

## Opening Day of the Omaha Transmississippi Exposition

(Photographs of Members of the Executive Committee Showing Them as They Were at the Time—Views of the Exposition from Copyrighted Photographs by F. A. Rinehart.)



G.W. Wattles  
PRESIDENT



The United States Marine Band that Played Opening Day



A.L. Reed  
CONCESSIONS AND PRIVILEGES



E.E. Bruce  
EXHIBITS



W.N. Babcock  
TRANSPORTATION



Edward Rosewater  
PUBLICITY AND PROMOTION



L.M. Lindsey  
WAYS AND MEANS



F.P. Kirkendall  
BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS



At the Head of the Lagoon Opening Day



South Side of Court of Honor Looking East from Government Building

great lakes by holding such an exposition in Omaha, the idea was enthusiastically endorsed by Colonel John Doniphan of Missouri, George Q. Cannon of Utah, Howell Jones of Kansas and a number of others, and the resolution adopted without a dissenting vote.

### Omaha at Work.

Omaha then had a basis to work on and the business men of the city got busy. They put their shoulders to the wheel and all joined in the boosting. January 18, 1896, the first meeting looking to a working organization was held. At that time the articles of incorporation were presented and adopted and the capital stock fixed at \$1,000,000, divided into shares of \$10 each. Five minutes after the articles were adopted, \$10,650 had been subscribed, Mr. Rosewater being one of the very first to subscribe \$500.

The exposition having been given a start at home, it was given attention in congress. William V. Allen was senator from Nebraska and David H. Mercer represented the Omaha district in the house. They both introduced bills, each in the branches of congress of which they were members. The bills were pushed through and in conference they were merged into one, it calling for the appropriation of \$200,000 by the government, to be used in the erection of a building and the making of an exhibit, the money to be available when the exposition company had subscriptions aggregating \$300,000. June 26, 1896, the bill was passed and the following day signed by William McKinley, then president of the United States. Subsequently an appropriation of \$40,000 was secured through the efforts of Mr. Rosewater and the proceeds used in bringing the Indian congress to Omaha during the period when the exposition was being held. This congress consisted of families and representatives of the different Indian tribes of the United States.

### Giving the Exposition Form.

While the bill appropriating money for a government exhibit was before congress, the promoters

of the exposition were busy here in Omaha. The Omaha Transmississippi and International Exposition association was organized with Gurdon W. Wattles as president; Alvin Saunders, resident vice president; Herman Koutse, treasurer; John A. Wakefield, secretary; executive committee, Zachary T. Lindsey, chairman and directing 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. A few months after the active work of promoting the exposition had been gotten under way, Mr. Hitchcock resigned from the executive committee, and the department of promotion was consolidated with the department of publicity, under the management of Mr. Rosewater.

The building of the exposition was a record breaker when time is taken into consideration, for in less than fifteen months after the site was chosen and within thirteen months after the first spadeful of dirt was thrown, the gates opened upon a magic city, the buildings, costing millions of dollars, filled with exhibits from all over the world, in quality unequalled and in quantity equalled only by the World's fair at Chicago.

### Opening Day an Epoch.

Of course, the crowning event of the exposition was the opening day, fifteen years ago, when nearly 80,000 visitors passed through the gates. Nature smiled upon Omaha and the exposition, The

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**W**HENEVER the history of Omaha and Nebraska is written no date will stand out more prominently than June 1, 1898, the opening of the Transmississippi and International exposition, an exposition held in Omaha during the following five weeks, attended by nearly 4,000,000 persons and the only one in the history of expositions that paid a dividend to the stockholders.

Fifteen years ago today the Transmississippi and International exposition opened its gates to the public and until the lights were turned off for the last time, October 31, 1898, every day was a most pronounced success, for in the magnificent show buildings and on the spacious grounds in the north part of the city men, women and children from every state in the union and many from foreign lands gathered to wonder at and admire the collection of exhibits brought together from twenty-six states and many foreign countries, all representing the industries and commercial life of the peoples from which they came.

So far as Omaha has been concerned, and for that matter, the entire state of Nebraska and every city, town and hamlet situated in its broad valleys and upon its fertile prairies, the exposition was a history marking epoch, held at a time that marked the parting of the ways.

For some years prior to 1898, Omaha, like other cities of the United States, had been experiencing a season of depression. The recession of the "boom" wave of the '90s and the panic of the early '90s had been felt in the Missouri river valley, and, while possibly Omaha had not suffered so severely as some of its sister cities, the effects of the general depression had been felt. Added to all of this, all through the west and the central portion of the country, there had been a couple of seasons when the crops were not of the best. The soil had continued just as fertile, but Dame Nature had not been as kind to the farmer as in some former years and had not been as generous in the distribution of her gifts.

### Genesis of the Exposition.

However, in Omaha there were men who believed and expressed the confidence that the storm could be weathered, and that the future held prosperity for all who were energetic and prudent. Among these was Edward Rosewater, the editor of The Bee. Early in 1895, Mr. Rosewater came to the conclusion that Omaha needed a tonic. He realized that the general health of the city was excellent, but conditions demanded treatment that would bring about complete recovery from the relapse into which it had fallen. During the summer of that year, in The Bee, he published two or three editorials as feelers, suggesting an exposition in Omaha, but did not advocate any particular plan.



View on North Midway

Some time later in the summer he published an editorial of quite half a column, and in this he called attention to the benefits that had accrued to Chicago by the holding of the World's fair there. He showed how the Atlanta exposition had turned the trend of investment and immigration toward the south, closing with the statement that an exposition held in Omaha would result in equally as great benefits to the central west.

Some of the then skeptics scouted the ideas advanced by Mr. Rosewater, contending that the undertaking was too great and that Omaha was too poor to shoulder the burden of promoting an enterprise of such magnitude as an exposition to attract more than local attention would have to be. As a rule, however, the ideas were endorsed and for several days the editorial was the talk of the town. It was copied extensively in the state press and the comments upon it were generally favorable, while papers outside of Nebraska intimated that as a rule the states of the Missouri and Mississippi valleys were willing to assist in promoting a proposition of the kind suggested.

### Idea Takes Root.

Exposition matters rested quietly, so far as the public knew, until November 25, though in the meantime Mr. Rosewater had opened up a correspondence with prominent men all over the central

west, the Pacific coast country, the south and the east and north. He had written hundreds of letters, outlining plans for an exposition and asking them if they were in accord with such an idea. Generally the answers were encouraging, the writers indicating that Mr. Rosewater could depend upon them for assistance when the time for action arrived.

November 25, 1895, the Transmississippi congress convened in Omaha and that morning in The Bee there appeared a strong editorial, urging the delegates to take some action looking to the holding of an exposition in Omaha, not an exposition that would be national, or international in its scope, but one that would show to the world some of the possibilities for making a great empire out of the central west and one that would portray to the public mind what had been accomplished in the past in the way of development.

That this editorial bore fruit soon became apparent, for two days later in the Transmississippi congress, William J. Bryan, a delegate, offered a resolution, endorsing an exposition, such as suggested by Mr. Rosewater, and fixing the dates, August, September and October, 1898. The introduction of the resolution was greeted with applause, and after Mr. Bryan had pictured the advantages that would be derived by every state west of the