During the Civil War the country went off the gold standard and all gold and silver money went out of circulation and was replaced by greenbacks. For smaller change we had five cent, 10 cent, 20 cent and 50 cent fractional currency, known as "shin plasters." These were printed on small pieces of paper, of different sizes. They were a nuisance to handle, but did the business.

Specie payments were not resumed till 1876. Just before the final announcement that we were going back to gold, fractional silver coins began to circulate. Father's custom was to pay off his men every Saturday night. One pay day he had secured from the bank a supply of silver half dollars, so each man received a silver coin in his pay. I was there when it happened and I remember how pleased the men were to see a silver coin. Most of them said that that coin was not going to be spent but they were going to keep it as a precious possession. But it was not long before there was plenty of silver in circulation and the shin plasters were retired.

In the 1880's the Knights of Labor was an organization feared and dreaded by all employers and all good citizens. Samuel Gompers was the head and prime mover. The Knights were going to get their rights. Mysterious chalk marks and symbols appeared on walls and side walks, and everybody was sure that something dreadful was going to happen. Charlie Newburg, a prominent west side business man had built a big wooden structure across the street from the Episcopal church, a kind of theatre and auditorium. This became the headquarters for the Knights of Labor. The Knights were the forerunners of the present day labor movement.

In the third Cleveland election campaign in 1892, General Farnsworth was in Beloit and gave a political address in the Knights of Labor Hall, which all good democrats attended, probably with a brass band and all the usual enthusiasm.

In 1880 Beloit was endeavoring to secure more factories. In Chicago there was an ornamental brass works shop, an offshoot of the big Adams-Westlake company on the north side. They wanted to dispose of the brass works and a bunch of Beloit promoters made a deal to take it over and move it to Beloit. A site was selected at the north end of Fourth street. The committee, headed by J. B. Dow, adopted a clever way to finance the enterprise. A large tract of land was acquired north of Liberty and west of Bluff and platted. It was on quite a big scale. A wide street was run east and west and named Olympian Boulevard. Lots were then sold to patriotic citizens at $400 per lot. It was a good scheme and it worked. Later many lot purchasers sold their lots at a big discount, but those who held them came out all right.

The Beloit Brass Works only ran for two or three years and was then given up. The property was then bought by Lou and Moses Rosenblatt, who moved their overall factory up there from the old building by the North Western depot.

When the Rosenblatts died, the city bought the property and it is now used for city work and the City Engineering Department.

In 1883 Beloit passed through a financial crisis. The big Rock River Paper Company failed, John Hackett, assignee; the Merrill and Houston Iron Works, failed, R. J. Burdge, assignee; Hinman, Moody and Company failed, The Beloit Wagon Works failed, and O. E. Merrill and Company failed. The John Thompson Plow Works was on a sound basis, and did not go under.

It could not be denied that Beloit was in the dumps and the situation looked gloomy. But a better era was coming. It developed that the Berlin Machine Works of Berlin, Wisconsin desired to move to a larger city. A committee of eleven citizens was formed of which my father was a member to negotiate with Mr. Yates.
and Mr. Forbes to see if Beloit could secure this factory. A certain sum of money was raised with which to buy the O. E. Merrill Machine Shop in Third street and the Berlin Machine Works was offered this property as a bonus if they would come to Beloit. The deal was closed and they moved here and grew into a large institution and helped to put new life into the community.

Another new factory was brought here about the same time by Mr. Wheeler. The Williams Engine Works. A bonus of $10,000 or $20,000 was given the Williams Engine Company, and the shop was built alongside the Eclipse Wind Engine Company. Wheeler also added Eclipse Friction Clutch Pulleys to his line.

In 1893 Fairbanks Morse and Company bought out Mr. Wheeler's holdings in the Eclipse and Williams Engine Works and started expanding the plant on a large scale. This gave the city a big impetus and we began a rapid growth. This is all comparatively recent history.

The old Merrill and Houston Iron Works had been lying dormant for several years after their failure. In 1885 a number of their old men organized a new company called the Beloit Iron Works. The organizers were Fred Messer, A. Aldrich, R. J. Burdge, W. H. Grinnell, Noble Ross and Lou Merrill. They started with a small capital, but bought the assets of the old Merrill and Houston Iron Works at a bargain price and so had a favorable beginning. In 1893 they exhibited a complete paper mill machine at the World's Fair in Chicago. Now they have grown into a large and strong company.

Chapter 19

In 1901 my brother and I organized a corporation under the State of Illinois laws, and built an engine factory in South Beloit. Ours was the first factory located across the line, and was placed in the middle of a corn field. At that time there was not a house in South Beloit except the old Dr. E. N. Clark homestead a mile south of town. Railroad switch tracks were run into the new manufacturing district and more factories were located, the Gardner Machine company, Racine Feet Knitting company, The Warner Instrument factory, the Hendley-Whittemore company, the Mork Foundry and the Lipman Refrigerator company.

Our factory prospered until disaster overtook us. In 1904 we had the big Turtle creek flood. That rampant stream overflowed its banks, and flooded the entire South Beloit area, and the water came up to McNeany's corner on State street. Strange as it may seem the flood caused the burning of our shop. Gasoline floating on the surface of the water entered our machine shop and reached the fires under the boiler, causing an explosion and completely destroying the building. Our watchman lost his life. This happened at 10 a.m. The fire caused us a loss of $200,000 and almost ruined us financially. But we rebuilt the shop and continued in business till 1915 when it was sold and passed into other hands.

The machine shop is now occupied by the Warner Electric Brake company, and the foundry by the Beloit Foundry company.

They say misfortunes never come singly. In December of the same year, 1904, a fire was started in the wood shop department of our plow factory in Third street by the gross carelessness of a workman. The fire department bungled the job and two-thirds of the plant was destroyed, with another heavy loss. We rebuilt the shop but after some years discontinued manufacturing operations.

From that time on for many years we had no big fires in the city. But on December 4, 1930, Beloit had a very serious fire caused by the explosion of gas from a leaky main in the E. L. Chester building. After considerable litigation with the insurance companies and the Wisconsin