



THE *Exposition Building*  
and the *Mississippi* at the  
*Falls of St. Anthony*

# Convention City

## *The REPUBLICANS in MINNEAPOLIS, 1892*

JUNE DRENNING HOLMQUIST

THE EYES of the nation were focused on Minnesota in the summer of 1892, when for the first and only time in its history the state played host to a national gathering of a major political party. In the Exposition Building on the banks of the Mississippi in Minneapolis, eighteen hundred delegates and alternates from forty-four states, five territories, and the District of Columbia met early in June for the tenth Republican convention, which nominated Benjamin Harrison and Whitelaw Reid as the party's standard-bearers in the presidential election scheduled for the following November.<sup>1</sup>

---

MRS. HOLMQUIST recently succeeded Mary W. Berthel as associate editor of the society's publications in book form. She joined the staff in 1949 as editorial assistant, and during the past four years she has been assistant editor of this magazine.

No major party had ever before met west of Chicago, where the Republican conventions of 1880, 1884, and 1888 had been held.<sup>2</sup> Minneapolis was one of nine cities to bid for the 1892 convention, and the opposition was formidable. New York City, Cincinnati, San Francisco, Detroit, Omaha, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and Chattanooga also competed for the honor.

At first glance, it might appear that there was no sound political reason for holding the 1892 convention in Minneapolis. Minnesota's voting record seemed to place it solidly in the Republican column;

---

<sup>1</sup> For information on the number of delegates from each state and territory, see *Convention Manual and Visitors' Guide*, 30 (Minneapolis, 1892).

<sup>2</sup> Only eight conventions have since been held in the West, three at St. Louis, two at Kansas City, and one each at San Francisco, Denver, and Houston. The 1956 Republican convention will meet in San Francisco. *World Almanac*, 1956, p. 609.

the state had given majorities to every Republican presidential candidate since the days of Lincoln and had been administered by Republican governors ever since 1860. Recent elections in Minnesota and the Northwest, however, told a different story. The Farmers' Alliance was on the rise, and in 1890 had entered the political arena in Minnesota and some other states as a third party. In the election of that year the Republicans lost every Congressional district in Minnesota but one. The new party also won major victories in Kansas and Nebraska, "held the balance of power" in Minnesota and South Dakota, and "ate more or less deeply into the customary Republican vote" in North Dakota, Michigan, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Colorado. In 1891 the Alliance moved to organize on a national scale a new third party known as the People's or Populist party. These events coupled with crop failures and growing agrarian unrest gave Republican leaders cause for alarm over their party's fate in Minnesota and the Northwest in the presidential contest of 1892. Located in the heart of this region, Minneapolis thus felt that it was a logical choice for the Republican convention.<sup>3</sup>

Although Minneapolis was the leading

<sup>3</sup> For Minnesota's voting record, see the state's *Legislative Manual*, 1955, p. 337, 340; and Eugene V. Smalley, *A History of the Republican Party*, 236 (St. Paul, 1896). The rise and influence of the Alliance are traced in John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*, 179-181, 205-237 (Minneapolis, 1931).

<sup>4</sup> Items on the convention clipped from newspapers throughout the nation are among the materials in nine scrapbooks in the George A. Brackett Papers owned by the Minnesota Historical Society. There also are to be found letter books and correspondence that shed light on the event. See Brackett Scrapbook, 2:75, for the material quoted here.

<sup>5</sup> Contemporary accounts of the Exposition Building may be found in Marion D. Shutter, *History of Minneapolis*, 1:146 (Chicago, 1923), and Isaac Atwater, ed., *History of the City of Minneapolis*, 299-303 (New York, 1893). For additional information, see issues of the *Tribune* for September 15 to 26, 1885, May 29, 30, and August 24, 1886, and Washburn to Brackett, November 20, 1886, Brackett Papers. An account of the building's subsequent fate appears in "Minnesota Memories," a column by Ruth Thompson in the *Tribune* of October 8, 1945.

saw and flour milling center of the country in 1892, many Easterners doubted that the relatively young city could handle the throngs that would gather for a national convention. They worried about the city's youth, its hotel accommodations, its streetcar, restaurant, railroad, and telegraph facilities, and its weather. A reporter for the *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, after a visit to the city, felt it necessary to assure his readers that Minneapolis had electric streetcars and was "not a frontier town by any means."<sup>4</sup>

Among the inducements the city could offer Republicans was an excellent hall in which to meet. The massive Exposition Building had been constructed some years earlier in the hope that it might be used on just such an occasion. The erection of this impressive hall was first suggested in an editorial in the *Minneapolis Tribune* of September 14, 1885. Outraged by the location of the new state fairgrounds within the limits of St. Paul and by what he regarded as the discrimination of the railroads against Minneapolis in the matter of excursion rates to the fair, the editor in a fit of pique proposed that Minneapolis "take active steps to erect an exposition building" in which to house its own industrial fair. The argument that the building might be used for a national political convention was later among those advanced to gain support for the plan, which was quickly taken up by the Minneapolis business community. On May 29, 1886, the cornerstone of the future convention hall was laid with appropriate ceremonies and the building was officially dedicated the following August. Built of cream-colored Mankato stone and brick, the hall boasted seven and a half acres of floor space, a main tower that rose 260 feet above the street, and a total seating capacity variously estimated at between eleven and fifteen thousand.<sup>5</sup>

Having acquired what it regarded as a suitable hall for a national convention, "a small movement was set on foot" to secure

the Republican convention of 1888. At that time a delegation from Minneapolis went to Washington "and presented the claims of the metropolis . . . but Chicago carried off the prize." An entering wedge had been driven, however, and in the summer of 1891 an earnest group of Minneapolis businessmen began seriously and systematically to lay the groundwork for securing the convention of 1892.<sup>6</sup>

WILLIAM H. EUSTIS, a local lawyer, spearheaded the initial drive. As president of the Union League, an influential local Republican club, Eustis, in April, 1891, appointed a committee to sound out other organizations in the city and to "arrange for financing the enterprise."<sup>7</sup> By May such other groups as the Business Men's Union, the Board of Trade, and the Chamber of Commerce had appointed committees to work with the Union League. At a joint meeting of these committees on June 27, Senator William D. Washburn and others were asked to select a group of fifty citizens who would constitute a general committee to work for the convention. From this number a smaller executive committee was to be chosen.

Gilbert A. Pierce, a former senator from North Dakota and owner of the *Minneapolis Tribune*, was elected chairman of the Citizen's Executive Committee, as it was called, and William McCrory, an official of the Twin City Rapid Transit Company, was made secretary. Among other members were Washburn, Eustis, Thomas Lowry, lawyer, financier, and president of the Twin City Rapid Transit Company and the Soo Line, and such other prominent businessmen and political leaders as George A. Brackett, Charles W. Johnson, and William S. King.<sup>8</sup>

The work of this group was not publicized, and not until after the convention had been secured did the Minneapolis papers report in detail on the energetic campaign conducted by its members. Apparently, as one of its first steps, the com-

mittee prepared and mailed to Republicans in ten western states letters describing the city and urging the recipients to influence national committeemen to vote for Minneapolis. Other material was sent out tabulating average temperatures in the city over a period of ten years and analyzing declining Republican strength in Minnesota and adjoining states, together with a map showing the distance to Minneapolis from other major cities. The Flour City's successful handling of earlier conventions of various national organizations was described in still other circulars mailed to national committeemen. In addition, the citizen's committee enlisted the help and support of leading Republicans in the West, who wrote letters or aided Minneapolis in other ways.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps more important to the success of the group's campaign, however, was the fact that Pierce and McCrory "were sent to Chicago to negotiate a deal." The Windy City was regarded as Minneapolis' principal opponent in the fight, and the committeemen hoped to persuade Chicago not to enter a bid for the 1892 convention. According to the *Minneapolis Times* of November 24, 1891, these two men "emphatically told the Chicago people that they must withdraw from the convention fight if they wanted to preserve the support of Northwestern people" for the Columbian Exposition to be held there in 1893. On November 26 the *Tribune* revealed that Chicago

<sup>6</sup> See H. C. Chapin, "The Local Committee and Its Work," in Tenth Republican National Convention, *Proceedings*, 4 (Minneapolis, 1892); and *Minneapolis Times*, May 29, 1892.

<sup>7</sup> Eustis describes his role in securing the convention and names others on the committee in his *Autobiography*, 112-114 (New York, 1936).

<sup>8</sup> Members of the general and executive committees are listed in the *Tribune* for November 24, 1891. See also *Tribune*, June 28, 1891, *Times*, May 29, 1892, and an unidentified clipping, "In Dead Earnest," in Brackett Scrapbooks, 2:73.

<sup>9</sup> The work of the committee is described in the *Times* of November 24, 1891, and May 29, 1892, and the *Tribune* of November 15, 22, 24, and 26, 1891. See also Eustis, *Autobiography*, 113, and Chapin, in *Convention Proceedings*, 4.

business leaders had passed a resolution declaring that the "city would not aggressively enter into the contest" and had forwarded copies of it to members of the national committee.

The local committee next persuaded Western Union to agree to install additional wires between Chicago and Minneapolis in order to assure adequate telegraph facilities for press coverage of the convention. Finally, and perhaps most important, the group undertook to raise a guaranty fund of fifty thousand dollars "to defray the expenses of the convention which Minneapolis would be expected to stand."<sup>10</sup> It was understood that the city securing the convention would "have to pay the old debts of the national committee and the expenses of the June meeting," and it was estimated that they might amount to sixty thousand dollars. In addition, forty thousand dollars in "audited bills" were reportedly already in the national committee's hands.<sup>11</sup>

A list of those who gave to the guaranty fund, although they believed that the city would never be successful, appears in the *Tribune* of November 25. It shows that the largest contributors were Lowry and John T. West, owner of the West Hotel, each of whom gave five thousand dollars. Among eighteen other subscribers listed for a thousand dollars or more each were Washburn, Eustis, Governor William R. Merriam, Thomas B. Walker, the Soo Line, William Donaldson and Company, and the North American Telegraph Company. The rest of the money came from numerous smaller contributions.

<sup>10</sup> Brackett Scrapbooks, 2:73; *Times*, May 29, 1892.

<sup>11</sup> *Tribune*, November 23, 1891. Five checks, each for \$10,000, signed by various members of the local and national committees and dated January 2, February 9, 12, March 20, April 18, 1892, are in the Brackett Papers.

<sup>12</sup> *Washington Star*, quoted in the *Minneapolis Tribune*, November 21, 1891. Accounts of the delegation's visit with President Harrison and Secretary Blaine appear in the *Tribune* for November 22 and 25, 1891.

ALL THIS work was done before the Republican national committee met at the Arlington Hotel in Washington on November 23, 1891. At that time, the competing delegations were to present their claims. The *Tribune* of November 19 reported that the Minnesota "convention hustlers" had departed for Washington the night before in three "elegant Pullmans," two of which were filled with men from Minneapolis and the third with valuable allies from St. Paul. On November 22 the paper stated that the total Minnesota delegation numbered "close to 100." The united front presented by the Twin Cities undoubtedly made a favorable impression on the national committee.

Upon arriving in Washington on November 20, the travelers were joined by powerful reinforcements—Senator Washburn, the magnetic Lowry, Chairman Pierce, and Alvred Bayard Nettleton, assistant secretary of the treasury—all of whom had been in the East. According to the *Tribune* of November 21, the Minnesota group secured "one of the best parlors" in the Arlington Hotel adjoining the quarters of the national committee and decorated it with flags, bunting, pictures of the Exposition Building, and of the Twin Cities' leading hotels.

The group impressed at least one Washington reporter who wrote, "There is more vim and hustle in a cubic inch of the Flour City's delegation than in a cubic yard of some of the delegations of our effete and 'cultuathed' Eastern contemporaries." He added that "it is vim and hustle that wins" and concluded that "The Northwest is for Minneapolis and the Northwest is not to be sneezed at these days." The Minnesota delegation was received by President Harrison, who had indicated no preference in the matter of a convention site, and by Secretary of State James G. Blaine, the man most often mentioned as Harrison's leading opponent for the presidential nomination.<sup>12</sup>

On the afternoon of November 23 the

Republican national committee met in executive session to hear the claims of the various delegations.<sup>13</sup> M. H. DeYoung, California national committeeman, presented San Francisco's financial guarantee and announced that the city would provide a round-trip rail ticket, free hotel accommodations, and a free excursion to the Yosemite Valley for each delegate. The *Tribune's* Washington correspondent remarked on November 23 that San Francisco had planned "to bid higher than any other town on the continent." Some indication of the real source of the Minneapolis delegation's financial strength may be deduced from the reporter's next comment. "It is said," he wrote, "that when DeYoung had sized up 'Governor' Lowry of Minneapolis, he drew in his horns."

After San Francisco's partisans had finished speaking, the Detroit delegation was heard, and the committee then adjourned for lunch. When the group reassembled, Minnesota's national committeeman, Robert G. Evans "handed up the guarantee" of Minneapolis, and Senator Washburn told the committee of its "comfortable auditorium" and of its many "excellent hotels," including the West, "the finest hotel on the continent." He praised the city's "salubrious climate," its "admirable location," and its fine rail service. Then he touched on the Minneapolis delegation's key argument when he said that political unrest had grown in the Northwest during the "hard times of the past few years," and that the region had become a "political storm center." "We need this convention," he told the committee, "to stimulate the fresh energies of the Republican party." Washburn was followed by Governor Merriam, who repeated this warning, and Senator Lyman R. Casey and Representative Martin N. Johnson of North Dakota, who added their pleas for Minneapolis.

The burden of the Minnesota delegation's case, however, was presented by Charles W. Johnson, a former newspaperman who was chief clerk of the United

States Senate.<sup>14</sup> He amplified and reinforced all the points made by previous speakers, analyzed at length the political situation in the Northwest, and told the committee that "the constituency of Minneapolis" was composed of fourteen western states which, when taken together, possessed a total of eighty-nine electoral votes. He warned the Republican leaders of "that avalanche of incoherencies known as 'the alliance movement'" that had swept over this "new political empire," and argued that a convention in Minneapolis "might be the determining influence that would render more than one doubtful Western state certain." With one exception, he said, the Eastern states appeared to be safely Republican, but west of Minneapolis lay fourteen doubtful states. "Is it not more important," he asked, "to hold these 14 states north and west than to hold the convention where its potent influence would be felt only upon one?"

Johnson went on to describe Minneapolis as a rail center, located on two transcontinental routes, and to extol the virtues of the Exposition Building. He told the committee that it was "perfect in acoustic properties, in ventilation, in lighting, exits and entrances." He spoke of the city's ability to take care of the crowd, assuring the Republican leaders that its facilities were ample and that its electric transit system was "the best . . . in the United States." Then he made a final telling point. "We guarantee our facilities," he told the committee. "What more do you need? Do you suppose for one moment these conservative business men of Minneapolis would come in force to Washington and urge you to come to their city if they had any doubt about their ability to satisfy you on these points?"

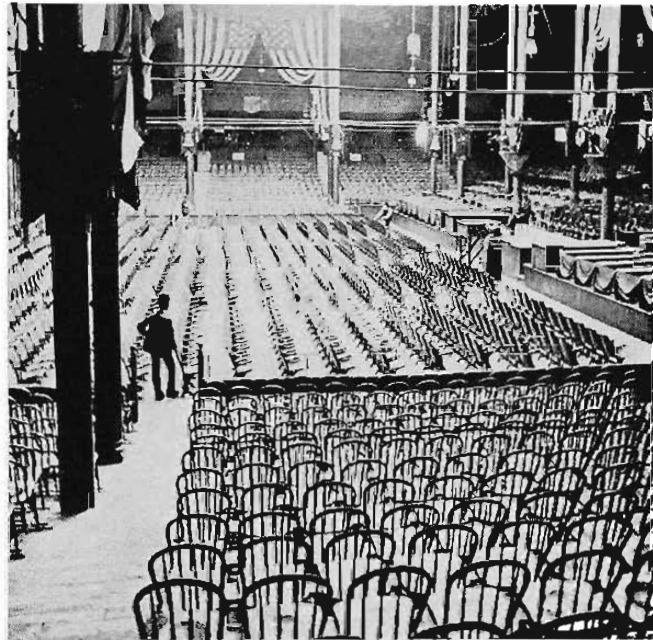
<sup>13</sup> The following account of the national committee's meeting is based largely on a detailed report appearing in the *Tribune* of November 24. See also Chapin, in *Convention Proceedings*, 5.

<sup>14</sup> Johnson's speech is printed in full in the *Tribune* for November 24.

The national group then heard the arguments of delegates from the other six competing cities, and it was late in the evening before the voting began. On the first official ballot, only fourteen out of forty-seven votes were cast for Minneapolis. On the second, third, and fourth ballots, the "Queen of the Northwest" received only thirteen votes. On the fifth, Minneapolis gained four votes, and on the sixth, it picked up three more. On the seventh, the Flour City won the convention with a total of twenty-nine out of forty-seven votes.<sup>15</sup>

One of the dominant factors in Minneapolis' victory was the feeling among Western representatives that the convention should be held west of the Mississippi River. Before the voting began, National Committeeman Evans of Minnesota offered a resolution stating the Westerners' conviction that the party should meet "in the Mississippi valley and the Northwest."<sup>16</sup> These committeemen apparently agreed to stick together in an effort to secure the convention for the western city "which on the first ballot appeared to be in the lead." After the sixth ballot, Committeeman DeYoung of California withdrew San Francisco from the fight and asked its supporters to vote for Minneapolis. It is apparent from the voting that Omaha and San Francisco stood by their agreement and that supporters of these two cities played a decisive role in securing the convention for Minneapolis.

NEWS OF THE city's glorious victory reached Minneapolis on the night of November 23. The weather was cold, and a strong northwest wind fanned the flames of a fire that destroyed the North Star Boot and Shoe Company. A storm was raging in the East, and only one telegraph wire out of Washington remained in opera-



COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

#### INTERIOR of the Exposition Building

tion when the vote was announced. Over it the United Press sent forth the message, "Minneapolis has 29 votes and the convention." When this report reached the office of the *Minneapolis Times*, the telegraph operator there "let out a yell that would have done credit to a Pine Ridge Indian." A large crowd had gathered to watch the fire, and when the news that Minneapolis had won spread through it "People threw up their hats and cried with joy at the success of the convention hustlers."<sup>17</sup>

For days afterward the Minneapolis newspapers jubilantly trumpeted tidings of the "wonderful victory which lifts the Prairie Queen into the first rank of cities." On November 25 a writer for the *Times* remarked that the Republicans had taken seriously the Minnesota delegation's warnings of growing Democratic and Alliance strength, and had "sent the convention to Minneapolis to brace up the northwest territory." On November 27 the *Tribune* reprinted headlines and quoted reports from various newspapers throughout the country. The reaction of the nation's press to the choice of Minneapolis was, on the whole, favorable. The *Omaha World Herald*, however, noted that in spite of all the

<sup>15</sup> For a tabulation of the balloting, see Chapin, in *Convention Proceedings*, 6.

<sup>16</sup> The text of the resolution and the material quoted below appear in the *Tribune* for November 21.

<sup>17</sup> *Times*, November 24, 1891. May 29, 1892.

talk of taking the Republican meeting to the West "the convention will be held east of the Mississippi river—the Exposition Building is in East Minneapolis."

But neither the truth of this statement nor the grumblings of a few disappointed competitors could dampen the city's enthusiasm. The evening after the news reached Minneapolis a meeting was held to arrange "a royal reception" for the returning "Argonauts." Bands and crowds met returning trains carrying the successful delegates, and a "most enthusiastic" demonstration took place in the Armory on November 27. The building was packed, and one after another the hustlers had to appear upon the stage and speak "amid vociferous bursts of applause."<sup>18</sup>

HAVING SECURED the convention, the city turned to the difficult task of preparing for it. As the first step, the citizen's executive committee was reorganized with George A. Brackett as chairman of an enlarged group of twenty-seven. He had been active in politics and civic affairs since his arrival in Minnesota more than thirty years earlier, when he had emigrated from Maine and had begun his new life in the West as a butcher's boy. After engaging in flour milling, railroad building, and other enterprises, the tall bearded man was in 1892 the respected president of the Minneapolis Stock Yards and Packing Company. He had been among the aldermen elected by the newly incorporated city of Minneapolis in its first municipal election in 1867 and had served as mayor in 1873.<sup>19</sup>

Although he had been active in the Minneapolis Industrial Exposition since its inception in 1886 and had been responsible for arranging the city's successful Harvest Festival in the fall of 1891, Brackett must have accepted the task of preparing for the convention with some trepidation. The city had never before undertaken a project of such magnitude, and Brackett himself had never attended a national political convention. He had reason to expect, how-

ever, that he would have the counsel of others on the committee familiar with national affairs—his boyhood friend, Senator Washburn, the influential and wealthy Lowry, and Committeeman Evans. In the reorganized citizen's group, too, he would have the aid of all who had served on the earlier committee to secure the convention, plus ten newspapermen and business and political leaders.<sup>20</sup>

McCrory was retained as secretary of the new group, and other members served as chairmen of subcommittees to deal with specific problems. Robert B. Langdon, a contractor, was given the double job of financing and remodeling the Exposition Building; George W. Marchant looked after decorations and accommodations for visitors; Pierce was head of the auditing committee and of a group in charge of dealing with the press; King worried about the city's telegraph facilities; Eustis arranged entertainment; and Joshua W. Nash of the music committee traveled east to secure bands and vocalists for a grand opening concert. In addition to serving as general chairman, Brackett took on the task of assigning delegates to hotels.

In spite of its early organization, the executive committee did not open its headquarters in the Bank of Commerce Building until February. By that time the convention was only four short months away. The committee had not been idle, however. Early in January, Lowry, Brackett, Washburn, Langdon, and others traveled to Chicago to secure the national committee's approval of their plans for the hall. Although many enthusiastic claims had

<sup>18</sup> Accounts of the demonstration may be found in the *Tribune* for November 28, 1891, and the *Times* for November 28, 1891, and May 29, 1892.

<sup>19</sup> This sketch is based on material in the *Times*, April 4, 1892; the *Minneapolis Journal*, May 17, 1921; Atwater, ed., *Minneapolis*, 241-244; Shutter, *Minneapolis*, 1:110; and Eustis, *Autobiography*, 110.

<sup>20</sup> Brackett to Fred Brackett, February 17, 1892. Letter Book 16:463. Brackett Papers; and Shutter, *Minneapolis*, 1:677. The names of all committee members are listed by Chapin, in *Convention Proceedings*, 6.

been made for the Exposition Building, it constituted one of the committee's principal problems. Two architects, Dankmar Adler of Chicago and Warren H. Hayes of Minneapolis, formulated plans for needed changes in the building. Apparently, the local committee did not entirely approve of Adler's suggestions, for on January 13, 1892, Lowry wrote Washburn that the adoption of Adler's plan would make it "utterly impossible for us to raise the balance of the money" needed to remodel the hall, and that the finance committee had "secured only \$60,000."<sup>21</sup>

In the end, major changes were made in the interior of the building, and new wooden stairways were constructed outside to enable the crowds to reach the more than two-score entrances to the hall, which was on the second floor. Over thirty thousand feet of lumber were used in remodeling the building. The auditorium was arranged on the amphitheater principle with galleries converging downward toward "a central space of about half an acre" reserved for delegates and alternates.

The official plans for the Exposition Building were announced in the *Tribune* of February 11, complete with sketches of seating arrangements.<sup>22</sup> From them it appears that ample aisles fifty-two feet wide were left around the outer walls of the building, an arrangement that gave the hall a total seating capacity of about twelve thousand. Opera chairs were placed in the central space for delegates, and around it a wooden fence about three feet high was erected. In the tiered galleries, "common hard-bottom chairs" nailed to the floor were provided for spectators.

On the main floor in front of the delegates was an elevated rostrum extending across the width of the hall, and in the

center was "a sort of raised dais for the chairman, the clerk and the speakers." Seats were provided on the platform for national committeemen and guests of honor. Tables on either side of the rostrum accommodated other officers, and newspapermen were seated at additional tables in a fenced enclosure in front of the platform. "Pneumatic tubes" connected the reporters' tables with telegraph offices on the floor below. Meeting rooms were located to the rear of the platform.

Over the auditorium stretched "a glass roof of about an acre" in extent, with extra ventilators in the skylights. "More than 1,200 incandescent lights and 150 arc lights" gave illumination for night sessions, and gas was also installed in case of emergency. Passageways and the platform were covered with linen to deaden the sound of footsteps. A hanging platform was erected up near the roof for the band.

According to Chairman Marchant of the decorations committee, the Exposition Building was to "appear artistic but not gaudy, patriotic and grand but not overdone, and the whole design was made subservient to the vision of the visitor sitting in the farthest corner of the gallery." The more than twenty posts in the auditorium seem to have posed a problem, since each

DELEGATES entering the convention hall

COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



<sup>21</sup> Lowry to Brackett, January 5, 7, 16, 1892, and copy of a letter from Lowry to Washburn, January 13, 1892, Brackett Papers. See also the *Minneapolis Journal*, January 20, 1892.

<sup>22</sup> For the material quoted below, see also Brackett Scrapbooks, 2:75, 77; McCrory to Brackett, March 17, 1892, Brackett Papers; and *Times*, May 29, 1892.



was "twice as big around as a telegraph pole." All were "gilded and bronzed," and those on either side of the platform were adorned with "national eagles" and "wheat and brown millet trimmings." Shields with the names of the states "emblazoned on American tin" were placed around the galleries, which were "artistically hung with brown plush." The hanging band platform was "draped in old gold." Over the auditorium stretched a ceiling with skylights painted in "delicate shades of blue" and strewn with gold stars.

There was a restaurant on the lower floor of the building, and another, just outside the grounds, consisted of a "big log cabin . . . built after the style of the logging camps," and served a "regular lumberman's dinner" of pork and beans. A reporter for the *New York Times* who appeared to look over the city early in May took a dim view of the whole restaurant situation, and especially of the logging camp. In a dispatch of May 6 entitled "Vistas of Pork and Beans," he wrote that "the men in charge have struck an idea which will fill the stranger from certain sections of New-England with delight. They propose to give them pork and beans in unlimited quantities. From present indications it looks as if the visitors from the balance of the country would be starved to the bean-eating point. Minneapolis is a bad restaurant city."

The "Beanery," as it was referred to, seems to have been Brackett's idea. To provide convention visitors with beans "fit for a king . . . 30 holes [were] dug in the ground, and then 30 cords of wood were put into them, and burned. When the wood was all aglow the flames were put out and 30 huge iron pots, filled with beans and a little water, were put into the holes and covered with tin covers. Finally, 30 stokers went around with shovels and piled the glowing wood all about and over the pots until they were actually buried in the fiery mass. Then the whole was covered with earth to bake."<sup>21</sup>

THE PROBLEM of housing and feeding a crowd which Brackett expected would number between a hundred and a hundred and twenty-five thousand people absorbed his energies and those of other committee members during the late winter and spring months. As secretary of the committee, McCrory spent most of his time taking care of details and correspondence, while Brackett was "everywhere about the city and at the convention hall watching the preparations . . . and looking after everything in general." Major attention, of course, was given to the assignment of hotel space to state delegations. The West Hotel with its convenient location, spacious rooms, and elegant furnishings had been the subject of so much favorable newspaper comment that some seemed to think it was the "one hotel in the two cities." As early as January 3, 1892, Brackett wrote in exasperation to Washburn, who had inquired about accommodations there for the Michigan delegation, "Now, if your friends and the friends of every prominent man in the country must go to the West, and must all have baths, I must give some a hurried wash and tier them up as best I can, kick or no kick. But, on the other hand, if men will be reasonable and permit us to do our work as we think best, being on the ground . . . I know that we can care for every one who comes, and do it in royal style." Brackett went on to say that his general plan was "to reserve as much room as possible at the West in case of any emergency," and "to locate all the Delegations possible at . . . other good hotels."<sup>22</sup>

By January 20, Brackett could tell a reporter from the *Minneapolis Journal* that the "hotel committee has already assigned 24 state delegations with quarters, thus accommodating 1,120 out of 1,800 delegates." On February 17 he wrote to a relative,

<sup>21</sup> Brackett Scrapbooks, 2:79.

<sup>22</sup> The letter is in the Brackett Papers. See also *Tribune*, April 27, 1892. and *Times*, May 29, 1892.

"We have very nearly completed our work in assigning delegates." It was fortunate that as much as possible was accomplished early in the year, for in April Secretary McCrory's wife died and he traveled to Ohio for the funeral. Although he returned in a few weeks, Brackett wrote a North Dakota friend that McCrory's absence had left him "alone, or virtually so, in Convention matters."<sup>25</sup>

The final assignment of delegates would seem to indicate that Brackett carried out, at least in part, the plan he outlined in his letter to Washburn. Most of the delegations were quartered at the West and Nicolle hotels; others stayed at the Beaufort, Brunswick, and Windom hotels and at the Masonic Temple. A portion of one delegation elected to stay at the Hotel Lafayette on Lake Minnetonka, and others were quartered in private homes. Chauncey M. Depew of New York, an active worker for Harrison, and Governor William McKinley of Ohio, the convention's permanent chairman, stayed at Washburn's impressive residence, "Fair Oaks," and several New Yorkers occupied Brackett's home. Some two hundred and fifty representatives of the nation's press were housed in the recently erected New York Life Insur-

ance Building, where a cafe for their convenience was installed. Brackett arrived at a clever and relatively inexpensive method of converting the office building into a hotel by persuading local dealers to let him rent new furniture and carpets, which they agreed to take back after the convention.<sup>26</sup>

AS JUNE 7, the opening date of the convention drew near, the pace of preparation became more hectic. Daily accounts of the progress of various phases of the work were given substantial space in the Minneapolis newspapers. At the last minute considerable confusion developed over the problem of tickets. After the complimentary tickets had been distributed, approximately twelve hundred were still supposedly available, and these the local committee hoped to sell to help defray the cost of the convention. The tickets, however, did not reach Minneapolis until May 29. At that late date, they could no longer be sold at premium prices.<sup>27</sup>

During the first week in June, delegates and visitors gathered in the convention city. On June 3 the *Tribune* remarked proudly that "the chief engineers and pilots of the great Republican party machine are here." On the following day, according to *Harper's Weekly*, these leaders received a jolt that "gave an entirely new aspect to all speculations" about the course of the convention when Secretary of State Blaine abruptly resigned his post in Harrison's cabinet. Although for months Blaine had maintained that he would not be a candidate for the presidency, considerable support for him existed among convention delegates. His resignation, which was widely interpreted to mean that he was willing to accept the nomination, produced, as *Harper's* put it, "an irresistible wave of enthusiasm for Blaine" among Republicans gathered in Minneapolis. The *Tribune* of June 5 reported that "all of the politicians are wildly excited by the withdrawal of Blaine" and that "what it means no one knows."<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Brackett to Fred Brackett, February 17, 1892, in Brackett Letter Books, 16:463; Brackett to E. B. Hance, April 5, 1892, Brackett Papers. Additional information appears in the *Tribune* for April 8, and May 13 and 26, 1892.

<sup>26</sup> Information on delegates' quarters is given in the *Directory of Delegates and Alternates* (Minneapolis, 1892). An itemized bill in the Brackett Papers indicates that it cost the New Yorkers \$775.37 to use Brackett's house. See Brackett to John W. Dwight, July 12, 1892, in Brackett Letter Books, 16:554, 555, and Dwight's reply of July 18. Press accommodations are described in a clipping from the *New York Sun* in the Brackett Scrapbooks, 9:5, and in a letter from Brackett to A. B. Nettleton, December 24, 1891, Letter Books, 16:427.

<sup>27</sup> *Tribune*, May 22-30, 1892.

<sup>28</sup> "The Minneapolis Convention" in *Harper's Weekly*, 36:580 (June 18, 1892). For discussions of Blaine's resignation, see George H. Knoles, *The Presidential Campaign and Election of 1892*, 49-58 (Stanford, 1942), and Chauncey M. Depew, *My Memories of Eighty Years*, 134, 139 (New York, 1922).



COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

# CONVENTION crowds outside the West Hotel

In an atmosphere filled with eddies and cross currents of political speculation, the Exposition Building was filled on the evening of June 6 with an audience that gathered to hear the grand opening concert planned by the committee as a money-making venture. Depew and McKinley, the only speakers, were cautious and general in their political comments and complimentary in their remarks on the city and its arrangements for the convention. The musical program, which featured such soloists as Olive Fremstad, a one-time Minnesotan who had become a prima donna, and a "grand chorus of one thousand voices" was a great success. The concert marked the formal opening of the remodeled convention hall, and the following day the *Tribune* carried the headline, "It's All Right." The paper said that "The multitude which was seated in that immense auditorium arrived with a look of concern on its face, which was soon replaced by an expression of entire satisfaction. . . The hall has been tried, and has been found wanting in no particular. In truth," the report continued, "the hall last evening, in all its

blaze of light and decorations, was more than a realization of the brightest dreams" of those who planned the convention.

THE LONG-AWAITED convention was called to order on the following day by James S. Clarkson of Iowa, chairman of the Republican national committee. The first day's session was short and was taken up with the appointment of committees and the election of a temporary chairman, J. Sloat Fassett of New York. On the second day, the permanent organization was perfected, and McKinley was elected chairman. At the second session, too, the rules committee reported, but the all-important credentials and resolutions committees asked for more time. In view of this delay, the convention was compelled to adjourn after having been in session for only an hour.<sup>29</sup>

When the delegates reassembled the following morning, the credentials committee was still unable to present a report, and there was nothing to do but adjourn again until eight that evening. At that time, the committee, finding itself unable to agree, presented both majority and minority reports, or as *Harper's Weekly* put it, Harrison and anti-Harrison reports. Twenty-four contested delegations were involved, but Alabama seems to have precipitated the most significant fight. In the matter of seating the Alabama delegation, the states were polled and the pro-Harrison Alabama group won by a vote of 476 to 365½ in a show of strength that foreshadowed Harrison's nomination.<sup>30</sup>

Following the vote on Alabama, the delegates approved a party platform that included, among others, planks reaffirming the protective tariff, calling attention to the "success of the Republican policy of reciprocity," and demanding "the use of both gold and silver as standard money."

<sup>29</sup> *Tribune*, June 7, 1892; *Convention Proceedings*, 9-21; Knoles, *Presidential Campaign*, 59.

<sup>30</sup> *Harper's Weekly*, 26:581; *Convention Proceedings*, 84.

The final plank of the platform commended the "able, patriotic, and thoroughly American administration of President Harrison." The platform was adopted as presented amid great cheering and applause, and the tired delegates left the convention hall at 1:27 A.M.<sup>31</sup>

Next day the convention got down to the business of nominating a presidential candidate. When the roll of states was called, Senator Edward O. Wolcott of Colorado rose to nominate Blaine. After the cheering subsided, the call proceeded to Harrison's own state of Indiana and in a brief statement Richard G. Thompson placed Harrison's name before the convention. When Minnesota was called, William H. Eustis seconded Blaine's nomination and touched off a twenty-minute "stampede," as *Harper's* called it. "Three ladies behind the chairman's desk arose, waving, one an American flag, one a white parasol, and one a black umbrella, in time with the refrain . . . 'Blaine! Blaine! James G. Blaine!'" while the "Blaine men stood on chairs and yelled, and the Blaine women beat time with their parasols, and the chairman could be seen but not heard to hammer his desk with his gavel." When at last order was restored, the call continued to New York, and Chauncey Depew eloquently seconded the nomination of Harrison. Another New Yorker rose to speak for Blaine, and as the roll call progressed various other delegates made attempts to be heard. The convention, however, was impatient to vote, and following the completion of the roll call, a motion was put and unanimously carried to proceed with the balloting.<sup>32</sup>

Once more the secretaries called the roll, and Harrison won on the first ballot. The

vote was 535 $\frac{1}{6}$  for Harrison, 182 $\frac{1}{2}$  for Blaine, 182 for McKinley, 4 for Thomas B. Reed of Maine, and 1 for Robert T. Lincoln. The convention then agreed that the vote should be made unanimous for Harrison, and adjourned. In a brief evening session, some of the delegates reassembled to nominate Whitelaw Reid, editor of the *New York Tribune* and former minister to France, for the vice presidency.<sup>33</sup>

THEIR WORK completed, the delegates dashed to the railroad stations. Since the convention ended a day earlier than expected, the railways were caught unprepared. A reporter for the *Boston Advertiser* commented: "All the cars at their command were at once summoned by the different companies, but these could not begin to make the supply equal to the demand. . . . Everybody was hot, discouraged and ill-tempered, and confusion was in command of all forces." The same writer expressed the opinion that "Minneapolis will not soon be selected again by the republicans as the place of holding a national convention. Her citizens did everything they could to make the convention a success and insure the comfort of every visitor to the city, but they were badly handicapped in all their efforts by the fact that Minneapolis was never intended as a convention city and refused to be turned into one at the last moment. The one hotel of any size lacks opportunity for the corridor enthusiasm which lends such great enchantment to a national convention. Every time that the lobby of the West Hotel would fill with a cheering, howling, marching crowd, the proprietor would hastily mount the desk and command the crowd to disperse, assuring them that if they did not the floor would break down and there would be a fearful accident. It was true that the marble-tiled floor could be felt to shake and swing whenever a considerable crowd gathered upon it."<sup>34</sup>

Although varying shades of opinion are reflected in the contemporary press, in gen-

<sup>31</sup> *Convention Proceedings*, 22, 36, 84-89; Knoles, *Presidential Campaign*, 64-66.

<sup>32</sup> *Convention Proceedings*, 117, 119, 120-126; *Harper's Weekly*, 36:582; Depew, *My Memories*, 137.

<sup>33</sup> For the balloting, see *Convention Proceedings*, 135-151, 143-147.

<sup>34</sup> Brackets Scrapbooks, 9:6.

eral it was favorably impressed with Minneapolis' handling of the event. Many dispatches commented on the friendliness and hospitality of the people, on the elegance of the West Hotel and the excellence of the Exposition Building, on the city's electric streetcars, its pretty girls, and its tremendous future potential. The *Toledo Blade*, for example, reported that Minneapolis "accomplished successfully a task which many good people doubted her ability to perform—that of properly caring for a national convention. It was done as well and as thoroughly as Chicago, or Cincinnati, or Philadelphia could have done it. The convention hall was one of the best, if not the very best, a national convention ever occupied. . . . The hospitality of the citizens was generous and heartfelt, and every visitor was . . . made to feel that it was genuine."<sup>35</sup>

Only the *Chicago Herald* was truly caustic in its convention report, a situation that may have been aggravated by the fact that a partially completed hall in which the Democratic convention was to meet was damaged in a storm. Helpfully, the mayor of Minneapolis invited the Democrats to meet in the Flour City, but indignant Chicago quickly repaired the damaged building. Perhaps in revenge, the *Herald* printed a number of satiric cartoons and a story entitled "Back from the Jungle," which pictured Minneapolis as a primitive region inhabited by "hospitable, if uncouth natives."<sup>36</sup>

Brackett, the man most likely to know, seemed to feel that the convention had been well handled. On June 23 he wrote to Senator Cushman K. Davis, "Our convention is over, and while I have put in eight months of very hard work managing the same, I feel quite well paid as our efforts have been crowned with success."<sup>37</sup> The Minneapolis papers, too, were pleased, although they reported that the crowds had been disappointing. On June 11 the *Tribune* stated that "only one-third" as many guests as expected had been lodged at the

West Hotel. On its biggest day, the hotel had housed 1,080 people and served 1,200 meals. Although estimates of the number who attended the convention vary, most accounts agree that thirty-five thousand is perhaps a realistic figure. Since the city had prepared for more, the *Tribune* on June 12 commented that many people "who made extra preparations to feed and lodge the thousands who never came" were disappointed, and that the West Hotel "was at no time full." The paper concluded, however, that "The great convention and the greatest, busiest week of Minneapolis are both ended and everyone is happy."

MINNEAPOLIS did not have the distinction of nominating a president. In the election that followed the Democratic nominee, Grover Cleveland, defeated Harrison by more than four hundred and fifty thousand votes. James B. Weaver, candidate of the People's party, polled more than a million votes and carried Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Nevada, and North Dakota. Iowa, Michigan, Montana, Nebraska, South Dakota, Wyoming, Oregon, and Washington were in the Republican column, but California, Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin went Democratic.

In Minnesota, the presidential race was closely contested; 122,823 Republican votes were cast, 100,920 Democratic, and 107,077 Populist. Perhaps in choosing Minneapolis as their convention city, Republicans helped in some measure to stem the high tide of Populism in the state. Certainly, the presence of the convention there gave recognition to the growing political importance of the expanding West, and, if only for a brief time, focused the nation's attention on the booming metropolis at the Falls of St. Anthony.

<sup>35</sup> Brackett Scrapbooks, 9:6. See also *Tribune*, May 22, June 11, 1892; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, June 11, 26, 1892.

<sup>36</sup> Brackett Scrapbooks, 9:7.

<sup>37</sup> Brackett to Davis, June 23, 1892, in Brackett Letter Books, 16:539, and Davis' reply, June 27.



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).