

# \$1,393,000 AVAILABLE FOR CONVENTION HALL

Action Should Be Taken at Once to Push Project, Asserts McCain

Two Former Attempts to Erect Structure Failed, With \$41,000 Expenditure

By GEORGE NOX MCCAIN

Two attempts have been made to begin the erection of a great convention hall for this city.

There is at present in the city treasury available for this purpose \$1,393,000. Contrary to a belief prevalent among the uninformed, this sum is not lying idle and losing interest.

In both attempts to get a convention hall under way, plans have been drawn and sites selected. Something like \$41,000 has been spent in architects' fees. Then the projects went to pieces, for the courts intervened.

There is no manner of doubt that Philadelphia has suffered lamentably for lack of a convention hall. The term is not applied in any restricted sense. By convention hall is meant a great building or public auditorium comprising in its architectural beauty and features with the dignity of the city and suitably equipped with assembly halls of a capacity for anywhere from 250 to 25,000 people.

One Big Hall Wanted

It should contain one vast hall large enough to accommodate a national political convention or any other national or international assembly that should select Philadelphia as its meeting place.

It should be absolutely perfect in the arrangement of light, heat, ventilation, acoustics and interior seating accommodations and stage accessories. Above all, it should be accessible. Its location should be such that transportation facilities to and fro should be ample and easy and free from congestion.

An investigation of past attempts and present conditions leads me reluctantly to the conclusion that there is little immediate prospect of Philadelphia securing such a building.

Previous efforts have left things in such an inextricable tangle that it will require action by Council, ratified by vote of the people and followed by delays of other kinds to an extent that years must elapse before such a structure will grace the city.

Back in the administration of Mayor Reuburn an ambitious and beautiful scheme was launched for a group of structures that would have embraced

## "What's the Matter With Philadelphia?"

FOR years this city has been trying to get a convention hall that would be adequate and representative. Colonel McCain, in today's article, tells of the difficulties and embarrassments that have delayed and all but defeated the project in the past.

not only a convention hall capable of seating 22,000 people, but a stadium, a coliseum and a water gate on the Schuylkill suitable for aquatic festivals.

This proposed assembly center was to be located on the eastern bank of the Schuylkill, just north of the Girard avenue bridge. On a tract of fifty-six acres, known as Snyder's Woods, was to be located an auditorium or convention hall seating 22,000 people, with space for permanent exhibitions; a coliseum seating 40,000, for open-air assemblies; a stadium with a seating capacity for 60,000, for fairs, athletic and aviation meets, and a water gate to facilitate aquatic sports and national regattas.

The site could be reached both by the Pennsylvania and Reading railways and by trolley lines. But the project encountered opposition. Official jealousy and the "pull-back" element defeated it. The availability of the site, cost of construction and other difficulties entered into the question and an injunction halted the whole matter.

Parkway Site Selected

Another site on the Parkway was later selected and foundation borings were made. It was thought that the

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work would proceed without interruption, so much so that in 1916 \$20,000 additional was voted for the project in the loan of that year.

It was estimated that the hall would approximate \$1,000,000 in cost when completed. Again the courts were invoked to halt the project and this time a decision was rendered which effectively blocked the plan. It was the judgment of the court that the \$1,500,000 voted by the people for a convention hall in the loan of 1911 was for a hall that was to be completed for that sum; that the \$1,000,000 was not to be considered as a municipal contribution for the erection of a structure that was to cost three or four times that amount.

This ended all further attempts toward a convention hall or municipal auditorium.

It is manifestly impossible to erect any suitable building that would be either a credit or ornament to the city and capable of seating at least 20,000 people for this sum. It would not even purchase today a Class "B" Hog Island ship, much less erect and equip a building of the class and size demanded.

Attempt to Revive Plan

Within the last few weeks an attempt has been made to revive the project of a stadium where athletic events, races and aviation affairs could be held. There have been ambitious plans to bring the state fair to Philadelphia as a permanent institution, but thus far it has been a failure. Some bright morning Philadelphia will awaken to hear that an interior town, more enterprising and ambitious than the second port on the continent, has seized the plum and wiped Philadelphia off the map in this connection.

Another neglected project is the soldiers' memorial, for which \$100,000 is available. It was originally designed, indefinitely, however, as to form, as a tribute to the survivors of the Civil War. Within the last two weeks a

venerable group of surviving officers of the great rebellion attempted to revive interest in this matter, but apparently with indifferent success.

It has not yet reached the limbo of the convention hall scheme, though unless some plan is adopted and a definite movement started, its erection may be delayed until the last survivor of the last Grand Army post tatters down Broad street under a tattered battle flag in the last Memorial Day parade in honor of the survivors of '61.

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