

# In Again, Out Again, Walker Is Back Again

## That Social Phenomenon, Playboy Jimmy

By CHARLES COLLINS

"WHAT kind of a mayor will he make?" a Tammany leader was asked when the name of James Joseph Walker, better known as Jimmy, was mentioned for nomination as mayor of New York City.

The satchem's eyes grew bright with political fever; his cheeks flushed with the greed for votes; his voice became husky with noble democratic emotions.

"A lousy mayor," he answered in ecstasy, "but O, boy, what a candidate! What a candidate!"

Jimmy Walker fulfilled that prophecy. He won two elections by impressive pluralities, and in the homestretch of his second term he resigned to escape probable removal from office because his administrations had been "characterized by inefficiency, waste, and corruption." (The words quoted are from a report of the Hofstadter-Seabury committee, which submitted an exhaustive study of the Walker régime to Franklin D. Roosevelt, then governor of the state of New York.)

After a self-imposed exile of three years Tammany Hall's Peter Pan returned in the fall of 1935 to reestablish himself in the practice of law and the affections of his many friends. The blaze of publicity in which he had strutted his dapper personality

Walker, putting aside political discussion, if possible, in favor of general behaviorism. He has been dropped out of "Who's Who in America," which refers the researcher to a brief paragraph in the edition of 1932-'33 (the period of his sensational decline and fall); but his story is long and rich with material for students of Americana.

He has always given the impression of youthfulness both in appearance and conduct. His slender figure, somewhat under the medium height; his alert, boyish face, and his wardrobe of clothing in the latest fashions of Broadway playboys have marked him as a pseudo-collegiate character in countless public gatherings. After receiving him as an official visitor in 1927 Mussolini said, "Mayor Walker is young not only in appearance but also in spirit." Nevertheless he was 51 years old when he told Governor Roosevelt a few days before his resignation:

"I haven't kept any books of any kind, haven't all my life, in fact, but surely not since I became mayor. I haven't even had my own checkbook since that time."

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He was born on June 11, 1881, in the Greenwich Village district of New York at 6 St. Luke's place. The site of his birth was a house built by his father, William Henry Walker, who emigrated from Ireland in 1877, and it remained his home until after his political downfall. He had often said that he wanted to keep the old homestead until the end of his days, but after his departure into exile his creditors seized it, for Jimmy's private fortunes as well as his official accounts were in a bewildering tangle when he resigned.

(For example: Suits for unpaid bills revealed that the first Mrs. Walker had made purchases amounting to \$20,059 in one dress shop between September, 1928, and March, 1931. The items included a \$150 bathing costume. At another shop, about the same period, she had ordered \$2,472 worth of shoes and handbags. Those were the whoopee days for both the mayor and his lady.)

Jimmy got his schooling at De La Salle academy and the College of St. Francis Xavier in New York City. He was elected to the state assembly at the age of 30; two years later he passed the examinations for the bar and began to practice law as well as politics. The period between his graduation from college and his election to Albany was spent as a lively young man about town with a strong bent toward theatrical life. He displayed some gifts as an amateur entertainer, and he hoped to become an actor. This was the time of Jimmy's song writing, so often vaguely mentioned as a part of his background.

As a minor adventurer along Tin-Pan Alley, writing the words for popular songs, Jimmy had a stroke of luck. One of his lyrics appealed to Ernest R. Ball, a composer whose ballads became famous in the sheet music market; and thus was born "Will You Love Me in December as

You Do in May?" The number proved to be a long-lived hit, and it still displays some vitality over the counters of music stores. It brought Jimmy Walker handsome royalties, and he was so proud of it that he had it played at his church wedding in 1912, to the annoyance of the priest who officiated.

This song was published in 1905. Its composer also gave to the ballad singers of the nation "Mother Machree" (in collaboration with Chauncey Olcott), "Till the Sands of the Desert Grow Cold," "Dear Little Boy of Mine," and "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling" (lyric by Chauncey Olcott). Ball died in 1927.

The other songs for which Jimmy Walker wrote the words are almost as much of a mystery as the songs the sirens sang. Experts in Tin-Pan Alley lore stare vacantly and shake their heads when consulted on the subject. Jimmy's ex-press agents are completely ignorant of this phase of his career, and the new generation of musicians are no more interested in these obsolete pre-jazz ditties than in fossil footprints of the Eohippus. Here for the first time you may read the full record of Jimmy's song writing, compiled by painful prowling among the music publishers of Broadway:

"Good-By, Eyes of Blue," 1905; "Will You Love Me in December as You Do in May?" 1905; "I



(Tribune photo.)

Walker draws a laugh from his wife (Betty Compton, of films and stage) at an annual jamboree of the Lambs club, an actors' organization.

May ditty were fairly sumptuous.

Soon after he became established as a lawyer, with a political side line, Jimmy Walker took unto himself a wife. She was Janet Allen, daughter of Frank Allen, former Chicago newspaper man, and a young actress in vaudeville sketches. She had appeared in New York and on tour as "Phoebe Snow," a character lifted out of railroad advertising. Phoebe Snow and her spotless journey upon the "road of anthracite" were familiar to the



(Acme photo.)

At left: James Joseph Walker, ex-mayor of New York City and ex-writer of sentimental words for sentimental melodies.

(Tribune photo.)

Mr. and Mrs. Walker in the Chicago courtroom of Judge Jarecki (judge at right) in connection with their adoption of a baby boy, whom they have named James J. Walker II.



(Associated Press photo.)

Walker and his wife are greeted by Postmaster General Farley at a Lambs gambol. At left, Mrs. Walker; at extreme right, Mrs. Farley.

Like Your Way," 1905; "After They Gather the Hay," 1906; "Kiss All the Girls for Me," 1906; "There's Music in the Rustle of a Skirt," 1906; "In the Valley Where Sally Said Good-By," 1907; "With the Robins I'll Return," 1907; "Black Gin," 1908.

Thus it will be seen that for three years he was a professional song writer, earning his living at that obscure literary trade. His receipts for the period from the minor items in the above catalog would have kept body and soul together in a garret; his royalties from the December

nation; and a vaudeville skit had been written around this immaculate heroine. Miss Allen's stage career was brief and she retired after her marriage.

Incidentally it may be noted that Jimmy Walker was one hour late in meeting his bride at the church and that there was some consternation in the wedding party until he arrived, jaunty and smiling, with the excuse that the best man had betrayed him by misplacing the wedding ring. Lack of punctuality has been a lifelong characteristic of this care-free character. He was notorious for tardiness during his terms as mayor; and on a formal appointment at the White House he kept President Coolidge waiting for forty minutes.

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He served five terms in the lower house of the New York state legislature and then was elected state senator from the Twelfth district in New York City. He continued to represent this district until elected mayor in November, 1925.

As a state legislator he was active in sponsoring bills of a liberal character, especially in regard to amusements in New York City. He secured the passage of bills legalizing Sunday baseball games, motion picture exhibitions, and boxing matches of fifteen rounds. He also brought about the passage of a law which deprived the Ku Klux Klan of its secrecy of membership. During his last five years in the state senate he was the Democratic leader.

He opposed bills seeking to establish a censorship over books and plays. He killed a well organized movement against publishers of erotic literature with the gibe:

"No woman was ever seduced by a book."

Nevertheless when he became mayor he took steps to repress an obscenity in the theater. Late in 1926 he summoned the leading Broadway impresarios to the city hall and warned them that a stage censorship would be es-

tablished if they did not change their ways. In 1927 his administration clamped down vigorously upon the activities of Mae West. She was arrested for bawdy utterances and behavior in her play "Sex" and was sentenced to ten days on Welfare Island, which she served, complaining bitterly about the fuzzy underwear of her prison garb.

Mayor Walker had been out of the city when "Sex" was raided; the acting mayor, Joseph V. McKee, was the Harun-al-Rashid of that cleanup, which also included plays called "The Captive" and "The Virgin Man." But in 1928 Jimmy himself bore down sternly upon Miss West for another dramatic misdemeanor called "Pleasure Man." This gross opus dealt with homosexuality and was too much for Jimmy's tolerant point of view. He called out the patrol wagons, and again Miss West had her day in court, to the amusement of judge, jury, and press. The jury failed to agree and the case was dismissed, but "Pleasure Man" never came to life again.

Walker's administration developed civic welcomes to celebrities to a fantastic pitch. He inherited this custom from his predecessor in office and gave it comic opera qualities. Almost every week, it seemed, had its orgy of official ballyhoo—the

régime began to feel the ground trembling under its feet, the New York board of trade adopted resolutions against these preposterous demonstrations. It called for "a more suitable and dignified method of welcoming distinguished guests" and stated that "it is a poor tribute to a great person to empty a waste basket on his head."

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The welcome to Gertrude Ederle, daughter of a New York butcher, who had broken the record for swimming the English channel, was the first great expression of Walkerian hospitality, and it established the pattern for all the others. Among the guests of honor who followed Miss Ederle's pathway of disorder to the steps of the city hall and Walker's glad hand were:

Prince Ludovic Spada Potenzi-ana, governor of Rome; Pierre Laval, premier of France; Ramsay MacDonald, British prime minister; Queen Marie of Rumania; Capt. George Fried of the S. S. Roosevelt, after his rescue of the crew of the S. S. Antinöe; Admiral Richard Evelyn Byrd (three times); Gen. Umberto Nobile; Paul Whiteman; Gene Tunney, after his first defeat of Jack Dempsey; Rudy Vallee; Kate Smith; a team of soccer players from Montevideo; the American Olympic skating team; Jimmy



Always at ease, even in the presence of royalty, Walker acts as official host to Queen Marie of Rumania. This photograph was taken while Walker was mayor of New York.

procession up Broadway under a heavy downfall of improvised confetti, the rally on the steps of the city hall, with Jimmy, frock coated and silk hatted, making one of his glib speeches to the honored guest; the blaring of loud-speakers, the purring of movie cameras, and general ecstasy among the masses.

There was no discrimination in the choice of the celebrity to be honored. It might be a foreign diplomat, an arctic explorer, a channel swimmer, or a champion prize fighter. Almost any one with an ingratiating press agent could get an official welcome out of Mayor Walker and his henchmen. These carnivals of ballyhoo, blatant and costly, went on for years, regardless of occasional protest about their lack of dignity. The United States government intervened when Dino Grandi, the Italian foreign minister, came to this country on an important mission, and had him sidetracked to Washington for his first impression of American manners.

In 1931, when the Walker

McLarnin, when a contender for the lightweight championship; Walter Hagen, after winning the British open golf championship; Bobby Jones, after winning both amateur and open golf tournaments in England; and Maj. James H. Doolittle, an aviator.

The welcome to Queen Marie was probably Jimmy's greatest moment. Hector Fuller, the city hall's press agent and court chamberlain, introduced her as "her imperial highness," much to the disgust of the New York World, which insisted that Rumania was not an empire. After the reception Jimmy escorted Queen Marie to the Pennsylvania station in an open carriage, and a sidewalk wag shouted to them:

"Have you dated her up yet, Jimmy?"

The reception to Captain Fried for gallantry at sea started the "scroll" feature of these fiestas. Fuller, the mayor's Boswell (author of a book called "Abroad with Jimmy Walker"), suggested that Captain Fried

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Walker's first wife as she appeared during the time of her brief career on the stage. Her maiden name was Janet Allen.

during his long period of amazing popularity had dimmed into a twilight. Jimmy was a private citizen again and seemed to want to live his own life as a family man and suburban dog breeder.

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Recently, however, he came to the surface as slick as a seal and grabbed a juicy fish that Tammany was glad to toss to him. He was placed on the city pay roll at a salary of \$12,000 a year as assistant counsel to the transit commission; and it was generally understood that if he held this job for seventeen days he would qualify for a city pension of \$16,000 in recognition of his twenty-two years of public service. His appointment came a month after a call on President Roosevelt, accompanied by the second Mrs. Walker (Betty Compton, stage and film actress), and is believed to have been arranged by James A. Farley, national chairman of the Democratic party. A court ruled, however, that the appointment was illegal, and his period of eligibility for a pension has expired.

Thus the legend of Jimmy Walker, in which cynical observers of American customs have taken delight for more than a decade, has been refreshed and again presents its brassy front toward the sun. The nation is talking about Jimmy again with a cheerful grin. A good man—or at any rate a good fellow—can't be kept down; and the "broth of a bhoy" whose wise-cracks were rated as the best along Broadway for many a year is at his merry tricks again. He is like a character out of folklore; he is the American Till Eulenspiegel.

Therefore let us study the social phenomenon called Jimmy



(Acme photo.)

Seldom if ever lacking for words, Walker talks to reporters before attending a recent meeting of the New York transit commission.