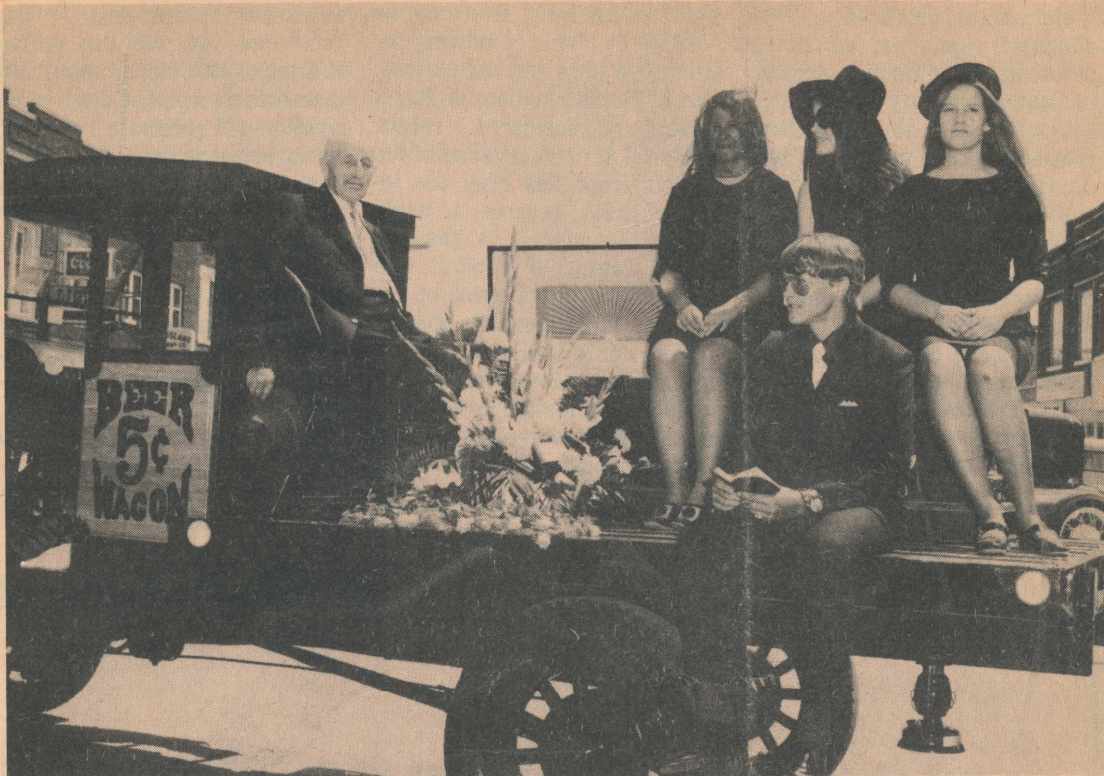


Parade Mourners

1971



The living corpse is shown with his casket in background as three young ladies pose as mourners. Mike Thompson, front, acted as the minister." Three ladies are, left to right: Debbie Amsberry, Jan Harrel, Claire Janssen.

Living Corpse Observes Funeral Anniversary

1951

Jim Gernhart, Burlington's 94-year-old living corpse, celebrated the 20th anniversary of his funeral Sunday, June 6, by riding down main street with his casket perched upon a polished 1920 Ford truck that advertised "Beer for 5 cents;" and listening to the music of "Out Behind The Barn."

Gernhart made national headlines in June of 1951 as he attended his own funeral. He was the chief mourner, as well as the director and the corpse. He stated at the time 20 years ago that "it was real nice to see such a swell crowd at my funeral. Would have been a shame to miss it." (Approximately 1,500 people attended his funeral in 1951.)

He also stated, "It will be a long time before this town forgets today. Jim Gernhart has had a funeral." Jim has made it

a point not to let anyone forget what happened 20 years ago as he observes his anniversary every June.

This year Jim was determined to have a parade to mark the occasion. The celebration started at 2 p.m. with main street jammed with people who wanted to see the "funeral procession." They were not disappointed as the living corpse of Burlington appeared on the bed of the 1920 beer truck with two young musicians playing tunes as he sat on a chair next to his casket.

Jim was attired for the occasion in a tailored suit which he purchased in 1922 for \$100. According to him, he's only had it cleaned twice and, "it's in excellent shape. Don't make them like they used to, do they?" he asked.

The parade lasted approximately 30 minutes and then

Gernhart returned with his coffin to the center of Main Street as people swarmed around congratulating him.

There were no tears streaming from Gernhart's eyes this year in contrast to 20 years ago when he wept intermittently thruout his service. "Why should I cry this time?" Jim asked. "You only cry at the real one and I had that 20 years ago. I'm going to live past 100 and then we're really going to have a celebration."

Gernhart, who keeps his copper casket in the basement of his home, receives visitors from other states and countries quite frequently who are curious to talk to a man who has had his own funeral.

As Jim stated at the conclusion of this year's celebration, "Wait 'till next year . . . we're going to have a humdinger! The whole world will want to attend."

"I'll never vote for President Nixon again," declared Jim Gernhart, Burlington's crusty character who first gained international recognition 20 years ago when he held his own "funeral."

Jim, who likes to be called the "Corpse of Burlington," disowned the President vehemently this week when he learned that the President, after receiving a personal handwritten letter from Gernhart, would not be able to attend the funeral celebration June 6.

Gernhart also invited Gov. John Love of Colorado and Gov. Robert Docking of neighboring Kansas to his celebration. Unfortunately, they'll not be able to attend.

Including other notable politicians, Gernhart invited the entire Colorado Congressional delegation.

"I'm off of all of 'em, with the exception of one, Congressman Frank E. Evans of Pueblo," who has indicated he may be able to attend the event Sunday.

Now 94, Gernhart retired when he was 70. One thing that had been bothering him was what kind of a funeral he would have.

"I don't trust those pesky relatives to bury me right," Old Jim said.

So after several months of planning, Gernhart announced to the world that he would conduct his funeral service.

He had difficulty hiring a hall, to begin with. Finally, he made arrangements to rent the state armory in Burlington. Then he proceeded to buy a casket and masoleum, hire a preacher, and he was in business.

James Nelson Gernhart was born in 1876. He survived the rigors of a sparse livelihood on the plains of western Kansas and eastern Colorado. He comes from a thrifty, hard-working stock; he's always provided for himself. He's had a feud going with someone most of his life. On the other side, he's been kind and helpful to many people, especially widows who needed help with their yards and small repairs around the house.

Getting back to the first funeral, Jim invited several pallbearers, 18 of them, all of whom showed up to help lug the casket. At first the townspeople were dismayed, then became philosophical about the entire matter. However, many of them attended the first funeral, a crowd estimated at 1,000 attending the event, some of them clad in mourning clothes.

All the media had represen-

tatives in Burlington to record the event, the AP flashing its wire service photos to distribution centers thruout the Unites States and eventually the entire world.

Jim admits that he's slipped a little in the past year.

"Why a year ago I could work the tail off any man one-third my age," Jim boasted last week. "Now I've slowed up a little."

Vigorous at 94, Gernhart is a great believer in vitamins and alfalfa pills. He gulps them down, 30 a day.

In this eastern Colorado town, geared to dryland and irrigated crops, Gernhart is about the biggest tourist attraction in the area. Persons who remember his funeral often stop to visit him, some of them having corresponded with him for years.

"All them widows think I've got a lot of money," Genhart said last week. "Sure, I've got enough to keep me." Newspaper accounts place his wealth at \$75,000.

Gernhart has received letters from all over the world. Some of the writers are seeking hand-outs, others support his strange ideas about funerals, others are curious.

With great pride, Jim announced last week that he had

purchased a new casket, delivered to the basement of his home where he keeps it stored.

"Why I wore out the lining of the old casket climbing in and out of it," he declared.

To celebrate this year's funeral, Jim plans a big parade down Burlington's main street. He's lined up several individuals who've promised to prepare floats, and there'll be many old

model cars in the parade. The parade will start at 2 p.m., at the north end of 14th street.

One old revamped Model T Ford truck, with a big red sign, "Beer, 5 cents," painted on the side, will haul the new casket in the parade.

Only thing bothering Old Jim is a band. All of the area schools will be dismissed by June 6, eliminating the possibility of obtaining high school bands.