

Actual Work of Preparing Floats for the Great Electric Street Pageant

ASIDE from the Coronation ball, with its attendant splendors, the electrical parade is the crowning glory of the Ak-Sar-Ben. The spectacular effect of these twenty allegorical chariots is seen in its greatest beauty in Omaha and is not surpassed by similar pageantry anywhere in this country, and scarcely equalled in the old world. Such at least is the verdict of observant people who have seen the best of these pageants, both at home and abroad. To Omaha alone belongs the glory of producing an electrical parade in the last thirteen years, that is unequalled anywhere, and which has never been duplicated either by the Mardi Gras, Veiled Prophets, Priests of Pallas or Festival of Mountain and Plain, even partially, though repeated efforts have been made to do so, but invariably with discouraging failure.

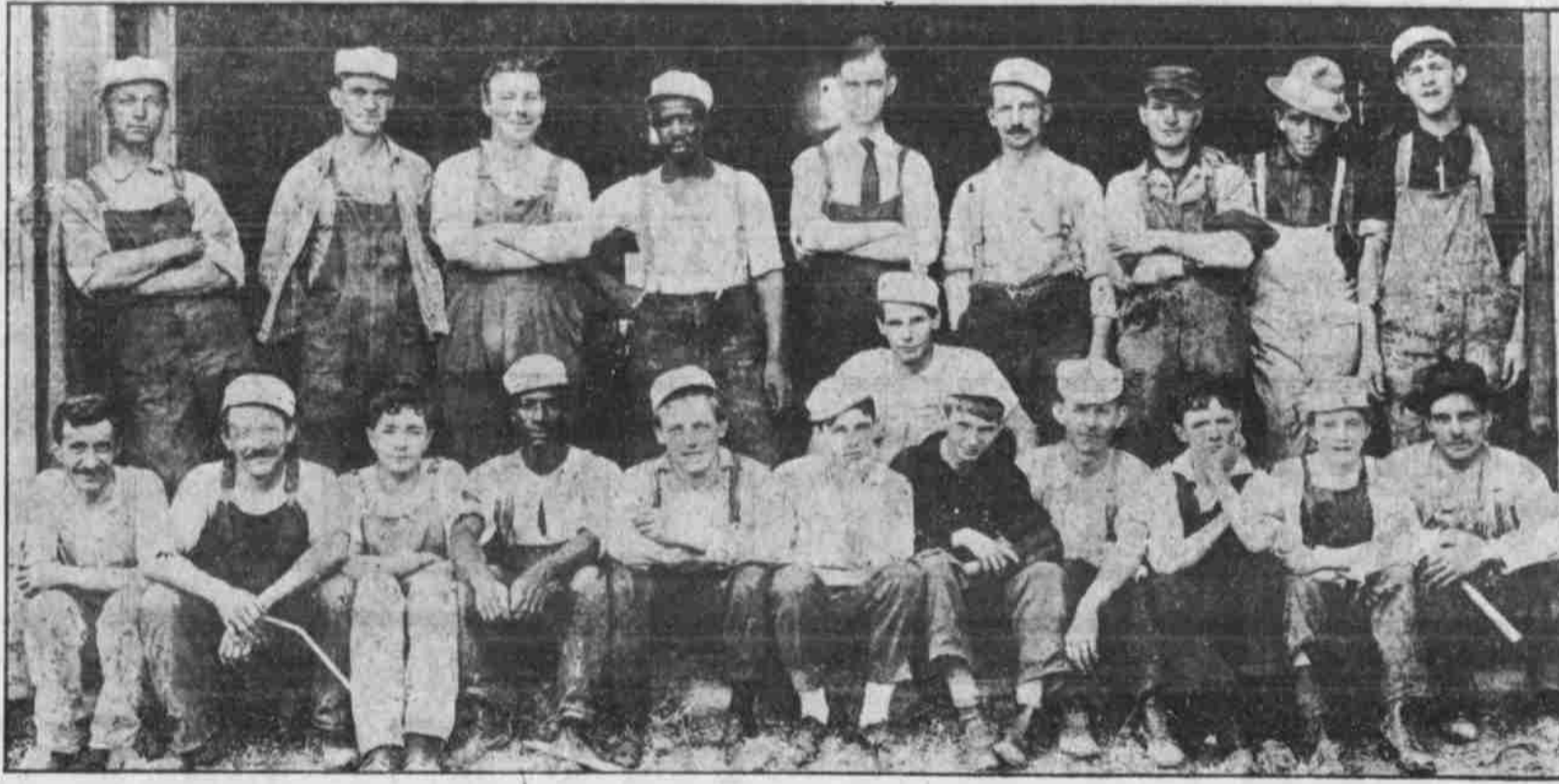
The building of these floats during the summer season employs the active energies of a score or more of men and boys, and the entire work is performed in the Ak-Sar-Ben den on North Twentieth street.

The theme of the parade, which varies every year, is usually decided upon by the Board of Governors early in January or February, and then it devolves upon that versatile genius, Gus Renze, to carry out the idea in designing the floats. The preliminary work is generally intrusted by Mr. Renze to his three principal assistants, Lawrence Nebe, carpenter; Thomas Bedford, papiermache maker, and Charles Eaton, electrician. Around this quartet of artists are grouped a number of miscellaneous assistants, all of whom have their special part to do, but always under the eye of the principals of these several departments.

The plans once decided upon, foundations for the floats are laid on specially designed wagons, which have flanged wheels that they may run easily on the street car tracks. The work of building the floats continues during the entire initiation season, which begins in June, and is continued until the finishing touches are given the marvelous creations but a day or two before they are exhibited to the public in the great electrical parades.

The materials entering into the makeup of the floats, are lumber for the substantial frame work, chicken wire netting, muslin, plaster of paris, paper and papiermache. Every detail of the work is carried out in the Den. All of the figures are made there, including the papiermache statuary, animals,

Group of the Men Who Build the Ak-Sar-Ben Floats



ried on at the Den there has never been a fire, and but one or two trifling accidents. This is all the more remarkable because of the flimsy character of the materials used in float building, and the unavoidable accumulation of debris, of paper, shavings and cloth. The building is equipped with abundant fire hose, with fire plugs both inside and outside the building, and the working crew is trained in the handling of the hose should an emergency arise for its use.

The painting of the floats is carried on during their building, as several coats of paint are necessary to produce the best effects. The gold and silver foil and tinsel is applied by experts in that line, and the gold and silver paper is fixed to the floats with a specially prepared paste. An enormous quantity of this gaudy material is used in the float construction and is necessarily of all colors and shades.

The electrical equipment for the light effects is fixed in only after the floats have

ulated and are repeatedly tested, and no float is permitted to go out until its absolute safety is assured. The number of incandescent lamps used on the floats varies from 100 to several hundred, according to the design. The globes are colored to correspond with the place they are to occupy. They are grouped in sections so that the breaking of the wire of one section will not interfere with the illumination of the other sections.

The floats once completed are drawn out of the building onto Twentieth street by the big teams that are to pull them along the street car tracks, for it should be borne in mind that the motive power of the floats is horses, the trolley being used only to convey the electricity to the floats for the illuminating effects, and are there tested again for electrical safety. This once assured the

parade then becomes a thing of life, though the floats are not always illuminated fully until they reach the parade starting point at Sixteenth and Cuming streets.

In the early stages of the float building only about two men are employed on the work and the force of helpers is increased as the necessity requires. It is an all summer's work, the greater work being done after all the parts are assembled. The work is carried on with several of the floats at once in order that the materials may dry gradually and thus expedite their completion.

put onto these beautiful creations, they are With the immense amount of work that is designed to last but for one night, that of the electrical parade. That being over, the gorgeous chariots, which may be only slightly damaged in their long tour of the streets, ad-

mitted by thousands and thousands of people, they are hauled back to the big yard of the Den and left there until after the Coronation ball, when they are hauled into the Den again, and during the winter are dismantled and taken down. This work of dismantling is usually the winter's work of the janitor of the building. Very little of the material is used in the floats for the succeeding year, unless it be a few of the figures that can be utilized in the new float decorations. But even in that event they are repainted and reornamented so that they would not be recognized as having ever been in use before.

Other cities have often made

propositions for the loan or purchase of the Ak-Sar-Ben floats for spectacular parades. These propositions have been invariably turned down, for the reason that the floats are too bulky for transportation.

In brief, the Ak-Sar-Ben parades can only be seen in Quivora's realm. Its beauty is peculiar and exclusive to Omaha. The float chariots are made for Samson and his subjects exclusively. To see them in their glorious beauty one must come to Omaha.

The parade this year, the fourteenth of the series, is going to be the most beautiful of all, and that is saying much in view of the ecstatic admiration that has been given its thirteen predecessors.

The Genius of Ak-Sar-Ben



GUS RENZE AND THE GOAT.



COMING WITH THE FATTED CALF TO WELCOME THE PRODIGAL.

enforced against smoking about the building goblins, dragons and other decorative features. These figures are usually made early in the season, molded and pressed, being placed in the position they are to occupy permanently on the float and are then let dry thoroughly. It often occurs that the designs are not completed until the middle of August or the beginning of September, as new suggestions are constantly presenting themselves which will produce better effects. After the various figures have become thoroughly dried, the building of the remainder of the float about them begins, and then follows the painting.

Water colors only are used in the painting of the floats, in order to reduce the danger of fire to the minimum. Rigid rules are during the construction of the floats. In the fourteen years that this work has been car-

been nearly completed, and once the wiring is finished the plaster of paris additions necessary to finish off the symmetry of the designs are added.

The paper used in the construction is what is known as "express" paper, because of its facility for absorbing moisture. It is astonishing how strong and rigid these paper constructions become after they have dried completely. The foundations of the creations must be strong and rigid, and absolutely safe in order that no mishap may follow to those who will have to ride upon them. Here and there iron rods are provided as grips for those riding on the floats.

In wiring the floats for the electrical effects through the incandescent lamps, as well as for supplying the current to the floats from the trolley, every precaution is taken to avoid danger. The wires are perfectly in-



ASTRONOMER WAPPICH.



PRELATE HODDER.



MUPTI THOMAS.



"FAIRY" MOLONEY.

