

## The Great Sioux City Boom

As a young boy, I remember the great Sioux City boom in the 1890's. These were the days of the annual Corn Palaces, which stirred the curiosity of the country. Every fall for five years these elaborate architectural structures were erected, covered inside and out with all the patterns that artists could produce with corn and stalks. Arches with millions of gaslights illuminated the streets at night, and people came from all over the nation to see the displays. President Grover Cleveland came from Washington to take part in this harvest festival. Special trains brought great throngs from hundreds of miles away, and for a few days the population of the city was doubled.

Many people believed that Sioux City was destined to become a very important commercial center. A group of Boston capitalists advanced millions to local promoters to develop enterprises that would make Sioux City unique among cities. One project was the construction of an elevated steel railroad for two miles on Third Street and, after crossing the Floyd River, three more miles on the surface to Morningside, then a booming suburb. Only recently has this structure been re-

moved. A genuine cable car line — the second such system in the world — was built the entire length of Jackson Street. Another big project was a five-mile railroad extending east of Sioux City, with cars powered by storage batteries. There are still remnants of fantastic excavations and gradings for subdivisions that were never built. A pontoon bridge crossed the Missouri River to Covington. Steamboats were carrying traffic up and down the river. Cowboys came from as far away as the Black Hills for recreation, and annually they engaged in a horse race from Cody in western Nebraska to Sioux City. Big prizes went to the winners. Like all pioneer cities, Sioux City had its districts of vice, and gambling houses ran free. Many millions of dollars were lost when the crash of 1893 came, and it took years for the city to recover its momentum. The trans-continental railroad which eastern investors thought was a certainty, did not come through Sioux City.

I had not been on the *Journal* very long when the owners of the Clover Leaf League of Newspapers (Des Moines *News*, Omaha *News*, Minneapolis *News*, St. Paul *News*) approached me to join them in establishing a third newspaper in Sioux City to be called the *Sioux City Daily News*. The group had fine backing, its principal stockholder being a son-in-law of the owner of the Scripps Newspaper chain. They were owners of the Newspaper Enterprise Association which,

from Cleveland, Ohio, distributes a picture and feature service. I accepted and became city editor. Their managing editor was Oliver Newman, a former Des Moines newspaper man, and they brought a well-known advertising man, Hal Fink, from Chicago. Six months later they transferred Oliver Newman to St. Joseph, Missouri, where they started a new paper. I became managing editor of the *News*. A year later they transferred Hal Fink back to Chicago and made me general manager. After about three years the Clover Leaf executives decided that Sioux City was not big enough to support a third newspaper in competition with two already established papers. I felt otherwise. John McHugh, then president of the First National Bank, gave me a loan of \$35,000 to purchase the plant. This was the same John McHugh who later became president of the Chase National Bank of New York City and who aided me in my motion picture financing after I had located in New York.

In a few years I increased the circulation of the *News* from 4,500 to over 16,000 and added a Sunday edition. One night I was awakened with a message that the plant was on fire. The destruction was almost complete, with the exception of the composing room machinery. Somehow I was able to acquire a new three-deck printing press and get a new location, but in the interim the *Journal* accommodated me by permitting me to

print on one of their presses. John W. Carey, formerly city editor of the *Journal*, joined me.

When Woodrow Wilson became a candidate for the presidential nomination, my paper supported him vigorously. Wilson carried northwest Iowa, and a Democratic congressman was elected. The afternoon that caucuses were to be held for the selection of delegates for the state Democratic convention at Burlington, I learned that at a low-priced hotel a representative of the Champ Clark faction was paying 50 cents a head to enlist men to attend the caucus that night and vote for Clark delegates. Carey went with me to the hotel, and we sold our votes at 50 cents apiece. I got the floor and exposed it that night in a caucus at the courthouse. The bitter contest resulted in Woodbury County sending two delegations to Burlington. But the Champ Clark faction was in control, and our delegation lost out. Fortunately, I had made a printed record of the purchase of votes and exposed it with a front-page story, preserving copies for later use. Julius Kerberg of O'Brien County was one of the delegates selected at Burlington to represent Iowa at the Baltimore national convention where the contest was between Champ Clark and Woodrow Wilson. Mr. Kerberg was the first member of the Iowa delegation to switch his vote from Clark to Wilson at Baltimore. He became advertising manager of the *Daily News* and joined me in Sioux City.

Upon the election of Woodrow Wilson as President, I became a candidate for the Sioux City postmastership. The state Democratic organization, including Judge Martin Wade of Iowa City, state chairman, had pledged its support to Ed Kirby, whom I had accused of being the master mind behind the vote buying. I took copies of this previous newspaper exposure to Washington and showed it to Postmaster General Burleson. Mr. Burleson became friendly to my cause when he saw the evidence, and a bitter political fight continued for several weeks. Finally Burleson went personally to the White House and showed President Wilson my evidences of fraud. The President advised Burleson that the fight had grown too bitter for the appointment of either Mr. Kirby or me, and I was given the option of suggesting a substitute. I suggested Julius Kerberg. In spite of the opposition of the entire state organization, he was appointed and served six years.

With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the price of white paper rose sharply, and it became obvious that one or more of the newspapers in Sioux City would have to go. The publishers of the two older papers jointly notified the three biggest advertisers that, beginning the following month, their display rates would be 75 cents an inch if they used two papers, but if they used three papers, their rates would be \$1 an inch. I

lost the accounts of the two largest advertisers — department stores — on the same day. Such a conspiracy could not operate under modern laws.

Frank Pelletier, owner of the third large department store, also owned the biggest department store in Topeka, Kansas. He asked me to go with him to Topeka and talk to Arthur Capper, who was then Governor of Kansas and the owner of the Capper Publications. Governor Capper told me to go back and try to buy up the obligations of the *Daily News* and draw on him for the money. One of the creditors, embittered by the post office fight, refused to accept settlement, and it became necessary to put the plant into receivership at which time Governor Capper bought it. I was to continue managing the paper and would receive 25 per cent of the equity. Capper then brought his advertising staff to Sioux City for a meeting, and while he was there the two Sioux City newspapers convinced him that continuation of the battle would mean insolvency for all. They bought him out.

FRANK R. WILSON