



Boosting "Omaha the Market Town"

The 1906 Trade Excursion Across Northern Kansas

by Les Valentine

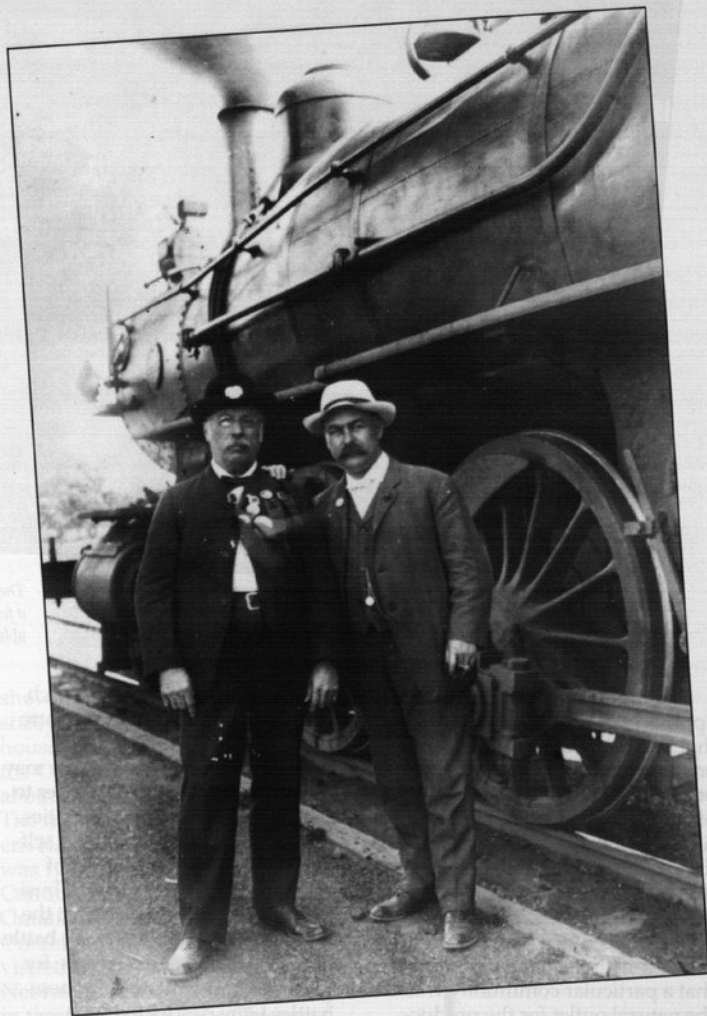
Urban development of the Great Plains during the last century owed a great deal to the booster spirit. Communities struggling to grow had a constant need for people. Those persons who possessed traditional booster enthusiasm used whatever means were at their disposal to attract permanent settlers to their areas. Tremendous competition existed among emerging communities, and boosters advertised their towns in lavish terms. Promotional materials claimed each had natural advantages and was destined to become the hub of regional social and commercial activity. Some communities made it past their formative period and became significant metropolitan areas; most did not.¹

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The Kansas State Historical Society extends special acknowledgment to the Historical Society of Douglas County in Omaha, Nebraska, and to its director, Roger L. Reeves, for allowing us to reproduce their original photograph collection of the 1906 Omaha excursion across Kansas. For their kind assistance and cooperation, we are sincerely grateful. All photographs appearing in this article are from that collection; unfortunately the photographs bore no identification when acquired by the Historical Society of Douglas County.

1. Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York: Random House, 1966), 113-14, 161-68.

Facing page: Omaha tour chairman William Yetter "boosts" a baby into a glad-handing gathering of local folks and Omaha boosters.



A Rock Island Special was chartered to carry the hustling bustling boosters across northern Kansas



The Husters, the official trade tour band, generated a festive mood and assured a memorable and enjoyable visit for all.

As the twentieth century approached, boosters from cities that had once competed for settlers now fought over trade. These boosters often were organizations of business people who had firm financial stakes in already established communities. They believed that the success of city and business went hand in hand. Twentieth-century boosters argued that if consumers were convinced that a particular community was the natural outlet for the production of a region, all businesses within that city profited.² Representatives from local commercial organizations often canvassed a territory, meeting people and promoting the advantages of their locations as marketplaces. For many of these boosters "hand

clasps [were] genuine" and such "occasions constituted a pleasure rather than [an] opportunity." Although these entrepreneurs may have enjoyed working together to preach the qualities of their cities, the quest for trade was also a selfish enterprise, "the interests of each individual and of each [business] firm are thrown against the interests of all others and the battle of trade is a constant struggle for gain and for supremacy."³ These battles were conducted with rhetoric and enthusiasm reminiscent of early boosterism. Each group of business people tried to generate the impression that its business was located in a great commercial area.⁴

3. *Lincoln (Nebraska) Daily Star*, May 7, 1906.

4. *Ibid*; *Denver Post*, February 2, 1905; Boorstin, *The Americans*, 161-68.

2. *Denver Post*, February 2, 1905.

By the spring of 1906, members of the Omaha Commercial Club had been actively promoting their city for fifteen years. Local business houses believed that the main competition in the region included Kansas City and St. Joseph, Missouri, and Lincoln, Nebraska. One method the club used to compete with these cities was the trade excursion. Omaha Commercial Club members had successfully conducted business trips into Wyoming, South Dakota, Iowa, and northern Nebraska. It is difficult to establish a link between specific trade excursions and increased trade from a territory. Yet, one contemporary source suggested that these trips had



Into each Kansas town, boosters came well armed with caps, pins, souvenirs—and an array of smiling faces.

generally helped the city increase its trade with outlying areas and had helped turn Omaha into a "great jobbing and manufacturing city."⁵

Omaha trade excursions covered many miles by train in very short periods and were hectic tiring journeys. Stops were made in practically every community along the route and each traveler hoped these new contacts would eventually increase business. Yet, sometimes dignified and often very wealthy businessmen got caught up in trade tour festivities and the profit motive appeared less important. These festivities included parades, picnics, banquets, and dances. By participation in such activities the Commercial Club hoped to

show that its members were not stuffy elitists. Omaha business houses were accessible, argued the Commercial Club, and cared about the trade of rural areas.⁶ The trade excursion across northern Kansas, May 23–25, 1906, was typical of attempts by the Commercial Club to promote Omaha. Over one hundred Omaha business representatives visited sixty-four towns in Nebraska, Kansas, and Colorado in three days along the Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific Railway line. A Rock Island Special was chartered to carry the group and included a baggage car, chair car,

and three Pullman cars. A banner that proudly displayed the excursion motto "Omaha the Market Town" was stretched along the side of the baggage car. At all stops a "ferocious" blast from the Bemis Bag Company whistle, which had been fastened on top of the train, was expected to alert towns along the route.⁷

The excursion also included the Husters, the official trade tour band. The twenty-five-piece ensemble played at most stops and was quite popular with residents of towns along the schedule. Omaha Commercial

6. *Evening World-Herald*, Omaha, May 22, 23, 1906; Commercial Club of Omaha, *Omaha the Market Town: The official publicity booklet of the Commercial Club of Omaha excursion into northern Kansas*, May 24–26, 1906 (Omaha: Festner Publishing Co., 1906), 2.

7. *Omaha Daily Bee* (morning), May 23, 1906; *Omaha Daily News*, May 22, 1906; *Evening World-Herald*, May 23, 1906.

5. *Denver Post*, February 2, 1905.



Flag-waving schoolgirls greeted the Omaha boosters and sang "America the Beautiful." An impressed Mayor Dahlman (left) offered his thanks and his advice "to obey their teachers."

Club officials thought the Husters were an important part of the tour and that the festive mood generated by the band would assure a memorable and enjoyable visit for tourists and local residents alike.⁸

Because of the large number of scheduled visits, Omaha businessmen spent only fifteen to forty-five minutes in most communities. Procedures at stops along this tour were fairly consistent and depended upon the community's size. In smaller towns local citizens met the train and were entertained at the station by the Husters. Tourists handed out souvenirs, mingled with local business leaders, and generally tried to meet as many

people as possible. Sometimes tour participants were entertained by children from an area school who sang and presented tourists with flowers or other remembrances of their visit. Local churches frequently served lunch or snacks to tourists and, since the Rock Island Special was well stocked with products from the Metz, Storz, and Krug breweries, alcohol found its way into most festivities. This visit was an important event in many small communities, and they, as well as Omaha business leaders, strove to make a good impression.⁹

In larger towns, tour procedures were often elaborate. Tourists organized themselves in rank

and file and marched up and down the main street to music provided by the Husters. Representatives wore pins and carried balloons or large colorful umbrellas that promoted Omaha. Scores of local citizens turned out for these processions and area businesses tidied up storefronts for the occasion. After the parade tourists broke ranks and joked, played with children, handed out souvenirs and, as one newspaper reported, "talked Omaha, Omaha, Omaha until their tongues [hung] out."¹⁰ In these communities the visit sometimes ended with a banquet organized by church women's groups or more often by local businesses. After many speeches and much eating, drinking and conversation, tourists marched back to the train for the trip to the next community.

8. *Omaha Daily Bee* (morning), May 23, 24, 1906; *Western Advocate*, Mankato, June 1, 1906; *Naska News*, June 1, 1906; *Phillipsburg Dispatch*, May 31, 1906.

9. *Goodland Republic*, May 18, 1906; *Western Advocate*, June 1, 1906; *Naska News*, June 1, 1906; *Belleville Telescope*, May 25, 1906; *Colby Free-Press* May 31, 1906; *Manhattan Nationalist*, May 24, 1906; *Omaha Daily Bee* (morning), May 24, 1906.

10. *Evening World-Herald*, May 24, 1906.



Not to be outdone by the girls, a group of schoolboys donned Omaha caps and offered hearty hellos to their visitors.

Many of those who traveled with this excursion represented the most prominent businesses in Omaha. The passenger list included Charles Wilhelm of Orchard & Wilhelm Carpets, Albert Munro of the Nebraska Power Company, Arthur Metz of Metz Brewery, Sol Bergman of Sol Bergman Jewelry, J. Frank Carpenter of Carpenter Paper, William Kenyon of the Union Stockyards, and Joseph Blanchard of the Livestock Exchange. William Yetter of the Yetter Wall Paper Company was chairman of the Commercial Club of Omaha Trade Extension Committee and was in charge of tour procedures. All major banks sent representatives as did the newspapers the *Omaha Evening World-Herald*, the *Omaha Daily Bee*, and the *Omaha Daily News*.

Louis Bostwick of Bostwick Commercial Photography served as tour photographer. The Rock Island sent five representatives in a private railroad car, including General Superintendent C. L. Brown. Omaha Mayor James Dahlman accompanied the tour during the first day.¹¹

Commercial Club officials hoped this expedition would open territory in northern Kansas.¹² They also believed that the image presented by Omaha was very important and did not want representatives to appear

pushy or overbearing. According to tour chairman William Yetter, Omaha merely planned to "meet in a social and friendly way" local business interests and "pave the way for the traveling men to come afterward."¹³

William Yetter was convinced that residents in communities on the schedule would be offended by an aggressive sales pitch and on May 22 announced that this tour would not actively "solicit trade." Yetter claimed that businessmen from Kansas City, Missouri, and Lincoln, Nebraska, had visited this territory earlier in May and had disgusted local citizens by "trying to drum up trade."¹⁴

11. Ibid, May 22, 1906; *Omaha Daily News*, May 22, 24, 1906; Commercial Club of Omaha, *Omaha the Market Town*, 17-32. In general, women did not have a substantial role in the Commercial Club of Omaha at this time and trade trips such as these were exclusively male events.

12. *Omaha Daily Bee* (morning), May 23, 1906.

13. *Plymouth (Nebraska) News*, May 19, 1906; *Omaha Daily Bee* (morning), May 23, 1906.

14. Ibid.



The Formosa Cornet Band along with eager town folks provided the boosters a "rousing welcome" at the depot.

The *Lincoln Daily Star*, however, saw the May 8-10 Lincoln Commercial Club visit into northern Kansas quite differently. Before the Lincoln tour, the *Daily Star* announced that Kansas residents would see "no evidence of profit seeking" from Lincoln business interests. Afterward, the newspaper reported the complete success of the trade trip. At every location, continued the newspaper, "Lincoln people were welcomed and well treated [and] on every hand there was a disposition to do business with Lincoln."¹⁵

Representatives of the Kansas City, Missouri, Commercial Club had traveled into northern Kansas one week before the Omaha trip. Local reaction to this excursion, as well, did not support Yetter's negative claims. The *Belleville Telescope*, for example, was quite impressed by the Kansas City

15. *Lincoln Daily Star*, May 11, 1906. See also May 7-10, 1906.

business entourage and claimed they were a "jolly lot and cast great gobs of sunshine wherever they went."¹⁶

Yetter's comments about the Lincoln and Kansas City trade excursions had been designed to cast a positive light upon the Omaha trip and set it apart from those that had just taken place. Yetter and his Commercial Club colleagues wanted to generate the impression that the Omaha excursion was more professional than those of other cities and planned to impress local communities with friendliness, organization, and entertainment. As one tourist exclaimed, Omaha would "make old KC look like 30 cents [and] Lincoln . . . just a deuce spot."¹⁷

On Wednesday morning, May 23, the Commercial Club trade excursion assembled at the Omaha Union Railroad Station.

16. *Belleville Telescope*, May 18, 1906.

17. *Evening World-Herald*, May 24, 1906.

Among the chaotic activities that morning, Commercial Club sponsors staged a controversy that was designed to set a lighthearted tone for the upcoming journey. Plans called for copies of the expedition publicity booklet, *Omaha the Market Town*, to be distributed at each stop. Along with Omaha economic statistics and photos of excursionists, the booklet roasted Rock Island officials and joked, "These gentlemen are responsible for the poor freight service on your shipments in this territory [northern Kansas]. They have now faithfully agreed to give us better service thereafter."¹⁸

With feigned indignity Rock Island general agent John Utt called this an "insult . . . not easily forgiven" and threatened to cancel the trip. The Rock Island

18. Commercial Club of Omaha, *Omaha the Market Town*, 17; *Omaha Daily Bee* (morning), May 23, 1906.



eventually reached a compromise with Commercial Club officials and John Utt soon announced that the excursion could proceed. As the *Omaha Daily Bee* reported, the railroad had received assurances that William Yetter and his business colleagues would "stay away from the pretty girls . . . along the line and leave them to Rock Island officials."¹⁹

Perhaps a more serious difficulty arose at the last moment when Omaha Mayor James Dahlman refused to join the expedition. Dahlman had spent several years as a cowboy, sheriff, and politician in western Nebraska. By 1906, he had become one of Nebraska's most prominent Democrats and was a close friend and advisor to William Jennings Bryan. A tireless campaigner and an excellent public speaker, Dahlman never shied away from his colorful background. He had great personal appeal with voters and, between 1906 and his death in 1930, Dahlman served twenty-one years as mayor of Omaha. Omaha's "Perpetual Mayor" was known as a loyal, honest, and forthright person, someone whom "it was better not to have as an enemy."²⁰

The presence of "Cowboy Jim" Dahlman was supposed to show the "cowboys of Kansas



Soliciting trade was not the only agenda item of the booster club; meeting folks "in a social and friendly way" held top priority.

19. *Omaha Daily Bee* (morning), May 24, 1906.

20. Orville D. Menard, *Political Bossism in Mid-America*, Tom Dennison's *Omaha, 1900-1933* (Lanham, Mass.: University Press of America, 1989), 93-126; James C. Dahlman, "Recollections of Cowboy Life in Western Nebraska," *Nebraska History Magazine* 10 (October/December 1927): 335-43.



According to the Colby Free-Press, the Omaha businessmen were the "cleverest lot of fellows" (bonnets and all?).

that Omaha [was] not an effete eastern town." Yet, the Rock Island locomotive that carried the tour was number 1313, a figure the mayor considered highly unlucky. Dahlman argued that he had seen many cowpunchers go against number thirteen and fall every time. It was particularly unlucky when "the 13's came doubled up or in pairs." Half a dozen businessmen finally convinced the mayor that a double thirteen was not nearly as unlucky as a single thirteen and he agreed to board the train.²¹

As the expedition traveled toward scheduled stops in Kansas, the Rock Island Special visited several Nebraska

communities along the route. At Prairie Home and Plymouth large crowds met the tour and local teachers and schoolchildren "marched to the train."²² A parade was held at Havelock, and Mayor Dahlman was photographed standing next to "one of the belles of the town." During the stop in Jansen schoolchildren greeted the businessmen and sang "America the Beautiful." Dahlman was impressed by this spectacle and in an impromptu speech thanked the students and urged them always "to obey their teachers."²³ Members of the Omaha Commercial Club were pleased by their reception and thought such good will augured well for a successful trip.²⁴

The Rock Island Special soon crossed the state line and that afternoon the trade tourists visited eleven Kansas communities in Republic, Cloud, Washington, Clay, and Riley counties. A minor disappointment occurred at Clyde: as the Rock Island Special approached that community the Bemis siren "blew so enthusiastically" that a valve flew off and the whistle was silenced for the remainder of the trip.²⁵ At Clifton a local band met the Rock Island Special and gave Omaha a "rousing welcome." Several young girls offered tourists a large basket of roses and badges saying "Clifton Welcomes Omaha." At Morganville a large group from Clay Center met the trade tour and traveled back home on the Rock Island Special.²⁶

21. *Omaha Daily Bee* (morning), May 24, 1906.

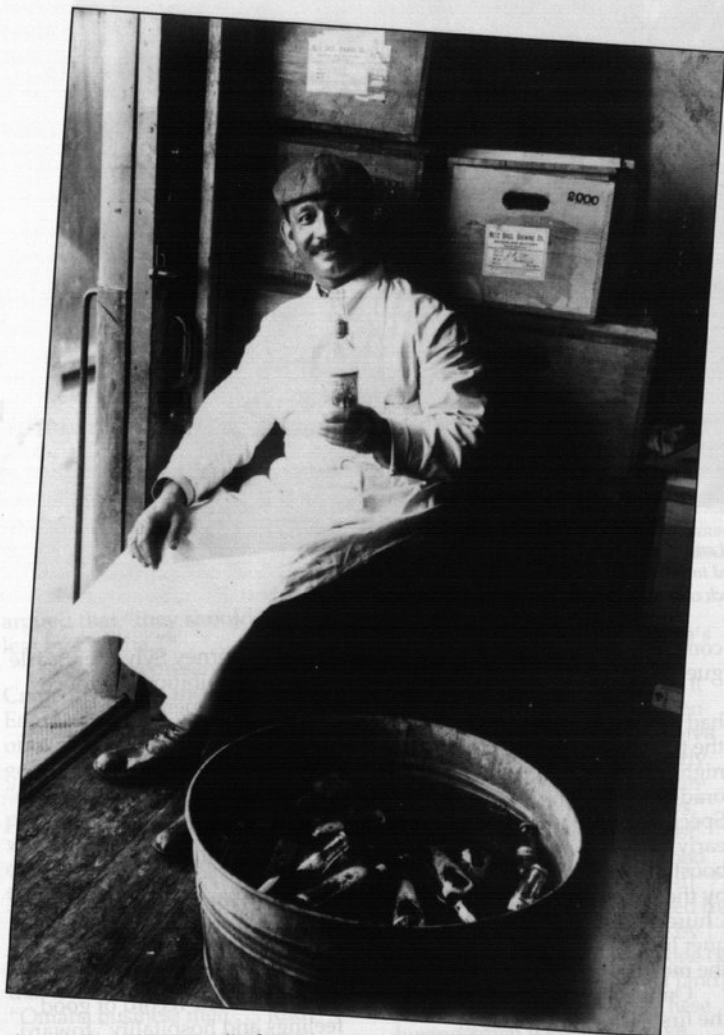
22. *Plymouth News*, May 19, 26, 1906.

23. *Omaha Daily News*, May 24, 1906; *Evening World-Herald*, May 24, 1906.

24. *Evening World-Herald*, May 24, 1906.

25. *Omaha Daily News*, May 24, 1906.

26. *Ibid*; *Clay Center Dispatch*, May 24, 1906.



Wares for the sampling?

Omaha boosters made the most of their thirty-five-minute visit to Clay Center. Husters played and "Omaha men scattered all over the town, each one visiting in the limited time the places in which he was interested." Souvenirs that advertised Omaha firms were "handed about with lavish hands." Most visitors wielded red and white umbrellas which both promoted Omaha and shielded them from a light rain which fell during their visit. Despite inclement weather, a "goodly crowd" watched the Omaha procession march through Clay Center and back to the train for the trip to the next town.²⁷

The first day ended at Manhattan with a dinner at the local hotel. The size of the supper spread helped confirm the "generous disposition" of Manhattan and the visitors dug in like a group of "hungry harvest hands."²⁸ Afterwards, tourists met local business leaders at the Manhattan Commercial Club Hall. There Omaha businessmen "talked effectively for Omaha as a market town" and felt they had made a positive impression. Mayor Dahlman disappointed tour organizers during an evening speech by announcing that "pressures of official business" prevented him from continuing on the trip. The mayor promised that the next

27. Clay Center Dispatch, May 24, 1906; Evening World-Herald, May 24, 1906.

28. Evening World-Herald, May 24, 1906.

29. Manhattan Nationalist, May 24, 1906; Evening World-Herald, May 24, 1906; Omaha Daily News, May 24, 1906.



Following a near collision of the Rock Island Special and Sarah Bernhardt's train, the famous French actress deigned to make an appearance and posed for a photograph from her coach car.

time he was invited he would stay to the finish.²⁹ Tour leadership generally was pleased with the excitement that the excursion had generated during the first day and with the "enthusiastic welcome" that local citizens had provided. This initial success was quite encouraging and organizers dared to suggest that "serious cuts [could] be made in Kansas City and St. Joseph trade" with this region.³⁰ The *Evening World-Herald* seemed equally optimistic. After proclaiming the first day of this trade excursion a success, the newspaper suggested that "skeptics who thought . . . this territory was too far from Omaha or beyond the Gate City's power to

compete certainly [had] another guess coming."

After Omaha businessmen had retired to their Pullman cars the train began the long overnight run to Burlington, Colorado.³¹ When The Rock Island Special arrived at Burlington early Thursday morning the boosters were served breakfast by the women of the Methodist Church. Donations from this banquet lifted the church debt and the meal was "enjoyed by all."³²

On the return trip to Omaha, the first Kansas stop was at Kanorado, just across the border in Sherman County, where

31. *Evening World-Herald*, May 24, 1906

32. *Omaha Daily News*, May 26, 1906.

On the return tour, donations from Omaha businessmen also lifted the debts of the Presbyterian Church in Mankato, Kansas, and the First Methodist Episcopal Church in Fairbury, Nebraska.

Omaha attorney Sylvester Searle gave an "exhibition of bronco busting." His performance, it was reported, drew applause from a large audience.³³ From Kanorado, the tour continued east through Sherman County and across northern Kansas through Thomas, Decatur, Norton, Phillips, Smith, Jewell, and Republic counties. At Goodland and Colby "big crowds" met the train at the depots. The *Goodland Republic* had urged its readers to continue "their record of good feelings and hospitality" toward business visitors. The citizens of Goodland had given Kansas City a royal welcome earlier in the month and the newspaper

30. *Evening World-Herald*, May 24, 1906;
Omaha Daily News, May 24, 1906

33. *Evening World-Herald*, May 24, 1906.



At many towns, church groups and ladies' societies became involved in the activities and often provided "dandy" luncheons for the entire Omaha entourage.

argued that "they should not do less by Omaha."³⁴

In Colby, representatives from Carpenter Paper and Baker Engraving called upon the offices of the *Free-Press* and made a very good impression. These were the "cleverest lot of fellows that [had] passed through Colby" in quite a while, the newspaper acknowledged, and they made the most of their brief stay in the community. The *Free-Press* was so impressed by the Commercial Club contingent that the newspaper claimed that it saw no reason why "Omaha business men . . . [did] not do all the business of [that] territory."³⁵

When the boosters pulled into Dresden they were greeted by the local band and a group of girls

with "large bouquets of roses." At Almena, a "dozen of Omaha's heavyweights" were riding around in a dray wagon when it collapsed.³⁶ This enthusiasm continued in Phillipsburg where area newspapers seemed particularly impressed by the Omaha contingent. These "jolly lot of fellows," claimed the *Phillips County Post*, were "doing a whole lot of good for the town they represent[ed]."³⁷ People were highly entertained by the Huster Band, considered by the *Phillipsburg Dispatch* as "one of the leading bands in Omaha [and] well worth while to hear." These businessmen were impressive physically as well as professionally. Quite a few "Omaha fellows looked pretty well fed," claimed

the *Dispatch*, and "sporting good-sized bay windows."³⁸

After the Phillipsburg visit the group traveled back west to Norton for an evening banquet. Norton organized the most elaborate banquet of the excursion—a two hundred-place supper followed by a dance. A huge caravan had been planned to drive visitors around the Norton area "but rain interfered." After four hours of "hustle and fun" boosters rode the train back to Phillipsburg where they spent the night.³⁹

During the final day of the tour the largest reception came at Mankato where William Yetter said the boosters were given a "hot time." The Mankato mayor and members of the local commer-

34. Goodland Republic, May 18, 1906.

35. Colby Free-Press, May 31, 1906.

36. Evening World-Herald, May 25, 1906.

37. Phillips County Post, Phillipsburg, May 24, 1906.

38. Phillipsburg Dispatch, May 24, 31, 1906; Phillipsburg News, May 24, 1906.

39. Omaha Daily News, May 25, 1906; Evening World-Herald, May 25, 1906.



As the travelers came well stocked with products from Omaha's breweries, "strong spirits" usually found their way into the festivities.

cial club met visitors at the train station, and the entire entourage rode carriages to a "dandy" luncheon provided by the Presbyterian Ladies Co-Operative Society. This meal reportedly was so impressive that when it was time to pay the fifty-cent charge each booster paid one dollar instead. A motion was made and carried that "Omaha people [did] better than Kansas City and Lincoln excursionists," which brought loud cheers. To show their gratitude, the ladies of the Presbyterian Co-Operative Society promised to "urge local merchants to buy Omaha goods" and announced that they would remember Omaha in their prayers.⁴⁰

The *Western Advocate* in Mankato was quite satisfied with the Commercial Club visit. Mankato had made a very "favorable impression" upon the trade tourists, one well "worth . . . all the effort and cost" to the city.

40. *Western Advocate*, June 1, 1906; *Omaha Daily Bee* (morning), May 26, 1906; *Evening World-Herald*, May 25, 26, 1906.

Members of the trade excursion had also made an excellent impression, continued the *Western Advocate*, one that was certain to be "worth much to . . . [the] wholesale interests" of Omaha.⁴¹

After leaving Mankato the expedition traveled two miles and almost collided with the back of a stalled train. The tender car of the special train, which carried famous French actress Sarah Bernhardt, had jumped the track and torn up quite an expanse of railroad ties. A crew member from the derailed train had prevented a more serious accident by flagging down the Omaha Commercial Club charter.⁴²

Bernhardt, traveling to a performance in St. Joseph, Missouri, was very upset by the accident. Although no one was injured, the actress reportedly was "wild with excitement" and ran back and forth along the track shouting that her locomotive was jinxed. When Bernhardt saw the Omaha

41. *Western Advocate*, June 1, 1906.

42. *Evening World-Herald*, May 25, 1906.

train she demanded use of its engine, and it required great tact for Rock Island officials to calm her down. Meanwhile, town boosting continued even at the crash site. Omaha boosters offered to pin "Omaha the Market Town" badges on members of the Bernhardt party.⁴³ As the *Evening World-Herald* reported, the actress's manager declined and said "Eet eez too silly to do dat." Undoubtedly possessed by the booster spirit, Omaha businessmen "pinned 'em on anyway."⁴⁴

The Rock Island Special was backed to Mankato and the excursion encountered a lengthy delay. Some members of the Omaha Commercial Club hoped to meet Bernhardt and sent a note which congratulated her upon her safety. In response, the actress sent the following note: "I thank you very much for your congratulations. I hope you will make a happy trip. I am taking my bath and I cannot see you." Sarah Bernhardt finally deigned to make an appearance and posed for tour photographer Louis Bostwick from the back of her coach car.⁴⁵

The excursion waited for two hours while workers repaired the track and reconnected the Bernhardt train. Despite this delay, large crowds were on hand in Formoso, where the local band was in attendance, and in Courtland. In Scandia the local banker and his wife sent buttonhole roses

43. *Lincoln Daily Star*, May 26, 1906; *Omaha Daily Bee* (morning), May 26, 1906; *Evening World-Herald*, May 25, 1906.

44. *Evening World-Herald*, May 26, 1906.

45. *Omaha Daily Bee* (morning), May 26, 1906.

to all members of the expedition.⁴⁶ Although a sizable crowd met the train in Belleville, the local newspaper did not seem satisfied. The *Belleville Telescope* softly criticized efforts of its community to greet the Omaha boosters and seemed upset in general with the status of business development in the community. If local business interests had organized a commercial club, argued the newspaper, this visit would have been handled "in style."⁴⁷ By contrast, the *Narka News* seemed quite pleased with local preparations for the Omaha visit. A "large number" of Narka business people met the train and escorted the Omaha contingent through the town. The *News* reported that Narka residents were entertained by "a few choice pieces" from the Huster Band and proudly announced, "Members of the [Omaha] commercial club spoke in the highest terms of our little city and the improvements we are making."⁴⁸

After a three-day journey, the excursion tour across northern Kansas ended as the Rock Island Special crossed the Nebraska line and made a scheduled stop in Fairbury. There a large evening banquet was held at the First Methodist Episcopal Church to celebrate the successful conclusion of the tour. Afterward, tourists met at the local Odd Fellows Hall where speeches were offered by both Fairbury and Omaha officials. General consensus held that the trade excursion was highly successful. Tour chairman Yetter expressed great satisfaction with those boosters who had accompanied him and



Dubbed by the Phillips County Post as "a jolly lot of fellows," apparently this dour duo momentarily forgot to let a smile be their umbrella!

46. Ibid.

47. *Belleville Telescope*, May 25, 1906.

48. *Narka News*, June 1, 1906.

claimed "a better crowd could not [have been] picked in a lifetime."⁴⁹

Many believed that Yetter also deserved praise for his efforts to advance Omaha. The *Omaha Daily Bee* agreed and stated that the chairman "deserv[ed] credit as a never-tiring worker in anything [undertaken] and this trip was no exception."⁵⁰

At the conclusion of the evening celebration, the Rock Island Special departed from Fairbury and covered the miles to Omaha in fifty-six minutes. At 12:40 A.M. on May 26 the "dusty and fatigued" travelers returned to Omaha.⁵¹

There is no easy way to gauge the success or failure of the 1906 Omaha Commercial Club visit to northern Kansas. Before the expedition began, Yetter had claimed that the purpose of the trip was not to establish new accounts, but merely to make contacts in northern Kansas and soften up residents for the sales people who would follow.⁵² By making these contacts, the Omaha Commercial Club hoped to compete favorably with other cities for the trade with this region. The best way to compete with cities such as Kansas City and Lincoln was to conduct a memorable expedition and leave a good impression of Omaha with the residents of northern Kansas.

Accounts from newspapers in Omaha and from cities along the route show that members of the

49. *Omaha Daily Bee* (morning), May 26, 1906; *Evening World-Herald*, May 26, 1906.

50. *Omaha Daily Bee* (morning), May 26, 1906.

51. *Evening World-Herald*, May 26, 1906; *Omaha Daily Bee* (morning), May 26, 1906.

52. *Omaha Daily Bee* (morning), May 23, 1906.



After a three-day journey across northern Kansas, "dusty and fatigued" travelers returned home shortly after midnight.



Their handclaps were genuine and their good will was sincere—in all, the businessmen of Omaha were "elated over the success" of their excursion into Kansas."

Omaha Commercial Club accomplished these objectives. The Omaha visit generated great attention in many small Kansas communities and local reports of parades, banquets, and the Huster Band were often lengthy and detailed. Such publicity pleased the members of the Omaha entourage and promised that local citizenry would remember this expedition long afterward.

Commercial Club members also succeeded in leaving a good impression of Omaha with residents of towns along the route. Many local tabloids reported that these important Omaha business people were friendly and genuinely believed that it was important to establish business ties with communities in northern Kansas. Yetter and his colleagues on the

Commercial Club Trade Extension Committee were certain that attaining these objectives would lead to an eventual increase in trade.⁵³

The 1906 trade excursion into northern Kansas was just one of several similar trips that the Omaha Commercial Club sponsored during the early years of the twentieth century. Yet, as with all their business trips, Omaha Commercial Club members treated each excursion as something special. The tour publicity booklet had assured the residents of northern Kansas that Omaha Commercial Club members appreciated their "trade and relationship" and were "pleased to meet you at your home

towns, [and] desire to achieve a closer tie of friendship with our loyal friends and patrons."⁵⁴

Accounts from towns along the 1906 Omaha trade excursion across northern Kansas showed that Omaha business representatives lived up to the friendliness and sincerity implied by this message. At the close of the trip, Omaha businessmen realized that they had made a positive impression and were "elated over the success of the trip, believing that an exceptional amount of good will was accomplished."⁵⁵ Commercial Club members were confident that Omaha was now well positioned to compete for the trade of northern Kansas. (KH)

54. Commercial Club of Omaha, *Omaha the Market Town*, 2.

55. *Evening World-Herald*, May 26, 1906.

53. *Plymouth News*, May 19, 1906.