

Gernhart Poses



"... I'm not going in the hole on this one."

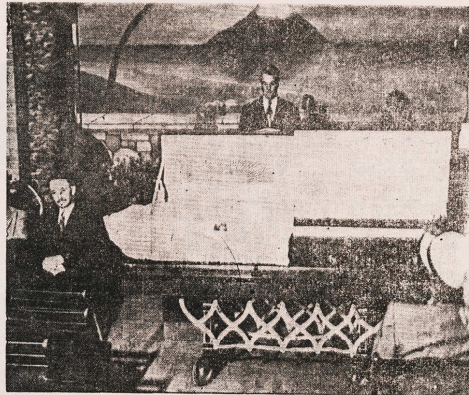


"... Jim Gernhart had himself a funeral."



"... life is a strange business but not so strange as death."

# Farmer Shudders, Cries At His \$15,000 Funeral



Rev. S. H. Mahaffey of Kanorado, Kan., intones the eulogy of Jim Gernhart while the Burlington retired farmer listens at left. —Rocky Mountain News Photo.

J. N. Gernhart's highly publicized funeral rites were held Sunday at the slab armory in Burlington, with an estimated crowd of 1,200 people turning out for the event. Persons from four states gathered to attend the rites, but most of the crowd assembled from eastern Colorado and western Kansas, where Gernhart has lived for the past 57 years.

There was standing room only in the armory, and an estimated 200 persons remained in their cars to watch the proceedings from the outside.

Gernhart's plans had been splashed across the front pages of the metropolitan dailies for several days, and by the time he was ready to start the rites, the crowd had assembled. The rites represented one of the biggest funerals ever staged in this area.

Mr. Gernhart entertained in guests at his home at dinner preceding the services. Members of the press and a few old friends were guests at the dinner. They enjoyed a chicken dinner, with all the trimmings. Gernhart, as chief cook and bottle washer, prepared home baked cakes and bread, and other trimmings to go with the meal.

Before the funeral cortege left the Gernhart home for the armory, about 100 friends gathered at the home. The procession went by auto caravan to the armory.

Worried by the proceeding, Jim said, "It takes a lot of doing to get yourself buried right."

The casket, borne by eight pallbearers, was at the head of the procession. Gernhart followed, and next came four ladies bearing flowers. Thirty honorary pallbearers brought up the tail end of the procession.

Pallbearers were Doris E. Soden, Ross McCall, Harvey Babcock, John Rust, Goodland Tracy DeFries, Seth Dwell, Rudolph Meinen, Ruelton, and Leon Tromball, St. Francis. They bore the heavy copper casket up the steep flight of steps at the armory.

Honorary pallbearers were from eastern Colorado and western Kansas.

As the cortege entered the armory, the Rev. S. H. Mahaffey, pastor of the Kanorado Full Gospel church, awaited them, surrounded by flowers. The brilliance of flash bulbs and flood lights cast and ere hue over the spacious armory.

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armory, as news photographers and news men started to crank their cameras. Mr. Gernhart was accompanied by Carl Dwell, an old friend, who sat with him through the rites.

Gernhart acted as director, corps and chief mourner during the rites, facing the audience as the preacher read the eulogy, obituary and sermon. He wept intermittently through the service.

With the entrance of the procession, a tape recorder was started by Harold Livergood and Dr. James L. Keen. The entire service was recorded, and later will be used for Gernhart's funeral.

Mrs. Herb Drew played two piano selections during the ceremonies, and recorded hymns, favorites of the principal in the event, were played at intervals.

Rev. Mahaffey based his sermon on John 11:25. He spoke on "Resurrection and Life After Death," emphasizing that our life belongs not to us but to God.

As the mourners filed out of the armory, Jim said, "... real nice, real nice ... does a man good to see so many people out to bury him." Later at his home he said that he was well pleased with the service, the size and behavior of the crowd. "Only they ought to arrest those two fellows who sat in the front row and laughed."

"Would be too bad if I had been dead, and missed all of this," he said. "Now I don't care what they do with me when I die. I've got myself fixed up good. It will be a long time before this town forgets today. Jim Gernhart had himself a funeral."

After the services, the pallbearers took the heavy casket to the

Gernhart home, where it is stored in the basement.

There have been several estimates made as to the cost of the services. One reporter estimated \$18,000, including the casket, monument, vault, and the promise of an \$8,000 inheritance to Rev. Mahaffey.

The daily newspapers have played up the feud between Gernhart and the town. Jim maintains that the whole town has been against him, including the school board, churches, and several individuals.

Nevertheless, it is doubtful if Jim has ever had as much attention and publicity as he has received in the past week. Reporters and photographers out the scene for the services were with him day and night, ready to flash his latest development to their papers.

The obituary read by Rev. Mahaffey follows:

James Nelson Gernhart, son of John and Katherine Gernhart, was born Nov. 29, 1893, at Little York, Ind., and moved to Hawatha, Kan., at the age of 6 years, in 1904. He received his schooling at Hawatha.

His father passed away in 1920. In 1922, James and his mother moved to Sherman county, Kan., at which time his mother took out a homestead in Grant township.

James lived with his mother and farmed her land until 1927, at which time he took a homestead north of Ruelton, Kan. In 1930 he traded for a hardware store. After selling it, he acted as assistant post master and managed his brother's general store. His mother kept house for him until she passed away in 1949.

In 1929, James bought a farm 4 miles north of Ruelton, selling it in 1943, at which time he came to Burlington to live with his sister, Mrs. Anna Helton, until she passed away in 1947. All of his brothers and sisters have preceded him in death.

Jim, as he is called by his friends, of which he has many, has always been kind to the widows and orphans and all those in sickness. Jim has always been a foe of evil, and has always been found on the side of right and justice. He has lead a clean life, never using liquor or tobacco.

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