

# WABASH VALLEY

P R O F I L E S

*A series of tributes to hometown people and events that have shaped our history.*

## George Bement

**H**ard work and shrewd business acumen transformed Terre Haute grocer George William Bement into a prosperous Indiana wholesaler.

Born in Stockbridge, Mass., Aug. 4, 1826, and reared on a New England farm, George moved to Terre Haute in 1844 to manage a small wholesale grocery founded by his brother Asa and Charles Veile. In 1846, George acquired the enterprise and was soon the community's largest wholesale grocer. About 10 years later, a young competitor named Herman Hulman came onto the scene and the two men experienced similar milestones in their lives. In 1864 Bement bought the mansion at 629 Ohio St., the former Wabash & Erie Canal headquarters; in 1869 Hulman purchased the John P. Usher mansion at 657 Ohio. With partner William S. Rea, Bement erected a new building for Bement, Rea & Co. at the northwest corner of Eighth and Wabash in 1892; one year later, Hulman & Co. opened its new headquarters one block down at the northeast corner of Ninth and Wabash.



A director of the National State Bank of Indiana (a predecessor of Terre Haute First National Bank) and a frequent investor in local business ventures, Bement was respected for his integrity. In 1860 he stockpiled commodities produced in the South in anticipation of a civil war. Their value skyrocketed after the conflict began. When Gov. Oliver P. Morton sought \$75,000 from Terre Haute in 1861 to equip Indiana regiments, Bement presented the state with \$10,000.

A bachelor until he was 46, George wed Helen Brotherton in 1870. A native of Saratoga, N.Y., Brotherton was a descendant of Samuel Woodruff, co-founder of Princeton University. The couple raised two sons, Asa Bruce and Charles Russell. By the turn of the century, the Bements owned nearly 2,000 acres of farmland in Lost Creek and Otter Creek townships. In 1890 Bement yielded the management of the business to Rea to devote his time to agriculture, particularly his attractive 575-acre farm west of the Glenn interurban stop, now the site of Hulman Links. The Bements also acquired land in Stockbridge. Bement died in Terre Haute Dec. 22, 1903, at age 79; Helen died at the Bements' Stockbridge retreat on Aug. 13, 1924.

Tragically, son Russell was killed in June 1901 when his horse leaped in front of an interurban at 24th and Wabash. After his father died, Bruce, a graduate of St. John's College in New York, built Bement Flats apartment complex between Sixth and Seventh on Walnut St. He also invested in oil fields and gold mines. In 1912 Bement, Rea & Co. constructed a new building at the southwest corner of Eighth and Cherry streets, now the Indiana Government Office complex. Forming Bement Oil Corp. in 1923, Bruce converted his Ohio Street residence into an office. Mace Service acquired the property in the early 1930s. In 1902, Bruce wed Anna Carlton, daughter of Judge Ambrose B. Carlton, chairman of the Utah Commission, but the couple eventually divorced. Before his death on Oct. 26, 1937, he married Katherine Ijams, estranged wife of J. Warren Ijams.

TERRE HAUTE

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