

CHAPTER FIVE

The presidential election of 1892 held more than casual interest for me. It was the first election year, state or national, in which I was eligible to vote. What would have been referred to in the mid twentieth century as a business recession but what the economists of the early eighteen nineties chose to call a commercial crises had been partially felt as early as 1891. It was natural that the Republican administration and the President, Benjamin Harrison, who had succeeded Grover Cleveland in 1889, should be blamed. In any event Grover Cleveland returned to power in March 1893. The real estate bubble had already burst in St. Paul. Building construction ground to a near standstill and a money panic siezed the nation. Banks and business firms across the nation by the thousands failed. It was a state election year in Minnesota. Cleveland had barely taken office when Minnesota's Republicans carved out a spring platform intended to cure the nation's economic ills. Their platform for the fall elections demanded that the nation and the world adopt the silver standard for currency, a tariff which would equalize domestic and foreign wages, the suppression of trusts,



and such other unheard of demands as pensions for veterans, arbitration of labor disputes, the exclusion of undesirable aliens and the cessation of certain extortions by vested interests. The Republicans also advocated a constitutional amendment to provide for a six year term for the president and the vice-president of the United States and a provision which would bar their re-election. The state's Democrats were compelled to stand pretty much on the same platform that Grover Cleveland had been elected upon the autumn before. They did, however, adopt such innocuous planks as approval of the election of United States senators by the people, setting up counsel for the investment of state funds and insisting upon economy in state affairs. And they too, favored the arbitration of labor disputes and expansion of provisions of the pension laws and a more just taxation of railroads lands and mines.

By taking jobs wherever we could get them Butler Brothers managed to survive the money panic and the so-called commercial crises, both of which were relatively short lived, and were to go on to more gigantic operations. Altho the session of the Minnesota state legislature in 1893 concerned itself largely with laws intended to remedy the ill effects of money panic and an act which put all manufacturing concerns under supervision of the state bureau of labor it also created a Board of Commissioners to select a site for a proposed new state capitol.

Butler Brothers during that period were kept busy with the milling company projects at Duluth and Superior; a plant for the Archer Daniels Linseed Oil Company on Raymond Avenue in St. Paul; and the construction of the Hiawatha flats in St. Paul; and an amusement hall and kitchen at the insane hospital at Rochester, Minnesota. The date October thirty 1895 when the new capitol commission accepted the designs of Cass Gilber of St Paul over forty other entiries for the new Minnesota State Capitol would have gone unnoticed except that Butler Brothers on that same date was awarded the three hundred thousand dollar contract by the Wisconsin Central Railroad to raise its ore docks at Ashland and build eighteen bridges along the right of way. It was at a time when we had the nine story general office of the Northern Pacific Railway in St. Paul under construction.



The Ashland Dock Project brought Butler Brothers into their first contact with that red magic, iron ore, and it never occurred to us at the time that ore was to play such a vital and important part in our lives and fortunes in the future. An enlargement of the Wisconsin Central's docks had been made necessary to accommodate the larger ore boats which were beginning to ply the Great Lakes from the Lake Superior ports to the eastern smelters. The railroad management had left it to our judgment whether to tear down the old docks and build new ones or make additions to the facilities which would meet their needs. This called for a meeting of Butler Brothers at which Walter conceived the idea of jacking up the dock thirteen feet so that they would serve the ore boats. It is possible to get some conception of the magnitude of the project when it is considered that the docks were fifteen hundred feet long, supported by three hundred and fifteen pockets each of which had to be elevated as the work progressed. This was something new in ore dock building. It had been only recently that the ore boat capacity had been increased from four and five thousand ton to seven thousand ton capacities.

Ashland at that time and today serves the Gogebic range in Michigan, and at that time it was the major port on Lake Superior. Brother John and I launched the project at the close of the navigation season in the late fall of 1895, and under our contract the work had to be finished at the opening of the navigation season late in April of 1896. I can't remember a winter that the weather was as bitter cold. Our crew of one hundred and thirty six consisted largely of Icelanders, Scandinavians, Irish and a few French. Never in all of my experience have I encountered and worked with a crew of men with the physical stamina and endurance as these. There was a fierce pride of accomplishment among these men of varying nationalities. I remember an Irishman and a Frenchman fought to the point of physical exhaustion as the result of an argument over which of them could swing thirty two foot heavy timbers into position with the greatest accuracy, speed and efficiency. We built the docks of fifty five foot lengths, twelve by twelve timbers of the finest white pine in America. It cost at that time eleven dollars per thousand feet at the sawmill. John and I had barely completed our work for the Wisconsin Central Railroad when we joined Bill and Cooley in completing the Northern Pacific Office Building in St. Paul in the fall of 1896.



The following spring we got the contract to build the state hospital at Cherokee, Iowa, under a contract that called for three hundred thousand dollars. That project measured a mile and a quarter around the outside walls of three stories including two wings and an administration building. It was during the fall of that year that my oldest son Hazen was born. Walter was in St. Paul working twenty hours a day in an effort to get the contract for the new Minnesota State Capitol Building.

It is noteworthy that no member of the Capitol Commission was native to Minnesota. Channing Scabury was eighteen years old when he came to St. Paul from Southbridge, Massachusetts, in 1860. He was secretary of the commission from 1893 to 1908 and at various times had been in the shoe and wholesale grocery business. Henry W. Lambertson, a lawyer, came to Winona, Minnesota in 1856 from Carlyle, Pennsylvania. George A. DuToit was a native of Harrisville, New York and had settled at Carver, Minnesota. James McHenry, a farmer, had come from Gilboa, New York in 1856 and lived near Plainview, Minnesota. John DeLaittre, a lumberman and banker, was a native of Ellsworth, Maine and had come to Minnesota in 1865. Charles H. Graves, formerly of Springfield, Massachusetts, became head of an insurance agency at Duluth. Ebon Corliss, also a lawyer, was Fayston, Vermont and after fifteen years service on the commission, he became custodian of the new Capitol in 1910.

No event in Butler Brothers' history could be considered as big as the day Walter told us that he had the major contract for the state capitol, signed, sealed and delivered. Getting the state capitol contract brought an end to the partnership between Butler Brothers and Mike Ryan. It was customary then, as now, for a contractor on a project of such magnitude to post a performance bond. In the case of Butler Brothers and the State Capitol Commission it was necessary for Butler Brothers to post every dollar of its assets in order to secure the bond. Ryan, apparently, with less confidence in the partnership than Walter, John, Cooley and Bill balked at what he considered to be an unjust requirement. When <sup>WALTER</sup> Ryan asked <sup>RYAN</sup> Walter how much he wanted for his stock in Butler Brothers, Ryan said.

"I'll Leave it up to you, Walter."

Walter told him that Butler Brothers would pay him eight thousand dollars for his stock. A check was made up a few weeks before the cornerstone of the capitol building was laid in July 27 1898 and from that day forward Butler Brothers was a one hundred percent family corporation.



I told him that was just what I intended to do and he said that he thought that it was a good idea, and wanted to know if I would like to have a partner. He said he had in mind an old friend ~~am~~ named Edward Hyland, and old bricklayer. He was surprised when I told him I already had a partner and that we had a thirty thousand dollar contract in our pockets.

The next day Bill got wind of this new cleavage in the ranks of Butler Brothers and he dressed me down properly.

"What the hell's the matter with you?" Bill said. "Are you nuts? You can't leave Butler Brothers."

I explained to Bill the circumstances of my financial predicament, the nature of the offer I had, and of my determination to take advantage of it. To think that a Butler Brother particularly one who had always one who had always been the kid brother could conceive of leaving his elders for purely monetary reasons seemed to infuriate Bill.

"Keep your shirt/<sup>on</sup>and you'll get more money," Bill admonished, and he walked away.

I don't know why Bill's words affected me so, but to me that was an order, and in those days you took orders.



Walter, Bill, Cooley and John at that time each owned twenty five percent of Butler Brothers stock. There were a thousand shares of stock. It was in 1902 that each of my four brothers pooled twenty five shares of stock apiece and made me a ten percent stockholder. That gesture climaxed for me fourteen years service in Butler Brothers and for the first time in my life, I felt that I was making progress and that I was going to get somewhere. The future looked bright indeed. But I hardly dared dream that the day would come when I would gain control of the company, assume its active management and direction and become its president. It was just as well I didn't know it.

End Chapter Five.