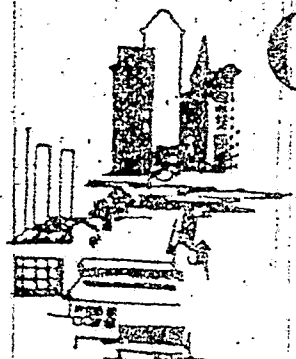


Chamber of Commerce still has a Town Hall Committee working—perhaps actively, certainly quietly—for a large community auditorium, one project which might help the civic spirit. At an "opportune time," and the need for this qualification is patent to those who remember the previous fiasco, this Committee will make its recommendations. The fact of this Committee together with Mayor Lawrence's endorsement of the Town Hall idea during his campaign may again call up the old ghost. If the next attempt is anything like the last, Pittsburgh had better hold on to its metropolitan hat.

Back in the twenties, when Sinclair Lewis was singing of the epic battles between Boosters and Knockers, the idea of a Town Hall was "spreading across America." Said the Chamber of Commerce at the time: "Today the public auditorium, a great building, housing many common services and offering many public uses, has been tried out in a large number of places and found an absolute necessity as a common center where the people of a community may gather on frequent occasions for many and widely varied purposes." It was the heyday of Pittsburgh's competition with the brawling cities of the Midwest; and, shortly after Cleveland built its own auditorium, Pittsburgh took up the challenge.

In March, 1924 the Chamber of

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COUNTY, STATE & NATION

No Town Hall Tonight

Pittsburghers do not need surveys to tell them their city is dying. Many of them are convinced that as a community in which one can live well it is already dead. Studies like those of the Econometric Institute and the Allegheny Conference on Community Development dramatize the need for diversification of industry, improved transportation systems and traffic control, elimination of smoke and stream pollution. But all men associated with these surveys agree that a principal obstacle to betterment is the apathy of the city's people. All opposition to community improvements which can be and often is raised by special groups would fall before the enthusiasm of a spirited public. There is no spirit in Pittsburgh.

What has Pittsburgh to offer, other than hard work and money, which can give this spirit? As the city shakes off war and the wartime monomania of production this question will be asked often.

Commerce created a Town Hall Committee under the chairmanship of George S. Davison, then president of Gulf Oil Corp., to determine the need for and anticipated support of a public auditorium in Pittsburgh. A year and a half later this Committee recommended that the Chamber raise \$15,000 for the single purpose of impressing upon public authorities the demand which existed for a Town Hall, and for "the proper presentation of the important question to our people and our administrative officers." After years of further study, lectures, reports, the Chamber held a dinner at the William Penn with County Commissioners Joseph G. Armstrong, E. V. Babcock, and C. C. McGovern the guests of honor. The dinner, which was to exhibit to the Commissioners an overwhelming public desire for a Town Hall, was a "magnificent success"; and a formal resolution passed by the Chamber in May of 1928 called upon the County Commissioners to include provision for the erection of the proposed auditorium in a County bond issue.

In September of that year the Town Hall Committee was dissolved, and a vote of thanks given its members for a job well done. A new Special Committee was set up, again under George S. Davison, which was to assist the Allegheny County Planning Commis-

sion in all details covering selection of site and actual construction. The first contribution of this Special Committee was to bring Lincoln S. Dickey, then manager of Convention Hall in Atlantic City, to Pittsburgh for professional advice on the choice of one of five (there had been eleven) sites for the building. Then the fun started.

Over the question of site Pittsburgh was rent by factious ill-feeling between North Side and Oakland and downtown. Selection finally narrowed to: (a) Monument Hill on the North Side; (b) An area from the North Side City Hall to Ober Park and the Allegheny Park at Union and Cedar Avenues; (c) Downtown near the Boulevard of the Allies at the north end of Liberty Bridge (advocated by the Golden Triangle Town Hall Association); (d) The Oakland site, bounded by Bigelow Boulevard, Ruskin, Fifth, and Tennyson Avenues. Mr. Dickey, after months of investigation, recommended the Oakland site (owned by the Schenley Farms Co., of which the late Frank F. Nicola, father of the Oakland Civic Center, was president). After consideration of Mr. Dickey's report, members of the Special Committee unanimously endorsed his conclusions, and turned the matter over to the Board of Directors. That was in May, 1929. To this

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