ward and R. L. Gregory. This was a devastating blow to "Big Jim" because Sebree was a Shannon man,<sup>57</sup> and Kemper was far from being a Pendergast follower. Pendergast had worked with Kemper out of necessity at times, but they were basically political enemies. It was Kemper, after all, who had founded the Jackson County Democratic Club in 1899, which was a faction independent of both Shannon and Pendergast.<sup>58</sup>

Between 1902 and 1904, then, Pendergast had lost his influence over two of the three members of the Board of Police Commissioners. When the term of that Board was drawing to a close, Alderman Jim again solicited the aid of Governor Dockery by asking him to appoint R. L. Gregory to the new Board.<sup>59</sup> Again Dockery refused to be pressured by Pendergast, and he appointed D. J. Dean who was associated with neither the Pendergast nor the Shannon faction.<sup>60</sup> In April, 1904, a Republican was elected mayor of Kansas City.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Star, February 10, 1902, p. 2, cols. 1-2.

<sup>58</sup>Star, December 9, 1904, p. 5, col. 1.

<sup>59</sup>Star, January 14, 1904, p. 3, col. 5.

<sup>60</sup>Star, January 21, 1904, p. 1, col. 5.

Thus when the Republican mayor, Jay H. Neff, joined the Police Board with D. J. Dean, Pendergast's influence with the Police Department was nothing but a memory. In August, 1904, the Kansas City Star asserted that "for many years 'Pendergast faction' and 'police faction' have been synonymous in Kansas City...[but] he [Pendergast] has been crowded to the second table in police matters."<sup>61</sup>

The control of the Police Department taken from him, Jim Pendergast lost most of the city-wide strength which he had gained by 1900, as well as much of his bargaining power. As early as July, 1902, the Kansas City Journal recognized Pendergast's diminishing puissance:

When Ward and Gregory were police commissioners, the mere appearance of the big alderman from the first ward at police headquarters sat every member of the "force," from Chief Hayes to the driver of the patrol wagon, to knocking his head on the floor. Great was the police machine and "Big Jim" was its prophet.

But since the appointment of Sebree and Kemper as police commissioners, Pendergast's power has been rapidly declining. Two years ago he absolutely controlled the Democratic city convention and nominated his candidate, Reed, for mayor. Last spring, the police having passed out of his control, he had to divide the spoils of the convention with his old enemy, Shannon. In the recent county convention he was so powerless that he could not even get his friend and candidate for governor, Reed, elected delegate to the state convention. And now the commissioners...are swiftly cutting off the heads of his friends on the police department.<sup>62</sup>

By 1904 the chance of Pendergast's returning to the powerful position which he had commanded from 1900 to 1902,

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<sup>61</sup>Star, August 12, 1904, p. 1, col. 1.

<sup>62</sup>Journal, July 26, 1902, p. 6, cols. 1-2.

was gone. Governor Dockery was to be followed in office by Joseph W. Folk and Herbert S. Hadley, both of whom were reformers who were out to destroy the kind of politics that Jim Pendergast had thrived on. Likewise, after Jim Reed vacated the mayor's office in 1904, the Republicans moved in and stayed until 1908. Thus Pendergast not only had lost his patronage from the Police Department, he had lost the valuable patronage that was at the disposal of the mayor as well. Pendergast, however, was not completely devastated. And the Republican organ's prediction of the "DECLINE AND FALL OF PENDERGAST"<sup>63</sup> was far from correct. It is true that the big boss had fallen far from the pinnacle which he had reached by 1902, but he still maintained his hold over the West Bottoms and the North end.

Alderman Jim's firm grip over the West Bottoms and the North end was demonstrated on several occasions before bad health seriously reduced his political activity by late 1906. In 1904, the big Irishman was elected to represent the First Ward in the lower house for the seventh time. This election illustrated Pendergast's strength in the North end as well as the West Bottoms because the ward boundaries had been changed just prior to the election. The First Ward of 1904 included all of the West Bottoms as it had before, but it annexed the entire Second Ward from the North

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 6, col. 1.



end, as well as two precincts of the much more heavily Republican populated Third Ward. The Sixth Ward remained intact, embracing the eastern half of the North end which the Second Ward had never encompassed.<sup>64</sup>

Pendergast was opposed by another Democrat in this 1904 election, and that was the first and last time that such a futile attempt to oust "Big Jim" ever occurred. Alderman Jim received 1,513 votes, his Democratic opponent, Daniel Rice, received 383. And the lonely Republican candidate, Edward Zola, rallied a slight 288 votes.<sup>65</sup> Although the city elected the Republican, J. H. Neff, as mayor by a well over 2,000 vote majority, Pendergast faithfully delivered enormous neighborhood majorities for the Democratic candidate, William T. Kemper. In the First Ward, Kemper received 1,487 votes to Neff's 420, and in the Sixth Ward, Kemper was given 1,341 and Neff an even 600.<sup>66</sup>

A year later Pendergast again demonstrated his strength in the West Bottoms and North end when he produced the votes in the river wards to help defeat the proposed Charter of 1905. James Peters, the lawyer who was the secretary to the Board of Freeholders which drew up the charter proposal, pointed out that there was a demand for a new

<sup>64</sup>Star, April 6, 1904, p. 1, cols. 1-2.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 2, col. 2.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

charter. The demand had developed because the Charter of 1889 had become outmoded. The existing charter, Peters commented, did not provide the city with many of the powers which it urgently needed. Among the powers that the new charter would have extended to the city was the power to construct tunnels, subways and viaducts between the two Kansas Cities. Likewise, the city would be granted the power to condemn property for hospitals, and to levy assessments against railroad property. The city also did not have the power to contract for such things as garbage collection and street repairs for a period over one year. This made it difficult to make the most satisfactory arrangements for such tasks.<sup>67</sup>

The charter proposal provided the city with the above mentioned powers, as well as the power to regulate saloon licenses. The city excise commission would be required to withdraw the saloon license from any saloonkeeper if at least two lot-owners on the same block signed a petition requesting such action.<sup>68</sup> Also, the proposed charter granted the city the power to license and tax all trades, professions and employments--thus allowing the city to tax common wage laborers on their earnings.<sup>69</sup> Another article in

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<sup>67</sup>Peters, "Charter Movements," p. 161.

<sup>68</sup>Star, February 25, 1905, p. 1, col. 1.

<sup>69</sup>Peters, "Charter Movements," p. 163.

the 1905 charter called for the creation of a civil service commission, which would control all city employees, and therefore do away with the spoils system.<sup>70</sup>

Alderman Jim was emphatically opposed to the charter proposal. He told a reporter for the Kansas City World that

"It makes the mayor too powerful. It gives him more power than George Washington had, or the president has, or the governor....If I was mayor and that new charter went into effect I could fix it so that my party would stay in power for fifty years....

"There's the excise article that says that two men in the block can close up a saloon. I believe the rule of letting the majority decide is a good one....I wouldn't let any commissioners dictate to me. I'd look my place up first....

"And the occupation tax. If someone was to tell all the clerks and men of any other occupation that the council could put a tax of from \$10 to \$50 a year on them just because they have a job, do you think they would go out and work for the charter? People tell me that that's just put in the charter--not because the council is ever going to pass an ordinance like that. But how are they to guarantee what the council is to do? If they don't want the council to pass a law like that, why don't they keep that section out of the charter?...Men ought to go into every ward in Kansas City and show this thing up. It ought to be beat and I'll fight to do it."<sup>71</sup>

Pendergast undoubtedly was opposed to the civil service section of the charter, as well as the saloon closing and occupation tax articles. A local newspaper, which was supporting the charter proposal, stated that Pendergast said to the voter: 'You help me and I'll help you. You vote as I tell you to, and when my men are in I will see that you

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>71</sup>World, February 26, 1905, p. 2, col. 1.

get a job.<sup>72</sup> The World asserted that this is a strong argument,

and it has made Mr. Pendergast a power in local politics. It is not extraordinary that he "views with alarm" a measure that proposes to put a quietus on the practice of doling out the positions in the public service as rewards for political services rendered to party bosses.<sup>73</sup>

Pendergast could not stand apathetically by and see the spoils system destroyed, nor could he stand by and see his saloon business threatened. "Big Jim" also had to think about the other saloon interests in the river wards which he was representing; and he could not forget the already poorly paid laborers in his domain who were threatened with an occupation tax, which very well might have ruined them.

Jim Pendergast promised to fight the charter, and that is exactly what he did. Joe Shannon, who looked at the civil service section of the charter in much the same light as Alderman Jim, put forth all his efforts to defeat the measure too. When the votes were counted, the Journal reported that the charter had been defeated and the "BOSSES SHANNON AND PENDERGAST [were the] ONES WHO DID IT." The Republican organ said that "In Wards Controlled by Them the Good Work Done by Citizens in Other Localities Was Negatived."<sup>74</sup> Most of the residential wards in Kansas City had

<sup>72</sup>World, February 27, 1905, p. 1, cols. 2-3.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Journal, March 8, 1905, p. 1, col. 1.

given a majority of their votes for the charter. Shannon's Ninth Ward on the other hand, delivered just less than two to one against the proposal. In Pendergast's wards, the majorities against the charter were even greater. In the First Ward the final count showed a five-to-one majority against the charter, and in the Sixth, the margin was almost four to one in opposition to the measure.<sup>75</sup>

The spell that Pendergast had cast over the humble dwellers in the West Bottoms and North end was illustrated several months later when he ran for alderman from the First for the eighth consecutive time. Alderman Jim waltzed back into the lower house with 1,346 votes to his Republican opponents 474.<sup>76</sup> Pendergast's strength had become so great in the First Ward that, as A. Theodore Brown phrased it, when he "decided to run in a campaign, it amounted to a decision to continue in office."<sup>77</sup>

Even though Jim Pendergast had lost much of the city hall patronage which he had won by 1900-1902; even though he had been forced to split his county patronage Fifty-Fifty with Joe Shannon after 1900, it is not difficult to see how the First Ward saloonkeeper continued to keep his autonomy over the river wards during the ensuing years. Jim's river

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Star, April 4, 1906, p. 9, cols. 3-4.

<sup>77</sup>A. Theodore Brown, The Politics of Reform, Kansas City's Municipal Government, 1925-1950 (Kansas City: Community Studies, Inc., 1958), p. 20.

ward followers did not forsake him because he no longer had as many jobs to pass out, they loved him just the same. The struggling have-nots in the West Bottoms and North end would never forget the many ways in which the humanitarian saloon-keeper had helped them.

The devastating flood of 1903 had brought the brunt of its burden down upon the river wards that Pendergast commanded. Many families lost their homes and entire possessions. When in despair they looked for aid, there was Alderman Jim, leading the relief work while his own property was being destroyed. Pendergast provided homes and furnishings for many families, and put many of the stricken back on their feet again. He asked the newspaper reporters not to mention his relief work, saying "It was my own money I spent, and the public is not interested in how I spend my money."<sup>78</sup>

Jim Pendergast's benevolence was not reserved for emergencies like the 1903 flood, his kindness was spread among his followers perpetually. The author of Tom's Town discovered that

the North Siders went to Pendergast for more than jobs. They went to him when they were in trouble and needed someone to soften the stern hand of justice. Many of them got fuel and other supplies from his precinct captains when they were down and out. Others ate his turkey and trimmings at the free Christmas dinners which he gave for the Old Town derelicts, beginning with fifty guests and growing into the hundreds as the

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<sup>78</sup>Journal, November 11, 1911, p. 3, col. 2.

Letter from William M. Reddig, author of Tom's Town, February 4, 1962.

number of drifters increased year after year.<sup>79</sup>

To the river ward unfortunates, living in a society inebriated with the selfishness of Social Darwinism, Pendergast was a savior whose name was to be revered. When Pendergast marched onto the political battlefields of Kansas City, he could count on the loyal support of his constituency in the West Bottoms and North end. However, after his election to the lower house in 1906, Pendergast played a much less active role on Kansas City's political stage. The alderman's health was beginning to weaken, and he therefore called upon his brother Tom to perform more and more of the strenuous political labors. Thus, even before Alderman Jim retired, Tom Pendergast was well versed in operating the machine he would one day inherit.

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<sup>79</sup>Reddig, Tom's Town, p. 71.

CHAPTER IV  
THE TWILIGHT YEARS AND THE  
JAMES PENDERGAST LEGACY

For many years Alderman Jim Pendergast's health had not been good. As early as 1900, the big saloonkeeper was forced to leave his ward and go to El Paso, Texas, where he could rest and rebuild his faltering health.<sup>1</sup> The following year, Pendergast again left Kansas City in search of health. This time he went to the Minnesota woods for a month's recuperation from the strain of being a businessman and the boss of the river wards.<sup>2</sup> The next winter, the Kansas City Star reported that Pendergast's health was again in poor condition. "Pendergast has a cold," announced the Star, "that threatens to develop into pneumonia....His lungs are not strong and he is not fitted to stand a sever attack of cold or pneumonia."<sup>3</sup>

Jim Pendergast's health continued to weaken throughout the years that he sat in the lower house of Kansas City's common council. After his re-election in 1906, "Big Jim"

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<sup>1</sup>Star, January 12, 1900, p. 6, col. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Star, May 19, 1901, p. 1, col. 2.

<sup>3</sup>Star, January 28, 1902, p. 1, col. 3.



continued his duties in the council, but he began delegating the chores of managing the Pendergast machine to his younger brother, Tom Pendergast.

Sixteen years younger than Alderman Jim, Tom Pendergast came with two of his brothers, Mike and John, to Kansas City from St. Joseph, Missouri in 1890. The three young men became important parts of the Pendergast machine, proving to be especially useful in organizing ward clubs. It was Tom Pendergast, however, who early proved to be the most talented of the three younger brothers in the field of politics. He was twenty years old when he arrived in Kansas City, and Alderman Jim put him to work as a bookkeeper in the Pendergast saloons. The young bookkeeper looked much like his older brother, having a stocky frame, round face, thick neck and massive mustache. Tom Pendergast, however, could be easily distinguished from Jim. Tom had lighter hair, and more of it; and his voice was deep and demanding when contrasted with the mild baritone of the First Ward alderman.<sup>4</sup>

A member of the Shannon faction recalled that in the early days, "we looked on cunning, resourceful Jim as smartest of the smart, and dismissed Tom...as a thick-skulled, heavy-jowled oaf."<sup>5</sup> Tom Pendergast was undoubtedly no sagacious politician when he first made his appearance in

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<sup>4</sup>Political History of Jackson County, p. 47.  
Reddig, Tom's Town, pp. 32-33.

<sup>5</sup>George Creel, Rebel at Large (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1947), pp. 50-51.

Kansas City's river wards, but the young man soon developed into one. Under the political tutelage of Kansas City's most powerful boss, brother Tom was prepared to take the reins of the Pendergast machine. It was clear that he would some day become the director of the organization, when Alderman Jim decided to retire. By 1906, Tom Pendergast had to start putting his political education to work, for his brother was no longer physically able to do more than tend to his council duties.

Tom Pendergast was well prepared to direct the Pendergast organization by 1906, because for sixteen years Jim Pendergast had instructed him in the ABC's of machine politics in Kansas City. As an election worker in the river ward precincts, Tom Pendergast learned how to use his fists and earn the respect of the West Bottoms and North end laboring men. Likewise in the Pendergast saloons, Tom learned still more about the mechanics of the Pendergast organization, and how it was administered. There he met and talked with the members from one end to the other of the Pendergast political hierarchy.<sup>6</sup>

In a short time, Tom Pendergast had graduated from his bookkeeping post in his brother's saloons to his first political office; he was appointed deputy county marshal of Jackson County in 1896. In 1900, when Alderman Jim had reached the acme of his political strength, Mayor James A.

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<sup>6</sup>Reddig, Tom's Town, pp. 32-33.

Reed appointed Tom to the patronage-laden office of Superintendent of Streets.<sup>7</sup>

Tom Pendergast remained the Superintendent of Streets in Kansas City for only two years, for in the Democratic County Convention of 1902, he was nominated for County Marshal. The ease of his nomination in the county convention was a direct result of the Fifty-Fifty compromise between the Shannon and Pendergast factions. Shannon selected most of the names on the county ticket, but Tom Pendergast was nominated for County Marshal, and Jim Pendergast was selected as a delegate to the state convention.<sup>8</sup>

The Democratic candidate was no stranger to Jackson County politics in 1902, for brother Jim had shown him the ropes on the county as well as the city level. As early as 1896 for example, Tom Pendergast was serving on the executive committee of the Democratic County Committee,<sup>9</sup> and he had been deputy county marshal for two years as well. Thus Tom Pendergast was well known in county politics by 1902. His own familiarity with county politics, plus the backing of Joe Shannon and Jim Pendergast, gave Tom quite an advantage.

The Goats, as the Pendergast followers were called,

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<sup>7</sup>Political History of Jackson County, p. 47.

<sup>8</sup>Star, June 28, 1902, p. 1, col. 1.  
Star, June 29, 1902, p. 1, cols. 1-2.

<sup>9</sup>Star, August 2, 1896, p. 1, col. 1.

and the Rabbits, as the Shannon men were called, rallied behind Tom Pendergast in 1902 and he was elected by a 5,240 vote majority.<sup>10</sup> Again in 1904 and 1906, Tom Pendergast was nominated for County Marshal in the Democratic County Conventions, which were harmoniously conducted on the basis of Fifty-Fifty. In both November elections, however, Tom Pendergast was unable to survive the Republican landslides which buried the Democratic county tickets. On both occasions, the river wards delivered large majorities for Tom Pendergast, but most of the other wards in the city, as well as the county districts, fell to the Republican candidates.<sup>11</sup>

Even though Tom Pendergast had fallen to defeat in 1904 and 1906, his two year term as County Marshal had been significant for both himself and Jim Pendergast. As County Marshal between 1902 and 1904, Tom Pendergast had, in some areas, acted in a way to gain some respect and popularity, and thus, in turn, bolster the Pendergast machine which Alderman Jim headed. An openly Republican Negro newspaper in Kansas City cast aside its partisanship in 1906 to speak out for Tom Pendergast. The Negro paper stated that "Mr. Pendergast's term as marshal established a new era in penal progress. He stood for the negro as well as the white man. No cruel treatment of prisoners. No jail scandals....Let

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<sup>10</sup>Star, November 5, 1902, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup>Blackmore, "Shannon," pp. 139-141.  
World, November 7, 1906, pp. 1, 2.

us try him again."<sup>12</sup>

As another example, at Christmas time in 1903, Tom Pendergast used his own money to purchase fourteen turkeys and all the trimmings to brighten the holiday for the 120 inmates in the Jackson County jail.<sup>13</sup> This sort of conduct had a dual effect. It not only added to the immediate stature of the Pendergast machine in places like the rough and tumble river wards, it also added to the number of men who would not forget Tom Pendergast when he ultimately took over the reins of the Goat faction in Alderman Jim's stead.

By 1906, Tom Pendergast was well versed in the politics of Kansas City and Jackson County. He was therefore qualified to take on some of the responsibility for directing the Pendergast machine, which was being delegated to him ever increasingly by ailing Jim Pendergast. While Alderman Jim continued to occupy his seat in the lower house until April, 1910, when Tom Pendergast was elected in his stead, his political activities outside of the city council dwindled markedly after 1906.

Throughout most of Jim Pendergast's colorful political career, he took an active and leading part in the Democratic City and County conventions every year in which they were held. It was always Jim Pendergast himself lead-

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<sup>12</sup>The Rising Son (Kansas City), October 25, 1906, p. 4, col. 2.

<sup>13</sup>Journal, December 25, 1903, p. 7, col. 5.

ing his faction into the battle, whether the prospects for victory were good or bad. After 1906, however, the big alderman's health forced him to pass the strenuous work of leading the Goat faction into battle over to his brother, Tom Pendergast.

Jim Pendergast made it to the Democratic County Convention in August, 1906, but this was one of the last important political gatherings that he was actively to work in outside of the city council. In the 1906 convention, "Big Jim" was on the spot to work out another Fifty-Fifty compromise with Joe Shannon, just as the two bosses had been doing with some semblance of regularity since 1901.<sup>14</sup>

The year 1907, without any city or county elections, was rather quiet for the local Democracy. The one big event of the year, however, the meeting of the Democratic County Committee, was held without Alderman Jim's presence. That development was so unusual, that the Kansas City Star was amazed.<sup>15</sup> But the saloonkeeper's health had grown much worse, and he was in Los Angeles attempting to regain his strength.<sup>16</sup>

Two months later, when the politicians began discussing candidates for the spring campaign of 1908, the Kansas

<sup>14</sup>Star, September 8, 1906, p. 1, col. 2.

<sup>15</sup>Star, December 2, 1907, p. 2, col. 3.

<sup>16</sup>World, February 17, 1908, p. 1, col. 4.

City World declared: "It is doubtful whether Pendergast will care to run for alderman of the 1st ward again. He has served the ward in the council for years. His health has been bad."<sup>17</sup> Pendergast himself said: "The doctor told me not to get into politics, and anything the doc'ie says goes with Jim."<sup>18</sup> But Jim Pendergast did not follow the doctor's advice completely. He let his loyal followers talk him into running for the lower house from the First Ward again. Alderman Jim did, however, stay away from the sweat and toil of the campaign much more than he had in the past. Instead of "hustling" the votes himself, "Big Jim" had his brother doing most of the leg work. The alderman told a newspaper reporter that "Tom's out this morning working like a bird dog. He went down to the stock yards on a handshakin' expedition. Goin' to make a house-to-house canvass..."<sup>19</sup>

Tom Pendergast's political chores did not end with his grass roots campaigning; he was given some responsibility on a higher level as well. When the Democratic party met to draw up its 1908 platform, Jim Pendergast stayed at home and Tom Pendergast represented the faction on the resolutions committee.<sup>20</sup> Also when the Democratic City Con-

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<sup>17</sup>World, February 15, 1908, p. 1, col. 7.

<sup>18</sup>World, February 27, 1908, p. 1, cols. 1-2.

<sup>19</sup>World, February 29, 1908, p. 1, col. 5.

<sup>20</sup>Star, March 7, 1908, p. 1, col. 2.

vention met two days later, Alderman Jim was not present, but the younger Pendergast was there to carry the organization's banner.<sup>21</sup>

The Pendergast machine did not falter under Tom Pendergast's guidance, for the First Ward returned Alderman Jim to the lower house with 1,330 votes to his opponents 443. The Kansas City Star's pre-election statement proved to be accurate: "The First ward doesn't elect Republicans; it is immaterial who will be nominated against Pendergast...."<sup>22</sup>

All things considered, Tom Pendergast had performed well at the helm of the Pendergast organization. While the entire Democratic ticket with the exception of four lower house candidates had been elected, no ward in the city delivered such large majorities for the Democratic candidates as the Pendergast First.<sup>23</sup> Tom Pendergast's leadership had been impressive, but it must be remembered that he had the seasoned and skillful hand of Alderman Jim behind him all of the way.

Things continued in the same vein for another few months, with Alderman Jim remaining at home, while Tom Pendergast met with the Jackson County Democracy to help select the delegation to go to the state convention.<sup>24</sup> The time

<sup>21</sup>World, March 9, 1908, p. 4.

<sup>22</sup>Star, February 3, 1908, p. 10, col. 1.

<sup>23</sup>Star, April 8, 1908, pp. 1-2.

<sup>24</sup>Star, May 20, 1908, p. 1, col. 7.



was at hand, however, when Tom Pendergast would have to direct the destinies of the Pendergast machine alone. "Big Jim" would not be able to stand behind his brother much longer. With his health failing him fast, Jim Pendergast began spending much more of his time on the farm he had purchased immediately across the state line in Johnson County, Kansas.

By August, 1908, Jim Pendergast was so tired that he planned to resign from his seat in the lower house. He told a reporter for the Kansas City Star:

"Here I've been dragging myself down to the city hall, acting like a mule one day and a messenger boy the next for nearly seventeen years and yours truly has his fill. It used to be exciting, this squabbling and fighting, but it's the peaceful me from now on to the finish. I'm tired, dog tired. Here I've been working myself to death, neglecting that farm up in Johnson county just on account of politics. I thought it was great sport the first few times I was elected, but it's too tame. Me for that fine hay, wheat and corn. Up on that farm I can lay back in my chair and feel sorry for all of the suckers in Kansas City. Say, won't it be great to read about the other fellows getting in bad?"

"For the last two years I've been racing around and two doctors telling me to get out of politics or they would be forced to quit taking my money. I wanted to quit last spring, but the boys handed me that harmony bunc. Then the first thing they did was to rib up a row. Now they are trying to drag me into a fight over county chairman. Not for Jim....It's going to be Farmer Jim now on to the end of the race."<sup>25</sup>

Jim Pendergast did not resign from the lower house as he had announced in August, 1908. He stayed in his council seat until his term expired in April, 1910. The

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<sup>25</sup>Star, August 16, 1908, p. 1, col. 3.

big alderman gave up all active participation in local politics, however, with the exception of his activities in the city council. Even though Jim Pendergast was too tired and too ill to carry on as the boss of the river wards, he found enough energy to work for the general interests of Kansas City as he had always done.

During the two terms between 1906 and 1910, when Tom Pendergast was having to assume the command of the river wards for his weakening brother, Jim Pendergast worked ardently for the issues he believed in which came up in the city council. In the summer of 1906, for example, Alderman Jim, who was always a friend of the underprivileged, took a vociferous stand in the lower house which was typical of him. The city council had sponsored a charity baseball game, and the proceeds were to go to several local charitable institutions. Two of the institutions, the House of the Good Shepherd and the Volunteers of the Industrial Home, had not sold any tickets to the game. Alderman J. G. Lapp suggested that since those two organizations had not sold any tickets, they should therefore not receive any of the proceeds. At that point Jim Pendergast jumped up and ardently opposed such a move. The big alderman from the First Ward said that "they were named as beneficiaries when we started and it would look pretty small to cut them out now." Pendergast's action successfully blocked Alderman Lapp's resolution.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Times, July 17, 1906, p. 3, col. 2.

Pendergast not only exerted his dwindling energy for the underprivileged during his last two terms in the lower house, the weakening alderman worked for the general welfare of Kansas City as well. On several occasions Alderman Jim actively supported issues involving the best interests of the city, even though those interests conflicted with his own personal and financial interests. An owner of two saloons himself, Pendergast threw his full support behind a measure to increase saloon licenses from \$250 to \$500. Pendergast's support for the measure made the Kansas City Times optimistic about the success of the bill, which would provide the city with some increased revenue which was always needed. The news article stated that the brewers in Kansas City were opposed to the measure

but their chance of success is thought to be small. Alderman James Pendergast, himself a saloon man, who voted against two previous license ordinances, which were killed in the lower house, said yesterday afternoon that he was in favor of the new measure. The other Democrats probably will follow in Pendergast's lead.<sup>27</sup>

The other Democrats did follow Pendergast's lead, and the bill passed the lower house a few nights later.<sup>28</sup>

Pendergast voted for the general welfare of Kansas City again in late 1906, when the issue of the gas franchise was being considered. The gas franchise held by the Kansas City, Missouri Gas Company, headed by Hugh McGowan, was ap-

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<sup>27</sup>Times, July 30, 1906, p. 1, col. 3.

<sup>28</sup>Times, August 7, 1906, p. 1, col. 7.

proaching expiration. The Fleming-Wilson Company, as well as McGowan's company, put in bids for the new franchise.

Pendergast openly fought giving the franchise to the Fleming-Wilson Company, and thereby drew harsh criticism from William Rockhill Nelson's newspaper. Nelson claimed that if Kansas City was to acquire cheap gas, the franchise should go to the Fleming-Wilson Company. Pendergast disagreed, and because of this the Kansas City Times accused him of being opposed to cheap gas. Pendergast asserted that the Fleming-Wilson Company could not be trusted, and that the only way to procure cheap gas was to make a deal with the old company or for the city to acquire municipal ownership.<sup>29</sup>

The Times implied that Pendergast and the other aldermen who opposed the Fleming-Wilson franchise were supporting the McGowan company for selfish reasons. This was grossly unfair because Pendergast had made his position clear. His preference was municipal ownership; he said so in the city Council.<sup>30</sup>

In any case, when the Fleming-Wilson franchise was voted on in the lower house, Alderman Jim voted for it, but with some misgivings.<sup>31</sup> Ultimately, however, the Fleming-Wilson Company refused to accept the contract, because its

<sup>29</sup>Times, July 31, 1906, p. 1, col. 5.  
Times, August 2, 1906, p. 1, col. 1.  
Times, August 9, 1906, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup>Times, July 31, 1906, p. 1, col. 6.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 1, col. 5.

directors felt the terms were not suitable.<sup>32</sup> It was soon evident that Pendergast had been right. The cheapest gas could be obtained through municipal ownership, or through a contract with the old company of which Hugh McGowan was president. McGowan's company agreed to such excellent terms that the city could not afford to refuse it the franchise. When the franchise ordinance passed the city council, the morning edition of Nelson's paper praised the councilmen who voted for its passage. Pendergast, of course, was among those who voted for the bill.<sup>33</sup>

On that occasion, as well as every occasion throughout his entire career, it was never discovered that Jim Pendergast had sold his vote in the city council. William R. Nelson, the big alderman's bitter opponent on many occasions, even conceded that point. Nelson's paper pointed out that

on big issues he voted with his party in the council and his vote on various measures may have been influenced by political considerations, but his support of any man or measure never had a price in cash. Not even his political opponents ever charged that.<sup>34</sup>

The gas franchise was not the final issue that Pendergast spent his vanishing strength on in the council during his last years in office. There were many other issues as well, because Pendergast continued to actively pursue his duties as a councilman until his ninth and last term

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<sup>32</sup>Times, August 15, 1906, p. 1, col. 5.

<sup>33</sup>Times, September 28, 1906, p. 1, col. 7.

<sup>34</sup>Times, November 11, 1911, p. 2, col. 1.

expired in April, 1910. Even though Jim Pendergast was too ill to actively direct his political machine in the West Bottoms and North end, he continued his labors in the lower house. After he embarked upon his last term in the council, he discovered that his health was failing faster than before. But Alderman Jim refused to resign, because he did not want to put the city to the expense of calling a special election to fill his vacant seat.<sup>35</sup>

The character of Jim Pendergast showed clearly during the last months of his political career. Even though he was so ill that he had to delegate the management of the river wards to his brother, and even though he was so ill that he wanted to resign from the council, he nevertheless continued to take care of his friends and followers. When "Big Jim's" friend and ward heeler, John Pryor, was arrested for assault, the loyal alderman was right on the spot with the \$500 bond to free him.<sup>36</sup>

John Pryor was not the only man that Pendergast was out helping during his last few months of life; the Chairman of the Republican County Committee, Homer Mann, remembered a different instance:

"The day before his last illness when he had hardly the strength to move he called upon me in my offices to get my help in a matter he had taken up for a person who was not really deserving of any help or assistance from

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<sup>35</sup>Star, August 16, 1908, p. 1, col. 3.

<sup>36</sup>Journal, April 6, 1910, p. 2, col. 3.

him. 'Jim,' I said to him, 'here you are running about when you ought to be in bed, helping a man who does not deserve such a sacrifice from you.' 'I know it,' he said, 'but it is not in me to refuse any poor devil help when it is in my power to serve him. I haven't long to live, but while I am here I want to do all the good for my fellow man that I can.'<sup>37</sup>

Jim Pendergast was correct; he did not have long to live. But as long as he was physically able, he continued to watch over his flock in the West Bottoms and North end. In April, 1910, however, Alderman Jim had spent most of his remaining energy. That month his ninth term expired, and after serving the First Ward for eighteen years in the lower house, Jim Pendergast retired from the city council, and, for all practical purposes, from politics entirely. The First Ward had lost a fine alderman, and the West Bottoms and North end had lost a benevolent leader.

"Big Jim's" departure from his throne in the river wards was not as devastating to the humble dwellers in the North end and West Bottoms as it might have been. Jim Pendergast, as usual, had taken care of his followers. Before he retired he suggested they "take Brother Tom; he'll make a fine alderman, and he'll be good to the boys just as I've been."<sup>38</sup> The loyal followers of Alderman Jim took his advice, and Tom Pendergast was elected to the lower house to fill his brother's seat. Thus the underprivileged inhabitants of the river wards continued to receive welfare ser-

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<sup>37</sup>Journal, November 11, 1911, p. 3, col. 2.

<sup>38</sup>Quoted by Blackmore "Shannon," p. 164.

VICES from the House of Pendergast; services which were not readily available elsewhere prior to the coming of the New Deal.

Soon after his retirement, Jim Pendergast moved out of the First Ward where he had resided since coming to Kansas City in 1876. He moved into the home of his sister, Mrs. Mary Klingbell, at 2309 Prospect Avenue, on the south side of Kansas City. Here the ex-alderman, so afflicted with Bright's disease that he could not go to his farm, remained during the last few months of his life. Too ill to exert himself in any way, Pendergast's activity was confined to occasional evenings on the steps in front of his sister's house, where he engaged in conversation with passers-by.<sup>39</sup>

Jim Pendergast's condition continued to grow worse and on the night of November 10, 1911, the kidney disease completely overcame the fifty-five year old politician.<sup>40</sup> In his will, Jim Pendergast bequeathed property valued at approximately \$100,000 to the members of his family.<sup>41</sup> But the Pendergast legacy which was not written in the will, was of much greater significance.

Kansas City still enjoys today the Union station which was moved uptown from the West Bottoms by the vote in

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<sup>39</sup>Interview with James M. Pendergast, nephew of Alderman Jim Pendergast, March 15, 1961.

Times, November 11, 1911, p. 1, col. 7.

<sup>40</sup>Journal, November 11, 1911, p. 3, col. 1.

<sup>41</sup>Star, November 14, 1911, p. 1, col. 4.



a special election on September 9, 1909. Jim Pendergast, had he opposed the moving of the railroad terminal, might very well have been able to rally enough votes to defeat the proposal. The moving of the station from the West Bottoms meant a decline in the property values in that area, where Pendergast owned a saloon and a hotel. Likewise the removal of the old terminal meant that the railroad workers would no longer live in the Bottoms in places like the Pendergast Hotel. This not only meant a cut in Pendergast's income, it meant many names would be removed from the voting lists in the First Ward.

Pendergast, as he had done on many other occasions, put aside his own personal interests, and wholeheartedly supported the proposal to build a new station.<sup>42</sup> The construction of the new terminal was not completed until after Pendergast's death. During the ceremonies celebrating the formal opening of the Union station, ex-mayor Thomas T. Crittenden gave the late alderman these words of praise:

"Mr. Pendergast, a councilman for eighteen years, had property interests in the West Bottoms. He was not a rich man, but when he became convinced that the interest of the city as a whole demanded that the terminal move uptown, he started in and worked with all his soul for the best location for the big project."<sup>43</sup>

The Pendergast legacy reaches far beyond the new Union station which Alderman Jim helped procure for Kansas

<sup>42</sup>Times, September 10, 1909, p. 1, cols. 5-6.

<sup>43</sup>Journal, October 31, 1914, p. 10, col. 1.

City. It reaches into realms which are quite impalpable, yet extremely significant. It is impossible to say how many lives, homes and jobs were saved, and how many people to this very day are still realizing the effect of Jim Pendergast's temperance campaign. As a saloonkeeper, according to the Times, "Pendergast saw nothing inconsistent in his abhorrence of drunkenness and his efforts to correct it while catering to those whom he classed as well regulated drinkers, 'who knew when they had enough.'"<sup>44</sup>

Many a young man whom Pendergast found inebriated, he hustled off to the Cathedral and watched them take the solemn pledge of the Catholic Church that they would abstain from drinking. Pendergast kept the name of each young man who took the pledge in the safe in his saloon. He warned them that if he ever learned that they had broken the pledge, they would lose his friendship forever. The loss of "Big Jim's" friendship was no minor matter to many young men in the river wards. Thus Pendergast was sometimes successful in putting his young admirers on the water wagon for good.<sup>45</sup>

Jim Pendergast's contribution to society is surely significant in many other areas where the effects can be neither measured nor demonstrated. To discount the long range effects of the jobs given to the unemployed, the food

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<sup>44</sup>Times, November 11, 1911, p. 2, col. 2.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

given to the hungry, and fuel given to the cold, just because they are immeasurable, would be a serious injustice to the man who provided these necessities for many of his constituents.

Probably the most profound aspect of the legacy which Jim Pendergast left to Kansas City, was a smooth running political organization, and a brother whom he personally had trained to manage it. When Jim Pendergast came to Kansas City, the river wards had no semblance of political consistency or efficient, political organization. During his active career, Jim Pendergast built a machine through which he controlled the political destinies of the river wards, and it never broke down. After his death, Alderman Jim's brother used that machine as a base from which he greatly extended the Pendergast organization, and ultimately transformed Kansas City into "Tom's Town."

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