

Ak-Sar-Ben Development Reflects Omaha's Growth

Institution Bears Same Relation to City as Mardi Gras to New Orleans or "Veiled Prophet" to St. Louis; Shows Now Finest of Kind.

The growth of Omaha is reflected in the growth of Ak-Sar-Ben, Omaha's chief business boosting organization. Founded 'way back in 1895 by just a few men with the interests of Omaha at heart, that tiny organization has grown to huge proportions in the 25 years of its existence.

The organization was founded when "hard times" were knocking at the door of every Nebraska business man, especially those of Omaha. There was no mistaking the knock and business was going to the dogs fast. Several business men got together and decided that something should be done and done quickly, to better conditions.

Business men having recognized the value of St. Louis' "Veiled Prophet" and the New Orleans Mardi Gras, they decided that Omaha should have something similar.

Committee Appointed.

A committee composed of Dudley Smith, E. M. Bartlett and W. R. Bennett was appointed to go to New Orleans and study the methods of the city used in staging the Mardi Gras. They also visited St. Louis and noticed the popularity and attractiveness of the big parades.

The committee went and was impressed. The members decided that Omaha should have the same thing. Upon their return they made their discoveries known to other Omaha business men and the first tentative organization was formed.

After this the next problem was to find a name for the infant organization. On the way back from New Orleans the name had been discussed and one man proposed Ak-Sar-Ben, Nebraska spelled backwards. This proposition was placed before the meeting and the name was adopted. L. M. Rheem, then local manager for the American District Telegraph company wrote the first ritual and the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben became established and ready for work. Formal announcement of the organization was made April 1, 1895.

Board of Governors.

The first board of governors was: Dudley Smith, R. S. Wilcox, C. C. Belden, W. L. Dickey, L. M. Rheem, C. C. Chase, E. E. Bryson, T. A. Frye and M. J. Penfold.

Omaha had always cast covetous glances at the Nebraska state fair which had always been held at Lincoln. The fair never came here because the city was unable to entertain the visitors. In 1894 the fair did come to Omaha and business men thought they had a panacea for their troubles, but their panacea fell flat, the fair was held outside the city some distance and as far as boosting Omaha and being of any aid, it was a dud. When Ak-Sar-Ben was organized the state fair came to Omaha in 1895 and was a success because the Knights made it so.

Visitors to the state fair went home pleased with their entertainment and boosters for Ak-Sar-Ben.

Back to Lincoln.

After five years the state fair went

back to Lincoln and since that time King Ak-Sar-Ben has been linked closely with Omaha. Yet the organization is not exclusively Omahan. Each year visitors to Omaha from almost every state in the union and citizens in many foreign countries are made members after being initiated.

The first entertainments were crude, nothing like the productions which are shown at the Den now. But year after year the shows got better and bigger and now they rank ahead of anything of their kind in the country.

Omaha patterned her parade ideas after those adopted and in use for years by New Orleans. Gus Renze, impresario of floats for Ak-Sar-Ben was chosen to make the floats for the first parade. He went to New Orleans and the first year worked on the floats the city had made to Omaha but his schooling had been of great help for in a short time he far surpassed anything the New Orleans had done and continues to do so.

Wagons Used.

For the first three years, wagons which had been purchased at New Orleans were used for the floats. Later W. S. Jardine suggested that trucks with wheels fitted the street car rails and hence was born the beautiful electrically lighted floats which now make up the Ak-Sar-Ben parades.

The first electrically lighted parade appeared in 1898. Bicycles were the principal features. There were 3,500 bicycles, beautifully decorated with the parade and the cause a great deal of comment. The second parade of the initial year was devoted to counties and towns of the state to show that Ak-Sar-Ben was not to be a strictly Omaha institution.

The third parade was a civic and military parade in which drill teams from every fraternal order in the city and the national guard took part. On the night of the fourth day there was the triumphal entrance of King Ak and his queen into the city, and the coronation festivities and ball were established. E. M. Bartlett and Miss Meloria Woolworth were the first king and queen. The coronation ball is now the crowning event of Ak-Sar-Ben year and each year the Den is crowded with knights and ladies. And since the first parade, which at that time was thought wonderful, Omaha's parades have become known nationally. The Trans-Mississippi exposition and the Greater American exposition of 1898 and 1899 saw great progress in Ak-Sar-Ben.

Den Cost \$11,500.

The Den at Twentieth and Grant streets was bought in 1905 for \$11,500. It would take several times that to buy the site now. The building has lately been enlarged and remodeled.

The first street carnival to be held in conjunction with Ak-Sar-Ben was held in 1900. This was given to help defray the expenses of the parades and ball. The carnival proceeds have been used every year since to help out on funds.

But all was not easy sailing during the 25 years of Ak-Sar-Ben. There were fat and lean times.

Scandal Mongers Barred

From W. Va. Police Court

Huntington, W. Va., Sept. 17.—Excitement, scandal mongers, public parasites and curiosity seekers of this community have been barred from police court hearings. The "closed door" policy was adopted by Police Chief John W. Coon. Hereafter only principals, witnesses, police court attaches, newspapermen and persons having a personal interest in such cases will be granted admission during trial of cases. A policeman will guard the entrance of the court room.

"Heretofore the police court room has been more or less a rendezvous for loafers and idlers who apparently glory in the misfortune of others," said Mr. Coon. "The fact that they are present hinders the smooth and rapid course of justice."

Electric Parade Floats

I—Title Float.
"The Wondrous Fables of Aesop."
II—"The Lion and the Mouse."
The hungry lion, with a little mouse in his paws, listened to its piteous pleading and let it go free. In gratitude, when the lion was entrapped in a rope net, the mouse gnawed the ropes in pieces and freed its former captor.
Moral: Humble friends may prove valuable friends.
III—"Belling the Cat"
At the mouse party, an enterprising but youthful little mouse suggested that the cat be decorated with a bell so they could always tell when it was approaching them. It was thought a fine plan, till an old gray-bearded mouse wanted to know who was going to attach the bell, then silence prevailed.
Moral: "It is easy to propose impossible things."
IV—"The Frog King."
The frogs once tired of leading the simple life asked the gods for a king. The gods splashed down a log for their ruler. The frogs tired of the log and asked for a livelier king. The gods sent a crane, who promptly gobbled them up, right and left.
Moral: It is a simple thing to say that something should be done, but quite a different thing to do it.
V—"The Fox and the Grapes."
The wily old fox, when he found he could not reach the grapes, turned away saying, "Well, they are sour, anyhow. Who cares for those grapes?"
Moral: "There are those who despise and belittle that which is beyond their reach."
VI—"The Goose That Laid the Golden Eggs."
A goose once laid a golden egg every day. Its owner killed it to find the gold inside the poor goose. Then he found he had no more goose and no more eggs.
Moral: "Greed oft overreaches itself."

for a crust of bread, but they refused saying, "You should have saved something in the summer time instead of singing and dancing the months away."
Moral: "Always prepare for the days of adversity."
XII—"The Dog in the Manger."
This dog laid in the manger and snatched at the hungry cattle, so that they could not eat a bite, while he himself could not eat their hay.
Moral: "People oft grudge others what they cannot enjoy themselves."
XIII—"The Wolf and the Kid."
A foolish kid who strayed from the flock was overtaken alone by a terrible wolf. The poor little kid asked a moment's respite that it might dance and be joyful before its death. The wolf, amused, played on his pipes, while the kid danced, but the dog heard him and chased the unwary wolf away.
Moral: "Let nothing turn you from your purpose."
XVI—"The Northwind and the Sun."
The bitter Northwind and the Sun, to decide which was the stronger, tried to strip the coat off a traveller. The Wind raged and tore at it viciously, but the traveller only wrapped it closer about him. Then the Sun cast its gentle beams upon him and he quickly doffed his cloak.
Moral: "Gentleness and kind persuasion win where force and bluster fail."
XV—"The Father and His Sons."
A Father gathered his quarrelsome sons about his bedside and showed them he could easily break a bundle of sticks when they were apart, but if they were bound together by com-

mon ties, it was impossible to break or bend them.
Moral: "In unity, there is strength."
XVI—"The City Mouse and the Country Mouse."
The city mouse visited its country cousin, and had a very plain dinner and slept in a quiet hedgerow. On a return visit to the city, the country mouse dined at the club and tried to sleep in a flat but got chased out at both places, and spent the time in indignation and fear and trembling.
Moral: "Better poverty with security than riches with uncertainty."
XVII—"The Piping Fisherman."
The Fisherman piped and piped but never a fish came, then he got tired and cast his net and caught a plenty. Then he played on his pipes again and the fish in the net danced for him, because they were now in his power.
Moral: "If you fall into a man's power you must do as he bids."
XVIII—"The Concord Club."
Joyfully singing for the deflection of his majesty and all his loyal subjects.
Dedicated to the Concord club of Omaha in recognition of their success in the 1921 membership campaign.
XIX—"The Ak-Sar-Ben Singers."
Warbling right merrily in token of their allegiance to his majesty.
XX—"The King."
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