

THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION AT KANSAS CITY.

By Alfred R. Rowley.

For the first time in our political history a national convention is to be held in the Mississippi valley. The Democratic party has been in existence since 1828 and during that time has held fifteen national conventions, but on two occasions, when they met in St. Louis, have its delegates been west of the Father of Waters. This year, however, the men who are to name the Democratic leader for the presidential contest of 1900 will gather in Kansas City.

Perhaps there is some subtle significance in the fact that the star of opportunity appears to be taking its course westward. The more obvious reason is that the people of Kansas City have determined to secure the convention if they succeeded. Their committee included the offer of a fine convention hall, the adequate entertainment of the national Democratic convention and the payment of \$50,000 in expenses.

The convention will begin on July 4th, and it is an unusual date, but Chairman Jones and his fellow committeemen have good reasons for making the

seat 20,000 persons, will be ready for use.

But the story of how this convention hall has risen from its ashes is too important to be dismissed in a single paragraph. It will be a unique chapter in convention history. To local pride is the credit due.

You will find local pride in every American city, large and small; but Kansas City seems to have this quality in an unusual degree. If you do not believe this, listen to the story of how this wide awake and comparatively little city of 200,000 population happened to have the second largest auditorium in the country. The largest, of course, is Madison Square Garden, in New York City; but, by the way, be careful not to say so in Kansas City. On the banks of the Kaw they admit no such thing.

The people of Kansas City, in the liberal sense of the term, built and own the big convention hall. The stock is held by all sorts and conditions of people, from millionaires to bootblacks. There are few citizens who do not hold at least one share. To make up the \$250,000 which it cost went the pennies of the poor as well as the dollar of the rich.

The idea of a great hall suitable to hold all sorts of gatherings came about

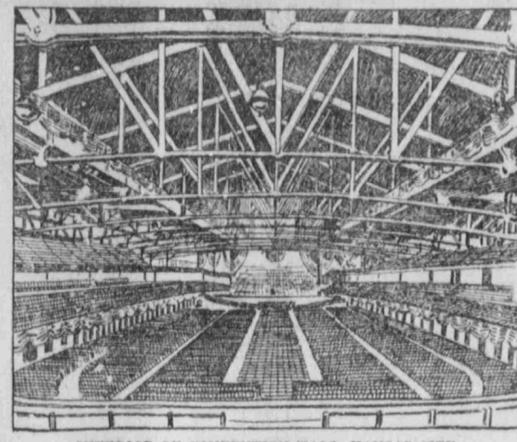
The roof was of copper and composition, lower or arena floor was occupied by a polished floor 2 1/2 by 125 feet, lined with boxes. Between the boxes and the outer walls was a space so arranged that horses, cattle or menagerie of a circus could be comfortably stored. The main entrance was wide enough so that any sort of conveyance could drive from the street directly to the arena floor, as in the case of horse shows. Above and encircling the sides of the building was the arena balcony. Above this was yet another balcony, still beneath the roof was a promenade allowing a fine view of the proceedings on the arena floor.

The acoustics of the hall were tested in every possible manner and found to be perfect. There was not a single staircase in the building, and the ascent from floor to floor was made by means of inclined planes. The building seated 20,000 people and by reason of many exits could be emptied at the rate of 5,000 a minute.

In the 11 months of the hall's existence many kinds of public entertainments were held in it. There were balls, fairs, horse shows, dog shows, and revivals here. Mayor Graue's grand opera company sang to its largest audiences in the building, and Paderewski filled the hall with his admirers.

But the one ambition of the thousands of holders was to nominate a presidential candidate within its walls. They were just preparing to see this ambition realized when the fire occurred. For a moment, when the people of Kansas City saw in flames the hall which had been their pride, they were dismayed. But they soon recovered.

When the fire began, members of the directory of the convention building were lunching in the Kansas City club, near by. They hurried to the scene. Men stopped them at every step with subscriptions toward the rebuilding of the hall. Street railway employes shouldered their arms and said, "Put me down for \$5! Here's a number," putting to their caps. Policemen, street sweepers and messenger boys did the same.



INTERIOR OF CONVENTION HALL, KANSAS CITY.

can accomplish it is probably unequalled.

Not for a moment did the burning of the convention hall interrupt the preparations of Kansas City for receiving the convention and entertaining the delegates. The total hotel capacity of Kansas City is less than 10,000. The principal hotels—the Midland, the Coates, the Baltimore and the Centropolis—can accommodate from 1,100 to 1,500 each and only under great pressure.

But from the first it was seen that this must be a boarding house convention. So the committee on public convention went to work. The city was divided into 240 districts, and to each was assigned a precinct committee man. Each committeeman has canvassed his district for boarding house accommodations. All these statistics have been compiled, classified and arranged.

When the convention visitors arrive, all that will be necessary for them to do in order to find a place to sleep and eat in the overcrowded city will be to make application at the bureau of information. The renting of rooms will be under the direction of this bureau, thus insuring the prevention of extortion and giving a visitor something to fall back on in case he has difficulty in securing suitable quarters.

The bureau has sent blanks to thousands of householders, with a circular asking them to fill out the blanks with their street number, how the house may be most easily reached by car line, the number of rooms and beds they are willing to place at the disposal of the bureau for the entertainment of convention visitors, the charge per person and the charge for meals if meals are furnished. Some of the best homes in the city are to be opened to convention visitors.

The hotels have been reserved for delegates, alternates, State committees, newspaper men, visiting clubs and the like, and they will all be full. Tammany has secured the exclusive social organization. The club is strictly non-political, but the use of its house, with in two blocks of the convention hall, was tendered to the committee by unanimous vote and was accepted. The club includes the absolute best of possession of the building—safe, billiard rooms, buffet, sleeping apartments and all—but the national committee hesitated about trespassing so far upon the club's hospitality, and will only make its headquarters there.

Tammany has signed a contract for 150 rooms at the Midland, to be occupied by the 600 braves who expect to attend the convention. The Midland will also be the home of two-thirds of the delegates. The absolute best of the convention, and the Elks clubhouse will serve admirably for headquarters for them.

Chairman Jones of Arkansas will occupy the banquet room in Kansas City during the convention. It is the bridal suit at the Baltimore and consists of bedroom and parlor, connected with bathroom between. There is little suggestion of Jeffersonian simplicity in the silk draped walls, the cut-glass chandeliers, the onyx bathroom, the velvet carpets and mahogany furniture. "But I'm not running for president," said Chairman Jones, when he engaged the suit, "and I've got the price."

John R. McLean is evidently preparing to bring a friend or two to the convention with him, for he has engaged three bedrooms, besides a large parlor for headquarters. It is hinted that one of the rooms is intended for the admiral of the navy and that the McLean headquarters will house a presidential boom, but if this is so no one in Kansas City knows it.

But, whether Dewey is there or not, Bryan is almost sure to be—no matter the convention meets, but might soon after the nomination is made. It is believed that a speech by Bryan during the convention would start the campaign of with a whoop and hurrah that would count for much in November, and plans have been laid to have him there. As soon as he has been nominated, the city will be the scene of a grand Dewey to "Kaw's Mouth," as Kansas City is called is less successful than his descent upon Manila bay—Mr. Bryan will be notified by wire and requested by resolution to present himself at the convention. A special train for which previous arrangements will have been made, will bring him from Lincoln in a few hours.

Mr. Bryan will not find himself homeless when he arrives, for the Nebraskans have engaged the most elaborate quarters of any delegation, and they will be able to take him in. The Nebraskans have about 15 rooms at the Coates and two of the largest parlors.

There is the usual rush for convention tickets, and, as usual the demand is far greater than the supply. One of the principal members of the executive committee of the Democratic national committee said recently that from one backwoods county in his State he had received a letter written by the chairman of the county committee saying that he had taken the greatest pains to procure down to the barest and lowest proportions the list of tickets which would be absolutely necessary for guests from his county and that he would be content with 125. As a matter of fact, that county chairman will be most fortunate if he gets ten.

The convention itself promises to be a short one. Three days is the utmost limit, and it is barely possible that the entire business may be transacted in two. This would establish its record, for in recent years national conventions have seldom adjourned earlier than the third day.

It is quite probable that the nomination for the first place on the ticket will be made on the evening of July 4, for sentimental if for no other reason. If the convention is called to order

promptly at 10 a. m. on Independence day, the organization can be effected, the committees appointed and the other preliminaries wound up before luncheon time, so that an adjournment until 1 p. m. can be taken.

The afternoon would begin with the report of the committee on platform and the attendant speeches. Then would come the nominating speeches.

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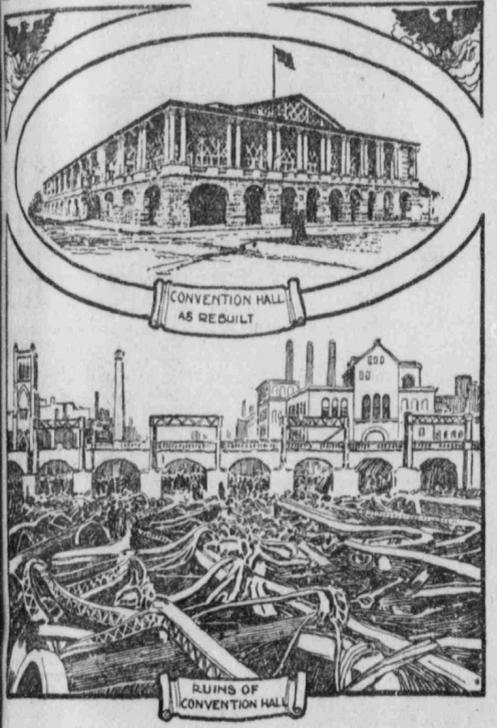
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These reasons, of course, are... assuming the burden of a national convention Kansas City took a bold step. It was audacious. This newropolis on the Kaw has a population of only a little more than 200,000. An ordinary convention crowd is 20,000. But this convention crowd which will sweep down on Kansas City July 4th is to be an extraordinary crowd. It will number 100,000, perhaps more.

Did you ever know of a young wife who had invited the 20 members of the sewing circle to meet with her and discovered that she had but nine left in the house? Kansas City now has a similar situation. The sewing circle of 20 members of the sewing circle, but does she think of backing up? Not she. She is going to provide for every member of the sewing circle who chooses to attend. It takes the last dollar in her purse. Some of them may have only canvas cap chairs, but they will have the purpose.

From Kansas City secured the convention, she possessed the chief qualification—a fine, large convention hall. She decided to test her courage to the utmost. She decided to wipe out this advance. On the night of April 4th, just two months before the date set for the convention, the hall was entirely destroyed by fire.

Boston has a more remarkable exhibition of western pluck and enterprise than was afforded by

through the annual ball of the Priests of Pallias, which in 1897 had far outgrown its quarters. This ball was the annual "event" in Kansas City and always occurred during the fall festivities. It was attended by the best people of the city and many from neighboring towns. It came to the point of being up this enjoyable event or finding a place large enough to hold it, and with this idea in mind the Commercial club took the matter up.

The first discussion brought out the fact that the hall was needed for many more purposes than mere dances, and the prospect of shows, circuses and other entertainments that would bring together large companies of people soon stirred these conservative business men to enthusiasm. Subscriptions to the fund began right there, and in no time a committee was appointed to get money to build the largest hall of its kind in the west. A subscription headquarters was established, and business men left their own interests to take up the newborn idea. It was decided that 250,000 shares should be sold or subscribed.

Then, when there seemed to be a lull in the subscriptions, new ideas were sought to keep the interest going. Twenty thousand buttons were printed and numbered to be sold as certificates of stock in the great hall. The committee went about in tailcoats, wearing the stockyards, the board of trade and all places where men were gathered, hawking off their buttons with great rapidity.

It was not long until the supply of buttons were sold, and it seemed that every man, woman and child in the city was wearing a convention hall token. The people were thoroughly aroused to the undertaking, and it became a necessity to the peaceful purchase of life to wear a button.

Restaurants induced their sales by setting aside a day when the wearers of buttons would be dined free. Barbers took turns one week shaving free any man wearing the emblem of his stock. The stockyards, the board of trade and all places where men were gathered, hawking off their buttons with great rapidity.

The streets soon abounded with the white celluloids, and the bearer of the dinner pail and the occupant of the brougham were equal in this—they wore buttons to prove it.

By this and many other schemes the money was raised and the hall built. On the night of Feb. 22, 1899, it was opened. Fully 20,000 stockholders in hand the hall heard the first crashing board from the giant sounding board in the north end of the hall. When the concert was ended, the chairs and canyons covering were removed from the arena floor in 14 minutes, and 4,000 couples danced far into the night.

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ONE of the biggest delegations will be that of Tammany Hall. The braves from Manhattan are to go in several specially chartered trains. They will turn out in unusual numbers despite the long distance which they must travel. One reason for this is that the New York state convention has been this year slated for New York city, which saved the Tammany Tigers much expense. The Tammany statesman is at all times a picturesque individual, but when he arrays himself in the blazing raiment which seems to him appropriate for convention wear he is truly an impressive personage.

Before the building was destroyed William H. Nelson, proprietor of the Kansas City Star, had subscribed \$5,000 to the rebuilding fund. Walter H. Holmes and W. B. Thayer contributed like amounts next day. By 3 o'clock, less than two hours after the fire, the three all important questions—that convention hall should be rebuilt; that it should be as nearly fireproof as possible; that it should be rebuilt in time for the national Democratic convention.

When convention hall burned, the company had \$10,000 cash in bank. By the evening of that day this amount had grown to \$16,250. On Thursday,

AMONG the multitudes who will go to Kansas City during the convention will be many whom the question of care and hotel bills will bother not at all. These are the farmers who intend to trek over the prairies in old fashioned emigrant schooners. They will start from all sections of Kansas, and many will be present from Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma and even from Arkansas. They will load their wagons with provisions and bedding and go into camp just outside the city. In the history of national conventions there is nothing to equal this novelty.

the next day, a mass meeting was held, and the amount grew to \$42,000 by voluntary subscriptions. Another mass meeting was held on Saturday, and the subscriptions grew to \$42,750.

The insurance companies waived all opportunities for delay and their rights to discount for prepayment and agreed to pay \$150,000 at once. The directory sold the ruins of the steel structure to a junk dealer for \$100. With the cash in bank and the popular subscriptions, \$71,000 the directory had a total of \$236,000.

The plan of the new hall is practically a duplicate of the one that was destroyed. An important difference is that the new building will be as nearly fireproof as slow combustion processes, noncombustible paint, asbestos and metal can make it. The only other changes are in the placing of the stage at the side instead of at the end of the ellipse and the sloping of the top galleries, which in the old hall was flat and was used as a promenade. This will increase the seating capacity.

This is the story of how the new convention hall rose like the phoenix from the blackened, twisted ruins of the old hall. As an example of what civic pride

ONE of the waning industries which the coming presidential campaign will start into new life is that of the manufacture of campaign buttons. The season will open briskly at Kansas City, where hundreds of leather lunged and knickerbockered tailors are preparing to stock with their wares. There will be Bryan buttons by the million. Probably the liveliest trade, however, will be in the buttons showing the good faces of the presidential possibilities. Then there will be the motto buttons by means of which the wearer can proclaim to the world from his coat lapel some favorite political slogan such as "Down with Imperialism!"

When Kansas City met this reverse, the flames still raged greedily and the structure the movement to rebuild the hall was begun. Before the subscriptions began to cool popular opinion was still smoldering. The reconstruction commenced the reconstruction.

From then the work has been rushed night and day, and Chairman Jones is fully satisfied that when the time comes for calling the delegates to order the great auditorium, which is to

