

# Ak-Sar-Ben Founded in Hard Times

**Little Group of Far-Sighted  
Men Formed Organization  
In 1895 — Society Has  
Helped Omaha Grow.**

"Behold, who great is this our Ak-Sar-Ben grown!" Thus might the words of Shakespeare be paraphrased to describe the progress of the unique and now nationally famous Ak-Sar-Ben enterprise.

Founded by a few men who were almost desperate in the "hard times" of 1895, it has had a continuous existence and an equally continuous and astounding growth. This year it had more than 4,300 paid memberships. And it is now building a great permanent exposition at a cost of \$2,000,000.

Omaha, together with the rest of this broad land, was pretty "dead" in the early '90s. The city had a considerable number of kicks from which it had suffered.

The little group of forward-looking and far-seeing men in whose breasts hope sprang eternal had sought for a method of awakening the city from its dull sleep even before the happy thought of Ak-Sar-Ben was hit upon.

**Fair Blossoms.** The first prescription was the state fair. Omaha business men went down to the capital and took that annual institution away from poor, old Lincoln. The fair blossomed north on fair grounds several miles outside of the city. Many people visited it. But this didn't help Omaha much.

In 1894 those who were seeking a cure for Omaha's troubles agreed that something must be done to bring people to the metropolis itself, something to entertain the people, something to make them go home thinking and talking about the good time they had here.

The remedy being decided upon, a committee was sent to St. Louis to study the "Veiled Prophet" and to New Orleans to investigate the modus operandi of the Mardi Gras. On the committee were Dudley Smith, E. M. Bartlett and W. R. Bennett.

**Spread Discoveries.** These men visited the two festivals in the southern cities. So impressed were they with the parade in New Orleans that they bought the paraphernalia for use in Omaha. By the time they arrived back in Omaha they had agreed that a permanent organization was needed in Omaha.

They spread their discoveries, observations and suggestions before the business men here and hope began to send forth the buds of enthusiasm. The suggestions of the committee were approved. The name, "Ak-Sar-Ben," being "Nebraska" spelled backwards, was adopted and the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben became an institution. L. M. Riehm, then local manager for the American District Telegraph company, prepared the first ritual.

Formal announcement of the organization of the Knights was made April 21, 1895. The first board of governors was composed of the following: Dudley Smith, R. S. Wilcox, C. E. Belden, W. L. Dickerson, L. M. Riehm, C. C. Chase, E. E. Bryson, T. A. Frve and M. J. Penfold.

The second year of the state fair, near Omaha, saw the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben ready to entertain the visitors, and they sent them away happy in a new idea of Omaha and its people.

**First Were Crude.** Contrasted with the elaborate entertainments of later years, those of 1895 and the years immediately following were rather crude, but in those days they were considered marvelous and their fame spread throughout the state and neighboring states, bringing larger and larger crowds each year.

After five years the state fair was put back in Lincoln and Ak-Sar-Ben became linked inseparably with the name of Omaha, flourishing and growing greater with the passing years.

Gus Renze, the great artificer of Ak-Sar-Ben, was living in Omaha at the time as good luck would have it. Gus has been the presiding genius of every year's Ak-Sar-Ben shows and parades. He is recognized as without a peer in this line of work in this country.

He worked with the New Orleans floats the first year. And the next year the floats which he designed and built were more wonderful than the New Orleans floats.

**Develop Pageant.** The wagons purchased with the New Orleans floats were used for three years. Then W. S. Jardine suggested that wagons be built with wheels gauged to fit the street car tracks. This idea was executed with admirable results. This was the first move in developing the old-fashioned parade of floats into the brilliant modern pageant.

The first electrically-illuminated floats appeared in 1898.

Bicycles were the principal means of quick mechanical locomotion in 1895 and the first parade of festival week that year was one of bicycles.

In the column were 3,500 wheelmen and wheelwomen. Nearly every bicycle in the city was in the parade. The "wheels" were decorated with flowers and flags. One body of riders was dressed entirely in white and the bicycles wrapped with white cloth. These riders changed continually from close formation to extended order, producing a wondrous effect.

**Parade a Marvel.** The parade was a marvel for those days when automobiles were still almost unheard of.

The second parade of that initial year was one in which the towns and counties of the state were represented by float. This served the purpose of showing that Omaha was interested in the rest of the state and appreciated the value of outlying counties and cities to its own advancement.

The third parade was a civic and military affair, in which drill teams of fraternal organizations and committees of the Nebraska National

## Board of Governors of Ak-Sar-Ben



W.D. MOSFORD, GEORGE BRANDIS, GUS RENZE, W.Q. WOOD, CHAS. E. BLACK, ARTHUR P. GUION, J.W. GAMBLE, RANDALL BROWN, E. BUCKINGHAM, G. SAUNDER, J. SAUNDER, G. DIEZ, J.W. GAMBLE, J.W. GAMBLE.

Guard and other military organizations took part. On the night of the fourth day there was the triumphal entry of King Ak-Sar-Ben and his knights, with the coronation ceremony and the grand ball at the Den. E. M. Bartlett and Miss Meliora Woolworth were the first king and queen.

Since those days Ak-Sar-Ben has staged some of the most elaborate parades ever seen in the world.

**Thousands of Visitors.** The Trans-Mississippi exposition in 1898 and the Greater America exposition of the next year saw great development of the Ak-Sar-Ben idea. Tens of thousands of visitors from all over the land came here.

The Den at Twentieth and Grant street was bought by the Knights in 1905 for \$11,500.

The first street fair or carnival was held in 1900 and the proceeds of this helped to defray the heavy expenses of the elaborate street parades and other entertainments.

This feature has been continued with great success ever since.

And so, from a small organization with a few hundred paid members, facing a doubtful and not encouraging future, Ak-Sar-Ben has developed in a quarter century into a rock-founded institution of incalculable value to Omaha in a business and social way. Its expenditures are more than \$75,000 a year and it is now fostering a \$2,000,000 enterprise.

The hopes and ambitions of the little body of men who had to do with the establishment of the organization have been more than realized. As the years have passed Omaha

and Nebraska, Iowa, northwestern Missouri, southern Minnesota, the Dakotas, eastern Colorado and Wyoming have developed a co-operative spirit that has resulted in wonderful development for all.

**Big Frontier Town.** There have been good times and hard times, but on the whole the tendency has been forward at an astonishing rate. Omaha's commercial institutions in both the wholesale and retail lines have grown by leaps.

It is impossible to recognize to what extent Ak-Sar-Ben has been responsible for Omaha's growth. But its effect has been very great. A quarter century ago Omaha was a big frontier town. Today it is a metropolitan city. Bank clearings in that day in Omaha were less than \$200,000,000. This year they will aggregate \$1,500,000,000.

And Ak-Sar-Ben, with 4,300 paid members and many thousands of other members from out of town, is entering on an even greater development than ever before.

**Denies Offering Wife \$75,000 For Divorce**

Boston, Sept. 18.—Davis H. Cohen, doing business as the Boston Stocking company, denied, in the superior court, offering his wife \$75,000 to allow him to obtain a divorce, so that he might marry the manager of his factory, Miss Flora Prussian.

Cohen admitted that such a sum was named for separate support, but declared that he went to Reno, Nev., solely for his health.

### How Ak-Sar-Ben Was Given a Name

**Committee of Three, Assisted  
by Priest, in 1894 Chose  
Moniker for Order.**

A committee sent in 1894 to New Orleans by Omaha business men was on its way home, convinced that a permanent organization was just what Omaha needed to "pep" things up. The committee consisted of E. M. Bartlett, Dudley Smith and W. R. Bennett.

Discussing the question of a name, Mr. Smith suggested that the name of the state, Nebraska, spelled backward would make a catchy and appropriate name. This was adopted eventually.

On the same train was a Catholic priest, Father Enright of Kansas City. He was interested in the discussion. It was he who suggested that the domain of Ak-Sar-Ben be known as the Seven Cities of Cibola which Coronado sought.

Father Enright's knowledge of languages also served to show a remarkable significance of the several syllables of the word "Ak-Sar-Ben." He pointed out that these syllables have the following meanings: "Ak" in Syrian, means "head of the household," "Sar" in Arabic, means "household," "Ben" in Hebrew means "brother in the household."

The whole word then, signifies the king, his domain and his retainers.

### Gus Renze, Boss Of Float Designs, Is Work's Nemesis

**Man Who Directed First Ak-Sar-Ben Parade Now Chief Artificer for Organization.**

Gus, the Great Artificer of Ak-Sar-Ben. Peculiarly fortunate was Ak-Sar-Ben in having residing in Omaha when the new order started, a man who is a recognized genius in construction of floats and the making of "shows" such as Ak-Sar-Ben needs.

This man is Gus Renze. He was in the decorating business in Omaha when Ak-Sar-Ben was launched in 1895. He was chosen to remodel the floats bought from New Orleans for the first parade. And, like the man in the ballad, "He did his work so doggone, darned well then, That now he is the chief gazabo of the Ak-Sar-Ben den."

The result of his remodeling of the New Orleans floats gave the board of governors a hunch that he was the very man they wanted. And the floats he built for the following year's parade were so much better than the New Orleans examples that the board of governors knew their hunch was decidedly right.

And he has been at the head of the artificing department ever since, and stands pre-eminent in the United States in this line of work.

Even several years before Ak-Sar-Ben was thought of, Gus had tried to start some sort of fall parade in Omaha. But the financial end of the project didn't work out well enough to make the parade possible.

### \$11,500 Was Paid for Ak-Sar-Ben Show Den 15 Years Ago

The Ak-Sar-Ben Den was bought by the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben in 1905.

The Knights had occupied it for years but only as renters, paying \$600 a year for rent.

In the fall of 1904 a movement for purchase of the Den was launched and in 1905 it was bought for \$11,500 and \$5,000 was spent on improvements.

The Den is a vast structure capable of seating many thousands, with an immense stage and great spaces for storage of floats and other paraphernalia. It is located on two square blocks of ground between Twentieth and Twenty-first and Grant and Burdette streets.

It is the scene of the brilliant coronation ball held each fall and of the weekly shows given each Monday night during the summer season.

### Ohio Towns Get Benefit Of Fines on Bootleggers

Akron, O., Sept. 18.—Before national prohibition came predictions were made that many—and dire—would be the privations which would follow in the wake of the loss of revenue which the liquor interests had been paying to national, state and municipal authorities.

Apparently, there has been a rude awakening. It now appears that prohibition is a big paying investment.

Investigation discloses that municipalities and townships in this county are deriving a revenue three times as big as during the days when, under license, booze, hooch, et al. could be sold legally, and a portion of the license money paid into the state treasury by the liquor dealers was distributed among the local political subdivisions of the state.

Under an act passed by the Ohio legislature all fines collected from moonshiners, bootleggers, blind pigs, speakeasies and other dispensers of raisin jack are retained when collected, be it county, city or township.

### 113 Rattlesnakes Killed by Trapper

Portland, Ore., Sept. 18.—Rattles from 113 rattlesnakes killed by one man this summer form the lettering on a belt which is the latest acquisition of the United States biological survey office here. "Compliments of R. C. Fulkerson, 1920," is the wording formed by the rattles. Fulkerson is a coyote hunter near Ormond Wash., near Wenatchee. He killed the rattlesnakes while attending to his trapping.

### Dream Was True.

Providence, Sept. 18.—Frank Silva dreamed he was being robbed. He awoke to find a burglar had entered and made away with his \$500 roll. Now he believes in dreams.

### King Ak-Sar-Ben Has Many Titles

**Royal Personage Has Five  
Imposing Handles to  
His Name.**

Potentates have many titles. And King Ak-Sar-Ben is no exception to this rule. The citizen who will be clothed with the royal purple and ermine and crowned with the golden crown in the Den, otherwise known as the "Great Hall of the Knights" on the night of the coronation ball, will have these titles: King Ak-Sar-Ben XXVI, King of Quivera, Master of the Corn Belt, Prince of Nebraska and the Fiefs Adjacent, Lord Protector of Omaha and All Our Smiling Cities.

Some title! Well, he's some king, too, and rules over a territory much bigger and much richer than many an European king.

The name of the king, that is his name in private life, is kept a deep secret until the very night of the coronation. Only the board of governors and the king himself know it. This is a secret that the king keeps even from his wife, because, if he told his wife—well, you know how women are!

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### Notice to Our Patrons



Beginning September 1st  
**\$1.75 rooms will be \$2.00**  
**\$2.00 rooms will be \$2.50**  
**\$2.25 rooms will be \$2.50**  
**\$2.50 rooms will be \$3.00**

When the Hotel Conant was built in 1917 our rates were fixed at "\$2.50 and down" and we have so maintained them in the face of advancing costs of everything pertaining to hotel operation. As there appears no prospect of costs reacting to former levels, we are obliged to make an advance in our rates.

We hope you will appreciate our position and that this necessary advance will meet with your approval. Sincerely yours

### Hotel Conant OMAHA

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Re-Sale Shares**

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Semi-Annually**  
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Put your money in these seasoned, tested securities, where it will be safe and returns sure.



Visitors in Omaha are cordially invited to call on us during their stay in the city.

Do not be discouraged by the torn-up condition of Dodge and Eighteenth streets. Our office will seem just so much pleasanter in contrast with its abnormal surroundings. Imagine the work of grading and paving completed, and you will appreciate the fine location of Home Builders' building as a place of business.

In constructing the building we anticipated the new grade. We selected the site for its future possibilities. Dodge and Eighteenth streets promise to be two of the main arteries of traffic in the very near future.

The long look ahead is one of our working principles. That is what makes our securities so safe. They are predicated upon a sure outcome.

You will find that we are in a position to render very helpful service in the matter of investing your surplus profitably. Call and find out what we have to offer. Ask for some of our interesting literature.

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C. C. Shimer, President.  
G. A. Rohrbough, Secretary.  
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FISCAL AGENTS.

# Ak-Sar-Ben Visitors Welcome

We wish to extend to you a cordial invitation to visit us and make our office your headquarters during your stay in Omaha.

## Omaha Liberty Fire Insurance Company

## Nebraska National Insurance Company

**P. F. ZIMMER, President and Manager**  
Second Floor Finance Bldg. 1817 Douglas St., Omaha, Neb.