

# Bryce B. Smith

Mayor of Kansas City, 1930-1934  
1878-1962

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by Nancy J. Hulston

Bryce B. Smith was a member of the city council from 1920 to 1924 and was elected mayor on the Democratic ticket in 1930, the second Kansas City mayor under the city manager charter. During his campaign, Smith publicly declared his independence from Pendergast-machine politics, but those were empty words. When he won the election, the Pendergast machine gained complete control over City Hall.

Smith was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1878. His family moved to Kansas City during the 1880s. His father owned a bakery at 17th and McGee. Smith learned to run the business, which eventually expanded to become the General Baking Corporation.

The candidate opposing Smith's mayoral reelection in 1934, A. Ross Hill, anticipated violence at the polls and contacted Governor Guy Park, asking him to call in the Missouri National Guard. Park refused, and Tom Pendergast's armed enforcers took charge of the day. The "bloody election" of 1934 left four people dead and dozens injured. Smith was reelected by a majority of the vote.

Accomplishments during Smith's terms as mayor included the establishment of the University of Kansas City and bringing the Kansas City Police Department under home rule (and machine control).

In May of 1939, Thomas J. Pendergast entered Leavenworth Prison after being convicted of tax evasion. Following Pendergast's imprisonment and city manager Henry McElroy's subsequent resignation, Smith tried to administer Kansas City by leading a reform movement. The fact that Kansas City was \$20 million in debt due the waste and corruption of machine politics did not help Smith's public image.

Ruby Garrett led several other machine-controlled council members in trying to convince Smith to abandon his reform efforts and continue as a front for the dying Pendergast organization.



Calling Garrett's move a "political double-cross," and facing a possible recall, Smith resigned in disgrace on January 5, 1940.

Bryce B. Smith died at St. Joseph Hospital, Kansas City, on May 22, 1962, at age 83, of a stroke.

### **Sources**

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