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**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 west of the Mississippi valley. The Democratic party has been in existence since 1828 and during that time has held 15 national conventions, but only on the two occasions, when they met in St. Louis, have its delegates gone 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 Democracy appears to be taking its way westward. The more obvious reason is that the people of Kansas City were determined to secure the convention and that they succeeded. Their terms included the offer of a fine convention hall, the adequate entertainment of the national Democratic committee and the payment of \$50,000 in cash.

The convention will begin on July 4. That is an unusual date, but Chairman Jones and his fellow committeemen give good reasons for making the choice. These reasons, of course, are political.

In assuming the burden of a national convention Kansas City took a bold step. It was audacious. This new metropolis on the Kaw has a population of only a little more than 200,000.

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 dollars of the rich.

The idea of a great hall suitable to hold all sorts of gatherings came about through the annual ball of the Priests of Pallas, 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 giving 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



The ordinary convention crowd is 20,000. But this convention crowd which is to swoop down on Kansas City July 4 is to be an extraordinary crowd. It may 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 then discovered that she had but nine chairs in the house? Kansas City now finds herself in much the same situation. But does she think of backing out? Not she. She is going to provide chairs for every member of the political sewing circle who chooses to come if it takes the last dollar in her purse. Some of them may have only canvas camp chairs, but they will serve the purpose.

When Kansas City secured the convention, she possessed the chief qualification—a fine, large convention hall. As if to test her courage to the utmost, fate decided to wipe out this advantage. On the night of April 4, just three months before the date set for the convention, the hall was entirely destroyed by fire.

Seldom has a more remarkable exhibition of western pluck and enterprise been seen than was afforded by the way Kansas City met this reverse. While the flames still lapped greedily at the structure the movement to rebuild the hall was begun. Before the twisted iron girders had cooled popular subscriptions began to pour in. While the ruins still smoked gangs of workmen commenced the reconstruction.

Since 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 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

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 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 tallies, serenading 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 was doubled, and it seemed that every man, woman and child in the city was wearing a convention hall

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 blaring raiment which seems to him appropriate for convention wear he is truly an impressive personage.

The people were thoroughly aroused to the undertaking, and it became a necessity to the peaceful pursuit of life to wear a button.

Restaurants induced their sale 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 in convention hall. Business men had placards printed and fastened them above their desks—"You can't talk to me unless you wear a button." Traveling salesmen found it necessary to wear a button in order to do business. The saleswomen in large establishments were provided with buttons and every customer who did not wear a button was reminded that one was necessary to make purchases.

The streets soon glistened with the white celluloids, and the bearer of the dinner pail and the occupant of the brougham were equal in this—they owned stock in convention hall and 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 the hall heard the first crash of Sousa's band from the giant sounding board in the north end of the hall. When the concert was ended, the chairs and canvas covering were removed from the arena floor in 14 minutes, and 1,000 couples danced far into the early morning to Sousa's inspiring music. Thus in eight months after the inception of the idea the hall was built by the people of Kansas City and in use by them. Their struggle to build something that would be an ornament and an advantage to the city, a monument that would give the town a good name and a wide fame, was indeed crowned with success.

The first hall cost \$250,000. The building fronted 200 feet on Thirteenth street and 314 feet on Central street. It was constructed of natural stone, cream brick and terra cotta. The first story was of stone in the style of the Renaissance. The second story was in peristyle form, of brick and terra cotta. The roof was of copper and composition. The lower or arena floor was occupied by a polished floor 218 by 125 feet, lined with boxes. Between the boxes and the outer walls was a space so arranged that horses, cattle or the 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 stairway 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, concerts and lectures. Dwight Moody held revivals there. Maurice Grau'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 stockholders 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 lurching at 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 employees shouted to them from their cars: "Put me down for \$5! Here's my number," pointing to their caps. Policemen,

street sweepers and messenger boys did the same.

Before the building was destroyed William E. 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 8 o'clock, less than two hours after the fire, the directors had met the crisis by deciding 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 \$16,230. On Thursday, the next day, a mass meeting was held, and the amount grew to \$43,000 by voluntary subscriptions. Another mass meeting was held on Saturday, and the subscriptions grew to \$52,750.

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 \$5,000. With the cash in bank and the popular subscriptions, which within a week had grown to \$71,000, the directory had a total of \$224,000.

The plan of the new hall is practically a duplicate of the one that was destroyed. An important difference is

Among the multitudes who will go to Kansas City during the convention will be many whom the question of car fare 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.

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 gallery, which in the old hall was flat and was used as a promenade. This will increase the seating capacity.

To be continued.

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