

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE
NATIONAL COMMERCIAL
CONVENTION, HELD IN
BOSTON, FEBRUARY, 1868**

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

THE Commercial Convention held in Detroit, in 1865, was the first occasion on which the merchants of the nation assembled together, to consult in reference to those great industrial and financial questions in which they have a common interest. That Convention was called in the hope and belief, that the members composing it, forgetting for the moment the particular branch of enterprise with the prosperity of which they were as individuals more especially identified, and laying aside also temporarily, local considerations and preferences, would endeavor to ascertain what would best advance the interests of the country at large, as it was then situated, and give definite expression to the opinions which they might reach, for the information of their fellow-citizens, and especially of the representatives of the people charged with the duty of framing the national legislation. The experiment was in a good degree successful. The attendance of delegates was large; the discussions were sustained with ability; germane and valuable statistics were supplied; and broad and comprehensive views were unfolded of the resources, the capabilities and the necessities of the nation. It was encouraging to hear commercial questions debated so thoroughly, upon their merits, by men who had a practical knowledge of what they were talking about, and entirely apart from all political and party considerations.

The Detroit Convention, if it produced no other result, impressed business men with a new conviction of the important influence which, in the sphere appropriate to its exercise, they might legitimately exert upon public sentiment, by unity of purpose and of action. The activity and efficiency of the various Boards of Trade and Chambers of Commerce, undoubtedly received from it a new impulse; but it had become apparent that something more than the agency of these associations, in their individual and independent capacity, was necessary to the complete attainment of the desired result. It was determined therefore, not only to hold a second general Convention, but also, to use the occasion for the organization of a National Chamber of Commerce, by means of which relations of an intimate and a permanent character might be established between the bodies which would be assembled in it.

The duty of calling this Convention was devolved upon the Boston Board of Trade. A Committee, who for some time had the subject under advisement, reported favorably in reference to it, on the second of December, 1867, and the Board voted to adopt their recommendations, on the sixteenth of the same month. A Committee of Arrangements was chosen, with the Hon. F. W. LIXCOLN, Jr., for Chairman; and the text of the call to be issued, was agreed upon, as follows:

"You are hereby cordially and respectfully invited and requested to appoint delegates, on the basis of one delegate to every fifty members, to a Commercial Convention representing all the Boards of Trade and Chambers of Commerce in the United

States, organized at the present date, to be holden in this city on Wednesday, the fifth of February, 1868, at eleven o'clock, in the forenoon, and succeeding days, for the consideration of the following subjects:

"The improvement of our inland and interior means of transportation.

"The adoption of an uniform system for the measurement of grain.

"The adjustment of the currency question in a manner which will reconcile conflicting sectional views, while at the same time promoting the welfare of the whole country.

"The restoration of the foreign commerce of the country from its present greatly depressed condition.

"The organization of a National Board of Trade, or Chamber of Commerce.

"And such other subjects, not of a local or political character, as may properly come before the Convention."

The Convention met at the time appointed. The invitation had been cordially responded to, even by those associations who could not accept it, and the attendance was quite as full as could have been anticipated, considering the season of the year. Fourteen States were represented; and thirty-six associations, situated in thirty-two cities. The number of delegates present was two hundred and forty-five. This volume contains a full record of the proceedings, reported by Mr. J. M. W. YERRINGTON, a skilful Stenographer, and is published under authority of the Convention. Upon the manner in which these proceedings were carried forward, and upon the general result reached, the members have good reason to congratulate themselves. Of course, it would have been impossible, within the limits of a four day's session, to exhaustively discuss abstract questions of political economy, or to critically examine underlying principles; nor was anything of the kind attempted. It was sought rather to give, in simple outline, a practical and suggestive statement of the present and pressing necessities of the country in connection with the currency, taxation, internal improvements and foreign commerce. It was believed that such an expression of opinion, coming from a representative body constituted as this was, would be welcomed by business men, as furnishing a commercial platform on which they could stand and work together; and that it would prove useful to Congress, as indicating the views of those who are most closely identified with and deeply concerned in the industry and enterprise of the nation.

The various resolutions adopted, have been printed together in the form of a Memorial, and sent to Washington, in behalf of the Convention. They have received additional weight, since their passage, by the approval given to them by most if not all the associations to whom they have been reported by the delegates; and they have received very general commendation from the press.

The following estimate of the Convention and its work, is extracted from the report of the delegates of the Philadelphia Board of Trade:

"We may here be permitted to say a word of the *personnel* of the Convention as it impressed us during the sessions.

"It consisted of men of acute minds who had come profoundly impressed with the magnitude of the subjects they were to consider, and the probable influence their discussions would have in shaping public opinion and legislation.

"They had brought with them deep conviction of what they deemed desirable for their several sections, and they defended these convictions with wisdom, intelligence and eloquence; and it is quite probable that the thoroughness of discussion and the enlarged comparison of views and conflicting opinions on many points, led to the

adoption of reports and resolutions, which, as nearly as was possible, brought their deliberations to an harmonious and safe ground on which each sacrificed a part for the good of the great whole.

"In such a result the bodies that sent them will have great satisfaction; and the voice which they have spoken, will, we think, be accepted to so large an extent by the people, that it will have a salutary influence in tending to settle some of the vexing and dangerous tendencies of the times in a safe and honorable way."

The tone of the discussions was thoroughly national. The essential harmony of all the great branches of industry, each with the rest, was fully recognized; and the feeling manifested mutually, on the part of the representatives of the various sections of the country, was hearty and fraternal. Those present from some of the Southern cities, were especially welcomed; and it was only regretted that they were so few in number. Letters had been received from Richmond, Wilmington, (N.C.), Charleston and New Orleans, expressing entire sympathy with the objects proposed, although they were unable to send delegates. A quotation from one of these letters will illustrate the spirit of them all. The President of the New Orleans Chamber of Commerce, wrote:

"I am instructed by the Chamber to return thanks to the Board of Trade for its polite invitation to us to send delegates to represent our Chamber in the Convention, and to state that whilst fully appreciating the importance of the subjects to be considered, the condition of our commercial community at present is such, and the leaving home at the time mentioned would be so inconvenient to our merchants, that the Chamber will most reluctantly be compelled to forego the advantages of being represented in the Convention."

Had these gentlemen witnessed the manifestation of kindness and good-will with which, on the third day, a resolution was passed in reference to "the destitution and suffering existing in the Southern States;" they would have been much impressed. It was an earnest of the Union which is to be. Such meetings are calculated to do more perhaps than anything else to hasten the day, of which one of our New England poets has sung, when

"— North and South, together brought,
Shall own the same electric thought,
In peace a common flag salute,
And, side by side in labor's free
And unresentful slavery,
Harvest the fields wherein they fought."

The Convention took important action in deciding upon the formation of a National Chamber of Commerce. This Chamber promises to be to the associated bodies, very much what these are to their individual constituents; and upon the country generally, its influence may be made most valuable. It will tend to correct harmful misapprehensions, to conciliate opposing sentiments, to modify sectional preferences, to harmonize and adjust conflicting interests, and to create a public sentiment which will demand well-considered, well-balanced and truly national legislation on all industrial questions. Its sessions will have advantages over Conventions such as those of Detroit and Boston, in that they will be held at regular intervals, and will probably be more protracted, the rules of procedure will be settled,