

# THE OMAHA DAILY BEE



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## STORY OF THE EXPOSITION

### Steps of Its Inception, Organization, Construction and Realization.

#### ALL OBSTACLES SUCCESSFULLY OVERCOME

#### Stupendous Effort Required for the Creation of a Wonder City in the Short Space of Twenty-One Months.

**A**T NOON today, by the pressure of a button at the hand of President McKinley, the machinery of the Transmississippi and International Exposition at Omaha will be set in motion for five months' instruction and entertainment of the public.

The gates of the exposition are opened in less than fifteen months from the day on which the site was selected and just thirteen months from the day on which the first shovel of earth was lifted. To the spectator it would seem that some long forgotten magician had escaped from the dingy covers of an ancient fairy tale and addressed the bare expanse of bluff and stubble with his creative wand. At the potent touch palaces of art and industry appeared as though fashioned from some low hanging cloud, their soaring domes and pinnacles resplendent in the June sunshine and their wide stretches of court and promenade gorgeous with the bloom and fragrance of Oriental gardens. Even nature is outdone by the persistent force and virility of the hustling west. For since the last snow flake disappeared the rugged bluff has been transformed into a panorama of turf and foliage and flowers that seems like the creation of a dozen seasons.

To the ordinary visitor the Magic City on the Missouri bluff speaks only of success grandly and wonderfully achieved. The story of its difficulties and discouragements, of obstacles surmounted and of storms successfully weathered is written only in the full recollections of the men who have given nearly two years of their best effort, without consideration or reward, to the consummation of this stupendous enterprise. They succeeded in the face of conditions that would have daunted less determined spirits. Horn in the midst of the greatest financial and industrial depression of recent years, when dollars were scarce and hope was stagnant, built up during a period when every forward step was a struggle against conditions that almost refused to yield, the exposition is at once illustrative of transmississippi resources and transmississippi enterprise.

**First Suggestion of the Exposition.**  
The exposition first appeared as a definite proposition during the session of the Transmississippi Congress in this city in November, 1895. Some time previous to this the idea had suggested itself to Edward Rosewater, editor of The Bee, but the time had not seemed opportune to put it into tangible form. But when the congress was about to convene it was a favorable opportunity to test the value of the suggestion. Mr. Rosewater communicated his idea to a number of leading citizens, by whom it was enthusiastically endorsed. After some further consideration it was decided to bring the matter before the congress and make an effort to secure its endorsement and approval. In accordance with this plan Mr. Rosewater made the first public announcement of the scheme in an editorial which appeared in The Bee November 25. This presented a concise exhibit of the rapid development of the western country during the preceding twenty-five years. Attention was called to the results that had been secured through the exhibitions at Chicago and Atlanta, and the opinion was expressed that the proposed exposition would result in equal benefit to the west. It would give a tremendous impetus to the westward trend of population and capital and advertise to the world the resources and capabilities of the transmississippi country. In conclusion, it was urged that Omaha was pre-eminently fitted by reason of its central location to be the theater of the enterprise and the hearty cooperation of its citizens was pledged to make the affair a success.

While a few of the more conservative people were at first inclined to regard the idea as chimerical, it was unreservedly endorsed by the progressive element. Omaha business men saw in it a factor that would stir the stagnant elements of trade and industry and the transmississippi delegates recognized the boundless possibilities that it offered of progress and development of the whole western country. It required but very little effort to secure their cooperation. Two days after the editorial appeared Hon. William J. Bryan, who was president of the congress, brought it before that body in the following resolution:

Resolved, That the United States congress be requested to take such steps as may be necessary to hold a transmississippi exposition at Omaha during the months of August, September and October, 1898, and that representatives of such states and territories in congress be requested to favor such an appropriation as is usual in such cases to assist in carrying out this enterprise.

**Action of Transmississippi Congress.**  
The burst of applause that followed the reading of the resolution was a sufficient indication of its favorable consideration. The enthusiasm increased as Mr. Bryan added a vivid word picture of the immense advantage that the exposition would obtain for the west, and his vigorous argument in support of Omaha as the location of the enter-



PROMINENT IN PROMOTING THE EXPOSITION.

prise was received with scarcely less favor. Following Mr. Bryan, Colonel John Doniphan of St. Joseph, Mo., George Q. Cannon of Utah and Howell Jones of Kansas spoke eloquently in favor of the resolution. It seemed that there was only one sentiment in the congress, for not a dissenting voice was raised and the resolution was adopted by a rising vote and a whirlwind of cheers that voiced the spirit of the delegates.

Such a gratifying unanimity of opinion was in itself a powerful encouragement to those who had then to assume the tremendous task of organization and execution. It also operated to crystallize the local sentiment, and within a few weeks the belief that the exposition would be an unprecedented success was everywhere predominant. Some weeks were spent in planning the details of organization, and at a meeting held at the Commercial club rooms January 18 the Transmississippi and International Exposition association was formally organized and articles of incorporation were adopted. They provided that the capital stock of the association should be fixed at \$1,000,000, issued in shares of \$10 each. The association was authorized to transact business as soon as \$10,000 in stock was subscribed. A board of eleven directors was specified, and also twenty-five vice presidents, one of whom should be from Omaha and one from each of the transmississippi states and territories. The only change made on the suggestion of Mr. Rosewater, and this amended the articles to provide that the exposition should open in June and close in November, instead of continuing only ninety days, as originally planned.

The subscriptions of stock necessary to permit the association to transact business were taken in five minutes from the time the articles were adopted. The original subscriptions were: E. Rosewater, \$500; W. J. Connelley, \$500; J. H. Evans, \$500; Dan Farrell, Jr., \$500; Lee Clarke, \$500; S. Ambler, \$500; Z. T. Lindmen, \$500; J. E. Markel, \$500; W. R. Bennett, \$500; J. M. Thompson, \$500; Belden & Co., \$500; William Krug, \$500; Oscar Pickard, \$500; Metz Bros. Brewing company, \$500; Frank H. Hibbard, \$500; Dudley Smith, \$500; Kelley, Stiger & Co., \$500; John A. Weaver, \$400; A. Clemmens, \$300; G. S. Ambler, \$200; Z. T. Lindmen, \$200; I. Mann Richardson, \$250; C. S. Montgomery, \$200; L. H. Bradley, \$200; I. W. Carpenter, R. W. Richardson, W. H. Robertson, George N. Hicks, M. H. DeLone, Euclid Martin, J. J. Gibson, J. E. Utz, Helin & Thompson, W. C. Bullard, O. C. Holmes, C. S. Hayward and Johnson Bros., \$100 each, Wakefield, G. H. Payne, G. A. Rathburn and I. E. Burdick, \$50 each; total, \$19,650.

**First Organization of Corporation.**  
The stockholders then met and elected the board of directors, consisting of H. A. Thompson, J. E. Markel, J. H. Evans, G. W. Wattles, G. H. Payne, C. S. Montgomery, W. R. Bennett, I. W. Carpenter, Dan Farrell, Jr., Dudley Smith and Charles Metz. The board of directors met at the Millard hotel on the following Monday and elected as officers G. W. Wattles, president; J. E. Markel, vice president; John A. Wakefield, secretary; Herman Kountze, treasurer.

No sooner had the organization been accomplished than the necessity for securing congressional recognition of the project became apparent. This would put the exposition on a firm basis and be an important factor in enlisting the support of states and individuals. In view of the general business depression and the spirit of economy that dominated all branches of the government the difficulty of securing an adequate appropriation was obvious. It was accomplished only after a long and persistent campaign, which was successfully waged by the Nebraska representatives at Washington with the assistance of all the influence that could be brought to bear through unofficial sources. Senator William V. Allen introduced the senate bill, which provided for the recognition of the exposition by the government, provided for the admission of foreign exhibits free of duty and pledged the government to expend not less than \$250,000 in organizing and installing an exhibit from the various government departments. The house bill, which was substantially similar, was introduced by Congressman D. H. Mercer, and for the next four months the promoters of the exposition labored unceasingly to secure favorable consideration. It was found necessary to accept an appropriation of \$200,000, and the senate bill carrying this amount was passed

June 15, 1896. It was signed by the president on the following day, and the news was received everywhere with jubilant satisfaction. It gave new impetus to the enterprise and encouraged its friends to renewed effort. The event was celebrated by a big street demonstration, followed by a mass meeting at Jefferson square, at which the people were roused to additional enthusiasm by stirring speeches and the music of a dozen bands.

This was preliminary to the active prosecution of the task of securing subscriptions and equipping the association for active operations. The congressional appropriation was to be available only after \$250,000 of the capital stock of the exposition had been subscribed, and after a careful canvass of the interests involved the president and committee were amended to provide for a board of fifty directors, to be elected only after \$200,000 had been subscribed. At the time there were many who declared that the idea of raising such a sum at that time was preposterous. The president's campaign was being hotly contested, the financial depression was at its lowest point, and even the most promising business openings were being. But the promoters of the exposition refused to be discouraged. They took off their coats and went to work. Soliciting committees were organized and turned loose on the community. They worked tirelessly night and day, and subscriptions came slowly but surely. Some who had the most to expect from the project still hung back, but the vast majority of the people came nobly to the front. No one was too poor to take at least one share of stock. The workmen and small home owners gave even more liberally in proportion than the millionaires. The goal was soon reached and passed, and early in November it was announced that the subscription list had reached \$250,000.

**Reorganization of Corporation.**  
The stockholders' meeting for the election of the board of directors was called at the Board of Trade rooms December 1. The voting occurred nearly all day and when the ballots were counted they indicated the election of fifty men conceded to represent fairly all the interests that were concerned in the movement as follows:  
William N. Babcock, general manager of the Union Stock Yards company.  
George F. Bidwell, general manager Fremont, Elkhorn & Missouri Valley railway.  
Jonas L. Brandeis, senior member of the firm of J. L. Brandeis & Sons.  
James J. Brown, vice president Omaha Loan and Trust company.  
Frank Murphy, president Merchants' Na-

tional bank, president Omaha Street Railway company and Omaha Gas Manufacturing company.  
Edward E. Bruce, president E. E. Bruce & Co., wholesale druggists.  
Isaac Carpenter, president of the Carpenter Paper company.  
John A. Creighton, capitalist, vice president First National bank.  
Edward Dickinson, general manager of the Union Pacific railway.  
John H. Evans, president National Bank of Commerce, president City Steam Laundry.  
Dan Farrell, Jr., senior member firm of Farrell & Co., syrup refiners.  
Frank H. Hibbard, one of the representative farmers of Douglas county.  
Gilbert M. Hitchcock, president World Publishing company.  
George W. Holdrege, general manager Burlington & Missouri River railroad.  
John H. Hussie, manager John Hussie Hardware company, retailers.  
Walter S. Jardine, manager Omaha Merchants' Express and Transfer company.  
John A. Johnson, manager of Johnson Bros., Transfer line.  
Thomas Kilpatrick, senior member firm of Thomas Kilpatrick & Co., dry goods.  
Thomas L. Kimball, president Omaha Union Depot company and president Union National bank.  
Freeman P. Kirkendall, member firm of F. P. Kirkendall & Co., wholesale boots and shoes.  
Louis H. Korty, superintendent of telegraph, Union Pacific railway.  
Herman Kountze, president First National bank.  
Dr. E. W. Lee, physician.  
Zachary T. Lindsey, wholesale dealer in rubber boots and shoes.  
Charles W. Lyman, president Commercial National bank.  
Charles P. Manderson, general solicitor Burlington & Missouri River railroad.  
Jacob E. Markel, proprietor Millard hotel.  
Charles Metz, general manager Metz Bros. Brewing company.  
J. H. Millard, president Omaha National bank.  
C. S. Montgomery, member firm of Montgomery & Hall, attorneys-at-law.  
Alfred H. Noyes, manager G. H. Hammond Packing company, South Omaha.  
George H. Payne, president Fidelity Trust company.  
William A. Paxton, president Paxton & Gallagher, wholesale grocers and Paxton & Vierling iron works.  
Edwin C. Price, purchasing agent Swift and Company, meat packers, South Omaha.

## SIX TRANSMISSISSIPPI GOVERNORS



Allen T. Rector, Rector-Wilhelm company, wholesale hardware.  
Abraham L. Reed, president Byron Reed company, real estate.  
Edward Rosewater, president The Bee Publishing company, The Bee Building company and editor of The Omaha Bee.  
Alvin Saunders, president Omaha Real Estate and Trust company.  
Arthur C. Smith, member firm of M. E. Smith & Co., wholesale dry goods.  
Dudley Smith, general manager Steele-Smith Grocery company, wholesalers.  
Henry A. Thompson, member firm of Thompson, Belden & Co., retail dry goods.  
Gurdon W. Wattles, vice president Union National bank.  
John L. Webster, attorney-at-law.  
Charles F. Weller, vice president Richardson Drug company, wholesalers.  
Lucius Wells, of Deere, Wells & Co. of Council Bluffs, Ia., agricultural implements.  
John C. Wharton, attorney-at-law.  
Robert S. Wilcox, manager Browning, King & Co., clothiers.  
Charles M. Wilhelm, treasurer Orchard & Wilhelm Carpet company.  
Casper E. Yost, president Nebraska Telephone company.  
Fred M. Youngs, president Printing Pressmen's union.

Later Fred M. Youngs was elected as representing union labor to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of W. R. Bennett, and Allen T. Rector was chosen to succeed John A. Wakefield after Mr. Wakefield had resigned to accept the position of secretary. Subsequently the death of Dan Farrell, Jr., left a third vacancy, which was filled by the election of Thomas Hector of South Omaha.

The form of permanent organization was the next question that confronted the directors, and as it was conceded that this would have an important bearing on the success of the enterprise it was given long and serious consideration. It was finally decided to divide the work of the exposition into seven departments, the heads of these departments to constitute the executive committee, which should have the active management of the affairs of the association. Under this plan the officers were elected, as follows:

Gurdon W. Wattles, president; Alvin Saunders, resident vice president; Herman Kountze, treasurer; John A. Wakefield, secretary.  
**Executive Committee**—Zachary T. Lindsey, chairman and manager Department of Ways and Means; Edward Rosewater, manager Department of Publicity; Gilbert M. Hitchcock, manager Department of Promotion; Freeman P. Kirkendall, manager Department of Buildings and Grounds; Edward E. Bruce, manager Department of Exhibits; Abram L. Reed, manager Department of Concessions and Privileges; William N. Babcock, manager Department of Transportation.  
Later the Departments of Publicity and Promotion were consolidated under the management of Edward Rosewater.  
The organization was completed by the appointment of a vice president by each of the twenty-four governors of the transmississippi states.  
**Swelling Subscription Lists.**  
By this time the subscription list had reached the grand aggregate of \$120,000, and the proper certificates were forwarded to the secretary of the treasury to show that the requirements of the bill providing for a government appropriation had been complied with. In accordance with its provisions the secretary of state at once took the necessary steps to notify foreign governments of the international character of the exposition and to invite them to participate. The sundry civil appropriation bill which passed the house February 15 carried a \$200,000 appropriation for the government exhibit, which was to be immediately available. An effort was made to have the amount increased to \$275,000 in the senate, but owing to the necessity for strict economy in all national expenditures, it was decided that to insist on the amendment would endanger the passage of the bill. Much to the disappointment of the friends of the exposition the bill was submitted to President Cleveland at the close of the session and he failed to attach his signature. It was nearly three months later before the

item was approved at the extra session of congress. By that time the work of construction was well under way.

In the interval active steps had been taken to enlist the interest and financial assistance of the legislatures of the transmississippi states. About the middle of February a party of exposition representatives was sent on a trip through Kansas, Colorado and other western states. Another party visited Missouri, Arkansas, Texas and Old Mexico, and a third went north to do missionary work at Duluth, St. Paul, Brainerd, Pierre and other northern points. In every instance their efforts were hampered by the spirit of economy that the hard times inspired, and at first it seemed that the cooperation necessary to give the exposition the scope contemplated could not be secured. The delay of the Nebraska legislature in making an appropriation was also a heavy handicap, as the promoters had no satisfactory answer when they were asked how much Nebraska had given. But, as the people became convinced that the exposition was bound to be a success, a more liberal spirit developed. Where legislative action could not be secured private interests came to the front, and as the possibilities of the enterprise became more apparent the interest in its success spread all over the transmississippi territory.

During the closing days of his career the Nebraska legislature finally made an appropriation of \$100,000, and although it had been expected that a larger amount would be provided, this served to insure a creditable state exhibit and to assure other states that the exposition had liberal support at home. At the same time Iowa, Illinois and several other states promised liberal appropriations and the success of the enterprise was no longer in doubt.

**Work of Construction.**  
While the Departments of Promotion and Publicity were thus engaged in making the exposition an interest in every corner of the transmississippi territory, the actual construction was being pushed with characteristic energy. On April 22, 1897, the entire population of Omaha and part of Nebraska and Iowa turned out to celebrate Arbor day by laying the corner stone with the elaborate exercises that marked the inauguration of the enterprise. A month later the architects met in Omaha to review the preliminary plans for the big buildings, and during the following sixty days the plans were completed and the contracts let. By midsummer the construction was in progress all around the main court and the heavy work of grading had been completed. At the fall election Douglas county voted \$100,000 in bonds, swelling the aggregate resources of the exposition to the \$1,000,000 mark.

The exposition was now no longer a promise, but a fulfillment that mounted far above the expectations of its most sanguine promoters. It had ceased to be compared with the exhibitions at Atlanta and Nashville, and began to rival the World's fair. During January and February large delegations from other states were brought on special trains to admire its superb architecture and to make many pleasant acquaintances with Omaha citizens. So far did the enterprise rise above what they had expected that their enthusiasm was invariably beyond expression and they went away thoroughly convinced that it would be one of the greatest exhibitions that had ever been spread before the people of this continent.

By early spring of 1898 the main buildings were practically completed and the lighter effects were rapidly taking form and beauty. Facilities for the most elaborate electrical illuminations were installed and hundreds of groups of exquisitely modeled statuary appeared in the main court and above the corridors of the buildings. The landscape gardeners wrought wonders in the transformation of the grounds into gardens that might fittingly surround the palace of an oriental monarch and every sunrise saw the vast inclosure invested with fresh beauties. The Departments of Exhibits and Concessions were literally flooded with an unprecedented demand for space. Scores of applications were rejected, and only those exhibits which promised to add materially to the attractions of the exposition were allowed admittance. As the last weeks of preparation passed the workmen labored day and night and the finishing touches were added under the glow of thousands of electric lamps. Buildings sprang up like mushrooms on the bluff tract and back of the main court, and the energy of a metropolis seemed to be centralized on the grounds. At the impulse of thousands of toiling hands the big show hurried to completion. When the bells struck midnight of the last day of May the promise of the management had been fulfilled. The Transmississippi and International Exposition is ready to receive its guests, an immortal monument to the energy and resources of the Mighty West and a lasting inspiration for its future.

PRESIDENT MCKINLEY  
PRESIDENT G. W. WATTLES  
The Executive Committee:  
MESSRS. LINDSEY, ROSEWATER,  
KIRKENDALL, BRUCE, REED AND  
BARBOCK.

