

THE 1950's



IT IS DIFFICULT, if not impossible, for us who live in the sixth decade of the 20th century to view it in perspective. Current history is making as we write. We have the feeling of being swept into the future by powerful currents flowing to us out of the past. Growth in every phase of community life during the '50s dwarfed the expansion of any previous era. The city burst its bounds to the south and west. New subdivisions and new homes sprang up as if by magic. New churches came into being, and schools so modern and attractive that oldsters wished they could revert to childhood. More streets, more sewer and water lines—the city's budget and bonded indebtedness bulged. Shopping centers in the outskirts sprang up, competing with shops in the inner city; parking meters helped, but didn't solve, the parking problem. All branches of sport leaped ahead, and industry, paced by Marathon, Kimberly-Clark, Neenah Foundry and Bergstroms, added new strength to Neenah's economic foundations and to the earning power of Twin City residents.

The mounting volume of Council business was relieved, in part, by putting the office of Mayor on a full-time basis at the spring elections of 1957. And to promote fairer, and more workable, representation on the Common Council, the city was divided into ten wards, with one representative from each ward.

Significant Industrial, Social and Professional Movement

BERGSTROM PAPER COMPANY EXPANDS. Early in this decade the Bergstrom Paper Company embarked upon a long-swing program of waste disposal destined to add many acres to Neenah's park system through fill along the south end of Little Lake Butte des Morts.

For some years this company, hemmed in at its downtown location,

contemplated expansion in the township of Neenah, and had, far-sightedly, purchased acreage west of Highway 41. During 1955 a new finishing plant was begun on this property, which came into operation the following year. In 1956 ground was broken for a new office structure east of the finishing plant, which was completed and occupied in 1957.

The Jersild Knitting Company moved into its new building on First Street.

The Manhattan Rubber Company, having outgrown its quarters in the Hewitt building, built its new plant on Cecil and Matthews Streets.

A new office for Edgewater Paper Company ('52).

Warehouse on Forest Avenue built by School Stationers Corporation ('52).

Neenah Electrotype Corporation purchased its plant from Marathon ('53).

Entire interior of Hewitt Machine Company remodeled to accommodate a new Farrell roll grinder and to give space to the Stowe-Woodward Company ('54).

Gilbert Paper Company rebuilt and enlarged its #3 machine ('54).

Wisconsin Tissue Mills rebuilt its paper machine and replaced its converting and storage buildings with a new structure ('56).

After ten years with the architectural firm of O'Connor & Kilham of New York city, Frank C. Shattuck returned to his home town during the summer of 1953 and opened an office at 174 East North Water Street, under the caption Frank C. Shattuck Associates, Inc. Associated with him in this venture is Melvin F. Siewert. The firm has specialized in the design of college, church, residential and industrial building.

This decade of expansion in every phase of community life was further punctuated by the Council of Social Agencies becoming a member of the Community Chest ('51) and in 1953 broadening its name to Neenah-Menasha Community Council.

The Optimist Club is added to the roster of Twin City service and luncheon organizations.

Among the commercial and professional newcomers during this decade were:

- J. J. Keller & Associates ('50)
- Fritz's Barber Shop ('50)
- Mace Laboratories, Inc. ('50)
- Don-El Beauty Salon ('51)
- Corr Opticians ('51)
- Jon's Shoes ('51)
- Oberreich's Camera & Card Shop ('53)
(formerly Sutter Camera Co.)
- DiRenzo & Bomier, Law & Accounting ('53)
- Sentry Foodliner ('53)
- Schmidt Drug Store ('53)
- Jeffrey's Apparel Shop ('55)
- Red Owl Store on South Commercial ('57)

NEW HOME FOR VNA. Mr. J. C. Kimberly, acting for the Kimberly family, deeded the former residence property of Helen K. Stuart, on East Wisconsin Avenue, to the Visiting Nurse Association for their headquarters. Not only that, an endowment fund of \$100,000 came with the gift ('56).

MARATHON EXPANDS INTO NEENAH. In 1953 this company acquired the Jersild Knitting Company building on North Commercial Street for occupancy by its engineers, and, as these lines are written, they have under lease the former Red Owl quarters next door for engineering and clerical overflow.

Needing a guest house, the large H. S. Smith residence on East Forest Avenue was purchased in 1951, and since has been used to capacity.

Coming into 1952 the corporation's new engraving plant on Western Avenue began operation. The following year ground was broken for the Neenah flexible packaging plant, now in production. This plant was constructed on a ten-acre tract south of Cecil Street, which had recently been purchased and annexed by the city of Neenah for industrial purposes.

As we move to the close of 1957, the corporation's new general offices on Neenah's south rim nears completion.

Finally, on December 3, 1957, stockholders of Marathon Corpora-

tion and American Can Company voted to merge through an interchange of common stock. Thus Marathon becomes a division of Canco. The Marathon Company, already a dominant factor in the food container field, supplements the extensive activities of Canco, which operates more than 100 plants throughout the free world.

KIMBERLY-CLARK STEPS UP THE TEMPO. In 1951 the Munising Mill was purchased. Leadership was chosen from local young men who had grown up with the corporation—notably Bill Fieweger and Bill Beerman.

Early in this decade, also, a new plant making absorbent products, such as Kleenex and Kotex, came into production at Fullerton, California—and, still later, there nears completion at New Milford, Connecticut, a duplicate of the southern California plant.

In 1951, K-C opened its Sales Promotion Center, located in the township of Menasha. This ingenious enterprise embodies all known visual and auditory aids designed to make the art of salesmanship pleasant and effective.

The following year its motel-type guest house north of its Lakeview Mill became ready for occupancy.

I.C.C. Company Moves to Neenah

The International Cellucotton Products Company, a sales organization marketing Kimberly-Clark's absorbent products, such as Kleenex and Kotex, with headquarters in Chicago, was integrated with the parent company in 1955, and the following year its personnel was moved to the Neenah area. This move coincided with the completion of Kimberly-Clark's new office north of the Lakeview Mill in Menasha township. This influx of people from the city was a major factor in Neenah's expansion during this decade.

Fox Valley's Largest Moving Operation

It will be remembered that the largest moving operation ever to take place in this Fox Valley occurred over the Labor Day weekend of 1956, when all furniture and equipment from the old Kimberly-Clark offices fronting on North Commercial Street were transplanted



A picturesque view of a portion of Kimberly-Clark's modernistic General Offices, taken from the east bank of the man-made lake, the water from which is used by the air conditioning system. This new structure is located in the township of Menasha (photo by Bill Hedrich, Hedrich-Blessing).

into the spacious and ultra-modern quarters north of the Lakeview Mill. On Tuesday morning, September 4, seven hundred people found their places in the new offices and went to work as though they had always lived there. The Research & Development Department of the corporation took over the vacated premises in the city proper. One aspect of this move, not to the liking of Neenah merchants, is the attractive cafeteria adjoining the new offices, which keeps Kimberly-Clark office people off Neenah's streets during the noon hour.

Merger of Neenah Paper Company and Kimberly-Clark Corporation

For many years there had been a neighborly relationship between Kimberly-Clark and Neenah Paper Company due to certain key personalities with stock interest in both companies. As Kimberly-Clark had already entered the writing paper field through its Munising Mill, there appeared to be a mutual advantage through merger of the two companies. This was effected during 1956. Neenah Paper Company thereupon became a division of Kimberly-Clark.

Neenah's Financial Strength

The strong position of all of Neenah's financial institutions reflects the economic well-being of the citizenry:

Twin City Savings & Loan Assn. shows assets of	\$12,770,267.34 ('57)
First National Bank's deposits at close of '57—	21,064,359.96 ('57)

In 1952 the bank remodeled its building to the south, providing a service center for installment and mortgage loans and a drive-in window.

Total assets of all Neenah credit unions—	2,224,321.00 ('56)
National Manufacturers' Bank shows deposits of—	16,510,633.16 ('57)

In 1952 this bank built its addition to the east to provide for a growing Trust Dept. and remodeled its commercial banking quarters, including auto window and adequate space for its accounting department, also attractive upstairs facilities for the comfort and enjoyment of employees.

Interest in City and Area Planning

For nine years prior to 1954 a committee composed of citizens from our Twin Cities labored to encourage coordinated planning of the cities and townships of Neenah and Menasha. The committee raised its own funds and employed technical talent which was put at the service of town boards and city councils. Some good results were achieved, such as solution of the street problem involving Neenah's First Street, Menasha's Washington and Tayco Streets, and the St. Patrick's Church corner.

In the main, however, the part-time councils and town boards were too busy with the pressures of today to give thought or time to the problems of tomorrow. On July 12, 1954, in a letter signed by Co-Chairmen J. M. Wheeler and S. F. Shattuck, the Twin City Planning Committee resigned.

In its letter of resignation the committee recommended a city manager form of administration, or its equivalent. The committee also expressed the hope that a new approach might be found to the pressing need for city and area planning. This need was recognized on a broader front two years later.

As we eased into this decade, the migration of people from the cities into the adjacent rural areas gathered momentum. Throughout

the Fox River Valley, from the township of Neenah to the township of Kaukauna, villages, townships and cities were overlapping. School problems, questions raised by antiquated tax laws, threats to the downtown commercial areas, and vexing traffic and parking problems, together with a rapidly increasing population (105,000 as estimated by the *Appleton Post Crescent*) all conspired to prompt the organization of the Fox Valley Regional Planning Commission. This much-needed agency came into being at a meeting in Kaukauna on May 1, 1956. The cities of Neenah and Menasha were charter members. It is the hope of the proponents of this organization that life for the generations to follow may be made more livable than it would be if left to Topsy-like or happenstance growth.

Neenah Police Boat

During the '40s, yachting, both power and sail, was on the increase. Many participants were inexperienced, and the phones of power boat owners rang at all hours of the night for help in finding or rescuing members of some family who were on the lake after dark. This led our nautically-minded Police Chief to induce the city fathers to take over a power boat, formerly owned by W. C. Wing, to be used by the department for patrolling races and for night emergency service.

In 1950 a group of citizens, led by J. C. Kimberly, provided the present well-equipped and tailor-made craft, which the Chief and his men have used to great advantage.

The city provides a minimum amount for gas and oil.

The men of the Police Department give their services, day or night, without extra pay, not only in rescue work, but in maintenance of the craft. Thus far the taxing units bordering the lake, such as Townships of Neenah, and Oshkosh and Calumet County, have declined to compensate the Neenah Department for service to their citizens. That declination has not deterred the personnel of the Neenah Department. They continue to go anywhere, anytime that anyone is in trouble.

This may be the time and place to say in behalf of all thoughtful citizens that one will search the nation for a more courteous and efficient police force. How Chief Stilp has maintained such outstanding

service, housed as his department is, in a hallway, is something only he can explain.

Neenah's Venetian Parade

Police Chief Irving Stilp is responsible for proposing and staging an event in 1954 which bids fair to become an annual institution, viz., the Venetian Parade on July 4. Twenty thousand people lined Neenah's waterway for the initial performance. This colorful event capitalizes on Neenah's distinctive river and park setting, together with the vast increase in small boat ownership. Two years later ('56) the Jaycees took over responsibility for continuance of the custom.

Upsurge of Power Boating

The Tri-City Boating Club, led by Lawrence Driscoll, Frank Sharpless, Fred Grupe and Verndyne Stelow, came into existence in 1954. This club, composed of families, opened the door to enjoyment of Winnebago's historic waterways by an enlarged circle of people of all ages. To the development and refinement of the outboard motor must go the credit for increase in this wholesome out-of-door sport.

New Park Pavilion

The antiquated and outmoded dance hall and outbuildings in Riverside Park finally disappeared in favor of the artistic and usable new park pavilion ('56), placed east of the drive at the center of the park area.

The John N. Bergstrom Art Center and Museum

It was during the decade of the '50s that both Mr. and Mrs. J. N. Bergstrom died (he in 1951 and she in 1958). Under the will of John N. Bergstrom, their residence property at 165 North Park Avenue became the property of the City of Neenah, subject to certain conditions, all of which have been fulfilled. When Mrs. Bergstrom died in February, 1958, the city, by ordinance, dedicated the property for use as an Art Center and Museum, in accordance with the wishes and direc-

tion of the donors. The full story of this valuable acquisition to the life of Neenah is told in Part II.

After ten years of service as Secretary of the Neenah-Menasha Chamber of Commerce, Don Colburn resigns to re-enter private business. In due time John Konrad was chosen to succeed him ('56).

Throughout this decade Neenah's able and progressive school board kept one step ahead of mounting school population through construction of the Hoover School, the classroom addition to the high school ('53), the big gymnasium ('55), and the Taft School in the rapidly-growing seventh ward in September, 1957. Nor is the project of home-bound instruction, instituted in 1952, to be forgotten.

The Churches

The churches, without which Neenah would be a spiritual wilderness, carry their share of the responsibility for maintaining Neenah as a good place in which to live and work.

St. Margaret Mary builds its parochial school, Sisters' Convent and gymnasium ('51).

Trinity Lutheran razes its old school building on Oak Street and builds a modern structure on the site ('51). At this writing, plans are being drawn for a new church to be built on the site of the present church.

The Presbyterians dedicate their educational wing, chapel and Fellowship Hall ('51) and the new sanctuary in October, 1954.

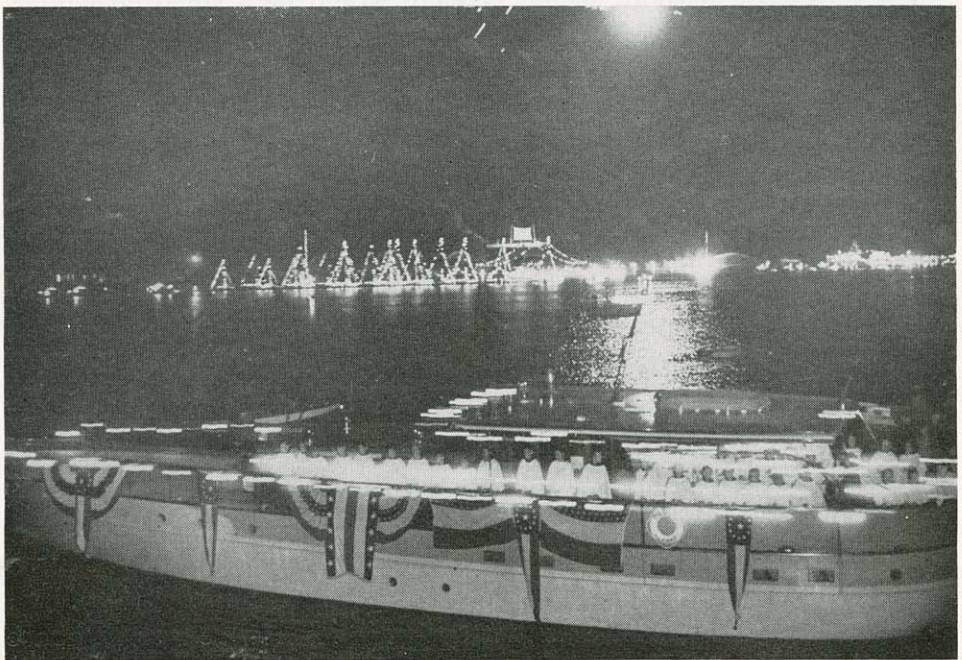
First Church of Christ Scientist opens a reading room at 107 Church Street ('54).

Calvary Baptist Church purchases the vacated former home of Our Savior's Lutheran Church ('55).

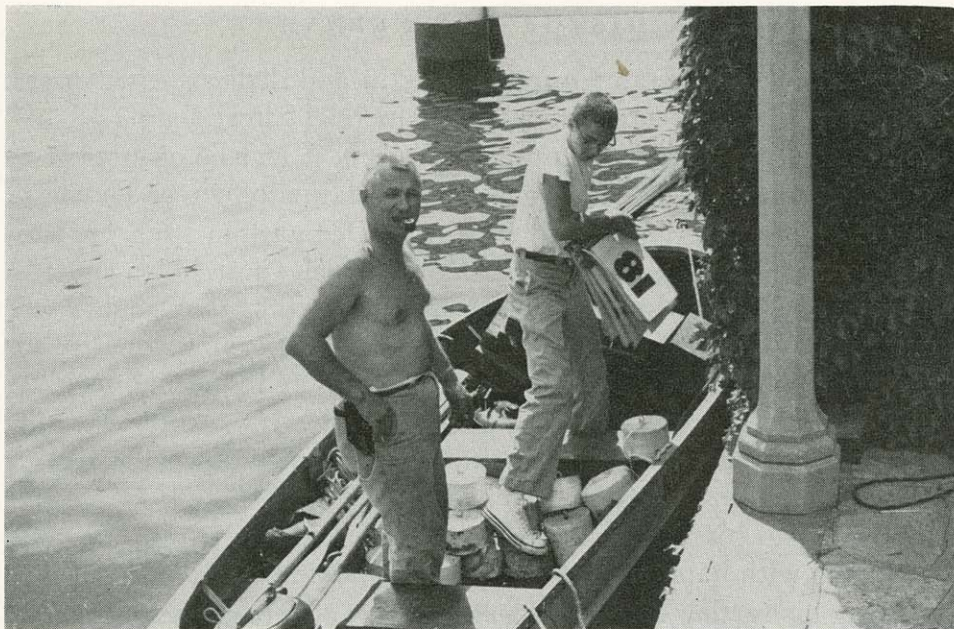
Martin Luther Evangelical Lutheran Church dedicates its new church edifice, converting its former church building into a school ('56).

First Church of Christ Scientist occupies its new red brick house of worship on East Wisconsin Avenue ('56).

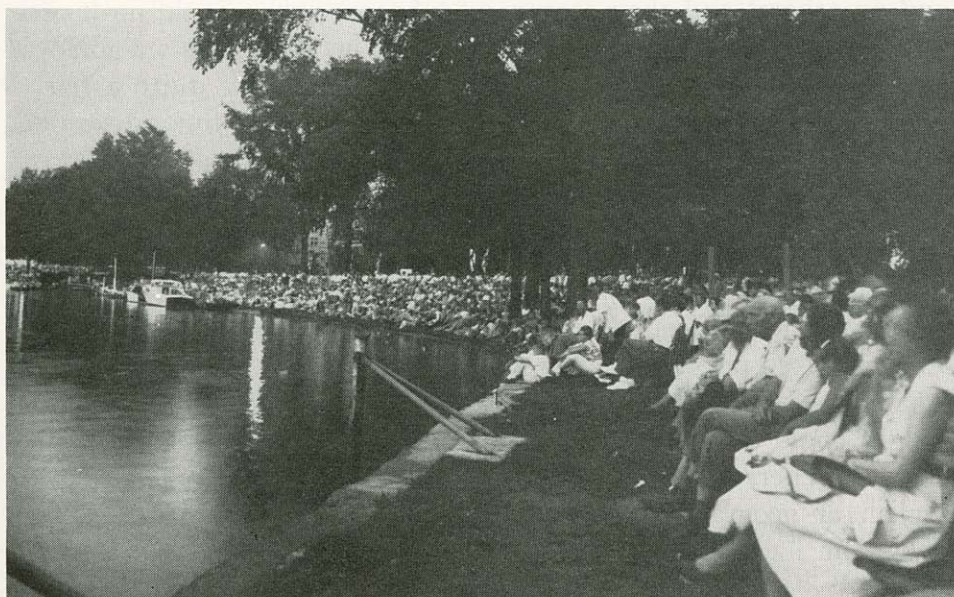
The enlarged and remodeled church of St. Paul's English Evangelical Lutheran congregation was dedicated and reoccupied ('56).



Glimpses of the first "Venetian Night," staged and organized by Chief Stilp and members of the Neenah Police Force—July 4, 1954. In the upper photo, the Queen and her Court of Honor wave to the crowd from the police boat.



Chief Stilp was found wherever work was the hardest in preparation for "Venetian Night."



One section of the huge audience lining Neenah's waterway for "Venetian Night."

Our Savior's Lutheran Church moves in and dedicates its artistic and roomy new structure on South Commercial Street ('56).

Apropos of Our Savior's Lutheran Church, it will be of interest to recall the pastorate of Niels Thomsen, grandfather of Oliver Thomsen.

Niels Thomsen arrived in America from Denmark in 1871. He was, so Oliver says, the first minister in "the Danish-Church" to come to this country. After a rough time in a congregation that couldn't or wouldn't pay him enough to exist on, he tried farming, then to an unhappy pastorate in Indianapolis and from there to Neenah in 1874.

Neenah looked good to him. To a friend he wrote, "Hurrah, now bring forth all your additions to our hymnal book—now we will need them—the church is continually filled with people."

Referring to his first congregational meeting, he writes, "No one was sitting with hats on, and no one was smoking tobacco."

Among his further comments was this gem: "A few days ago I conducted a queer funeral service. The dead man had been an atheist. He drank himself to death. Most of the atheists attended the funeral (and no others) and their sorrow was, because they could no longer, as they had done, drink on his expense. The dead man's coffin was placed in the town's biggest saloon, and astonishing quite a few, I entered the saloon, dressed in clerical vestment. The funeral sermon, however, was preached at the grave."

C. F. Hedges

On August 9, 1957, Mr. C. F. Hedges departed this life.

For twenty-nine years Clare Hedges was Superintendent of Schools. During the ten prior years, he taught science, was Assistant Principal, then Principal of the High School. An associate said of him that Mr. Hedges could enter any classroom at Neenah High in the absence of the teacher, and take over. "It might be math or science, or English or geography;—he stepped in and handled the session as though he had taught it yesterday and was going to be there tomorrow."

In retrospect we remember the man's gentleness and his delicate sense of fairness. He induced in his teachers and work staff a loyalty,

deep and firm, that persisted long after severance of relations with Neenah's schools.

Then came the age of retirement, and finally his passing.
Of this Ed Cochrane wrote:

"We will miss his going by with his dogs. The slight figure, huddled into heavy winter cap and coat on a wintry day, with a shepherd and a nondescript dog, trudging through the snow. He didn't just 'walk the dog' as householders know the term. He took long tours in the high school area and beyond the city limits.

"We will miss a living example of a man whom we always felt should have been placed in a publicly useful niche in his retired years.

"C. F. Hedges left his blaze marks deep on the 'trees' of our community, and somehow they will always be there to compass the trail for many who were privileged to be his students or his friends."

Twin City Relationships

In view of discussions in the *News Record* during the latter half of 1957 relative to a common city hall and the possibility of uniting the Twin Cities, it seemed pertinent to bring to the fore an all-out effort in this direction during the last decade of the 19th century.

Mayhew Mott, out of his long memory, contributes this:

"I was told by Silas Bullard along about the first of this century that an effort had been made, not long before I had the talk with him, that a movement had been started to unite Neenah and Menasha into one city. He said that a committee was formed by the city councils of the two cities, who met and considered the proposition and ironed out all of the problems (bond issues, contributions to projects like the Menasha library, etc., conditions attached to legacies to the cities, etc.) and that the committee, consisting of some twenty members, was unanimously in favor of the united city. The only way they could unite was for one of the cities to annex the other, which involved the annexed city giving up its name. Neither side would consent to being the annexed territory. It is my understanding that this committee functioned sometime in the 1890's. Silas Bullard was one of the committee."

Our Shrinking Dollar

No phase of our history since the turn of the century deserves more serious thought from our generation than the shrinking value of our dollar and what can be done about it. We would indeed be remiss if we should close this summary of the '50s without registering what is undoubtedly one of the most dangerous problems of our time.

The *U. S. News & World Report* pictures the downward slide of dollar value since 1939.

In 1939, prior to World War II, the dollar may be said to have been worth—	100¢
From 1939 to 1945, under the impact of all-out war and unrestrained spending, the dollar shrank from 100¢ to— (or a shrinkage of 22.8¢)	77.2¢
During the twelve years between January 1, 1946, and January 1, 1958, the wage-cost-price spiral, along with other influences, sent the dollar down to— (This was at the rate of between 2 and 3¢ per year.)	48.8¢

Now we look forward to celebrating Neenah's 100th birthday in 1973 (15 years away). With what kind of dollars will that event be recognized?

Suppose the wage-cost-price spiral continues unchecked for the next 15 years. Assume also that the purchasing power of the dollar is driven down at the rate of only $1\frac{1}{2}$ ¢ per year; that would spell an anniversary celebration in 1973 with dollars worth—

Or, if the downward creep were to continue at the rate of 2¢ per year, we'll celebrate with dollars shrunk to—

Increasing numbers of older people and others on fixed incomes look with dismay on a trend that spells for them impossible living costs. While this is not the place to discuss economics, as such, it is pertinent to bring to view some of the causes of the creeping inflation that enmeshes us, such as big government, all-out defense spending, fiat money (paper currency issued by government without guaranty of redemption), and the wage-cost-price spiral.

We, as private citizens, can do little about the control of government spending except to back such agencies as the Committee for the Hoover Report, dedicated to economy in government.

There is, however, one sector of our citizenry that is big enough and strong enough to attack the inflation problem at its heart, viz: labor unions.

Coupled with this is the historical fact that when wartime restraints were removed, wage demands and higher costs marched upward in lock step.

During the '80s, '90s and first decade of this century, corporations were in the driver's seat. They abused their power. It was existence of too much power in the hands of business leaders of that day that led to enactment of the anti-trust laws. Today, the shoe is on the other foot. Unions, grown big, wealthy and politically powerful now dominate the industrial life of America.

As always in a democracy, great financial and political power is accompanied by corresponding social obligations. The question now asked is whether there is top leadership in organized labor with wisdom, patriotism and guts enough to measure up to the total social responsibility that is theirs.

Or, in the public interest, must governmental action reduce and control the exercise of union power as it did half a century ago in the case of the corporations?

Could Become A Grass Roots Movement

Evidence is not lacking that American men and women constituting the body of unions, if given opportunity for self expression, are capable of courageous, even sacrificial action, that might well become contagious. For instance, this from Detroit, under dateline of January 2, 1958:

"The most amazing thing that's happened to us in the last 30 years," is the way Edward J. Nowark, Detroit's assistant budget director, put it. He was referring to a letter from the Michigan Sewage Treatment Employees Union, representing about 200 city employes, which said, "Because of the steady mounting of the nationwide spiral of inflation, we feel that any direct pay raises as such will only contribute to the already alarming inflationary trend, and will ultimately result in greater loss than gain. Therefore, for the fiscal year of 1958-59, we are foregoing any request for a direct pay raise."

Richard J. Gray, President of the Building Trades Department, at the AFL-CIO Convention in December, 1957, was clear-eyed when he proposed a year's pay freeze to halt inflation and spur construction, predicting that the nineteen construction unions would endorse his plea. Gray's proposal made headlines on the front page of the *New York Times*. His fellow officials buried his proposal in ridicule. Mr. Gray recognized the sober fact that only by a decisive action that cuts squarely across the wage-cost-price trend can the spiral be jolted.

Ralph McGill, Editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, widely known for his wise comment on the American scene, slips in this observation: "It would make sense if the nation should seem to be heading into a long strike-bound period over wages, to freeze prices and wages. If costs and wages go up, then prices will mount, and the recession will deepen."

From the viewpoint of an interested observer of current history, it would seem that the psychological moment is here for a fresh look. We have arrived at 1958 with industry on a plateau—slackened sales, sharpened competition, lower earnings, and, in many industries short running. Has not the time arrived for a change of pace?

Harold B. Wess, in *Human Events* of July, 1957, suggests the tragic alternative: "Unless the major economic trend of the last twenty-five years in this country is reversed, the only true free enterprise system in the world will bleed itself to death."

When Neenah becomes 100 years old on March 13, 1973, and takes a backward look at the critical fifteen years between then and now, what shall the verdict be?

Local Unions and Local Leadership

Returning to the Twin City scene, we find a situation that is typical of many another smaller community where relationships between people in the mills and people in the management have been cordial and cooperative over a long span of years. Generations of young people have grown up in an atmosphere of industrial peace, friendliness and understanding. It was out of this atmosphere that the Neenah-Menasha Trades and Labor Council, back in 1951, staged the first of a series of Labor-Management Dinners. This gesture reveals not only a civic-minded leadership, but points up the quality and character of local union membership.

And, in this connection, be it remembered that leaders of this Council, including John Arnold, Ebbe Berg, and John Pawlowski, played a strong hand in establishing the Community Chest of Neenah-Menasha. (S.F.S.)

Neenah's Population 17,000

As we leave the year 1957 to history, we would record that during 1957 Neenah's population crossed the 17,000 mark.

TO SUMMARIZE

We who have been privileged to work on this historical project emerge with a fresh appreciation of what it takes to develop a community in which its people live in reasonable comfort, and enjoy opportunities for mental, physical, social and spiritual satisfactions. Threading our way across the eighty years since 1878 gives us a keen sense of indebtedness to the generations that have gone before. It is upon their foundation of thought and effort that we have builded.

The repetitive references in the decade write-ups to buildings, corporations, societies, churches, financial institutions and dollar values are oppressive. These things are important, but they are so impersonal. It is the faith and the vision, the initiative and persistence of *individual people* that have made these institutions and services what they are and that have given to Neenah its quality and character.

Material things pass away. Spiritual values—ideals, civic pride, faith and love persist from generation to generation, and determine the tone of a community.

As one traces the ebb and flow of life through these eight decades, we find ourselves saying with the Psalmist: "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain."

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