

# Building the Billy Sunday Tabernacle

## Work is now in progress to erect the big meeting place in which the converts will hit the sawdust trail

**T**HE "BILLY" SUNDAY tabernacle takes form at Fourteenth street and Capitol avenue, and the coming event casts its shadow before.

Three weeks from today the famous ex-base ball player evangelist will address his first congregation in Omaha, inaugurating a two months' campaign. During those two months he will preach twice every day in the week except Monday, which is his resting day.

The Omaha tabernacle will be one of the largest ever built. Its ground measurements are 178 by 240 feet. The tabernacle at Des Moines measured 174 by 227 feet; that at Philadelphia, where meetings were held for ten weeks last winter, measured 216 by 303 feet. This was the largest ever built.

The capacity of the Omaha tabernacle has been somewhat exaggerated in reports.

It will seat about 7,500 people, including the choir of 1,500 on the rostrum. In addition to this there will be standing room for from 2,500 to 3,000 in the vestibule, ten feet wide, which extends all around the building. Between this vestibule and the main auditorium doors can be lowered so as to give those standing there an unobstructed view of the rostrum. Thus the total maximum capacity of the building, including those seated and those standing, will be from 10,000 to 10,500. The tabernacle at Philadelphia had a maximum capacity of 18,000 people.

The Sunday tabernacles are all alike—all built under direction of the same man, J. H. Speice, who goes from place to place a month or six weeks in advance of the evangelist to erect the tabernacles. With him travels his foreman, Jess Henderson, all other labor is hired in the locality of operations.

The tabernacles are built with two objects in view—namely, capacity and acoustics. The latter is, naturally, a great desideratum when a man is preaching at least twelve times a week in a vast building.

The broad, low, "turtle-back" roof is ideal for hearing properties, as well as being easily constructed and covered with weather-proof material. This roof comes down at the eaves to within eight feet of the ground. At its center it is only twenty-six feet from the ground.

The ten-foot vestibule surrounding the building on all sides is really in the nature of an addition to the building proper and its roof slopes from an eight-foot height to seven feet at its outer edge.

The whole building is constructed of yellow pine, from the heavy timbers which uphold the roof to the thin shiplap siding on the sides. About 175,000 feet of lumber will be required to build the Omaha tabernacle. The roof will be covered with a combination fire-proof roofing material. Three cupolas on top will help much in ventilating the building. Numerous dormer windows set in the roof will act both for lighting and ventilating. These windows will be provided with ropes and pulleys so that they can be opened or closed from the ground.

There will be twenty-four doors in the building, opening directly upon the streets, each door six feet wide, allowing the biggest audience to get out in two and a half minutes.

The tabernacle will have no floor. Thirty tons of sawdust will be spread upon the ground within the tabernacle. Aisles five feet wide will run lengthwise of the building every sixteen feet.

The seats will be made of smooth planks, with board backs. Numbers will be painted on the numerous posts upholding the roof for the assistance of the ushers in seating the people.

The rostrum will be built at the north end of



View of the Tabernacle in process of construction looking down from the Union Pacific Headquarters building

Lighting of the building will be entirely by electricity. A 100-watt or 150-watt incandescent light will be placed every eight feet. The outside of the building will also be brilliantly illuminated by twelve arc lights.

Though grading is still being done at the north part of the site, the framework of the building is all in place at the south and east sides.

The tabernacle will be completed without a doubt by Friday, September 3, when choir rehearsals in it are to start.

The official tabernacle builder, J. H. Speice, is a rotund, jolly, scrapple-fed Pennsylvanian. A policeman sauntered up to the scene of operations while the interview with him was going on.

"Have they got them one-armed men yet?" he inquired.

"Oh, yes," laughed the builder.

"How many of them they gonna have?"

"Well, it'll take about twenty-five," said Mr. Speice.

"What do they want with so many one-armed men?" asked the Innocent Bystander.

"To take up the collections," said the cop.

"I've never missed a date," said Mr. Speice. "Always have had the tabernacle ready for the meetings on schedule time. In Pittsburgh I had the hardest tussle with time. I reached there just fourteen days before the meetings were to start. But I got the tabernacle up. I couldn't get the electric wiring done, but I put in gasoline torches the first few nights, and the meetings went right along."

After the meetings are over here the tabernacle will be sold to the highest bidder. According to Mr. Speice, the building usually sells for about 75 per cent of what it cost, so that the net cost is not great.

When the tabernacle here is complete the builders will go to Syracuse, N. Y., to begin work on the tabernacle there, whence they proceed to Baltimore, Md., which is the next city on the schedule.

It is interesting to observe that there is a reason for naming the "Billy" Sunday meeting place a "tabernacle." There is good scriptural authority for the use of that word in a building of this character. The ancient Jews carried a structure of wooden framework, covered with curtains, through the wilderness in the Exodus as a place of worship and sacrifice. This was called the tabernacle.

The dictionary defines tabernacle as "a slightly built or temporary habitation; a transient shelter."

The human body is considered as a temporary habitation of the soul. "Shortly I must put off this my tabernacle," says St. Peter.

The word was once used derogatively in England, referring to the meeting places of dissenters, chiefly Methodists. Now it is often used to indicate a church with a very large auditorium.

In the Bible there are many verses in which the word occurs. For example:

"Lord, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in Thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness and speaketh the truth in his heart."—Psalms xv:1 and 2.

"How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts. My soul longeth, yea even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord."—Psalms lxxxix:1 and 2.

"Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities: Thine eyes shall see Jerusalem, a city of quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down."—Isaiah xxxiii:20.

"And thou shalt know that thy tabernacle shall be in peace."—Job v:24.

the building. It will be seven feet high. From it the tiers of seats will rise for the 1,500 members of the choir. Chairs will be placed here for the choir.

Mr. Sunday's platform will be at the front of the rostrum. It is built the same size in all places—six feet wide and sixteen feet long. His pulpit is thirty-four inches high and sixteen by twenty-six inches in top measurements. It also is built of yellow pine and covered with a cloth material. His platform will be carpeted, and above him will hang an "augophone," a device of concave shape to still further emphasize the acoustic properties of the

building in carrying his voice. A large section of the rostrum will also be fitted up for the use of newspaper men, accommodating about twenty-five. Under the rostrum will be various rooms for various uses.

There will be a reporters' room, where they can use typewriters and have telephone connections with their offices. There will be a hospital, where trained nurses and doctors will be in continuous

attendance and where those who faint or meet with accident will be taken at once for first aid. An ushers' room and a doorkeepers' room will be there for the accommodation of the scores of men charged with care of the audiences. Here will be also a postoffice, where those connected with the Sunday party will receive their mail. Telephones will be available at many places. There will be booths in the vestibules for the use of the public.

## Graphic Pen Picture of Rev. "Billy" Sunday as He Appears When in Full Action

**T**HERE never was any preaching done just like that base ball man does it. He's got a platform to stand on more'n as big as two wagon boxes, and he kivers every inch of it in every sermon he preaches. In the meetin' he got so fired up that he tore off both his coat and vest, jerked off his collar and keravat, an' then rolled up his sleeves as if he was a-go'in' to help thresh. I thought I'd heard rather strong preachin' all my life, but I never heard none that took hold of me like his'n does. Why, it goes into you like chiggers."

That is the way an early convert of Billy Sunday described his work. Since then his reputation has lost nothing in force and strength, judging by the speeches of more recent date and the throngs which flock to hear him.

In a place where Sunday was to hold a meeting a delegation of ministers asked him to tone down his remarks. To them he replied:

"Why, if I did that I wouldn't have any more people to preach to than you do!"

And that is the light in which he views his unusual methods.

The typical Sunday meeting takes place in a large, brilliantly lighted building, with a roped-in space in front for delegations from various lodges and organizations, and over the platform a huge white banner on which is planted in black letters three feet high:

"Get Right With God."

A stir comes from the audience packed in the hall—there are almost always a large number turned away—when Sunday appears and takes his seat on the platform. Several songs are sung and enthusiasm is aroused. The opening prayer is delivered by some local clergyman, and two or three more songs are sung. Then Sunday makes a few

This sketch is by Rev. Elijah P. Brown of Indianapolis, commonly known as "Ram's Horn Brown," sometime assistant to Sunday, and is taken from a published volume on "The Real Billy Sunday."

introductory remarks of a pertinent nature and says:

"Dig up!"

The new, shining milk pans which hang on the posts about the hall are now brought into play, and the expense of the meetings is defrayed in this way. After more singing by the choir Sunday goes to the pulpit desk and gives out his text.

"As the first words of the text are announced," says Mr. Brown, "his muscles become rigid and he bends backward as if about to throw a somersault. The manner of the speaker is in a sense mild at the start; he is not violent; he does not speak unduly loud; there is nothing approaching a strain in his voice. He quickens his pace; his collar begins to look as if it had seen better days; soon he is raining great sledge hammer blows on the desk to force home his points, and people start as if shot at."

There is but one word that will even remotely indicate his manner, and that is "action." At one moment he is at one end of the platform and the next at the other, and then quicker than thought he bounds back to the center, giving the desk a solar plexus blow that would knock out a giant. Ever and anon he makes long, rapid strides to give it more whacks, until at last a large piece splits off and bounds to the sawdust floor below, at

which every small boy in the front row jumps and says "Gee!"

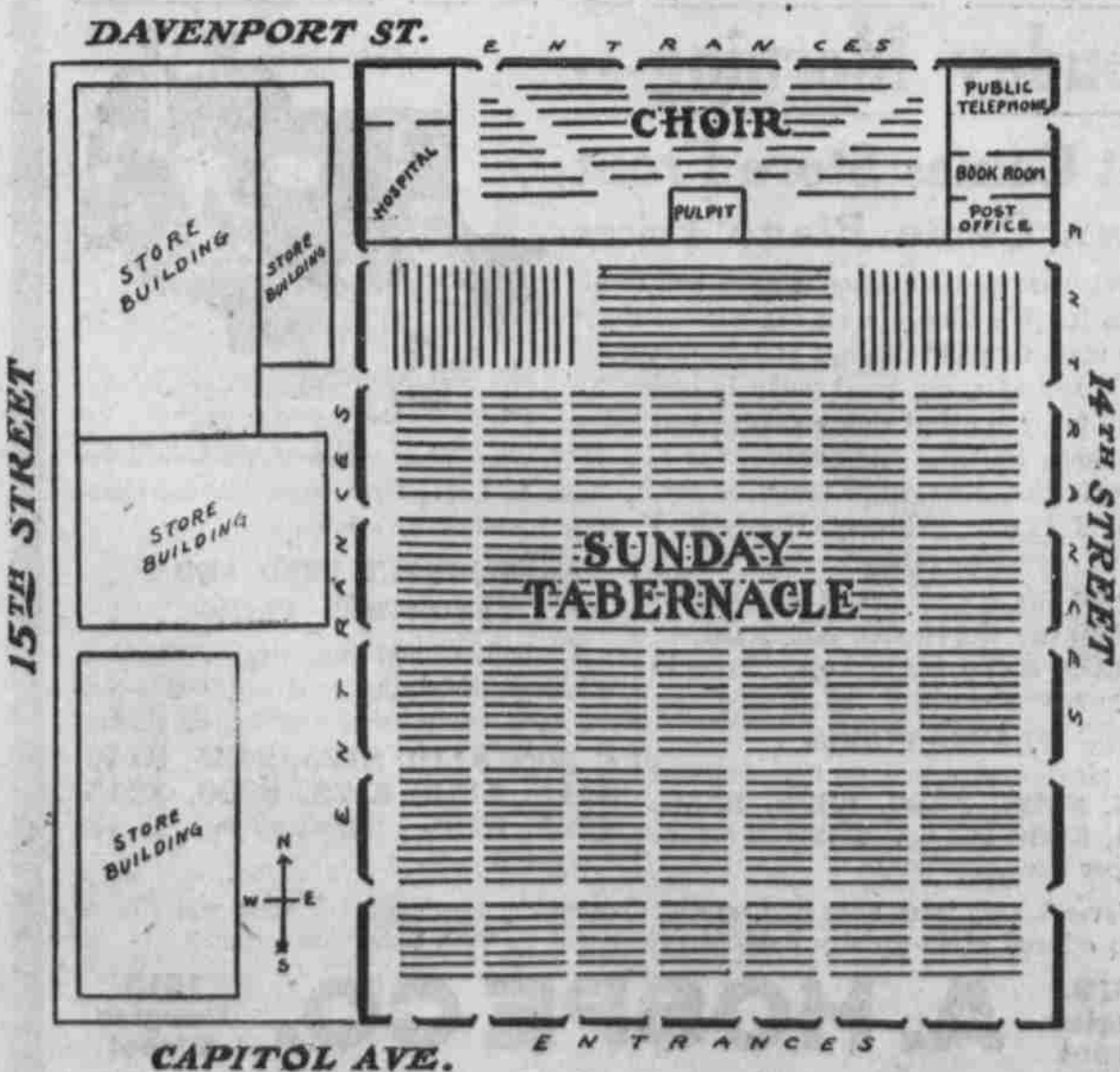
And here are some of the things he says: "I don't care if a church has 2,000 church members. What I ask is, how much power have they? Nine times out of ten you blame the evangelist when there are no conversions. Instead of the Godforsaken, booze-hitting, card-playing church members. There were places where Jesus could do no mighty works because of unbelief, where there should have been faith.

"I said to a barkeeper one time, 'Why don't you give your heart to Christ? You are too nice a fellow to be in this vile business.' He said, 'I wouldn't be in it if the church members hadn't voted for me.' If there is anything that makes me sick it is to have some red-nosed, buttermilk-eyed, beetle-browed, peanut-brained, stall-fed old saloon keeper say that he wouldn't be in the business if it were not for church members voting for him. Hell is so full of church members like that their feet are sticking out of the windows."

And this is one of his replies to criticism for the language he uses:

"Where you put salt it kills the bacteria that cause decay. If a man were to take a piece of meat and smell it and look disgusted, and his little boy were to say, 'What's the matter with it, pop?' And he were to say, 'It is undergoing a process in the formation of new chemical compounds,' the boy would be all in. But if the father were to say, 'It's rotten,' then the boy would understand and hold his nose. Rotten is a good Anglo-Saxon word and you don't have to go to the dictionary to find out what it means. Some of you preachers had better look out or the devil will get away with some of your members before they can find out what you mean by your sermons."

### Diagram of the Tabernacle in Omaha



CAPITOL AVE. ENTRANCES