

JOEL B. ERHARDT DIES SUDDENLY

Ex-Police Commissioner and Collector of Port Is Stricken in Union League Club.

WAS CANDIDATE FOR MAYOR

Made a Strong Fight, but Was Defeated by Tammany's Candidate, Grant—His War Record.

Joel Benedict Erhardt, 70 years old, President of the Lawyers' Surety Company and a Director in a number of corporations, died suddenly yesterday morning at 1:20 o'clock in the Union League Club, 1 East Thirty-ninth Street, from heart failure. During the absence of his wife, who was spending part of the Summer with her daughter, Mrs. Louis Dupont Irving, at York Harbor, Me., the Erhardt town house at 120 West Fifty-seventh Street, was closed, and when he was in the city Mr. Erhardt stayed at the Union League Club, of which he was a member.

On Tuesday he told his private secretary at his office that he did not feel well; he believed he was suffering from rheumatism. At the Union League Club his friends knew that he had not been in the best of health, but on Tuesday night he went about in the club as well as he had been for a month or so.

At 1 A. M. the club watchman, while walking along the corridor off which was Mr. Erhardt's room, noticed that Mr. Erhardt was sitting on the side of the bed, apparently in pain. Mr. Erhardt told him to get a doctor at once. Dr. John Solley of 114 West Fifty-eighth Street, his family physician, was called, but Mr. Erhardt died at 1:20 o'clock.

Joel B. Erhardt was born in Pennsylvania of poor parents, who removed to New York when he was three years old. Through hard work outside of school hours the boy was enabled to pay the expenses necessary to get him through the public schools. He worked as a letter carrier and as a clerk. He taught school in Upper Jay, N. Y., in order to get money for his expenses at the University of Vermont, where he was to study law.

When the civil war broke out Mr. Erhardt was anxious to get to the front. He joined successively the Ninth Militia Regiment, the Second and the Seventy-first, but as there was delay with them he quit one after the other until finally he got to the Seventh Regiment, which did get away fast enough to suit him. He borrowed the money to buy his uniform.

Having remained with the Seventh until its period of service was over he went back to Vermont and helped to raise the First Vermont Cavalry, with which he served until 1863, rising to the rank of Captain. He was then appointed Provost Marshal of the Tenth District in New York City. Complaint was made to Secretary Stanton that Mr. Erhardt wasn't enlisting nearly as many recruits as some of the other Provost Marshals in the city. "The men he enlists may be few," replied the Secretary, "but they go to the front and fight, every one of them. They are not bounty jumpers."

After the war Mr. Erhardt was admitted to the bar, and he was for a while Assistant United States District Attorney in Brooklyn. In 1876 Gov. Tilden having removed Police Commissioners Matsell and Disbecker on complaint of Mayor Wickham, Mr. Erhardt was appointed to succeed Mr. Disbecker. He believed that a rigorous military discipline should be used in the Police Department, the head of it having the power of summary removal. He denounced the substitution of one Commissioner for the old board of four Commissioners, a question that was agitated, as a mistake, holding that it was an absurdity to have a removable Commissioner at the head of an irremovable force.

For political reasons, it was charged at the time, Mayor Cooper preferred charges against the four Police Commissioners, but nothing came of the trial that followed. In 1883 President Arthur appointed Mr. Erhardt United States Marshal for the Southern District of New York, after which he served as receiver of the New York City & Northern Railroad. The receipts of the road were \$24,000 the year before it was handed over to Mr. Erhardt. When he turned it back to its owners in 1888 its annual receipts were more than \$400,000. On its reorganization he was made its President.

While United States Marshal Mr. Erhardt had made friends with Elihu Root, who was United States District Attorney at the time. In 1888, when Mr. Erhardt was nominated for the Mayoralty by the Republicans, Elihu Root said of him:

"His name is the synonym for the faithful discharge of duty. In his business relations he has won the respect and admiration of all who know him. As a public officer, when fortunes were within his grasp, not a thought of seizing them entered his mind. He is a man vigorously positive, determined, honest, generous, and able. Not a stain has been cast on his name. Not a man can say a word against him to impeach his qualifications for the Mayoralty of New York."

There were seven candidates in the field at that election. Many believed that Mr. Erhardt had been put on the ticket merely as a Republican sacrifice. He was defeated, though he made a strong fight. Hugh J. Grant, the Tammany candidate, was elected.

Though Platt, who was then the Republican boss in New York, was against the appointment of Mr. Erhardt as Collector of the Port here, public opinion forced him to agree to it, and the appointment was immediately made. Because he did not make appointments as the machine wished, Platt and his followers began to do all they could to restrict his authority.

Mr. Erhardt resigned his position in disgust in 1891, saying, "I resign because the Collector has been reduced to a position where he is no longer an independent officer with authority commensurate with his responsibility." He never again held political office.

He was President and Director of the Public Accountants' Corporation, Trustee of the Bowery Savings Bank, Director of the Echo Lake Ice Company, and interested in several other corporations. He was a Director of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals up to 1906, when he resigned because of dissatisfaction with the management of the society. He was a member of the Union League Club, Loyal Legion, New England Society, St. Nicholas Society, Sphinx and Down Town Clubs.