



AK-SAR-BEN IS NEBRASKA SHOW

Enchanting Festival of the North Attracts Wide Attention.

STORY OF ITS ORGANIZATION

Sixteen Years Prove Value of King Ak-Sar-Ben to Trans-Missouri Country—Writer in Hearst's Papers Gives State Big Boost for Its Enterprise.

By Will A. Campbell.

When Mark Twain wrote thirty years ago that no such an enchanting festival as the Mardi-Gras of New Orleans could live in the practical north any longer than it could live in London, one season—the distinguished journalist did not know what kind of men and women the future citizens of the middle-west would be; did not imagine that a foundation of business fraternalism would continue a great festival in the north just as surely as the love of romance would sustain such a festival in the south.

On the practical foundation of business, Ak-Sar-Ben has been built and has flourished. The festival is about to open in Omaha for the sixteenth year and for the first time membership has been limited because of the growing popularity of the enterprise.

Void of all those things which set the world in love with dreams and phantoms; without sham grandeur, gauds and chivalries, Ak-Sar-Ben is really a big "boosters" organization which has done more to put Nebraska on the map and renew the confidence of her people, than any other force in the trans-Missouri country.

This festival has everything which Mardi-Gras has and more. The romance is present; there are kings and knights; big sounding titles go thundering along after the names of its officers, but the soul of Ak-Sar-Ben is the co-operative spirit of the people of the middle-west the eternal effort of the business fraternity to boost for each other and for the trans-Missouri empire always.

Ak-Sar-Ben is more than a relic of the French and Spanish occupation with the religious features knocked out. It is more than a tawdry masquerade of knights and nobles clothed in silken and Paris-made gorgeousness. Ak-Sar-Ben has a reason and has had since its inception back in those hard days when Nebraska and Kansas were thought to be a blizzard cursed western waste in the winter; sun baked prairies—the harbors of cyclones and grass hoppers in the summer.

"We must do something," said the men of Nebraska in 1895 when the veins of commerce had become sluggish that the state had lost confidence and lay bankrupt at the feet of the national government. What to do was a mystery. Eastern insurance and trust companies became possessed by foreclosing of the most valuable real estate, some owning from fifty to one hundred pieces of property widely separated. Out in the towns and cities of the state homes of men were being moved to the ranches to house cattle and sheep in the winter that the more comfortable quarters might take the place of nourishing food.

Thus the Ak-Sar-Ben festival was born in poverty; planned with the belief that it would bring the people of the state closer together; keep their money at home and working. As they joined hands to hold this festival sixteen years ago, confidence began to return; an opportunity has been given each fall for taking an inventory of the resources of the middle-west and a graphic lesson in the advantages of co-operation has been driven home to the people.

There was something about the selection of the name which increased this business fraternalism. True, the name is Neb-ras-ka reversed, but it is more than that. "Ak" is Syrian in its origin and is said to mean "head of a

household." Then "Sar" is good Arabic for "household," and "Ben" in the Hebrew is literally translated as "family" or "brothers of a household."

Thus there is a touch of Oriental enchantment about the word. There is Ak, the head of the household, or the king; sar, the board of twelve governors who manage the affairs of the festival; last there is the family called ben, which embraces the body of knights, and every true Nebraskan is a Knight of Ak-Sar-Ben whether he has been able to journey to the den in Omaha and attend the ceremonial or not.

The same spirits who organized Ak-Sar-Ben made the Trans-Mississippi and International exposition possible in 1893, and this enterprise marked the close of stagnation and opened the era of prosperity in the middle-west; the period of the '90's, dark with industrial gloom and commercial disaster, became history and the star of Nebraska began its ascendancy.

The men who have continued Ak-Sar-Ben for sixteen years and made it the most enchanting festival the north has ever known, are the men who have planted the boom seed deep in the soil and nourished it until Nebraska and Kansas are second to none in the individual prosperity of their people, and in the amount of food contributed annually to help feed a hungry world.

Ak-Sar-Ben has two distinct seasons. The first comes in the summer and is for initiating candidates. The second is festival time in the fall.

Beginning early in June the unknown king who is to be revealed and crowned in the fall, holds initiations in his great den every Monday evening. Business men of Omaha join each year and pay substantial initiation fees. Some 2,500 contribute thus annually. Every stranger within the state is knighted without paying a fee if recommended or accompanied by some Omaha knight.

The initiations are unique, change each year and are originated and executed entirely by Omaha talent. Some of the ceremonials "would linger in the memories of your great grand-children" to use an expression of a distinguished visitor who knows.

Three presidents, McKinley, Taft and Roosevelt, have been initiated and Colonel Roosevelt returns this fall as a private citizen to renew his allegiance to the king. Foreign ministers, cabinet members, senators, army officers, governors of almost every western state and many eastern states, have journeyed to Omaha, been knighted and experienced the mysteries of Ak-Sar-Ben.

All this mystery vanishes in the fall. It is a season of great events. As the carnivals of Venice became famous in history because "no less than seven foreign princes and thirty thousand foreigners" attended them, so have the festivals of Ak-Sar-Ben attracted attention because one hundred and fifty thousand people attend them annually and men more than foreign princes have been guests of the organization.

Last year the event of the festival was the visit of President Taft. This year it is the presence of Colonel Roosevelt.

The electrical parade of King Ak-Sar-Ben is excelled nowhere in the world. The scores of floats, different each year, move through the streets, bearing hundreds of actors appearing as the men and women of song and story or as the oddities and pleasant creatures of fairland. All these floats are brilliant with tens of thousands of electric lights which from the first succeeded the smoking and flickering torches in the parades.

Then at the coronation ball comes the cry, "The King, the King," and for the first time in the season the real personality of the king becomes known. He is always a gentleman of position and consequence as the "Rex" of Mardi-Gras, and it is an honor highly esteemed to be selected king of Ak-Sar-Ben, so the mystery with which his personality is hidden all summer is merely for the sake of romance and not an account of the police.

During the summer and fall festival the country west of the Missouri river is referred to as the Kingdom of Quivera. This is explained by Samson Lord High Chamberlain of the realm Coronado, a Spanish grandee and ad-

venturer was tempted one time by tales of a wonderful country north and east of Mexico, known as the Kingdom of Quivera and said to contain the seven cities of Cibola, wealthy beyond comparison. Coronado made the journey to the northeast in 1540, crossing Arizona and through the Puebla Indian villages. He is said by history and fable to have reached Nebraska—truly the Kingdom of Quivera, wealthy "beyond compare," a land of promise and of gold—not that gold which is "hard and yellow, bright and cold," but the gold which is realized from the vast



A QUEEN OF AK-SAR-BEN.

agricultural area when cultivated by an industrious and intelligent people.

Even the colors of Ak-Sar-Ben, the red, yellow and green, are explained as symbols of the products which make the middle-west great; the red of the beef, the yellow of the corn and green of alfalfa.

All this pomp and display of power; the mixing of progressive ideas with the jejune romanticism of the middle ages; these kings on thrones resembling those in fabled isles of touristy; the knights swearing allegiance to the name of their state spelled backwards, have but one object—to bring men and women of the middle west closer together in a great co-operative movement to develop the country west of the Missouri river.

The success of Ak-Sar-Ben as an empire builder is unquestioned. For sixteen years his armies have battled with the knockers and the grumblers; the prairies have grown tired of producing sage brush and buffalo grass and are giving the world corn, alfalfa and wheat; every town is a bivouac of this army of boosters, and backed



A GRAND MUFTI OF AK-SAR-BEN

by a series of successful years in agriculture, the middle-west will realize a record-breaking year when King Ak-Sar-Ben is crowned in Omaha, Oct. 7, 1910.—From New York Journal

EVERYBODY MAY HEAR ROOSEVELT IN OMAHA

When Colonel Roosevelt speaks in Omaha Friday afternoon, Sept. 2, it will be to the general public and not to an exclusive few political admirers or members of any social organization.

The great Omaha Auditorium—which the people of Nebraska helped build—has been engaged. It will seat comfortably 10,000 people and as it is fireproof there will be no fire department interfering with those who wish to stand in the aisles.

At 4 o'clock in the afternoon Colonel Roosevelt will arrive at the Auditorium and make his address. It will be the only address he will make in Omaha or in Nebraska. While he is going to the Ak-Sar-Ben den later in the evening and while he will be a guest at both a dinner and a luncheon in Omaha, he will speak but once—in the Auditorium, where all who come may hear him.

Only a few seats—150 to 200—have been reserved and all others are free to anyone who gets them. Visitors from outside will have the same chance as Omaha people.

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