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The formation and early history of the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben as shown by Omaha newspapers

Arvid E. Nelson
University of Nebraska at Omaha

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THE FORMATION AND EARLY HISTORY OF
THE KNIGHTS OF AK-SAR-BEN
AS SHOWN BY OMAHA NEWSPAPERS

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of History
Municipal University of Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Arvid E. Nelson Jr.
November 1962
PREFACE

Little has been done in the way of collecting and preserving material dealing with local history. In surveying the various aspects of Omaha's history the author found many topics of interest which should be, and presently are not, in a collection. Many items of local interest have already vanished, and others will soon go the same way if proper research is not accomplished.

In selecting a topic for research the author discovered that no material had been collected on the Ancient Order of the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben, an institution which has become an integral part of the city in its sixty-eight years of existence. Thus, the purpose of this study has been to collect material dealing with this civic organization and provide a coherent account of its founding and early history before it is lost for all time.

As one might expect, the major portion of this research was done from local newspapers of the period, which have been preserved on microfilm in the Omaha Public Library. Since the records in the Ak-Sar-Ben office were too current for the period covered in this study they proved to be of little value, although for research done after 1920 they would be very helpful. The plates reproduced in the appendix of this thesis were secured from Mrs. Ethel Powell of the Ak-Sar-Ben Headquarters and also from Mr. Buchanan, who is the present owner.
of the Gus Renze Company.

At this time the author would like to acknowledge his indebtedness to Dr. Frederick W. Adrian of the Department of History of the University of Omaha for his constant interest and constructive criticism rendered in the preparation of this study. The author would also like to express his gratitude for the valuable assistance given him by the staff of the Omaha Public Library Reference Department. Finally, the author wishes to thank the World-Herald for access to their clipping file without which this thesis would have been made immeasurably more difficult to complete.

A.E.N.
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CHAPTER I

THE ORIGIN OF THE KNIGHTS OF AK-SAR-BN

One of the most unique civic organizations in the mid-west, established in 1895, was the Ancient Order of the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben. This organization was established as a temporary panacea to help Omaha survive the drought and depression which had spread over the city in the early 1890's. During this period brave pioneers, who opened the gateway to the West, were watching their dreams and hopes of Omaha becoming a "great metropolis," drift down the Missouri River to their rival Kansas City. Those citizens, who were seeking a cure for Omaha's troubles agreed that something must be done to bring people from the surrounding area to their city; something to entertain them once they were here and make the people return home thinking and talking about the hospitable treatment they had received in the city. These problems were solved when a number of prominent businessmen founded the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben, which provided "fabulous" entertainment for the state fair held in the city and turned the tide of the depression toward an era of prosperity.

The depression of 1893 caught the cities and towns of Nebraska in a paralyzing grip. Bank deposits of those years dropped from $53,674,113 in 1892 to $27,264,537 in 1896, and creditors of Nebraska banks had over five million dollars tied
up in one hundred and one institutions which failed.\textsuperscript{1} Factory buildings in Omaha and surrounding Nebraska towns stood empty, and store windows showed dismal "for rent" signs.

In many Nebraska towns street railway tracks, which had been built to reach new subdivisions, rusted from the lack of use. The population of Nebraska towns which had skyrocketed in the 1880's came to a standstill in the nineties. Omaha's major links with the industrial world, the railroads and big packers, became restive under federal restrictions, and heard from the city's streets were murmurs of the fearful Populist oratory of the eighteen nineties.\textsuperscript{2}

The city and its civic leaders were determined not to be subjugated by this depression and decided to rebuild their fallen fortunes. During these depression years the suburbs of Dundee and Benson were founded and South Omaha, home of the meat packing industry, increased greatly in population.\textsuperscript{3} In 1894 progressive businessmen formed the Chamber of Commerce and in the following year the Omaha Business Men's Association organized the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben, "to promote patriotism among Omaha citizens."\textsuperscript{4}

\begin{itemize}
\item[2] Ibid., p. 265.
\item[3] Ibid.
\item[4] Ibid.
\end{itemize}
The unsuccessful Nebraska State Fair held at Omaha in September of 1894 lead to the formation of the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben. At this fair hundreds of visitors, tired men, women, and crying children, thronged the downtown streets after alighting from shuttle trains that had brought them from the fair grounds located west of Omaha, later Ak-Sar-Ben Field.5

Night after night those weary women stood about in the streets of Omaha holding the moist hands of their crying children as they waited for transportation to take them back to their outstate homes.6 There was no entertainment; not a decent place to sleep could be found; Omaha businessmen had made absolutely no provisions for a crowd of this size; the weary fair visitors could do nothing but wait for the next overcrowded train to take them home.7

The State Fair Board, angry, because Omaha businessmen failed to provide suitable evening entertainment for families attending the fair, laid down an ultimatum: "Provide entertainment other than saloons, gambling houses and honkytonks for the 1895 fair or lose it to a competitive alert Lincoln." 8

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5 *Omaha Sunday Bee*, September 19, 1920.
6 *The Omaha Excelsior*, September 21, 1895.
7 Ibid.
In this ultimatum lay the seed for the most successful booster organization Omaha has ever known, the Ancient Order of the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben.9

Stunned by this appalling prospect the merchants of the city formed their booster club. They agreed that whatever was done must be big, spectacular, and striking. Their first plan was for a "harvest festival" climaxed by a night parade, but conservative merchants protested saying that this type of affair would require an enormous amount of cash, publicity, and organization; others countered by saying the result would warrant the additional expense.10

At that time, the state fair was re-located every five years by the State Board of Agriculture.11 The board consisted of twenty-eight members, including the president of every county agricultural society. The board, of course, always tried to locate the fair where it would be of general benefit to the entire state. Five years prior to 1894 Omaha applied for the state fair, but made little effort to impress the individual members of the board by stating the superior advantages of locating the fair in Omaha. As a result, Lincoln secured the fair and it was not until 1894 that Omaha regained

9Ibid.


11The Omaha Excelsior, September 21, 1895.
it from Lincoln much to the latter's dismay. 12

The State Board of Agriculture was disappointed in many respects with the way in which Omaha had handled the fair in 1894 and threatened to re-locate it in Lincoln the following year if provisions were not made for more and better entertainment. In September the board delivered an ultimatum to the city's civic leaders, who headed the state fair committee, to the effect that they would have until January 15, 1895, the date set for voting on the fair location, to raise money and provide a satisfactory plan for the entertainment of the state fair visitors in 1895. 13 The board warned that these preparations should be made by that date if the committee did not want the fair to be re-located in Lincoln.

In December of 1894 the Commercial Club consisting of Omaha businessmen assembled and appointed a committee to solicit subscriptions to aid the state fair financially. C C. Patterson was elected chairman of the committee to acquaint members of the State Board of Agriculture with the facilities Omaha had for the successful operation of the state fair. 14 This committee cited the following reasons of locating the fair in Omaha, rather than another place in the

12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
state, particularly in Lincoln. It stated that the city had better railroad facilities, faster and better trains, as well as many fast trains leading into Omaha from various parts of western Iowa. These facilities, the committee postulated, would undoubtedly enhance the attendance at the state fair.

These arguments were presented to the board when it met in the University of Nebraska chapel on the appointed date to decide on the location of the fair for 1895. The vote on the first ballot, stood: Omaha fifty, Lincoln forty-one and Grand Island eight. Omaha's civic leaders promised the board that one hundred acres of land would be available for the fair grounds and that improvements would be made on the amphitheater, which would seat twelve thousand people. They agreed, also, to provide street car and railroad facilities for transporting one hundred thousand people daily to and from the fair grounds.

Omaha businessmen estimated the cost of the state fair, exclusive of the floats, to be about ninety thousand dollars. This amount they felt should provide the needed improvements for the city and the state fair grounds. Considering the nationwide panic which held the country in its grip at that time some of the donations given, by Omaha enterprises, were

15The Omaha Daily Bee, September 19, 1895.
quite large. A list of the most liberal donations given are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metz Bros. Brewing Co.</th>
<th>$5,000</th>
<th>Kelley, Stiger &amp; Co.</th>
<th>$500</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Missouri Pacific</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>Nebr. Clothing Co.</td>
<td>$500</td>
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<tr>
<td>William Krug</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>Thomas Kilpatrick</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O. J. Packard</td>
<td>$5,000</td>
<td>W. H. Koenig</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John A. Weaver</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
<td>F. P. Kirkendall</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Kountze</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
<td>D. T. Mount</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. R. Bennett</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>F. D. Brown</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayden Bros.</td>
<td>$1,100</td>
<td>C. F. Reindorf</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston Store</td>
<td>$1,100</td>
<td>Lewis Bradford</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed Cadshy</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>George F. Lombard</td>
<td>$500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Z. T. Lindsay</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>Byron Reed Co.</td>
<td>$500</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cyrus Norton</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>E. ... Coe</td>
<td>$500</td>
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<tr>
<td>J. R. Markel &amp; Son</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>W. E. Clark</td>
<td>$500</td>
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<tr>
<td>J. B. Brown</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>John A. Creighton</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis S. Reed</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>Chicago Lumber Co.</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Stock Yards</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>C. L. Cady</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. A. Wakefield</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>H. F. Cady</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. L. Druin</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>C. L. Schafftee</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank E. Moores</td>
<td>$750</td>
<td>S. H. Clark</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. F. Smith</td>
<td>$700</td>
<td>E. A. Bowl</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. H. Davis</td>
<td>$600</td>
<td>Dewey &amp; Store</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. B. Kitchen</td>
<td>$500</td>
<td>G. H. Belli</td>
<td>$500</td>
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<tr>
<td>J. S. Ambler</td>
<td>$500</td>
<td>George Hicks</td>
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<td>American Biscuit Mfg. Co.</td>
<td>$500</td>
<td>H. Hardy &amp; Co.</td>
<td>$500</td>
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<td>Morrison White &amp; Co.</td>
<td>$500</td>
<td>W. J. Hughes</td>
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<tr>
<td>McCord Brady</td>
<td>$500</td>
<td>George A. Hoagland</td>
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On the evening of March 28, 1895, a meeting was called at the Commercial Club, with sixty of Omaha's most prominent businessmen in attendance. At this meeting the twelve men who formed the executive committee of the Omaha Business Men's Association and who had taken entire charge of the festivities of fair week presented a plan before the assembled businessmen. This plan was to secure for Omaha the floats which had comprised

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The Omaha Excelsior, September 21, 1895.
the Mardi Gras Parade at New Orleans the preceding February.17

Walter Jardin, a member of the twelve man committee, one which eventually made up the original board of governors for the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben, and Gus Renze, Omaha's leading artificer had previously ascertained that the floats could be purchased at a reasonable price.18 Immediately after the presentation of this information a committee was appointed to see if enough money could be raised among the citizens of Omaha to buy the floats. To start out upon the streets of Omaha during those times of depression in search of more money was a perilous undertaking, but nobody flinched and considerable progress was reported at the next meeting. The amount collected for the floats was in addition to that secured for the state fair fund. At the following meeting the whole matter of raising the money needed for the purchase of the floats was placed in the hands of the executive committee of twelve men who were the following:

Major R. S. Wilcox, president of the committee and local manager of Browning & Co., wholesale grocers.

Mr. Dudley Smith, vice president of the committee and president of Steele-Smith Grocery Co., wholesale grocers.

Mr. H. J. Penfold, treasurer of the committee and owner of the Penfold Drug Co.

17 Ibid.

18 South Omaha Sun, October 20, 1955.
Mr. William Lyle Dickey, secretary of the committee and owner of the William Lyle Dickey & Co.
Mr. Lewis H. Sheen, general manager of the American District Telegraph.
Hon. E. N. Bartlett of Bartlett, Baldrige & DeBoard, Attorneys
Mr. Thomas A. Fry, manager of the Booth Packing Co.
Mr. Elmer E. Bryson, local manager of the Fleischmann Compressed Yeast Co.
Mr. Walter Jardine of the Omaha Merchants Express Co.
Mr. John E. Utt, commissioner of the Commercial Club.
Mr. William R. Bennett of the W. R. Bennett Department Store.
Mr. Clement Chase, Editor of *The Omaha Excelsior*. 19

These twelve men became the original board of governors of the Knights of Mt.-Car-Bon. They immediately attacked the job of preparing for the state fair and formed the regular habit of lunching together every Monday noon at the Commercial Club where they discussed state fair matters for several hours. They met also at the home of a member of the board every Thursday evening to continue this discussion. All members of the various committees labored together harmoniously, and not a dollar was expended by the committee for salaries for themselves or for others who helped, except that of the superintendent of construction, Gus Renze, and his assistant. 20

In April of 1891, Bartlett, Smith and Bennett together with Renze, the famed artificer, went to New Orleans to select

19*The Omaha Excelsior*, September 21, 1895.

20Ibid.
the floats and secure the parade costumes. While visiting New Orleans they secured information on various aspects of carnival management and were handsomely treated by Mr. Isaacson and other gentlemen prominent in the Rex, Proteus, and Comus Society of the Crescent City. The committee bought every piece of equipment which had been used in the New Orleans Mardi Gras. The twenty floats were purchased for fifteen thousand dollars and the costumes, which had been made in Paris, for an additional eight thousand dollars.

The committee made arrangements for the floats to be collapsed, packed securely, and loaded into box cars for shipment, and it required a special train of fifteen cars to transport the floats and Parisian costumes from New Orleans to Omaha. When the shipment reached its destination it was decided by the men that Gus Renze should repaint and refashion each float to harmonize with the theme of the proposed parade. The committee was convinced that a permanent organization such as the Rex, Proteus and Comus Society of the Crescent City was just what Omaha needed to add zest to its progressive outlook.

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21 Morning World-Herald, April 16, 1929.
22 World-Herald, September 5, 1895.
23 South Omaha Sun, October 20, 1955.
24 The Omaha Sunday Bee, September 14, 1920.
Enroute to Omaha the committee stopped to view the pageant of the Veiled Prophets at St. Louis and the one held annually at Kansas City. As they were traveling home on the train from Kansas City this very much impressed group decided they would organize a secret society similar to the Priests of Pallas of Kansas City.

The next question which came up was, "What shall we call this organization?" At first, no one had a suggestion, but Dudley Smith finally proposed, "Why not reverse the name of our beloved state, since everything seems to be going backwards these days?" He continued, "Nebraska hyphenated and spelled backwards is Ak-Sar-Ben." Another member suggested that since this group of Omaha men had saved the fair for the city the organization should be called the "Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben."26

Traveling on the same train was a Catholic priest, Father Enright, of Kansas City. He became interested in the discussion and suggested that the domain of Ak-Sar-Ben be known as the Kingdom of Quivira, since Omaha was close enough to where historians believed the kingdom had once existed. Furthermore, he proposed that the Seven Cities of Cibola be included within the ritual of the new organization.

25 Vestal, loc. cit.
26 Ibid.
27 The Omaha Sunday Bee, September 19, 1920.
because these cities were located within the boundaries of the Kingdom of Quivira, that Coronado had sought and according to some historians had found in 1541.

Father Enright's knowledge of language succored the group, when he made the significant suggestion that the three syllables of the word Ak-Sar-Ben had indicative meaning. He pointed out that these syllables had the following meanings:

"Ak" in Syrian, means "head of the household."
"Sar" in Arabic, means "household."
"Ben" in Hebrew means "Brother in the household."

Thus, the whole word signified the king, his domain, and his retainers.

When the committee returned to Omaha and related to other members of the Omaha Business Men's Association what they had accomplished, the organization voted to adopt the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben as their title. Thus, these twelve men became the original board of governors of the Ancient Order of the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben. They decided to put the money already collected into the state fair building fund and they in return provided the money from their own treasury for the floats and costumes purchased in New Orleans. They gave their pledge to

28 The Omaha Excelsior, November 13, 1909. For a description and map showing Coronado's trek to the interior of the United States consult Appendix A.

29 The Omaha Sunday Bee, September 19, 1900.

30 The Omaha Excelsior, September 21, 1895.
the city that their organization would provide the entertainment needed for the 1895 state fair.\(^{31}\)

A short time later the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben decided to lease the coliseum. It was the largest building in Omaha and at that time the largest in the Middle West. The Knights decided to lease it for one year, with a clause in the lease stating that it could be renewed for a term of five years if the organization wished.\(^{32}\) The amount agreed upon was six hundred dollars per year.\(^{33}\)

Until 1895 people referred to the coliseum as the Madison Square Garden of the Middle West, but from that time on it was called the Ak-Sar-Ben den.\(^{34}\) The coliseum had been built in 1887 at Twentieth and Burdette Streets at a cost of more than twenty-five thousand dollars. It was first used for the nationally famous six-day bicycle races which attracted audiences of more than ten thousand. The coliseum then, became a roller skating rink and remained so until it was purchased by the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben.\(^{35}\)

After leasing the coliseum the Knights sat about

\(^{31}\)Ibid.

\(^{32}\)World-Herald, September 5, 1895.

\(^{33}\)The Omaha Sunday Bee, September 19, 1920.

\(^{34}\)Vestal, loc. cit.

\(^{35}\)World-Herald, September 5, 1895.
organizing their planned secret society. Lewis Rheen, the local manager for the American District Telegraph Company, was chosen to draw up the initial ritual of the secret organization and the first initiation was held early in the summer of 1895. This was followed by similar initiations every Monday evening during the summer. The ceremony was a unique free show which combined the satire of a college fraternity initiation and the solemnity of a dignified secret order. The novices were assigned unrehearsed parts in the play as part of their initiation and spectators were brought by special trains from all over the neighboring counties on both sides of the river to share in the entertainment which was held in the Ak-Sar-Ben den.

The Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben was founded as a secret society for men only. It was formed as a non-profit organization and its by-laws provided that it would be directed by twelve governors, who would be prominent leaders of Omaha. These governors were expected to give freely of their time without drawing one penny remuneration. The men who made up the original board of governors agreed to these stipulations. They believed that Ak-Sar-Ben's program was good for Omaha

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37 Vestal, loc. cit.

38 World-Herald, April 26, 1929.
and the entire Middle West.  

The organization's aims, which have remained unchanged throughout its history were threefold: First, the organization aspired to weld together the business and professional men of the city of Omaha and surrounding area into a compact secret society, which would present a new show annually. It was planned that these performances should consist of vast paraphernalia and hilarious ceremonies. Men of the Mid-west, particularly, would be invited to these secret ritualistic den shows where they would be "lavishly" entertained. Secondly, during days and nights of state fair week, the organization planned to provide attractions such as street pageants and parades of "great magnitude" which would portray historical and political events pertaining to Nebraska in particular, and the United States in general. The third motive behind Ak-Sar-Ben's organization was to give to the people of Nebraska and adjoining states a wonderful and "magnificent" coronation ball, which was planned for late September or early October to close the autumnal festive season.  

At this ball in regal ceremony would be crowned a king and queen who would hold social sway over the fabled Kingdom of Quivira for one year. The king was to be selected,

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39 The Omaha Excelsior, September 21, 1897.


41 Ibid.
because of his civic leadership and he would usually be chosen from the board of governors. It was arranged that the twelve men who made up the board of governors would select the queen, the maids of honor, and ladies in waiting for each coronation ball. If one made application and was accepted into the secret society he was and still is required to pay ten dollars annually. This fee paid in the year 1895, entitled one to full privileges of the organization, such as, being able to attend a den show every Monday night during the summer to which he could bring as many guests as desired and also, he was permitted to attend the court ball with a lady.

Early in the spring of 1895 the executive committee of the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben offered ten dollars for the best suggestion for the name of the proposed entertainment which was to be given in connection with the 1895 Nebraska State Fair. Suggestions came in from every direction, and embraced all manner of ideas. The one selected was made by Louise MacDonough, a stenographer in the office of Horton and Blackburn, located at that time in the First National Bank Building.

Louise, twenty years of age, was born and reared in

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42 The Omaha Excelsior, September 21, 1895.
43 Gamble, loc. cit.
44 The Omaha Excelsior, September 22, 1895.
Nebraska. She had been educated in the Catholic schools of Omaha and Plattsmouth and had taken a business course in high school. Her father, who was dead, had published at one time an Omaha journal The Watchman and was known to the old timers as "Little Mac." Louise suggested the "Feast of Mondamin" as a name for the festivities. Her letter to the executive committee was as follows:

Omaha, April 9, 1895

The Commercial Club
City-Gentlemen,

In entering into the competition which you have organized for the selection of a name for the autumnal festivities to be run in connection with the state fair I am first impressed with the idea that the committee will desire a name which will also apply especially to our state. I believe that it is conceded that were Nebraska to cease to be a part of the greatest of all republics and to become a kingdom of her own the ruling sovereign would be hailed as King Corn. Accordingly, it seems to me that the name of the festivities which are to be of the nature of a harvest fair should recognize the dominion of the corn crop of this state.

My inspiration in the selection of a name is Longfellow's immortal poem "Hiawatha." In that poem I find that the Indian maize is given a characterization of its own under the name of Mondamin, the god of Indian corn. I find that Mondamin, the god of Indian corn, is described in the fifth section of the poem as the friend of man in these words:

"From the master of life descending
I, the friend of man, Mondamin,"

Again in the thirteenth section appear these lines:

"All around the happy village
Stood the maize fields green and shining,
Waved the green plumes of Mondamin."

Further along in this same section the harvest time is pictured in these lines:

45 Ibid.
"Let us gather in the harvest,  
Let us wrestle with Mondamin,  
Strip him of his plumes and tassels  
Of his garments green and yellow."

It seems to me in consideration of the attributes of Mondamin that an autumnal festival in his honor (and I take it that the honor of a prosperous year in the great corn growing state of Nebraska) could be given no better name than "The Feast of Mondamin."

I therefore, tender you that name, "The Feast of Mondamin," to be applied to the celebration which we all hope will be a celebration of profuse prosperity, induced by a magnificent crop of the golden cereal.

Yours truly,  
Louise MacDonaugh  
2215 California St.

The formal announcement of Ak-Sar-Ben appeared in the local newspapers on April 21, 1895. It was in the form of an article written by Judge Savage describing the Kingdom of Quivira. He related how Coronado in search of the Seven Cities of Cibola had discovered and penetrated the land of Quivira, as far as the Platte River in 1541. It was explained that the name Ak-Sar-Ben, Nebraska spelled backwards, had been substituted for Coronado; the etymological derivation of the syllables in Ak-Sar-Ben was also given.

The article, went on and discussed the twenty floats which had arrived on May 13, 1895. It related how they

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46 Ibid.
47 Sorenson, loc. cit.
48 *The Omaha Daily Bee*, April 21, 1895.
49 *Omaha Sunday Bee*, September 19, 1920.
50 *World-Herald*, May 12, 1895.
had been purchased from New Orleans and were fifteen feet wide, thirty-five feet long, mounted on five large wheels and would be pulled by six teams of horses. Since the floats arrived, only the workmen, who were pledged to secrecy, and members of the Order of the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben were admitted to the den where all were being reassembled. Thus, the article remarked, until the floats appeared on the streets in the "grand" pageant on the evening of September 19, their beauty, and meaning would remain a mystery to Omahans.

The announcement also stated that the autumnal pageant would be named the "Feast of Mondamin," and there would be a parade every night of state fair week, with the "Feast of Mondamin" or Mardi Gras parade being given twice during the week. Arrangements had also been made for participants in the "Feast of Mondamin" to wear costumes. Colonel Cody was suggested as a candidate for the local King Rex, but the committee ascertained that he could not serve, and then decided that the king should be chosen from the board of governors, since this monarch would fill the shoes of the biggest man at the carnival ball.

The "Feast of Mondamin" ball was described as the


52 World-Herald, September 5, 1895.

53 The Omaha Daily Bee, April 21, 1895.
"greatest" dance ever to be given in Omaha and that it would take place at one of the downtown theatres, either the Creighton or the Boyd. A floor was to be laid above the seats of the theatre, placing it on a level with the stage and arrangements would be made to accommodate five hundred couples on the dance floor. The article promised that the city would be illuminated by electricity and gas and that most of the theatres would be open every night as well as for several matinees. The comment was made that several of the best shows in the country would be on the boards of the theatres. Also, during part of the fair week Pain's "Siege of Vicksburg," was on exhibition at Courtland Beach.

As soon as Ak-Sar-Ben's purposes were clearly put before the businessmen of Omaha, it began to gather in members. Elaborate circulars were distributed together with application blanks and the organization reached a total of 554 members by December of 1895. The applications instructed interested prospective members to include a ten dollar fee and address all communications to Samson, Box 777, Omaha. This anonymous or "pseudonymous" way of doing business made some people skeptical and "missionary" work was necessary to convince

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54 Ibid.
55 World-Herald, September 5, 1895.
56 Ramble, loc. cit.
57 The Omaha Excelsior, September 21, 1895.
them that it was not devised to protect the individual members of the committee, but rather insure greater secrecy. The scheme worked well and the Odd Fellows Hall at Fourteenth and Dodge Streets was secured for the initiations. They were held with tremendous and somewhat noisy success and before the end of the summer the organization outgrew its quarters and found it necessary to transfer its ingenious apparatus and terrible instruments of torture to the coliseum, hereafter to be known as the den of Ak-Sar-Ben.

The executive committee of Ak-Sar-Ben devised a number of schemes for increasing the funds in the strong-box of their Lord High Treasurer. A beautiful badge was designed symbolizing Ak-Sar-Ben and five thousand of these were manufactured for sale to the general public as a souvenir of the "Feast of Mondamin." At fifty cents each the badges netted a considerable sum. These souvenirs were sent to surrounding areas and served as an effective advertisement for Omaha.

\[58\] Ibid.
CHAPTER II

PREPARATION FOR THE FAIR PRESENTED OMAHANS
WITH MANY PROBLEMS

The executive committee of the Omaha Business Men's Association made many promises to the State Board of Agriculture in order to persuade them not to re-locate the state fair in 1895. Striving to fulfill their commitments to the board the committee was presented with many problems. Some Omaha businessmen were of the opinion that it would take a "near miracle" to raise the money needed to rebuild the state fair grounds as the committee had promised. Once the money had been raised the committee still had the problems of housing and transporting visitors during fair week.

To cope with the problems of preparing for the state fair, the Omaha Fair and Speed Association was organized and incorporated on April 30, 1895.¹ The aim of this organization was to prepare the state fair grounds for the festive week. The capital stock of the association was placed at $150,000 which was divided into six thousand shares at twenty-five dollars each. The association spent sixty thousand of the $150,000 on new state fair buildings.²

¹*World-Herald*, January 1, 1896.
²*The Omaha Daily Bee*, January 1, 1896.
On the morning of April 22, 1895, work was commenced on the state fair grounds west of Omaha in preparation for the exposition which was scheduled for the week of September thirteenth. Initially, work was started on the race track with a large force of men pulling up the weeds with which the track was overgrown. It was necessary to pull the weeds instead of cutting them off and covering them, as the stumps would have protruded after the first rain and left the track in a rough and uneven condition. After pulling the weeds, the workers removed a foot of clay from the track and replaced it with one foot of black loam. Once this task was executed grading and rolling was immediately commenced.

The track was seventy feet wide and it cost thirty thousand dollars to put it in shape. Race officials from Buffalo, Detroit, and other cities having model tracks said the Omaha track, upon completion, would compare favorably with any other one-mile track in the country.

Superintendent Swigart, who was in charge of the racing activities at the state fair informed the citizens of Omaha on May 12, 1895, that a number of inquiries and applications had been received by him and that the indications were that there would be a string of the country's fastest racing horses

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3 World-Herald, April 23, 1895.
4 The Omaha Daily Bee, April 24, 1895.
5 World-Herald, May 12, 1895.
at the fair. The stables, located on the south eighty acres of the grounds, were very well built and Swigart intimated that the main reason for the "lavish" construction of the state fair buildings was that civic leaders planned on having the state fair located in the city indefinitely.

Transporting state fair visitors from Omaha to the state fair grounds was a problem for city officials. The president of the Omaha State Fair Association, Dan Farrell Jr., reported to a group of civic leaders on May 11, 1895, that a "big cloud" which appeared on the state fair horizon was that of transportation. He pointed out that the distance to the fair grounds was long for a carriage drive, no matter which route was selected, and it would be necessary for many people to rely upon electric or steam lines. The route out Leavenworth Street was not direct and the grade west of Holy Sepulchre Cemetery was steep while the turn south from Elmwood Park to Pacific Street was confusing to a stranger. Farrell, recommended that Omahans use Center Street from the southwest corner of Hanscom Park; the street was macadam in very good condition; the grade was easy; and the area was built up in most places with suburban homes.

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6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
The following month, President Barnes, of the Omaha State Fair and Speed Association, a subsidiary of the Omaha State Fair Association, called attention to another problem. He related that he did not know how the city was going to accommodate an estimated 150,000 people who would be visiting Omaha during the state fair week.\textsuperscript{10} He pointed out that the hotels in Omaha could handle only a very small portion of the visitors and their extra rooms had already been engaged.

The best hotels had rates ranging from two to five dollars per day, while others set their rates at $1.50 to $2.50.\textsuperscript{11} Hotel proprietors agreed to maintain the usual rates during fair week. Preceding fair week, License Inspector Hues of Omaha issued printed cards giving the legal hack and cab rates allowed by law in the state of Nebraska. These were displayed in hotels, depots, and other public places. This move was made to protect state fair visitors from being overcharged.\textsuperscript{12}

Since housing visitors for such an event was always a problem, Barnes proposed that Omaha follow the example set by other cities, that is, private families would rent their

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{10}Ibid., June 5, 1895.
  \item \textsuperscript{11}Ibid., September 8, 1895.
  \item \textsuperscript{12}Ibid.
\end{itemize}
spare rooms. When the state fair was at Lincoln some people had to sleep out of doors because there were no rooms available in either hotels or private residences. President Barnes believed since Omaha was a much larger city that every fair visitor could be accommodated if a systematic method of bringing the visitors and accommodations together was adopted. Barnes suggested that a list be compiled of all hotels, boarding houses, and private homes having one or more furnished rooms for rent during the fair week. This he felt would alleviate a communication problem at the last minute. This list would also contain information regarding rates, location, and instructions for reaching the houses.

The donations received for the state fair fund were far short from the ninety thousand dollars needed and more financial aid was asked of Omahans. On July 20, 1895, an article appeared in the World-Herald urging those of wealth to contribute financial support to the state fair. The article related that a few public spirited and enterprising businessmen had taken upon themselves the burden of securing the state fair for Omaha. These men had also entered into a contract

\(^{13}\text{Ibid.}, \ June \ 16, \ 1895.\\n^{14}\text{Ibid.}, \ June \ 5, \ 1895.\\n^{15}\text{Ibid.}, \ July \ 20, \ 1895.
with the state fair board which required the expenditure of large sums of money. The need for contributions was pressing. The editor explained that these twelve men had undertaken a task which was monumental and costs had exceeded all estimates.\textsuperscript{16}

In round figures, the Omaha State Fair Association estimated it would require a total of ninety thousand dollars before the commitments made to the State Board of Agriculture could be fulfilled.\textsuperscript{17} The city council had appropriated money to illuminate the streets during fair week and they also paid the bill of the Thomson-Houston Company to illuminate the route to the fair grounds. This amounted to $2,150 dollars.\textsuperscript{18} The Knights of Ak-Sar-Bein had spent directly from their own treasury twenty-five thousand dollars in preparing entertainment for the fair.\textsuperscript{19}

The Editor of the \textit{World-Herald} made a desperate appeal to the property owners and opulent men of Omaha asking them to marshall forces behind these few merchants who were struggling with the stupendous undertaking in which they had become involved.\textsuperscript{20} He related that what the Omaha committee did in

\begin{footnotes}
\item[Ibid.]
\item[\textit{The Omaha Daily Bee}, July 23, 1895.]
\item[\textit{World-Herald}, January 1, 1896.]
\item[Ibid., July 10, 1895.]
\item[Ibid., July 20, 1895.]
\end{footnotes}
the way of pledges to the state fair board was done on behalf of the whole city. The committee believed that those men who were interested in Omaha's welfare, who owned property, and who had acquired wealth in the city were morally bound to sustain the local committee by contributions as large as they could reasonably afford. The editor admitted that times were hard and that money was scarce even for rich men, but he considered the support of this fair a public duty. The wealthy men he commented should not permit their public spirited fellow citizens to carry the burden of Omaha's obligations to the state board.\(^{21}\) In conclusion the editor pointed out that so far as the benefits to Omaha were concerned, there could be no doubt that the state fair would bring the city prosperity in the month of September and in the winter months which were to follow.

In the latter part of July, the Omaha Fair and Speed Association ran an article in the form of a letter in the *World-Herald*, entitled "What One-Dollar Will Do" urging citizens of Omaha to contribute to the state fair.\(^{22}\) The association felt that it was the duty of the capitalists, jobbers, merchants, and retailers to subscribe liberally to the fund.\(^{23}\) It was also the duty of the working people, who

\(^{21}\) *Ibid.*  
\(^{22}\) *Ibid.*  
\(^{23}\) *Ibid.*
had employment in the city, in the interest of Omaha to contribute at least one-dollar each to assist in carrying out the fair project.\textsuperscript{24} The letter read as follows:

Dear Sir:

Are you with us in making the state fair a success? In having a White City of our own? Will you help us start the dollars rolling in again? This interests you personally.

The officers and directors of this association make this appeal to you to contribute one or more dollars toward the erection of buildings, and to aid Nebraska state fair in Omaha for the next five years. It is a great undertaking and means much for the prosperity and upbuilding of Omaha. There will be a vast sum of money paid to mechanics and laboring men and for materials during the summer. Our association has agreed to erect 39 buildings in all and many of them will be large and handsome, and will be a credit to our city.

We feel that you will take especial pride in having a financial interest in this undertaking, and that you will appreciate the importance of each and everyone who is in business or earns their living in this vicinity to contribute as they can to the enterprises of this broad nature, which will bring direct and quick returns, many times greater than the outlay. The capital stock of this association is divided into shares of twenty-five dollars each. If you want one or more shares we will be pleased to issue and send them to you. This stock ought to, and we believe will, be a fairly good investment.

In the interest of Omaha, \textsuperscript{25}
the Omaha Fair and Speed Association.

The Omaha Fair and Speed Association commented that it did not receive one cent from the State Board of Agri-

\textsuperscript{24}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{25}Ibid.
culture for the use of the fair grounds. Omaha's contract with the state board was that it should supply the buildings for the fair free of charge in return for the benefit which Omaha would derive from the fair. Hence, the association, believed that every citizen should contribute a minimum of one dollar. It was emphasized by the association that they received no help from Ak-Sar-Ben since that organization was providing the entertainment and parades for fair week.

In addition to housing, transportation, and financial problems the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben also had difficulty with the social leaders of the city. While the Ak-Sar-Ben coronation ball came to be considered one of the cities most elite social functions, it was not accepted by the citizens of Omaha when the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben first proposed a ball in connection with the state fair. Not only were the society women of the city totally unacquainted with the idea of a ball, but they were also very slow in accepting the invitations extended to them to take part in that function. One reason for their slow acceptance was that in those days it was not socially acceptable for a woman to appear in public as they do today.

26 Ibid.
27 World-Herald, January 1, 1896.
28 The Omaha Excelsior, October 15, 1898.
29 Ibid.
The first ball committee found that society women before accepting an invitation insisted on knowing who the women were managing the ball. They wanted to know why Omaha was having a ball, who the king and queen would be and a thousand other questions equally embarrassing to the committee in charge. It was only by putting one influence over another that the committee was able to finally arrange a list of ladies for the court.
That Omahans were trying their utmost to oblige the state fair board was shown by the preparation which they made during the months preceding the fair. The city spent large sums of money erecting arc lights and on extensive advertising. The committee in charge of the fair had many problems with which to cope, but as the summer wore on these difficult situations began to disappear.

Omaha's civic leaders wanted the city to be a blaze of glory and light during state fair week. They urged the city council to add "thousands" of lights to augment the regular street lights. The council, realizing the importance of the state fair activities, ordered the additional lights to be hung.¹

On Sixteenth Street between Cumings and California ten additional arc lights were installed in every block. Five arc lights were put on each side of the street and hung about twenty feet above the curbing. One hundred and sixty incandescent lights were placed in each block, from Sixteenth and California Street to Sixteenth and Douglas and down Douglas to

¹World-Herald, September 5, 1395.
²Ibid.
Twelfth Street. In fact, there were approximately one hundred and sixty incandescents added to each block throughout the downtown area. The city council decided also, to put the finishing touches to the brightening of the downtown streets by placing at each street intersection decorative festoons of incandescent lights starting from the four corners and meeting in the center.

City electrician Schurig was placed in charge of illuminating the city hall. He told World-Herald reporters on September 5, that he and his assistants had been working on the project for over a month. Schurig described his illumination scheme as follows:

Beginning at the tower there will be 100 incandescent lights surrounding the cornice, and the same number around the second cornice. The arches of the tower will also be lined with lights. The statue of liberty will have a real torch composed of twenty-five incandescent lights. The main entrance will also be illuminated and the whole hall inside will be brilliantly lighted. The single place, however, and one which I am justly proud, as I have built it, will be an immense star swinging below the statue of liberty. It is seventeen feet across and will contain 223 incandescent lights. By means of a switch the colors, red, white and blue, will be instantly changed. The different lights, by automatic arrangement will be constantly going out, their places being taken by others and the appearance that it is revolving will be given to the big star.

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3 World-Herald, September 3, 1895.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., September 5, 1895.
A number of large buildings in Omaha that had "electric plants" made arrangements for installing hundreds of additional lights. Several of the stores, in fact, all of those along the line of the parade made arrangements for electrical displays. Many Omaha firms had arc lights placed in front of their places of business, while others ordered signs made of electric lights. The demand for power taxed to the utmost the capacity of all public and private plants every night of fair week. Any house of business or private party that had not made arrangements for electricity before September 5, could no longer do so, because there was such a shortage of power.

The work of stringing the wires and attaching the lamps went on steadily for over a month preceding the fair. The lights and the circuits were throughly tested before fair week, so that no breaks could possibly occur. The work done on the city hall was of a permanent nature, so whenever desired it could be illuminated in the future at minimal expense. The city was indeed a spectacle during the festive week, due in no small measure to the increase in vari-colored lights.

In the meantime, elaborate plans had been made for the

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6 Ibid., September 3, 1895.
7 Ibid., September 5, 1895.
8 The Omaha Daily Bee, September 4, 1895.
9 World-Herald, September 5, 1895.
Ak-Sar-Ben parades. On the evening of July 25, 1895, the Ancient Order of the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben held a meeting and decided on the following prospectus of parades for fair week. On Monday evening, September 16, there would be a grand bicycle parade with at least five thousand wheels piloted by costumed riders. To add to the display each bicycle would be illuminated with a Chinese lantern. On Tuesday evening, a Nebraska parade was to be held with no less than sixty counties represented accompanied by at least thirty bands. The following evening a grand military and civic parade with approximately forty bands was planned. Thursday evening was expected to be the grandest of all, because the Ak-Sar-Ben pageant the "Feast of Mondamin," would be presented and climaxing the spectacular parade of Mardi Gras floats would be the grand Ak-Sar-Benz ball, the first in a long line.

The idea behind the Nebraska parade, was to invite each of the principal cities throughout the state to furnish a float, representative of their community. These floats were to be as elaborate as possible and would properly ad-


13 *The Omaha Daily Bee*, April 21, 1895.

14 *World-Herald*, July 26, 1895.
advertise the county they exemplified. They were not to be in the nature of an individual or common advertisement, and, in order to insure a higher standard, the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben offered a cash prize for the three best productions. The first prize was one hundred fifty dollars; the second, seventy five dollars; and the third fifty dollars. Douglas county did not compete in the Nebraska parade float contest.¹⁵

The Knights suggested to the counties that the floats be built on a running gear, loaded on cars, and brought to Omaha ready to enter the parade.¹⁶ Arrangements were made with the railroads, by the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben, to transport the floats free to Omaha¹⁷ so as a result almost every county was represented. The city council, also arranged for a fireworks display each evening preceding the parade.

Advertising was a project of vital importance in making the state fair a success. One of the first steps taken by the Ak-Sar-Ben executive committee in advertising the projected entertainment for the fair was the preparation of an elaborate poster, lithographed in seven colors, containing the proclamation of King Ak-Sar-Ben I to his subjects.¹⁸

¹⁵Ibid.
¹⁶Ibid., Jul. 23, 1895.
¹⁷Ibid.
¹⁸The Omaha Excelsior, September 21, 1895.
The appearance of these colored posters in the show windows of Omaha stores was the first intimation some people had that anything out of the ordinary was in progress and they began to wonder "whether this thing was really going to be a success."\(^{19}\) Ten thousand copies of this proclamation were prepared and distributed throughout the Northwest by the railroads.\(^{20}\) It was one of the most elegant pieces of lithography that had ever been issued in the West and caused some individuals to declare that it could never have been done in Omaha. The city council responded that the ignorance of some citizens as to the possibilities of their own workshops would be amusing were it not so deplorable.\(^{21}\) The proclamation was couched in the most courtly language and read thus:

Proclamation,

By His Royal Highness, Ak-Sar-Ben:
By the grace of God, King of Quivira, Duke of The Seven Cities of Cibola, Defender of the Faith, and Knights of the Royal Home.

"To our faithful subjects everywhere, behold our Royal Edict." It is our command: That the week of the present year, beginning September 16, and ending September 21, be set apart for the occasion of our royal visit to our beloved,

City of Omaha

Province of Nebraska, for the purpose of celebrating

\(^{19}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{20}\) *The Omaha Daily Bee*, August 28, 1895.

\(^{21}\) *The Omaha Excelsior*, September 21, 1895.
this year the

Feast of Mondamin

The Good Spirit of the Harvest, the King of Corn. It is decreed that his be a time of high carnival, dazzling pageants, and magnificent fetes, prepared by our loving subjects for the pleasure of ourself and visiting pilgrims from many lands, and that on

Thursday, The Nineteenth Day of September

As evening falls, the entrance of our royal hosts through the gates of the city will be made. It is therefore enjoined upon all who owe us allegiance, whether in this land of Corn, in the mighty East, or in foreign lands, that they assemble in the City of Omaha on this occasion and enjoy with us the gorgeous spectacles and royal hospitality tendered by our loving subjects.

By order of His Royal Highness.

Samson
Lord High Chamberlain

The city council asked the people of Omaha to write letters to their friends describing the festivities. Realizing the advertising possibilities of letters, a number of Omaha businessmen had advertising printed upon the backs of their business envelopes. This was inexpensive costing only a few cents per thousand. Some of the forms printed on the business communications were as follows:

The Nebraska State Fair
At Omaha, September 13 to 20.
The Finest State Fair Grounds
and Buildings in the World.

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22 Ibid.
23 World-Herald, July 25, 1895.
Tuesday, September 17,  
"Nebraska Parade"  
of Floats from all Cities  
in the State.

Wednesday, September 18,  
Grand Civic, Military and Bicycle  
Parade

Thursday, September 19,  
CARNIVAL NIGHTS  
Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben will  
celebrate the  
Feast of Mondamin.  

Such matter printed in red ink on thousands of envelopes  
leaving Omaha daily served to attract attention and emphasize  
the fact that Omaha was going all the way to improve this  
state fair. One Omaha musician, to honor the "Feast of Mondamin," wrote a grand march which was known as the "Knights  
of Ak-Sar-Ben March." By the order of Samson thousands of  
copies of it were printed in official colors and distributed  
under the direction of the Ancient Order.  

The transportation problem which had been one of the  
most perplexing in the early part of the summer of 1895 had  
been largely resolved by September. Being cognizant of the  
poor transportation facilities at the World's Fair in Chicago  
the Omaha committee in charge of the fair made transportation  

24Ibid.  
25Ibid., July 26, 1895.  
26Ibid., September 5, 1895.
arrangements which insured not only speed and safety, but also comfort and convenience in traveling to and from the state fair grounds.27

Leavenworth Street, before grading, was one of the roughest highways imaginable, and initially it was not a suggested route to pursue to the fair grounds by the transportation committee. However, after it was graded and restored to good condition it made a good route, except at Thirty-fourth Street where a trestle had been built over a washout.28 The fact that Leavenworth Street had been marked with signs also succored transportation difficulties and the street was acclaimed the throughfare to Nebraska's greatest state fair.

In the latter part of August the Omaha Street Railway Company was persuaded to build a double track line on Leavenworth Street to the east entrance of the grounds. Plans were made to run street cars directly to the fair grounds from the downtown area with the fare not to exceed five cents.29

The railroads also did their part in providing transportation facilities for the fair. The Missouri Pacific Railroad built a branch from its main line to the fair grounds.30 In addition to the excursion trains which delivered passengers

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27Ibid., September 9, 1895.

28Ibid.

29Ibid., September 5, 1895.

30Ibid.
to the west entrance it ran a special train from the Webster Street depot every fifteen minutes during fair week. The Burlington Railroad secured an entrance to the fair grounds by a track from its main line. It too ran excursions and also provided shuttle service from the depot for passengers coming in on the regular trains. The Elkorn Railroad Company had a line a short distance west of the fair grounds and in August it built a sidetrack to the entrance of the grounds and ran its excursion and special trains over this track. The Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha Railroad also used the Elkorn tracks to run trains from the Webster Street depot, while the Union Pacific Railroad put on a quick service from Omaha, Council Bluffs and South Omaha, depositing passengers at the gates of the fair grounds every few minutes. Thus, if a person was not taken directly by train to the fair grounds, he could travel either by a steam or electric car from the Union depot.

Unusually low ticket rates prevailed during fair week. Owing to the low rates from all eastern points an unusually large number of visitors from other states attended the state

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31 Ibid.
32 The Omaha Daily Bee, August 13, 1895.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
35 World-Herald, September 17, 1895.
fair. All of the railroads running into Omaha sold round-trip tickets for the price of a one-way fare.\textsuperscript{36} As early as September 1 these tickets were put on sale in the eastern part of the United States and were honored for thirty days with an extension of time if desired.\textsuperscript{37}

As time for the fair drew near the \textit{World-Herald} emphasized the importance of beautifying the city. It reminded residents that thousands of people would be in Omaha to visit the fair during the day and witness the splendor of the festivities at night.\textsuperscript{38} The Editor of the \textit{World-Herald} emphasized that it was imperative that the Board of Public Works and the city authorities have the streets cleaned and thoroughly swept and that the city should be attractively decorated, and its streets and buildings made beautiful with illuminated arches, flags, festoons and banners of every description.\textsuperscript{39} In voicing this demand the editor felt he was emphasizing the sentiments of every businessman and property holder of the city.\textsuperscript{40}

It was suggested that the street lamps of the city should receive every care on the part of the authorities, both in the business and residential districts, so that the

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., September 5, 1895.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., August 21, 1895.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., September 17, 1895.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
visitors would have no trouble in locating their lodgings following the evening parades. The city council warned the Omaha Police Department that it should be on the lookout for suspicious characters who would be converging on the city during fair week and they demanded that these characters be found and driven from the city.

City authorities said that to keep the streets clean they would find it necessary to rope in the sidewalks and strictly enforce orders prohibiting crowding into the streets. They said that each parade would march over a two-mile route with every block brilliantly illuminated and that steps would be taken to prevent overcrowding on Farnam, Sixteenth and the other principal streets of the city. Local authorities pointed out that Omaha had an advantage over New Orleans, St. Louis, and other parade cities in having wide streets and wide sidewalks, but that if the twenty-thousand or more people expected to witness each parade were not properly restrained they would destroy the beauty of the parades, while at the same time lessen their own pleasure.

On Friday, September 6, 1895, the Nebraska State Fair was opened, inaugurated, and dedicated. For this festive event

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41 *World-Herald*, August 21, 1895.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., August 2, 1895.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 *World-Herald*, August 18, 1895.
Omaha sent greeting, through the World-Herald, to their friends in Nebraska, Iowa, the Dakotas, Kansas, Minnesota, and Missouri and the more distant states to the north and west. Omaha authorities while dedicating the fair grounds brought its history up-to-date. The state fair grounds or "The White City," as it was called had been built in six months. The fair grounds were considered by some to be among the most elaborate in the country. The architectural design of the buildings was stable and their appearance elegant. Omahans were proud that they had erected such buildings to receive the exhibits of the people of the surrounding states.

These buildings were situated on the highest point of the fair grounds and over-looked the race track located below. This one mile track was built up above a plain so the space within the circle of the track housed the stand for the judges. The buildings on the state fair grounds were painted a clear white, thus, giving them much the same effect as those of the World's Fair in Chicago.

Omahans invited everyone in the Middle West to attend the state fair and gave all a hearty welcome. In the inaugura-

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47 Ibid.
48 The Omaha Daily Bee, September 5, 1895.
49 Ibid.
50 World-Herald, September 5, 1895.
The present season is a joyous one. Drouth and famine have fled. The harvests are ripe and the corn is ready to be gathered. The oxen are fat and the sheep are covering the hills. The fields are waving with golden grain and the song of the harvester is heard on every side. The railroads are busy carrying our products to the markets, of the world, and our granaries are bursting with abundance. The grape is purple, the apples are red and mellow, and the plum is luscious to the taste. Everything is most auspicious in this perfect year when providence has smiled and blessed the labors of the farmer and the husbandman.

Omaha springs into new life and a giant armed. The days of care and worry have passed. The lines on the brow have relaxed, and all are looking confidently for the reward of an era of prosperity that shall be enduring. The currents of business are swelling on our streets; the hum of machinery is everywhere. Our homes are becoming more beautiful and our thoroughfares are grand highways through which multitudes will move to the Feast of Manna, and the March of Ak-Sir-Ben. Omaha urges you to come, and come 300,000 strong.

Never has the west seen such pageantry as will be visible on our streets. Omaha will be garlanded with festoons and streamers, and fragrant wreaths, and her temples and buildings will be beautiful with banners.

The "White City of Nebraska," the finest in this western land, will be glad to greet you. Eye hath not seen and ear hath not heard the glories of the west that will meet the eye and cheer the spirit in that rare collection of fruits and grains and flowers; and the human heart will respond with touching emotion to the bounteous God who has so truly blessed this flourishing city and this imperial commonwealth. Come and rejoice with us, and join in giving thanks and praise to the giver of all good.²¹

²¹Ibid., September 6, 1893.
It was a glow of light and the bare walls had disappeared. The floor, which so often resounded to the ring of skates and the thunder of applause, was covered with canvas for dancing. Hung on the walls, which were of glistening whiteness, was eight thousand yards of red, yellow and green bunting.

At each end of the main floor was placed a large band and easy chairs for dancers. One great change made in the building was the cutting of more doors. One entrance was made at the south end of the building so it would be used exclusively for dancers. This entrance opened into a reception room on each side of which were dressing rooms. These dressing rooms were reserved for the knights who took part in the parade, and after opening the ball they retired to these rooms to change into evening dress.

The executive committee for the coronation ball announced that:

The identity of the queen will remain in mystery until the king, with much ceremony, appears in front of her at the coronation with a bouquet of roses. The queen will, of course, be distinguished by her beauty and her high social position.

The ten grande dames of the court are matrons of high social position in Omaha. The ladies of the court and the maids of honor will be selected from the most beautiful and popular maids and young matrons of Lincoln, Council Bluffs, Nebraska City, Beatrice, Fremont and

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52 *The Omaha Expositor*, September 21, 1895.


Kearney. The Ball will be without doubt, the brilliant affair of the sort which this city has ever seen. The most fashionable men and women of the city will fill the positions of honor, and the display of gowns and jewels will be greater than has ever been seen, here before. It is a well known fact that society in Omaha is exclusive in the sense that it seldom appears at any public function. In this case, however, civic pride rises above everything else.

The women, who make the success of a social affair are as determined as the men that the whole festival shall be a success. The part which they can perform is to make the social phases fashionable as well as popular and this they will do. Indeed, the lady who is crowned queen of Ak-Sar-Ben will have every cause to feel that a great compliment has been paid her beauty grace and popularity. The identity of the king will remain unrevealed until at midnight when he will lift his mask.

Early in September, six thousand invitations were issued for the grand ball of the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben. The invitations were copper-plate, surmounted by a design of mounted knights charging and embossed in bronze. The large envelopes bore on the flap a flag of Ak-Sar-Ben beautifully embossed in the proper colors. The invitations were made by the engraving establishment of Clement Chase, in Omaha, not in New York or Boston as many Omahas supposed. The wholesale firms and banks of Omaha took large numbers of these invitations to send to their country customers and

56 Ibid., September 5, 1895.
57 Ibid., September 15, 1895.
58 The Omaha Excelsior, September 21, 1895.
correspondents. The invitations read as follows:

By the command of His Royal Highness
Ak-Sar-Ben, King of Quivira
you are informed that it is his most
gracious pleasure that you attend

The Court Ball

in celebration of the Feast of Mondamin,
by the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben at their Den,
Thursday the Nineteenth of September,
Eighteen hundred and ninety-five,
at ten by the clock on that evening.

Omaha

Samson
Lord High Chamberlain

59 Ibid.
CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST AK-SAR-BEN PARADE

AND CORONATION BALL

The first fair week to be held in conjunction with the festivities of the Ancient Order of the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben was not easily forgotten by Omahans. Few citizens had ever witnessed a social event of such magnitude as the court ball or anything as elegant as that first Ak-Sar-Ben parade. The importance of this fair week was shown by the enthusiasm it instilled in the citizens of Omaha. For the first time many people were glad they were residents of the city; at last they could see future prosperity.

On September 19, the day of the Ak-Sar-Ben parade and court ball, all local newspapers contained articles welcoming King Ak-Sar-Ben I to the Kingdom of Gallivra. The route of the parade was announced as follows:

The route of the carnival parade will be from the Den at Twentieth and Grant streets south on Twentieth to Izard Street, thence east on Izard street to Sixteenth, thence south on Sixteen to Douglas, east on Douglas to Ninth, south on Ninth to Farnam, west on Farnam to Eighteenth north on Eighteenth to Douglas, east on Douglas to Sixteenth and return to the Den. The parade will leave the Den at 10 o'clock and open the court ball soon after.1

1world-Herald, September 19, 1895.
Throughout the early part of September the newspapers were full of warning for the children of Omaha. Owing to many thousands of people who would be on the streets to witness the parades, the papers stressed that extra precaution must be observed to preserve the safety of all. The papers warned that anyone found climbing one of the poles on which were stretched incandescent light wires he would be promptly taken in custody by the police.

The streets of Omaha were gayly decked with Ak-Sar-Ben colors and illuminated with countless electric lights. Farnam and North Sixteenth were ablaze with continuous streams of electric lights on either side, with fiery arches at the crossings, and innumerable individual designs on the principal buildings. As expected, the courthouse stood out in relief against the September sky, outlined by rows of electric lights and brilliant with stars and arches. Across the street the city hall flashed back twinkling arches and curves, and the tower could be seen for miles by reason of the girdles of lights which circled it. Electric lighted arches and festoons were featured along Farnam Street.

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2 World-Herald, September 15, 1895.
3 Ibid.
4 The Omaha Excelsior, September 21, 1895.
5 Ibid.
The display of the Ak-Sar-Ben colors, red, green, and yellow was beautiful, although the full effect was not brought out at night as well as by day. These colors were selected not only for their flaunting "gaiety and brightness," but also to remind everyone of the state's chief products, beef cattle, alfalfa hay, and the golden ears of "King Corn." These products were frequently used as an ornament in the embellishment of badges, buttons, and stationery.

Broad bands of Ak-Sar-Ben colors met the eye everywhere. Some of the designs were quite striking, such as the Ak-Sar-Ben blizzard at Cartrights, and the elaborately decorated double windows of Wilcox and Draper, both downtown stores. Browning King and Company and Orchard and Wilhelm both located on Douglas Street also had beautiful displays.

Officially, the state fair opened Monday, September 16, 1895. The evening was devoted to a bicycle parade and on this occasion "the crowd was the largest ever assembled, in Omaha during fair week." Many state fair visitors and citizens of Omaha went downtown as early as five o'clock that evening in order to secure points of vantage from which to view the parade. There were five thousand costumed wheelman in line

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6 *Omaha's Own Magazine*, November 1928, Volume 3., p. 12.
8 *The Omaha Excelsior*, September 21, 1895.
and the Ak-Sar-Ben colors were well displayed.\(^{10}\) The Omaha Wheel Club made a good showing in the parade as did the Tourist Club, another local organization. Each rider carried a basket in front of the handle bars of his bicycle with a goodly supply of fireworks to enliven the scene.\(^{11}\)

Tuesday evening, September 17, Omahans and state fair visitors witnessed the Nebraska parade. This night was devoted to a display of Nebraska county floats. The parade was headed by the Nebraska State Band of Lincoln, followed by a platoon of police, and a formation of Indians and cowboys.\(^{12}\) The Douglas county float, which was not in competition, bore a gigantic ear of corn and a mammoth key. The motto was, of course, "The Key of the State."\(^{13}\) The latter part of the parade was devoted to advertisements of individual firms.

The next evening a military and secret society parade was viewed on the streets of Omaha. These parades were devoted to military and fraternal societies with three thousand men in line accompanied by fifteen bands.\(^{14}\)

Thursday evening, September 19, saw all of Omaha ablaze with lights. The Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben who took part in the

\(^{10}\)Ibid.  
\(^{11}\)Ibid.  
\(^{12}\)The *Omaha Excelsior*, September 21, 1895.  
\(^{13}\)Ibid.  
\(^{14}\)Ibid.
Pageant of the floats reported to the den at five o'clock on the afternoon of the day of the pageant. Refreshments were served them at six o'clock and they started the parade from the den at 7:15 p.m. sharp. When King Ak-Sar-Ben I, whose identity was concealed, and his knights marched through the city the line of the parade was closely packed with Omahans and state fair visitors. So packed were the streets, especially in the downtown area, that standing room could scarcely be found at any price. Stands and seats were erected wherever possible and all windows on Sixteenth and Farnam were reserved days in advance. The minimum price set on these choice spots for viewing the parade was five dollars.

A platoon of mounted police headed the parade followed by the Second Infantry Band from Fort Omaha. The immense floats were each drawn by four horses, a page walked at the head of each with the name of the float aloft and two men walked in the rear to guard against accidents. Three attendants with torches marched on either side of each float to illuminate the fairy scene depicted.

Following the tradition of all carnivals, the first float of the Ak-Sar-Ben parade represented Boeuf Gras, the Nebraska

15 *World-Herald*, September 15, 1895.
16 *The Omaha Excelsior*, September 21, 1895.
17 *Ibid*.
18 *Ibid*. 
corn fed steer. There was not a custom more essentially characteristic of a carnival than that which retained the fat ox for its sacrificial ceremonies. The steer was a good specimen, which one might have expected to arrive at the great abattoirs of South Omaha where by the metamorphosis of modern machinery it would be speedily converted into food products for the world. The float was constructed to represent a miniature meadow whereon a fat Nebraska steer, garlanded for the slaughter, was attended by royal executioners and guarded by two members of the royal lhouse. This float was significant to the state and was especially selected to inaugurate the "Feast of Mondamin." 19

The second float was the key note to the parade and to the "Feast of Mondamin." Mondamin was known to all readers of Longfellow's beautiful legend of Hiawatha as the King of Corn, the Good Spirit of the Harvest. This title was eminently fitting, in the great corn state of Nebraska, where so much depended upon the success of the annual crop. 20 This float displayed a green bank, alive with musical frogs and swamp insects. One could see the roots of an upturned tree, upon which was perched a cross between a gnome and an insect supporting an open volume. On this book was inscribed the name of the feast day. The

19 The Omaha Excelsior, September 13, 1895. Ak-Sar-Ben Edition.

20 Ibid.
effect was weird and fantastic.\textsuperscript{21}

On the next float came King Ak-Sar-Ben, himself, masked and seated upon a lofty throne of the petals of an enormous rose emerging from a golden crown. The lower part of the float was covered with brightly colored roses, green leaves, emblematic of the beauty as well as the usefulness of the cavalier’s kingdom. King Ak-Sar-Ben was accompanied by a guard of knights arrayed in the brightest of court costumes.\textsuperscript{22}

The souvenirs which were for sale to all spectators for five cents, told the following story of King Ak-Sar-Ben I:

It is now over 350 years since the first visit of the Ancient Order of the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben, to Quivira, now known as Nebraska. It was during the reign of the mighty king, Tatarrax, in the year 1540, that the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben set out from Mexico in quest of the Seven Cities of Cibola, in the Kingdom of Quivira. They entered the land for which they were in search, where now are the southern boundaries of the subdivisions called Gage and Furnas, and found in full of interest and containing fabulous wealth. This was eighty years before the landing of the pilgrims at Plymouth Rock, sixty eight years before the discovery of the Hudson, sixty six years before John Smith sailed up the river which now bears the name of James I of England, twenty three years before the birth of Shakespeare; Queen Elizabeth was yet a little girl, and the thrones of Spain and Germany were occupied by Charles V.\textsuperscript{23}

As King Ak-Sar-Ben’s chariot approached the City Hall at

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., September 21, 1895.

\textsuperscript{23}Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben Official Souvenir Programme, (Omaha: Klopp and Bartlett Company, 1895). p.2.
Eighteenth and Omaha Street it halted and Mayor Bemis, standing on the reviewing platform welcomed him and presented him with a key to the city. King Ak-Sar-Ben I received the key graciously and promised prosperity, not only to Omaha, but to all the state. Mayor Bemis addressed him as follows:

Most Mighty potentate: The city of Omaha welcomes the return of Ak-Sar-Ben King of Quivira, to the domain that his predecessor discovered and that has come to be so prosperous and happy. In doing so we feel that the influence of that great spirit whose laudable courage sought out the soil of Nebraska while it was yet a part of the kingdom of Quivira, has left its impress here and will stimulate our trade and commerce, so that we shall keep step with the progress of the age, and since your royal highness has signified his intention of visiting these, his royal subjects, every year at the time of the Feast of Mondamin, and while our state fair is in session, I, as the ruler of the city, in behalf of our citizens hereby surrender the key of the city to your care and keeping, and hope that your royal highness may not only be able to unlock all the store houses of royal hospitality, but that this key will unlock the hearts and minds of these people and open them to a broader and higher conception of true citizenship and patriotic reality to the best interests, not only of our great and growing metropolis, but to the state at large.24

It was most fitting that the fourth float of the parade should represent the wealth of the monarch's kingdom. In this float, Gus Renze, who designed the floats, presented a charming fairy picture.25 "Man himself could not sufficien-

24World-Herald, September 20, 1895.

25The Omaha Excelsior, September 19, 1895.
ently express his joy over the beautiful harvest of the goldenrod state," so the fairies of the field were pressed into service to fully represent the joy which reigned over King Ak-Sar-Ben's domain. On this float was shown a scene in which fairies of the field, surrounded by the products of their toil were showing to the court their revelries. This float was significant in that Nebraska had that year produced its largest crop in history.26

The next float bore the name, "Mondamin's Castle." It represented a castle guarded by an immense flying dragon, and an ogre of frightful appearance, both of which had been conquered by a brave knight of Ak-Sar-Ben, who found a princess imprisoned in the castle. He freed her and as the story was told, the castle was dedicated to Mondamin.27

In the early seventeenth century many people in the East believed that the Mississippi Valley grew nothing but sand and grasshoppers.28 Contradicting this belief, the sixth float of the parade, represented Mondamin in the beneficent act of driving insects from his kingdom. This float was rated by Nebraskans as one of the most beautiful in the parade.29 The

26 Ibid.


28 Ibid.

29 The Omaha Excelsior, September 21, 1895.
luxuriant foliage which grew rank upon it, appeared to great advantage under the torches of the attendants. The dejected look of the locusts and grasshoppers vainly striving to hold their own on the outer edges of the float, gave a practical side to the display which was appreciated by Nebraskans. This float was significant to the state's history, because it showed the grasshopper, which once swept the fields of Nebraska, recognizing his lord and master and bowing to his decree.30

The seventh float of the Ak-Sar-Ben parade was called "The War of The Elements," and typified the contest for mastery between water and flame. In the forepart of the float were pictured water nymphs, who were sporting fountains of water, while in the rear red flames were making futile attempts to destroy the luxuriant vegetation which the fountains were sustaining. Again, this float was significant to the history of the state, in that, it had suffered severe drouth during periods of its history.31

Everyone in the kingdom of Ak-Sar-Ben, formerly known as Oívira, had heard of Samson the King's High Chamberlain, who signed all commissions and to whom all communications were addressed.32 The next float showed Samson's entrance to the city in almost as regal a manner as that of the King. Armed

30 Olson, op. cit., pp. 181-182
31 Ibid.
32 The Illustrated Bee, October 4, 1903.
Knights were stationed in the front part of the float, while in the rear arose two knightly columns, handsomely designed and surmounted with vases of flowers. Between these two columns stood the Lord High Chamberlain, Samson, and his immediate attendants.

While Ponce de Leon and his followers were making their fruitless search through the Everglades of Florida for the fountain of youth, its waters, as the story was told, were already flowing in Nebraska. It was upon this story that the ninth float of the parade called "Ak-Sar-Ben's Fountain of Youth," was founded. At both ends the float showed beautifully carved columns which were contrasted in the center by the sparkling magic fountain which was responsible for giving Nebraskans "that young and handsome appearance for which they felt they were noted." 33

The spectators were of the opinion that the ultimate in the design of floats had been reached, but when the tenth float called the "Water Witch Opening the Flood Gates of Nebraska," appeared they realized that this float surpassed all the others in the parade. 34 On the crest of a sea green wave rode the queen of the fairies, directing her subjects to rain beneficently upon her chosen land, Nebraska. The

33 *The Omaha Excelsior*, September 21, 1895.

rain brought prosperity to the state of Nebraska and in the next float the Grand Vizier proclaimed rain with banners and the blare of trumpets. This float depicted an elevated throne upon which was seated the notable Grand Vizier while upon the steps below stood a guard of armed knights and pages with trumpets and banners.35

The cradle of Ak-Sar-Ben was the subject of the seventeenth float, on which an infant hero in a nursery was being rocked to sleep in a mammoth cradle by watchful fairies. Rich in color and picturesque in design was "Ak-Sar-Ben's Fisheries" the title of the eighteenth float. A gigantic leaf formed a boat which sailed the guardian of the water in which were visible fish bigger than the best Nebraska liar ever caught.36

The final float named, "The Grand Mufti" brought the first Ak-Sar-Ben parade to a close with a scene of rare beauty. The Grand Mufti, the herald of this mysterious court, was emerging from the midst of an enchanted forest where strange music was heard and unknown flowers blossomed underfoot. The Grand Mufti proclaimed loudly to the citizens the glad tidings that panics were of the past, that hard times should be no more, and that peace, plenty and prosperity should be the lot of those citizens who were infinitely faithful subjects

35Ibid., September 21, 1895.

36Ibid.
of King Ak-Sar-Ben I.  

Originally the court ball was to be held in a downtown theatre, but in the early part of September it was decided by the board of governors that the coliseum was the only structure in the city which could accommodate the huge crowd expected. Fifteen hundred seats were provided for dancers and seven hundred and fifty were reserved for spectators. Many people considered the tickets quite expensive, especially for non-members. Tickets for non-members of Ak-Sar-Ben were two dollars per person for general admission to the gallery and three dollars for a reserved seat.  

After his royal procession through his beloved city of Omaha, King Ak-Sar-Ben, found a warm reception awaiting him at the den, which was decked brilliantly with the colors of the ancient order. The all white and elegantly lighted den made a fitting place for the king to hold his court ball and crown his queen of "beauty." King Ak-Sar-Ben I seemed to be entirely satisfied as he looked upon his court with the group of "fair maids of honor, ladies in waiting and ladies of the court in the royal boxes, and the five hundred

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37 Ibid. For a pictorial description of the floats of the first Ak-Sar-Ben parade consult appendix .

38 World-Herald, September 5, 1895.

39 The Omaha Daily Bee, September 22, 1895.

40 Ibid.

41 The Omaha Exelsior, September 19, 1895.
handsomely costumed knights.

From the center of the roof of this "immense" building were stretched bands of yellow, green and red bunting with banners tastefully arrayed throughout the court. This splendid setting impressed viewers with the significance that Ak-Sar-Ben was indeed a new power in Omaha. At the west side of the coliseum stood the royal throne upon a dais raised three feet from the floor, and upon it, surrounding the king, were the maids of honor, on either side of whom were grouped the ladies of the court and the ladies in waiting. Both midways along the wall of the den were decorated in Ak-Sar-Ben colors, and under each window hung festoons of red, green and yellow fastened in place with rosettes and streamers. This display of colors mounted upon a white background made the Ak-Sar-Ben den an attractive setting.42

Upon their return from the parade, the knights were refreshed with coffee and sandwiches in their private dressing rooms at the den. The ball did not start at ten o'clock as planned; it was almost twelve o'clock when the Second Infantry Band started to play the inspiring march "Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben."43 As the knights marched on the dance floor

42 *World-Herald*, September 20, 1895.

they made a dazzling spectacle in their rich costumes which sparkled under the electric lights of the den.

Marching in pairs the knights completely filled the open space of the dance floor making the assemblage one of the most picturesque, most fanciful and most "magnificent ever seen in Omaha." It was a scene of beauty with knights, esquires, pages, fairies, princes, and princesses, kings and queens from neighboring dominions, elves, dwarfs, owls, mice, toads, grasshoppers, all costumed figures from the floats mingled together in a delightful harmony of color. Following the knights in line of march came the board of governors.

The King then entered followed by his Lord High Chamberlain, Samson, and a brother king from a neighboring province. The King unmasked before entering the ball room and everyone seemed pleased when they saw the King was the Honorable E. M. Bartlett of Omaha. He was dressed in a Lohengrin costume of white satin and silver with a coat of mail that shone resplendent as he took his stand before the throne he was soon to occupy with his "queen of beauty."

Arriving before the royal box the Lord High Chamberlain advanced and handed King Ak-Sar-Ben I a bouquet of flowers. At one side of the King stood a tiny page, the daughter of

44 The Omaha Excelsior, September 21, 1895.
45 Ibid.
William R. Bennett, who knelt before the King and received from him an elaborate bouquet of red and yellow roses with sprays of green in its midst representing the royal colors. Then the page arose before an excited audience and bore the bouquet of roses to the royal box. The page entered the box and knelt before Miss Meliora Woolworth, who accepted the flowers, rising and bowing to the King.47

The visiting monarch then presented King Ak-Sar-Ben I with a cup of champagne. As the King raised the cup to his lips, the drums began to roll as he drank to the health of his beautiful queen; he turned and drank to the health of his royal knights; and then a third time, to all his faithful subjects.48 This ordeal gave everyone in the audience an opportunity to see who had received the great honor of being the first King of the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben and the applause and cheers burst forth afresh.

Next the Lord High Chamberlain presented the little page the royal crown on a satin cushion laced with gold. Again the page bearing the crown advanced toward the royal box followed by the King and Lord High Chamberlain. The coronet of the crown consisted of an emerald and a topaz. At either side of the crown was a row of brilliant rhinestones and above

47 Ibid.

48 World-Herald, September 20, 1895.
this band glistened a star of pearls in the center of which was set a resplendent diamond which was contrasted by a white aigrette placed behind it.49

Taking this stately souvenir from the page the King placed it on the brow of Miss Woolworth, who knelt to receive it. As she knelt every costumed knight knelt with one knee to the floor and the ladies of the royal box rose, making a tableau of wonderful effectiveness and beauty. As the queen arose, his Majesty assisted her to the throne, to the sound of drums and trumpets while the knights sprang to their feet. The whole coronation ceremony was a scene "ever to be remembered in the annals of Omaha." Never was an Omaha audience more pleased. It seemed as if the months of work on the part of the untiring committee, the months of waiting on the part of the public, had reached the apex of ambitious success.50

The band then struck up the grand march and the knights led by the board of governors, began their evolutions before the court, with the royalty now seated. For the grand march the knights had received the careful training of Professor Morand,51 and they executed the movements with precision and promptness. As they came down the floor initially by twos, then


50Ibid.

51*The Omaha Excelsior*, September 21, 1895.
by fours and finally by eights, the real elegance of the masquerade was manifest to all. Every movement was calculated to show off the costumes to advantage. There was great speculation by the viewers concerning the identity of those behind the masks, but detection was out of the question. After the Knights returned from their dressing rooms the ball started.52

There was no doubt that the people of Omaha were greatly impressed with the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben and their elegant coronation ball. One editor commenting upon the affair wrote:

The Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben is a secret society, founded on the lines of the Veiled Prophets of St. Louis, the Priests of Pallas of Kansas City, and the great society of New Orleans, Rex, Proteus and Comus, that have been accomplishing so much in attracting vast crowds of strangers annually to their gorgeous parades. The success of this year's entertainment in Omaha has been so great that the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben will become a permanent institution of city life and they have leased the coliseum, the largest building in the city for five years, as their den, and here will be given from year to year, the greatest and most splendid balls ever attempted in Omaha.53

52Ibid. For a complete description of the first Ak-Sar-Ben ball program, and a list of names of those taking part in the first coronation consult appendix B.

53Ibid.
CHAPTER V

THE SUCCESS OF THE STATE FAIR BENEFITED OMAHA

The state fair held in September was the largest and most successful ever held though it labored under the double disadvantage of extremely disagreeable weather and inadequate transportation facilities.¹ The unprecedented crowds overtaxed the capacity of both the steam railways and electric street cars. While surveying the past week Omaha saw many things upon which they could improve, but generally agreed that the city had benefited from the fair.²

F. H. Davis, cashier of the First National Bank, said the effect of the large number of visitors in Omaha was very noticeable in the deposits of their customers.³ One retail cigar merchant had sold over three hundred dollars worth of cigars in a single day.⁴ Davis considered the street parades the most valuable as they brought people to the downtown shopping area before each parade.⁵

Victor Caldwell, vice president of the United States National Bank, commented on the large amount of silver and

¹ World-Herald, January 1, 1896.
² Ibid., September 22, 1895.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.
small change brought in for deposit. He was certain that it would not be difficult to secure contributors for another state fair next year, because many small businessmen, such as, restaurant operators, druggists, and saloon keepers had been pleasantly surprised by the amount of business transacted in the last week. 6 Caldwell believed also that more could be done with the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben and that there would come a time when it would do more for the city than several state fairs combined. 7

Charles Ford, president of the American National Bank, believed the retail houses of the city had profited by the fair, but the good derived from the fair would be felt more several months later than at the present time. He said a great deal of money had been brought to Omaha and placed in circulation and all through the winter the effect of this additional money would be experienced. 3

A reporter for The Omaha Daily Bee interviewed a number of businessmen covering the fair. From their standpoint it had been a success. 9 Hayden Brothers, local merchants, reported their business was very good and that the store had

6 The Omaha Excelsior, September 21, 1895.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 The Omaha Daily Bee, September 22, 1895.
been crowded constantly. While it was not the largest week they had ever had, they had never done as much business before at that time of the year. Hayden Brothers felt amply repaid for their contribution to the state fair fund.\(^{10}\) The Boston Store officials estimated that one million dollars had been spent in Omaha during the fair week and they felt they had received their share; in fact, it had been their biggest week in sales.

There were many reports from the managers of the city's larger hotels. C. W. Squires, manager of the Millard Hotel, reported that his guests were very much impressed with the Ak-Sar-Ben parade and ball. Ralph Kitchen, of the Paxton Hotel, said his guests spoke well of the fair, but were especially enthusiastic about the parades as they were held at night, the days being disagreeably hot.\(^{11}\) Some of his patrons had made reservations for next year's fair. The only complaint the manager of the Hotel Dellone had heard concerned the inability of some to find hotel accommodations. He had tried to secure lodging for some at the Grand in Council Bluffs, but it likewise was filled. The Editor of The Omaha Daily Bee reported that some fair visitors had been forced to sleep in chairs or on the floors of hotel.

\(^{10}\) Ibid.

\(^{11}\) Ibid.
lobbies. 12

The Ak-Sar-Ben ball was proclaimed the social event of the week. Society people had eagerly anticipated it, "since nothing of such magnitude had been attempted in Omaha before." The extent of the undertaking had taxed to the utmost the resources of the committees in charge. 13 The den made a magnificent ballroom but the committees felt the whole affair would have been more effective if every seat in the spectator's gallery had been occupied. Some were of the opinion that seats should have been sold for half the price asked or better still, invitations including admission could have been sent out or given to the knights to send to prominent people. This was the policy in New Orleans, Kansas City, and other cities where functions of this type were held. 14

Omaha's society leaders said, "the treatment of feminine guests from out of town was a cause of positive grief." These guests were permitted to sit in their boxes and wait in vain for people who failed to introduce and assist them in filling out their dance programs. 15

The delay in starting the street parade and in returning the floats with their occupants to the den caused the

12 Ibid.

13 World-Herald, September 22, 1895.

14 Ibid.

15 The Omaha Daily Bee, September 22, 1895.
the greatest inconvenience of the ball. Had the parade
begun promptly the ball might also have commenced on time
and there would have been no need to eliminate some of the
dancing numbers. The Ak-Sar-Ben ball initiated more new
gowns than any previous affair in the history of Omaha. The
modistes had been busy for weeks and Omaha society women felt
these designers did credit to the ball by their work.17

An article appeared in The Omaha Daily Bee commending
the people on the fine city they had built. The article
entitled "Omaha Is Risen," was written to the citizens who
contributed to the state fair fund and was as follows:

Omaha is risen!
No more the sackcloth and sorrow of drought and care.
Henceforth the garments of light and beauty, of which
the ornaments and illuminations of our streets are so
typical.
A city has come through a season of tribulation.
It has weathered the storm and its bark is once more
in the haven of progress and prosperity.
The manifestation of the superb courage of its
resolute men and the generous enthusiasm of its friends
and visitors has given Omaha a new birth of ambition,
energy and enterprise.
It firmly knit the bonds of friendship with the
people shown splendid cities and towns of Nebraska,
Iowa and the west.
It has brought us closer in the courtesies of
life with those whose kindly words and deeds we honor
and appreciate.
From this time let the word be "Forward."18

In October of 1895 the executive committee of the Knights

17Ibid.
18Ibid., September 21, 1895.
of Ak-Sar-Ben and Gus Renze attended the Priests of Pallas parade and carnival in Kansas City. The reception accorded them in Kansas City was most cordial. They were met by a committee of prominent civic leaders and entertained at the Kansas City Club.

The festivities in Kansas City were not held in connection with any state fair or other attraction but, nevertheless, this celebration had attracted immense crowds each year since its inception in 1886. Kansas City businessmen subscribed liberally each year to the celebration and they were confident, so they informed their guests from Omaha, that a large part of the city's prosperity was due to the annual carnival. They credited the carnivals with a large share of the city's jobbing trade and the good feeling which had existed for so many years between their city and its tributary territory.

Upon their return the Knights began to lay plans for an Ak-Sar-Ben Jubilee Night which was to take place at Boyd Theatre on November 13, 1895. It turned out to be a festive occasion with excellent music, voices, wit, humor, gaiety, and brightness. The knights held the event to raise funds for a most worthy institution of the city— the Old Ladies Home.

19 *World-Herald*, October 1, 1895.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
The Jubilee was a success in that, every seat in the Boyd Theatre was filled and every available inch of standing room was taken.

The Knights of Ak-S r-Ben ended a successful year by sponsoring a gala circus in their den on December 9. The tickets were especially adapted to a hard times purse because the price was fifty cents for adults and twenty-five cents for children. The circus was for the benefit of the Associated Charities which had done excellent work among Omaha's poor.
CHAPTER VI

THE AK-SAR-BEN FESTIVALS OF 1896 AND 1897

SHOWED MANY IMPROVEMENTS

In summarizing the accomplishments of the preceding year, the Editor of the World-Herald remarked that one was securing a location for the state fair. Incidental to this, he remarked was the formation of the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben which united the businessmen of the city more completely than ever before. It was this organization made up of Omaha's civic leaders which had rejuvenated the city with its unsurpassed entertainment during state fair week. ¹

The board of governors met in January and started to formulate plans for the next state fair which was scheduled for August 31 to September 5. By February the board of governors had selected the theme for the fair, "The Feast of Olympia." ² The floats were to be completely rebuilt and the carnival parade would again be financed by the board of governors and, as formerly, the ball expenses would be met by the membership dues. Hence, the frequent question, "Why should a knight be required to pay ten dollars ever year," was answered. Not only did the membership dues pay expenses

¹World-Herald, January 1, 1896.
²Ibid., February 10, 1896.
of the ball, but also entitled a knight to all benefits of the organization including a ball ticket for himself and his lady.³

In April of 1896, Omaha, following the example of Cleveland and Chicago, adopted a city flag. It was a combination of red, green, and yellow the Ak-Sar-Ben colors. The Editor of the World-Herald took this to mean that the organization was in great favor with the people of Omaha.⁴

On April 30, 1896, the board of governors announced the incorporation of their organization. Judge Bartlett had drawn up the articles of incorporation and they were approved by the board at their April 29 meeting. At the same time the resignations of William Lyle Dickey and Lewis H. Rhaen were accepted and Clement Chase was selected to fill William Lyle Dickey's post as secretary.⁵ W. H. McCord and C. D. Kiplinger were elected to the board of governors to fill the two vacancies.

When the state fair of 1896 commenced the membership of the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben had reached nearly one thousand, almost double that of 1895. This figure included a number of prominent citizens from various cities in Nebraska as well as from other sections of the United States.⁶

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³The Omaha Daily Bee, February 15, 1896.
⁴World-Herald, April 10, 1896.
⁵Ibid., April 30, 1896.
⁶The Omaha Daily Bee, August 9, 1896.
The transportation facilities of the 1895 fair were thought to be adequate when the fair opened, but as the week progressed the Omaha Street Railway Company realized that power was insufficient to run the number of street cars needed at one time to satisfactorily transport the huge crowds home after the Ak-Sar-Ben parades. Manager Smith of the Omaha Street Railway Company promised Omahans it would not be necessary to combat a similar problem in 1896, since the company had added a six hundred and forty horse-power dynamo to its equipment, and the company connected new lines of feed wire directly with the fair grounds. These lines were of heavy copper and nearly a half inch in diameter, so they would supply an abundance of power according to manager Smith. On the nights of the big parades the Omaha Street Railway Company planned to operate cars on all lines all night if necessary to transport people to their homes.

To ease transportation the Union Pacific built a new cut-off to the state fair grounds. The train consisted of ten coaches and the Union Pacific guaranteed state fair visitors a twenty-minute non-stop service from Omaha to the state fair grounds.

In the realm of illumination a novelty was incorporated

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8 Ibid.
9 *The Omaha Daily Bee*, August 27, 1896.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., August 23, 1896.
in the 1896 fair. It was a bloomer girl on a bicycle riding back and forth across Douglas Street near the corner of Fourteenth at an elevation of sixty feet above the street. The figure was life size, outlined with lights and was driven by electric power back and forth across the street. Other than the addition of this novelty the illumination of Omaha remained practically the same for the 1896 fair.

The citizens displayed their enthusiasm again as an estimated crowd of one hundred thousand hailed King Ak-Sar-Ben II. The floats which made up the "Feast of Olympia" were just as elaborate as those of the previous year and the visitors again enjoyed the pomp and festivities of the state fair week. The second coronation ball of the Kingdom of Culwira was more successful than the first. There was less reluctance on the part of women to serve on the committee in charge of the coronation. The ball itself was presented on a much higher social plane than the first.

The coronation of 1896 was not held on the same night as the parade, permitting it to start at 8:30 p. m. sharp so the delays prevalent in the former ball did not occur. It

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12 World-Herald, August 29, 1896.
13 The Omaha Excelsior, September 12, 1896.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
was not until after the grand march that the king and queen were revealed as Caspar E. Yost and Miss Mae Dundy. Caspar E. Yost, a long time resident of the city and a former postmaster, was at this time president of the Nebraska Telephone Company. His consort was the daughter of the Honorable Elmer Dundy, Judge of the United States District Court.16

The state fair and Ak-Sar-Ben festivities were climaxed by a grand concert of Scandinavians held at the Ak-Sar-Ben den on the Saturday evening following the Friday night coronation ball.17 The third biennial meeting of the Scandinavian Singers Association was a three day session opening on the morning of September 4 of fair week. The activities of the Association included a large street parade, an immense reception, a grand concert, and a huge picnic.18

The Scandinavians wore unique caps which immediately attracted attention any place on the streets. Six hundred singers from all parts of the Middle West with members of their families and with friends added at least five thousand people to the crowd already assembled in Omaha for the fair.19 Fourteen special trains brought them from their homes to Omaha.

16Ibid.
17World-Herald, August 22, 1896.
18The Omaha Daily Bee, August 31, 1896.
The Soulx City contingent, alone, filled a train of five hundred people. 20

Owing to the lack of housing facilities in Omaha during fair week the Association found it necessary to erect tents on the western edge of Hanscom Park. 21 Over one hundred tents in the park gave it the appearance of a camping ground. The headquarters of the Association, Washington Hall at 403 South Eighteenth Street, was elaborately decorated for the occasion. All of the meetings and receptions of the Association were held there, while the concert was placed in the Ak-Sar-Ben den in order to accommodate the immense audience which turned out to enjoy the grand feast of music. 22

On the opening morning of the Association, the singers rehearsed in Washington Hall. Their rehearsal was followed by a parade down Farnam Street to Eleventh, then over to Douglas, west on Douglas to Sixteenth Street, and thence to the Webster Street Station. 23 Here the Association took cars to the State fair grounds where they gave a free concert in the Court of Honor. The six hundred voice chorus was accompanied by one hundred musicians of the Musical Union. 24

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20 The Omaha Daily Bee, September 4, 1896.
21 World-Herald, September 3, 1896.
22 The Omaha Daily Bee, September 4, 1896.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
That evening at eight o'clock a magnificent reception was given in Washington Hall by the visiting delegates of the Association. Mayor Broatch welcomed the members of the Association to the city and a responding speech was made by Charles Johnson, president of the Association. The affair concluded with a banquet honoring Mayor Broatch.

On the following Saturday the Association convened at nine o'clock in Washington Hall for a business meeting. Following another rehearsal that afternoon the Association presented their grand concert that evening before an immense crowd of Omahans at the Ak-Sar-Ben den. On Sunday afternoon the Association staged a picnic at Rusers Park on Fifty-eighth and Center Street to which all the Scandinavians of Omaha were invited. During the course of the afternoon an informal musical program was rendered by the Association. The Scandinavians of Omaha were commended on the generous hospitality shown the members of the Association. The executive committee of the Association was convinced that Omaha was the right location for their festival of 1893 since it would be the year of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition.

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26 The Omaha Daily Bee, September 6, 1896.

27 Ibid.

28 World-Herald, September 6, 1896.
On Sunday, September 6, Nebraska’s thirteenth annual state fair came to a close. It did not leave as large a balance on the right side of the ledger as expected by state fair officials due, no doubt, to the rainy weather experienced during fair week. Since the grand concert given by the Scandinavians of the Northwest was presented on Saturday evening it was decided by state fair officials to experiment and extend the state fair through Saturday. Secretary Furnas, remarked that this was the first and last time the committee would do so, since the grounds were practically deserted on that last day of the fair.

By 1897 Omaha, like New Orleans before her, was fast becoming known as a city of gala celebrations. In this year a unique feature, a mechanical parade, was added to the state fair 3nd Ak-Sar-Ben week. Until that time no mechanical parade, especially one electrically equipped had passed through the streets of any American city. For many months mechanics and electricians had worked on the few electrical floats which were being used for an experiment.

The fact that one important feature of the mechanical parade

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30 *The Omaha Daily Bee, September 6, 1896.*

31 *Ibid.,* August 30, 1897.

32 *The Omaha Excelsior, September 4, 1897.*
parade had been imported directly from France evidenced a desire on the part of Ak-Sar-Ben to please, interest, and elate visitors of the 1897 state fair. The prominent feature of the parade was an immense tricycle built in France. It was manned in the parade by fifteen Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben. Following the huge tricycle were a number of mechanical floats and near the end of the parade came the three experimental floats which were illuminated. These electrical floats were built by Gus Renze. They were mounted on wheels which were guaged so they could be driven on the street car tracks and secure electric power from the trolley wires. This had been suggested by Walter Jardine, a member of the board of governors, and it was executed by Gus Renze with admirable results.

The greatest number of lamps ever used on a float was eight hundred, but this number was too large and did not bring success. Even though it was a cool evening when the mechanical parade was presented the large number of lamps caused Gus Renze's brother-in-law, who was costumed on an experimental float, to nearly succumb to the intense heat. This situation was corrected in 1898 when fewer lamps were used on each float.

33 *World-Herald*, September 23, 1897.
35 *The Omaha Daily Bee*, October 7, 1898.
The uses of electricity exemplified the experimental floats in the mechanical parade and the success of the experiment was far greater than that anticipated by the promoters of the pageant. So great was the enthusiasm of the people who witnessed the mechanical parade that the board of governors decided to reproduce the display in the Ak-Sar-Ben pageant "The Feast of Quivira," which followed the next evening.

The pageant of the "Feast of Quivira" consisted of twenty floats which were witnessed by an estimated crowd of one hundred thousand and related to the viewers the story of the Kingdom of Quivira.

An official stand which could seat three hundred people was erected in front of the city hall. The expense of this collapsible stand was borne by the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben and it was from this location that Governor Holcomb, Mayor Moores, state and city officials, and guests from New Orleans viewed the pageant. The following evening the coronation ball climax the fair of 1897 when Edward P. Peck and Gertrude Kountze were crowned king and queen of the Kingdom of Quivira.

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36 Ibid., September 23, 1897.
37 World-Herald, September 23, 1897.
38 Ibid., September 17, 1897.
39 The Omaha Excelsior, September 25, 1897.
By 1897 the city had solved or at least was able to cope with the problems which a state fair presented. State fair visitors in 1897 generally agreed that this fair was more successful in accommodating them than any previous fair. The city had learned much in handling great crowds and city officials felt the knowledge gained would benefit Omaha in 1898 when it would be expected to handle the crowds in attendance at the Trans-Mississippi Exposition. Omaha had learned what it was capable of doing in the way of providing attractions for its visitors and realized more than ever what could be accomplished by earnest and united effort.41

Civic leaders felt the important lesson learned by citizens was that united effort was necessary to make a success of a civic project.42 They were certain the success of the 1897 state fair and Ak-Sar-Ben festivities would spur citizens to even greater effort to make the Trans-Mississippi Exposition a success.

40 Ibid.
41 World-Herald, September 25, 1897.
42 The Omaha Daily Bee, September 25, 1897.
CHAPTER VII

THE TRANS-MISSISSIPPI EXPOSITION CLIMAXED
OMAHA'S STATE FAIR ACTIVITIES

The year 1896 was an eventful one for Omaha and its citizens for it marked a turning point in the growth of the city. The Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition held from June to November was a memorable event in the city's history.\(^1\) The Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben gave much support to the Exposition since most of them were directly connected with the planning of the Exposition which the Omaha Business Men's Association had proposed in the fall of 1895.\(^2\)

The Trans-Mississippi Exposition was conceived, as was the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben, to arouse the people of Omaha and of the Middle West from the stupor, depression, and gloom which prevailed in business circles.\(^3\) This condition, had come about by successive crop failures and the financial panic of 1893. The formation of the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben inaugurated a period of recovery and the Trans-Mississippi Exposition helped speed up the process.\(^4\)


\(^3\)Ibid.

Gurdon W. Wattles, a former Iowa banker, who came to
Omaha on the eve of the financial panic of 1893, was selected
president of the Exposition. When Wattles came to Omaha in
1893, he became vice president of the Union National Bank and
two years later was elected a member of the first board of
directors of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition and later be­
came its president. He was very active in the Knights of
Ak-Sar-Ben and served as president of the board of governors
from 1905 to 1908 when he was crowned king.  

In exploring the city for a suitable site the board of
the Trans-Mississippi Exposition decided upon an area in the
northeastern part of the city known as Kountze tract. It
contained one hundred and eighty-four acres, and was bounded
on the East by Sherman Avenue, on the North by Pratt Street,
on the West by Twenty-fourth Street, and on the South by
Pinkney Street. Kountze tract was an excellent location for
the Exposition for it was only twelve minutes from the business
center of the city by either of three street car lines. These
car lines entered the Exposition grounds on Sherman Avenue,
Twenty-fourth Street, and by a street car line which came
by way of Locust Street from East Omaha.  

5Sorenson, loc. cit.
6Haynes, op. cit., p. 29.
7Ibid.
Thus, it was on Kountze tract that the group of glittering white buildings of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition were built. Surprisingly, the buildings were of Classic and Renaissance architecture which had absolutely no relation to the life on the western plains. President McKinley, who visited the Exposition in October, opened it on June 1, 1898, by pressing a button in Washington D. C., which in turn sent electric current flowing across the nation to set the machinery of the Exposition in operation.

The Ak-Sar-Ben autumnal festivities of 1898 were much more unusual than any since the formation of the organization for it was in this year on October 6 that Omahans witnessed the first complete electrical parade called, "Constellations." The Knights also presented a non-electrical parade "Feast of Alhambra."

The pageant "Feast of Alhambra," consisted of twenty floats manned by four hundred noble Knights. Each float was typical of some story related in Washington Irving's celebrated work, The Alhambra, which was an enchanted castle in Granada.

The scenes depicted by the floats were elegant in effect and

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8 Olson, op. cit., p. 265.
9 Ibid.
10 The Omaha Daily Bee, October 5, 1898.
11 Ibid.
12 World-Herald, October 4, 1898.
varied in style. It was a little strange that this theme was selected in view of the Spanish-American War, which had been concluded earlier that year, but the glories of Spain were carefully excluded from the floats and the representations were largely given over to the story of the Moors.13

Interspersed between the floats, which made up the "Feast of Alhambra," were various bands from adjoining cities. The South Omaha Riding Club numbering about seventy horsemen, each wearing a unique costume of Ak-Sar-Ben colors, also participated.14 The high light of the pageant was reached when King Ak-Sar-Ben IV, halted in front of the City Hall where he received the traditional welcome to the city by Mayor Frank E. Moores. This year a new feature was added in the preparation made for King Ak-Sar-Ben's appearance in front of the City Hall. Shortly before his appearance a bugler, stationed high in the tower of the Municipal Hall, sounded his approach, which was confirmed by the appearance of two armoured messengers of the court.15

Desirous of presenting a parade unlike any heretofore witnessed in any American city the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben early in 1897 decided to build an electrical parade.16 Electrical

13The Omaha Daily Bee, October 4, 1898.
14World-Herald, October 5, 1898.
15The Omaha Daily Bee, October 6, 1898.
16The Illustrated Bee, September 21, 1902.
parades had been attempted previously in other sections of the United States, but were never successful. The year before a few illuminated floats had been tried as an experiment and they attracted so much attention that an entire pageant of electrical floats was ordered to celebrate the "Feast of Alhambra."  

There were twenty floats depicting subjects of modern history including the most popular heroes of the Spanish-American War. Each float was illuminated by two hundred and fifty to five hundred lamps, each of sixteen candlepower, and seventy-five percent of these were colored. The coloring was done at the den under the supervision of Gus Renze. The colored globes were fastened to a board one hundred at a time before they were mounted on the paper mache floats. A can of "exsicative" preparation was placed upon each globe and then a coat of coloring fluid was applied.

Special wagons were constructed at a cost of three thousand dollars to carry the electrical floats. They were equipped with flanged wheels, on which rested iron shoes which were connected with the trolley wires. The peculiar construction of the wheels allowed them to ride either on the pave-

17 Ibid.
18 The Omaha Daily Bee, October 6, 1898.
19 The Illustrated Bee, September 21, 1902.
ment or on the street car tracks. Heavy springs provided the proper connection above, making the wagon as well grounded as a street car.20

The Ak-Sar-Ben den for two weeks before the parades housed forty paper mache floats which made up both parades. These floats were carefully guarded day and night by a special detachment of the city fire department, who took up residence at the den while guarding the floats.21 Approximately fifty artists and artisans under the watchful eye of the chief artist, Gus Renze, had worked for eight months on the floats. The floats were built at a cost of twenty thousand dollars and were considered by the board of governors the best they had brought before the citizens of Omaha.22

The electrical parade "Constellations," which was given on Thursday October 6, far eclipsed any of previous years. The parade route had to be changed in order to use the trolley wires for power. The parade left the Ak-Sar-Ben den at 7:15 p. m. and started promptly at eight o'clock from Sixteenth and Cuming Streets. The route was as follows:

South on Sixteenth Street to Howard; east to Fourteenth; north to Douglas; east to Tenth; south to Farnam; west to Nineteenth, south to Harney; east to Sixteenth, and north to the Ak-Sar-Ben den.23

20Ibid.
21 The Omaha Daily Bee, September 11, 1898.
22 Ibid., September 25, 1898.
23 Ibid., October 4, 1898.
Each float as it reached the corner of Sixteenth and Cuming Street was attached by its trolley to the street car wires. When the trolleys were placed in position the floats were illuminated with varied colored incandescent lights which were artistically arranged to produce the most brilliant effect. The constellation of colors corresponded with the idea to be conveyed by the various floats.

Edward F. Schrig, the city electrician, was given credit for the display. He personally looked after the floats and kept the lights working during the parade. Luther Sterringer, a student of Edison, and consulting engineer for both the Trans-Mississippi Exposition and the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, was in Omaha at the time of the electrical parade. He described it as "a marvelous and magnificent electrical display which had never before been surpassed even at the World's Fair."

The Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben promised Omaha that they would continue to have an electrical parade, but in the future because of the expense involved there would be just the electrical parade instead of the usual three. They also

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24 World-Herald, October 7, 1893.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
intimated that a patent had been secured on the method of illuminating the floats.\textsuperscript{27}

The ball of 1893 was held on the evening following the first electrical parade. R. S. Wilcox and Grace Allen were crowned king and queen, respectively, in what was probably the most decorative and otherwise successful ball that had up until that time been held.\textsuperscript{28} One very definite improvement was a new ball room floor; gone were the days of trying to dance on a canvas covered floor.\textsuperscript{29}

The war with Spain did not last long and a Peace Jubilee was held in Omaha to celebrate the victory. This Jubilee occupied the week of October 10 through 15.\textsuperscript{30} The President of the United States with his cabinet, the Diplomatic Corps, and prominent generals of the Army and Navy were invited to open the festivities.\textsuperscript{31}

The opening day of the Jubilee Week was denominatated Mayor's Day and the Mayors of the principal cities of the West were invited to attend and participate in the exercises. Tuesday was Governor's Day and governors of all the Trans-Mississippi states were invited to participate in the exercises.\textsuperscript{32} That evening the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben completed

\textsuperscript{27}The Omaha Excelsior, October 8, 1893.
\textsuperscript{28}The Omaha Daily Bee, October 8, 1893.
\textsuperscript{29}Ibid., September 22, 1893.
\textsuperscript{30}Haynes, \textit{ibid. cit.}, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{31}World-Herald, October 6, 1893.
\textsuperscript{32}Ibid.
last minute details for the grand parade which was to be given in honor of the coming of President McKinley to the "seat of government of the Kingdom of Quivira." 33

It was arranged that the South Omaha Equestrian Club would join the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben in welcoming the President and in escorting him from the depot to the City Hall. 34 All of the floats in the two previous parades that year were combined making a grand total of forty-two.

A few days previous to the President's arrival local newspapers printed articles informing the people that it was their duty to make gala preparations for his visit in order to show their appreciation. 35 The Editor of the world-herald urged everyone to lay aside all political prejudices and make a united effort in paying tribute to the chief magistrate of the greatest country on earth. On this occasion, Democrat, Populist, Republican, Prohibitionist, Bimetallist and Gold Standard Champions should join together as one. 36

On the evening of October 11, two special trains, bearing the President of the United States and his distinguished party, arrived in Omaha at nine o'clock. For hours previous to the President's arrival people were gathered on the station platform to greet him. 37 His train had scarcely whistled on the

33 Ibid., October 12, 1898.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., October 19, 1898.
36 Ibid.
37 Haynes, op. cit., pp. 87-88.
Omaha side of the Union Pacific bridge when a great shout went up from the thousands on the platform of the station and as the train pulled in police and extra guards were taxed to the utmost to restrain the crowds from the track.38

The President came off the train with his hat in his hand and he acknowledged the greeting offered him by the crowd. He was greeted by city officials and the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben. The scene was an inspiring one as the presidential party moved from the depot to the reviewing stand at Eighteenth and Farnam.39 The party received a tremendous ovation as it passed through the streets of Omaha. When it reached Fifteenth and Farnam the crowds were so immense the police were able to keep only a narrow path of sufficient width to permit the passage of the carriages.40

The buildings along both sides of the street were alive with people, who occupied every foot of available space from the street level to the "roof line." The windows of the buildings were crowded and from some windows platforms were improvised to seat people.41 The Ak-Sar-Ben parade was an hour and a half passing the grand stand and its features were regarded with much interest by the members of the presidential party and

38 World-Herald, October 12, 1898.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
other distinguished guests. The electrical floats were very much of a novelty and the subject of as much comment as was the grand effect of the general illumination of the city which received many words of approval from the President.

The vista was spectacular as one viewed it from the hill on Farnam Street as the electrical parade was approaching the grandstand and Omaha's visitors expressed their appreciation.

There were more people in the city that night than ever before and the police had a very difficult task controlling the crowds. Almost the entire force was stationed along the route which the President took from the depot to the reviewing stand in front of the City Hall. The President was well guarded, and at the City Hall he was met by Detectives Dunn and Donahue, who quietly and without attracting any attention drew constantly near him until he was escorted by the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben to the Omaha Club where arrangements had been made to make him comfortable during his stay in the city.

Omaha officials estimated that the city had a crowd of two hundred and fifty thousand on the night of the President's parade. The hotels of the city were taxed to their full capacity. The Millard and the Paxton each had five hundred guests and at both places many cots occupied the lobbies. The Murray,

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42 Ibid.
43 World-Herald, October 12, 1893.
44 Ibid.
Mercer, Dellone, Barker and Ille Grand were overflowing to the point that they were unable to care for the city's visitors. Thus, for the first time in the city's history many people walked the streets or spent the night in its parks for there were no other accommodations.45

The Omaha Club became the executive mansion and the official flag of the Chief Executive floated from the peak of the flagstaff from sunrise to sunset during his sojourn.46 In the anti-room of the Omaha Club, the Nebraska Telephone Company installed a handsome telephone cabinet and a special set of instruments. An attendant was placed in charge and the President was afforded every facility for talking over the lines of the Nebraska Telephone Company.47 By this means the President was enabled to hold conferences with his office in the White House or many other points in the country.

President's Day, October 12, was a typical Nebraska October day. By 7:30 a. m. people began to gather about the Omaha Club to catch a glimpse of the President before he was escorted to the Exposition grounds by the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben.48 Before the gates of the Exposition were opened, thousands of people had made their way to the entrances. Street cars, railway trains, carriages, and every means of conveyance were taxed to the utmost to carry the crowds. As expected the

45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., October 7, 1898.
47 Ibid.
48 The Omaha Daily Bee, October 12, 1898.
admissions for the day broke all previous records; with 98,854 paid admissions.49

The Second Nebraska Regiment which had just returned from the Cuban campaign assisted in preserving order on the grounds. The regiment was drawn up in two solid lines reaching from the entrance of the Exposition grounds to the grandstand where the President was to make his address.50 These two lines formed a passageway through the immense crowds for the President and his escorts. The presidential party arrived at the gates of the Exposition grounds at eleven o'clock and as the red-coated board of governors of the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben, who were riding in front of the President's carriage appeared the cheers of the crowd began.51

The greeting was acknowledged by the President with smiles and bows, and as he alighted and mounted the platform escorted by President Wattles of the Exposition, the vast crowd shouted and waved hats.52 The exercises began with prayers by Reverend John McQuold Paster of the First Methodist Church, followed by a short introductory address by President Wattles. He described the gratitude felt by all classes of citizens because of the return of peace and was certain that he voiced the greetings

49 Haynes, op. cit., p. 89.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 World-Herald, October 12, 1898.
of the whole Trans-Mississippi country in welcoming the distinguished and honored guests of the day.\textsuperscript{53}

The President then addressed the gathering. He complimented Omaha on its Exposition and talked along the general lines of the lessons the United States had been taught by the Spanish-American War and the territorial problems which confronted the nation.\textsuperscript{54} At the close of these exercises an informal reception was held and congratulations were extended to the President by the Exposition officials and other prominent guests on the platform.\textsuperscript{55}

On the following day, the President left the city for St. Louis. Before leaving, he said:

\begin{quote}
I want to congratulate Omaha on the splendid management of every detail of my reception, which was carried out most satisfactorily and in the best way possible.\textsuperscript{56}
\end{quote}

The following days of the Peace Jubilee Week were taken up with an Army and Navy Day, a Civil Government Day, and was concluded with a Children's Day.\textsuperscript{57}

The organization of the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben was probably more appreciated after 1898 than before, since it then

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Haynes, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 97.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Ibid., pp. 97-100.
\end{itemize}
provided the "only" source of entertainment. The state fair, because of an amendment which had been passed through the state legislature, was re-located in Lincoln permanently, and the Trans-Mississippi Exposition had been called to a successful close. Thus, Omahans had only the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben to rely on to bring people from outstate to celebrate the autumnal festivities. By 1899 the Ak-Sar-Ben festivities, because of the absence of the state fair, were called "Ak-Sar-Ben Carnival Week."

That the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben was a popular organization by its fifth year was shown by many comments made by Omaha newspapers. One newspaper summarized the work of the organization as follows:

The advent of the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben five years ago marked an era of prosperity. The movement began at a critical period in the history of Omaha, when some active measures were needed. The organization created a better feeling between the businessmen. It got them acquainted with one another, and showed them that their interests and that of the building up the city were identical. By this means thousands of dollars were put in circulation among the laboring classes and better feeling was engendered among them also. The parades were also the means of drawing crowds to the city during the annual week of festivities and of advertising Omaha as a live city throughout the west.59

58 The Omaha Excelsior, September 9, 1898.
59 Ibid.
While a policy of having only one parade instead of three had been decided upon in 1893, it was not carried out since the next year three parades were presented for the pageant of 1899. On Tuesday evening September 26, the Knights presented an electrical parade, which was followed the next evening by a civic, military and fraternal parade. Thursday evening, September 28, marked the triumphal entry of King Ak-Sar-Ben V into the city. The Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben on this evening presented their annual pageant and this year it bore the name, "Gems of The Grand and Comic Opera."

The fifth coronation ball of the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben took place on Friday evening, September 29. At this ball, W. D. McHugh and Ethel Morse were crowned king and queen. This coronation was somewhat different from its predecessors, in that, the ladies of the court took a more active part. At previous coronations the ladies of the court, had remained seated during the major part of the coronation, but this year for the first time they participated in the ceremony parading down the ball room preceding the crowning of the queen. Other than this change the coronation ball and the electrical parades presented in 1899 were not much different from those of other

60 Ibid., September 30, 1899.
61 The Omaha Daily Bee, September 29, 1899.
62 The Omaha Excelsior, September 30, 1899.
63 Ibid.
The Ak-Sar-Ben Carnival Week of 1899 was successful, although it did not present anything unusual or unique, and it certainly did not eclipse the pageant of 1898. The city's visitors did enjoy the parades and ball of that year, but it was the general opinion that the Carnival Week of 1899 was an anti-climax to that unusual year, 1898, which has stood out in the city's history.
CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben, founded in 1895 for the purpose of entertaining and attracting people to the city during the Nebraska State Fair, has become well known throughout the United States and ranks with other festival societies such as the Mardi Gras of New Orleans and the Veiled Prophets of St. Louis.\(^1\) The Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben, a non-profit corporation chartered by the state, has always had as its stockholders and governing body the board of governors.

The significance of the annual festivals of Ak-Sar-Ben is apparent. They brought the people of the city and the surrounding states in closer touch and these acquaintances increased trade for the city, which in turn promoted its well being.\(^2\)

The Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben from its formation to 1899 furnished amusement for thousands and broadcasted the glories of Nebraska and its products throughout the United States. It gave a general interest to thousands of Omahans—a means whereby all of them could work together in fun and

\(^1\) "A Historical Sketch of Ak-Sar-Ben," *Omaha's Own Magazine*, November, 1928. p. 12.

\(^2\) *The Examiner*, September 30, 1908.
fellowship knowing that by so doing they were contributing
to the general good of the city.³

By 1895 the organization had established a reputation
among Omahans, who had observed its formation and early
history and had by this time an opportunity to form opinions
concerning the organization's accomplishments. Arthur C.
Smith president of the firm of M. E. Smith a dry goods
company said:

There is no doubt that the annual festival of
the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben is the best thing ever
organized in the city. It does more good than all
other business organizations combined for the general
welfare of the city. In my opinion it was this society
which was responsible for the first Omaha exposition,
and if it had never done anything else the promoters
should be entitled to the last gratitude of the
citizens. There has always been a spirit of antagonism
in the country against Omaha and the Knights of Ak-
Sar-Ben have done more to cut off the sharp corners
of criticism than any other thing. When you take a
man to the den and show him what you think of him--
that you have a warm welcome and cheery god-speed for
him--he cannot but have better feelings for Omaha
than he had before.⁴

N. H. Neilson manager of W. O. Butts a wholesale fruit
company felt the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben championed the cause
of Nebraska's society. He said:

I hope that the annual carnival in Omaha will
become permanent, and that it will become as much
a part of the city's life as the carnival at New

³Ibid.
⁴The Illustrated Bee, September 3, 1901.
Orleans is of the life of the Crescent City. It may do our firm little good in a direct financial sense, but it does me good and does every other man in the town good, if it were only the sociability at the den. It not only binds the business men of the city closer together, but it cements the business interest of the state, allaying jealousy and spreading a feeling of good fellowship which endures.

The Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben has been an important force in promoting the city's growth and in its sixty-eight years of existence has become an integral part of the city's social affairs. The organization has changed over the years, in that, it no longer is a secret society but is open to anyone who wishes to join by presenting a membership fee of ten dollars an amount which has remained unchanged since the beginning. The street carnivals and electrical parades no longer exist, but the coronation ball still remains as an important social event. There has been a constant increase in the scope of activities of the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben since its origin, and these occur throughout the year.

Today, the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben stands as a monument to the city. This nationally famous organization has sponsored parades, flower shows, harvest festivals, horse racing, rodeos, livestock shows, ice pageants and hockey games. The Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben was founded as an emergency

5Ibid.

6The Examiner, September 6, 1902.
business panacea, but has become a stable institution which has changed its program to suit shifting conditions through the years.  

Today, as in 1895, Al-Sar-Ben's leaders include many prominent citizens and industrialists of this region who live by the slogan, "Knights to the rescue!" Al-Sar-Ben's purpose from its inauguration has been to do whatever possible to make Nebraska more prosperous and a better place in which to live.

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7 *The Illustrated Bee*, September 8, 1901.

APPENDIX A

THE EXPEDITION OF CORONADO

The Coronado expedition is believed to have started from the City of Calliacan, in February of 1540. Today, Calliacan is a city located in Southwestern Mexico near the Gulf of California, about five hundred miles south of the United States. While Coronado was staying in Mexico there was a current story that the great wealth in the Seven Cities of Cibola was lying far to the north. The story claimed the Seven Cities contained houses built of stone many stories high and a great abundance of gold, silver, and turquoise existed in its midst.

Coronado was born in the city of Salamanca and he came from an eminent and wealthy Spanish family, then, he was given a superior education. He was appointed governor of New Galicia, one of the northern provinces of Mexico, about the same time De Soto was appointed governor of Florida and Cuba. Coronado has been described by historians as cold, cruel, ambitious and always looking for an opportunity to distinguish himself and win the favor of the King.

Hearing of the wealth of the Seven Cities of Cibola, Coronado saw his chance to win fame and establish himself


2Ibid., p. 298.
more firmly in the Spanish court. With his ambitions in mind, Coronado and his army of three hundred Spaniards and more than a thousand Indians started on the long journey to reach the Seven Cities of Cibola and seize the wealth the Indians had accumulated.3

After a long journey across the desert of the southwestern states Coronado reached the Pueblo towns of the Zuni and Hopi Indians of Arizona. Coronado and his men found there, Pueblo houses several stories high which could be reached by ladders, but they found no gold, silver, or great wealth as expected. It seems that the riches and splendor of the wonderful Seven Cities of Cibola were a mythical dream of the desert. Coronado was deeply disappointed and since it would not be expedient for him to return to Mexico with nothing to show for his long journey, he traveled eastward across Arizona and New Mexico.4

Soon Coronado and his company reached the valley of the Rio Grande not far from the present town of Bernalillo, where they found many Indian villages inhabited by very poor people living in an abject condition.5 The Indians, according to Coronado, had learned the art of irrigation and raised sufficient corn, melons, beans, and other vegetables for their

3Ibid.


5Ibid.
subsistence. The Spanish army encamped with these Indians through the winter and made life very burdensome for the natives. Initially, the Indians made an attempt to kill the Spaniards but were badly defeated and compelled to furnish food for their oppressors.6

While the Spanish army was in winter encampment the story concerning the Kingdom of Quivira circulated in the Rio Grande valley. It was told by an Indian prisoner of the Pueblos and who was called "The Turk" by the Spaniards. He was probably a Pawnee Indian, but was so-called by the Spaniards because he wore his hair in a peculiar way similar to the Turks in Asia. The prisoner agreed to guide the Spanish army to the rich province of Quivira, which was ruled by the magnificent Tartarax and which was located far to the Northwest. Thus, Coronado proceeded on his second "wild goose" chase in April of 1541.7

Coronado left the valley of the Rio Grande on April 23, and after nine days of marching reached vast plains where there were great herds of buffalo or cows as Coronado called them. He traveled 789 miles over the plains and at the end of thirty-five days marching the army had consumed most of the corn brought from the valley of the Rio Grande. Realizing that


7 Ibid.
rations were inadequate for his army, Coronado sent some of his troops back to the Rio Grande, and with only thirty horsemen he continued to travel forty-two days. Thus, at the end of seventy-seven days travel from the valley of the Rio Grande, Coronado reached the Kingdom of Quivira. Here, he found twenty-five villages of straw and grass houses and he described the land as being very flat and black, well watered by rivulets, springs, and rivers. He took particular notice of the plums, nuts, grapes and mulberries, which were growing wild everywhere, because they reminded him of his own country, Spain. After Coronado had traveled for twenty-five days through the villages of Quivira he realized that cold weather would be upon them, so he decided to say farewell to Quivira and with his troops he returned to the valley of the Rio Grande.

The Coronado expedition and its literature has proven to be a wonderful contribution to the history and romance of Nebraska and the picture presented of the great plains has been found to be one of the most accurate and interesting ever written. The portrait of the land of Quivira with its soil, flat and black, its beautiful running streams, its hills, its nuts and fruit, its plants, its animals, its people

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9Ibid.
living in houses made of woven grass and straw is also a
most faithful and enduring one. Certainly, the people who
wrote these descriptions of the Great Plains and the Kingdom
of Quivira lying beyond them had visited these regions. The
story of Quivira had furnished, especially in the Middle
West, an inexhaustible source for literature and drama which
has been used throughout all time.¹⁰

It was clear that Coronado and his colleagues came in
search of gold, but they were certainly doomed to disappointment. Sadly, Coronado wrote the King of Spain:

...what I am sure of is there is not any gold nor any
other metal in all that country, and the other things
of which they had told me are nothing but little
villages, and in many of these they do not plant
anything and do not have any houses except of skins
and sticks, and they wander around with the cows.

Coronado continued:

The country itself, is the best I have ever seen for
producing all the products of Spain, for besides the
land itself being very flat and black and being very
well watered by the rivulets and springs and rivers,
I found prunes like those of Spain and nuts and very
good sweet grapes and mulberries.¹¹

The Spanish were not farmers, they wanted gold, and
it has been suggested by some historians that the observa-
tions of Coronado may help explain Spanish neglect of the

¹⁰Sheldon, op. cit. p. 141.
Great Plains. At any rate, after Coronado's expedition Spanish interest in the Plains seems to have been confined to keeping other European powers out.12

Historically, the importance of Coronado's expedition lies in the fact that for the first time it exposed white men to the central plains. Also, the historians views have been changed on the origins of American history, in that, those explorers reaching the east coast were not the first to explore the North American continent. The traditional view of this Kingdom of Quivira has been kept alive by the Ancient Order of the Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben who, establishing its ritual upon this mythical Kingdom, crown each fall, in the state's most elaborate social function, the King and Queen of Quivira.

12Ibid. (For a map description of Coronado's trek to the interior of the United States consult page 112.)
APPENDIX B

THE FIRST AK-SAR-BEN BALL PROGRAM

CONCERT PROGRAM

First Infantry Band
Herman Schunke, Director

1. Overture. .......... "Grand Festival" .................. Leutner
2. Intermezzo. ....... "Cavalleria Rusticana" .......... Mascagni
3. Song. ............. "Little Green Irene" ............... Bodine
4. Serenade. .......... Cornet Solo ........................ Schubert
5. Waltz. ............. "Hydropathen" ................. Gounod
6. Bridal Chorus. ..... "Lohengrin" ................. Wagner
7. Patrol. ............ American ........................... Meacham
8. Overture. .......... "Bohemian Girl" ................. Balfe
10. Dance. ............ "The Colored Jubilee" ......... Bachel
11. Spring Solo. ...... "King Karl" ....................... Mendelssohn
12. March. ............ "King Karl" ........................... Ellenberg

DANCE PROGRAM

Second Infantry Band
A. Wedmeyer, Director

1. Waltz. .......... "Sobre Las Olas" ..................... Roses
2. Lanciers. ...... United States Army ..................... Tobani
3. Polka. .......... "Snow Flake" ........................ Strauss
4. Two Step. ...... "Liberty Bell" ........................ Sousa
5. Quadrille. ...... "Vile L'Armee" ....................... Musaid
6. Waltz. .......... "Litana" ................................. Buccalossi
7. Schottische. ... "Queen of the Knights" ............... Bennet
8. Lanciers. ...... "Loomis College" ..................... Zimmerman
10. Waltz. .......... "On The Beautiful Blue Danube" .... Strauss
11. Two Step. ...... "King Cotton" ........................ Sousa
12. Waltz. .......... "Dreams of Childhood" ............... Waldteufel
Master of Ceremonies:
Mr. Dudley Smith

Reception Committee:
William R. Bennett
C. Wilhelm
John E. Wilber
Thomas J. Rogers
William S. Poppleton
Henry D. Estabrook
H. H. Baldridge
S. J. Love
George W. Kelley
H. T. Lemist

Floral Managers:
Lieut. W. M. Wright
Charles L. Saunders
George P. Cronk
Arthur P. Quicke
George H. Palmer
C. T. Kountze
Edwin T. Swob
Frank T. Hamilton
William G. Doane

Maids of Honor:
Omaha
Miss Mary Nash
Miss Daisy Doane
Miss Hattie Cady
Miss Helen Hoagland
Miss May Bartlett
Miss Alice Drake
Miss Mellora Woolworth
Miss Grace Himebaugh
Miss Brownie Baum
Miss Sue Copetzer
Miss Linda Curtis
Miss Blanche McKenna
Miss Lillian Wilcox
Miss Stella Hamilton
Miss Pearl Hartmen
Council Bluffs

Ladies of Honor:
Omaha
Mrs. Henry Estabrook
Mrs. Victor Caldwell
Mrs. Charles Hall
Mrs. Clement Chase
Mrs. Elmer Bryson
Mrs. James Baum
Mrs. Gilbert Hitchcock
Mrs. John E. Wilbur
Mrs. Harry Cartan
Mrs. William L. Dickey
Mrs. Warren Rodgers
Mrs. William Poppleton
Mrs. Thomas A. Fry
Mrs. William Redick
Mrs. Walter Jardine
Council Bluffs

Ladies in Waiting:
Omaha
Mrs. Oliver Simons
Beatrice
Mrs. A. T. Cole
Lincoln
Mrs. William Leonard

Ladies of the Court:
Omaha
Mrs. C. F. Manderon
Mrs. Guy Barton
Mrs. J. M. Woolworth
Mrs. R. S. Wilcox
Mrs. J. M. Metcalf
Mrs. C. W. Doane
Mrs. E. M. Bartlett
Mrs. W. R. Bennett
Mrs. H. J. Penfold
Mrs. Ben B. Wood
Mrs. H. M. Caldwell
Mrs. James McKenna
Mrs. Lewis M. Rhen
Mrs. Gordon Wattles
Mrs. Adolph Meyer

Council Bluffs
Mrs. Oliver Simons
Beatrice
Mrs. A. T. Cole
Lincoln
Mrs. William Leonard

Hastings
Mrs. Jon M. Ragan
Grand Island
Mrs. G. M. Thummel
Lincoln
Mrs. Carl Funke

Lincoln
Miss Marie Marshall
Miss Bertie Clark
Miss Olive Latts
Kearney
Miss Kate Black
Miss Blanche Finch
Hastings
Miss Effie McIntyre
Miss Ida Leland
Grand Island
Miss Carrie Wasmer
Miss Margaret Howard
## APPENDIX C

### THE KINGS AND QUEENS OF QUIVIRA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>King</th>
<th>Queen 1</th>
<th>Queen 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>E. M. Bartlett</td>
<td>Meliora Woolworth</td>
<td>Mrs. E. M. Fairfield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>Caspar E. Yost</td>
<td>Mae Dundy</td>
<td>Mrs. George Lee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>Edward P. Peck</td>
<td>Gertrude Kountze</td>
<td>Mrs. J. F. Stewart II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>R. S. Wilcox</td>
<td>Grace Allen</td>
<td>Mrs. Harry Clark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>W. D. McHugh</td>
<td>Miss Ethel Morse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

1895

Major R. S. Wilcox - President
Mr. Dudley Smith - Vice President
Mr. H. J. Penfold - Treasure
Mr. William Lyle Dickey - Secretary
Mr. Lewis H. Rheen
Mr. E. M. Bartlett
Mr. Thomas A. Fry
Mr. Elmer E. Bryson
Mr. Walter Jardine
Mr. John E. Utt
Mr. William R. Bennett
Mr. Clement Chase

1896

Major R. S. Wilcox - President
Mr. Dudley Smith - Vice President
Mr. H. J. Penfold - Treasure
Mr. Clement Chase - Secretary
Mr. E. M. Bartlett
Mr. William R. Bennett
Mr. Elmer E. Bryson
Mr. Thomas A. Fry
Mr. Walter Jardine
Mr. Oscar D. Kiplinger
Mr. Vance Lane
Mr. William H. McCord

1897

Major R. S. Wilcox - President
Mr. Thomas A. Fry - Vice President
Mr. H. J. Penfold - Treasure
Mr. Vance Lane - Secretary
Mr. Fred Netz, Jr.
Mr. Elmer E. Bryson
Mr. E. M. Bartlett
Mr. William R. Bennett
Mr. Edward P. Peck
Mr. Oscar D. Kiplinger
Mr. Walter Jardine
Mr. William M. Glass
1898

Major R. S. Wilcox - President
Mr. Thomas A. Fry - Vice President
Mr. H. J. Penfold - Treasure
Mr. A. H. Noyes - Secretary
Mr. Fred Metz, Jr.
Mr. Elmer E. Bryson
Mr. Vance Lane
Mr. William R. Bennett
Mr. Edward P. Peck
Mr. Oscar D. Kiplinger
Mr. Walter Jardine
Mr. William M. Glass

1899

Mr. Thomas A. Fry - President
Mr. Walter Jardine - Vice President
Mr. H. J. Penfold - Treasure
Mr. A. H. Noyes - Secretary
Mr. Elmer E. Bryson
Mr. William M. Glass
Mr. Oscar D. Kiplinger
Mr. Vance Lane
Mr. J. G. Martin
Mr. Fred Metz, Jr.
Mr. Edward P. Peck
Major R. S. Wilcox

1Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben Official Souvenir Programs, (Omaha: Klopp and Bartlett Company, 1895, 1896, 1897, 1898, 1899). Plates on pages 118-125 have been reproduced from these official souvenir programs.
Plate III: Board of Governors 1897

E.W. Haight
T.A. Ford
Vance Lane
W.S. Judkins
O.D. Kipnis
E.E. Brown

(Plates made from photographs furnished by Gray.)
APPENDIX E

AK-SAR-BEN PARADES

1895

"Feast of Mondamin"

Louise MacDonough, Author

Float
1. Subject
2. Ak-Sar-Ben, King of Quivira
3. The Harvest Festival
4. Mondamin's Castle
5. Mondamin Banishes The Insects
6. The War of The Elements
7. Samson's Arrival at Omaha
8. Ak-Sar-Ben's Fountain of Youth
9. The Water Witch Opens The Flood Gates For Nebraska
10. The Grand Vizier Heralds The Return of Prosperity
11. The Queen and The Rose Fairy
12. Quivira Fairies Before King Ak-Sar-Ben
13. Revelries of Ak-Sar-Ben's Court
14. Ak-Sar-Ben's Counselor
15. The Lord of The Exchequer
16. Ak-Sar-Ben In The Chrysalis State
17. At The Shrine of Mondamin
18. Ak-Sar-Ben's Fishery
19. Mondamin Preparing The Feast
20. The Grand Mufti From The Enchanted Forest Proclaims Peace, Plenty and Prosperity To All

1Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben Official Souvenir Programme, (Omaha: Klopp and Bartlett Company, 1895). Plate on page 125 has been reproduced from this program.
Plate I: The First Ak-Sar-Ben Parade
1896

"Feast of Olympia"

Mrs. A. J. Turkle, Author

Float

1. Jupiter
2. Juno
3. Flora
4. Hercules
5. Minerva
6. Ceres
7. Apollo
8. Aurora
9. Nyx
10. Neptune
11. Mercury
12. Pegasus
13. Vulcan
14. Esculapius
15. Diana
16. Pan
17. Justice
18. Cronus
19. Mars
20. Victory

\(^2\)Ibid., 1896. Plates on pages 129-134 have been reproduced from this program.
No. 1—Jupiter.

The father of all the gods of mythology has descended to earth from Mount Olympus to assist mortals in celebrating the feast of Olympia. Holding the thunderbolts in his hands, and crowned by a fair divinity, he rides in triumph, his symbol the eagle preceding him, and his coming heralded by two goddesses on horses that plunge through the clouds. The eagle was sacred to Jupiter because, as it looks unblinkingly at the sun it could contemplate unshrinkingly the splendor of divine majesty.
No. 7—Apollo.

The god of light, prophecy, music, poetry and the arts and sciences, the hero of all mythology, rides triumphant surrounded by his noble companions. Apollo represented the great orb of day. He was eternally young and the very embodiment of immortal beauty. He rides crowned with laurel, in his hands the silver bow, and by him the magic lyre, both gifts of his father Jupiter.
No. 12—Pegasus.

Pegasus was a beautiful winged horse, who sprang from the body of Medusa when she was slain by the hero Perseus. Spreading his wings, he flew to the top of Mt. Olympus. The later poets represent Pegasus as being at the service of the muses of which there were nine, and for this reason he is more celebrated in modern times than in antiquity. He would appear to represent that poetical inspiration which tends to develop man's higher nature, and cause the mind to soar heavenward.
No. 15—Diana.

The goddess of hunting and chastity stands in the midst of a grove, a pure mountain brook breaking at her feet. Her hunting dogs are held in leash, and the game bounds away before her. Diana was skilled in the use of the bow and devoted herself to the chase with great ardor.
No. 20—Victory.

The goddess Victory is represented as a lovely woman with large graceful wings and flowing drapery. In her left hand she holds aloft a crown of laurel and in the right a palm branch. In the Olympic games those who had won the victory were led to the goddess and had wreaths placed upon their heads, in token of her pleasure.
1897

"Feast of Quivira"

Mr. George F. West, Author

Float
1. Title Float
2. "His Majesty, The King."
3. "The Departure of Coronado."
4. "The Land of The Aztec."
5. "Guzman and The Captive."
6. "Onward To Quivira."
8. "Tartarzax, The Dreamer."
9. "The Vanished Races."
10. "Explorers and Traders of Another Era."
12. "The Lewis and Clark Expedition."
13. "Columbia At The Gates of Nebraska."
14. "The Great Seal of Nebraska."
15. "Agriculture and Commerce."
16. "Steam and Electricity."
18. "The Sugar Beet."
19. "Welcome Prosperity."
20. "The Trans-Mississippi."

3Ibid., 1897. Plates on pages 136-141 have been reproduced from this program.
Plate VIII
No. 1. THE TITLE FLOAT.—"THE PAGEANT OF QUIVERA." A moving history of the land of Sunshine and Grain, whose vast future is but dimly touched upon; a true brief glimpse of the story unfolded of the brave men who trolled Nebraska's soil generations before the Mayflower reached New England, or the Virginian Colonists sailed up the James River; a story, too, of the equally hardy, courageous men of our race, who followed their steps in after years and added another star to the flag in the creation of this broad commonwealth of Nebraska.

Plate IX
No. VI. "ONWARD TO QUIVERA." The year of our Lord 1540, an army of 30 Spaniards and 800 Indians set forth from the City of Mexico. The little band fought, starved and plodded wearily on for nearly two years, when a part of them, led by Coronado, entered the realm of Tarascas, King of Quivera, within the present State of Nebraska.

Plate X
Plate XI

No. VII. "THE VISION OF THE PLANTS." The illumination of the Wraith of Cholia, which filled the minds and fixed the hearts of the Spanish invaders, are described from new stylish, striking lines turned toward.
1893

"The Alhambra"

Mr. G. A. Renze, Author

Float

1. Title Float
2. The King's Float
3. Alhamar, The Founder of The Alhambra
4. The Adventure of The Mason
5. The Arabian Astrologer
6. The Gothic Beauty
7. The Garden of Iran
8. The Pilgrim of Love
9. The Moor's Legacy
10. The Three Beautiful Princesses
11. The Rose of The Alhambra
12. The Garden of The Lindersza
13. Yusef and The Ambassadors
14. The Two Discreet Statues
15. The Soldier's Story
16. Palace of Zahara.
17. Hafsah and Her Lover
18. The Enchanted Soldier
19. Cave of Salamanca
20. Guardians of Enchanted Treasures. 4

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4Ibid., 1896. Plates on pages 143-143 have been reproduced from this program.
No. 1—TITLE FLOAT. "A Moslem pile in the midst of a Christian land; an Oriental palace amidst the Gothic edifices of the West; an elegant memento of a brave, intelligent and graceful people, who conquered, ruled and passed away."

Plate XV
No. 14—THE TWO DISCREET STATUES. "By possession of the Black Hand of Jet, a talisman powerful against all spells and enchantments, little Sanchíra was enabled to see the Alhambra in all its pristine glory and remove the jars of treasure of a Moorish King from the care of the watchful guardians. Two figures of nymphs brought out of alabaster, each with her head fixed upon a particular spot in the vault."

Plate XVI
No. 18—THE ENCHANTED SOLDIER. "Guardian of countless powles and treasure, awaited each hundredth year to be relieved of his spell by the magic touch of the seal of Solomon—with the device of two triangles crossing each other, so as to form a star—a cabalistic sign of mighty power in all cases of enchantment. The treasure was to be the prize of the fortunate possessor of this talisman, if properly used, with the assistance of a Padre to exercise the powers of darkness, and a Christian maid to touch the coffer."

Plate XVIII
No. 20—Guardians of Enchanted Treasures. "Generally an uncouth monster or fiery dragon of hideous mien and supernatural construction, to be placated only by the possession of some potent talisman of simple appearance and marvellous properties."
1898

The First Electrical Parade

"Constellations"

Float
1. Title Float
2. Pegassius
3. Mercury
4. Draco
5. Jupiter
6. Polar Star--Pegasus
7. Cygnus and the Swan
8. Pegasus
9. The Pleiades
10. Lyra
11. Saturn
12. Mars
13. Venus and Coming Night
14. The Great Ship Argo
15. The Eagle of the Republic
16. Our Heroes on Sea
17. Our Country
18. Our Heroes on Land

5World-Herald, October 7, 1898.
1899

"Gems of Grand and Comic Opera"

Mr. C. F. Renze, Author

Float

1. Title Float
2. His Majesty King Ak-Sar-Ben V.
3. The Fortune Teller--Scene from Act II.
5. The Little Corporal--Scene from last Act.
6. The Merry Wives of Windsor--From last Act.
10. Aida--Scene from Act I.
11. The Highwayman--Act II.
12. Tannhaeuser--Scene from Act I.
13. The Charlton--Scene from Act I.
14. Siegfried--Scene from Act II.
15. Wang--Act I.
16. Lohengrin--Scene from Act I.
17. Wizard of The Nile--Act II.
18. The Barber of Seville--Opening Scene.

6 Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben Souvenir Program, op. cit. 1899.
Plates on pages 151-156 have been reproduced from this program.
No. 2. His Majesty King AK-SAR-BEN V.

Plate XXII
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