

# Joseph B. Shannon

Congressman  
1867-1943

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by Nancy J. Hulston

While Joseph B. Shannon was growing up in Kansas City, his family's home at 18th and Charlotte streets served as the Democratic headquarters for the ninth ward. Early on, Joseph showed a flare for politics. As a young man, he emerged, along with Jim Pendergast, as a major Democratic leader in Kansas City politics.

Joseph Bernard Shannon was born in St. Louis, Missouri, on March 17, 1867, and spent his early years in Girard, Kansas. After the death of his father in 1872, Joseph, his mother, and seven siblings moved to Kansas City. He was introduced to politics by his older brother Frank, who was active in local labor unions and the Democratic Party. Shannon's own political career also eventually flourished.

Shannon considered himself a Jeffersonian Democrat, and his faction became known as the "Rabbits," while Pendergast's group was called the "Goats." Clashes between the two factions at the primaries caused Shannon and Pendergast to realize that they were splitting the Democrats at the polls, so they devised the fifty-fifty rule. This divided all city and county patronage between the two leaders.

In 1910, Shannon selected Casimir J. Welch as his chief lieutenant in Kansas City. Shannon then began concentrating his political ambitions towards the State Democratic committee. Shannon and Welch parted ways in 1924, when Welch refused to help defeat Tom Pendergast's candidate for governor. Welch then set up his own political faction.

Shannon was elected to the United States Congress in 1930 and served until 1943. When he went to Washington, D.C., to begin his term in the legislature, Tom Pendergast's "Goats" began systematically infiltrating Shannon's "Rabbits." By 1935, Shannon's faction had been completely absorbed by the Pendergast machine. Shannon suffered a mental breakdown in 1935. When he regained his health, supporters asked him to get involved in Kansas City politics again, but his heart was no longer in it.



Joseph B. Shannon died in Kansas City on March 28, 1943, just over two months after he left his post as U.S. Representative.

**Sources**

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