

CHAPTER FOUR

It was difficult for each of the Butler brothers, accustomed as we all were to feeding from the horn of plenty at Waterford, to accustom ourselves to the high prices for groceries when we first came to St. Paul. While John and I were still on the farm we regularly supplied Father and Mother and the older boys with fresh beef, pork, poultry, eggs and the rest of the farm produce. During the first year of brother Bill's marriage we sent the newlyweds at one time a young one hundred and fifty pound hog, but I remember we neglected to prepay the express charges. Bill was so hard up that he had to wire us for money to pay the express. Month after month during the first couple years Cooley worked for Butler Brothers, he tried with persistent regularity to badger his way into a partnership in the firm. He quit his bricklaying job in 1890 and went out to Salt Lake City. Within a year he had saved a thousand dollars; he returned to St. Paul and his money bought him a quarter interest with Welter, Bill and John in Butler Brothers.

As sub-contractors, specializing in brick work and plastering, Butler Brothers began to really make a name for themselves after 1890. Walter secured the sub-contracts for one of the Freeman Company mills and another for the Russell Milling Company both at Superior, Wisconsin with an old friend of Walters named Mike Ryan as general contractor. A bachelor who lived with his sister Ryan, the small of stature, had the reputation of being the brainiest construction man in St. Paul. Between Ryan and Timothy Reardon, another St. Paul contractor, Butler Brothers had all the work that they could handle from 1890 to 1894. It was not unusual when the work was pressing for Walter, Bill, Cooley and myself to be laying brick side by side at the same time. During those years Walter also had the responsibility for the business management of the firm, figuring the contracts, meeting the payroll and keeping the organization going. Walter and Bill usually did the office work at night. A journeyman bricklayer's wages at that time was forty cents an hour. Brother John who never mastered any of the building trades managed to keep pretty busy lining up new work.

The first Butler Brothers' partnership held in equal shares by Walter, Bill, John and Cooley and which had come into being in 1884 lasted just ten years.

Because an increasing amount of Butler Brothers' sub contracting work was coming from Mike Ryan, it was decided in 1894, to take Ryan into the company. Ryan put in a little cash, a considerable amount of building equipment and a lot of good will into the new concern. It was decided to split the ownership five ways with Ryan, Walter, Bill, John and Cooley as equal partners. Walter held the presidency, Ryan the vice-presidency, John was secretary and Bill was treasurer. Cooley was never one for a title. Because I was still the kid brother I had neither title nor interest in the new company and the fiscal transition didn't raise my salary a dollar over the seventy five dollars a month that I had been getting.

It became obvious almost from the first that Butler Brothers with an outsider in the firm were doomed to discord. But a shingle bearing the slogan Butler Ryan Company hung over every major construction project in which Walter, Bill, John, Cooley or myself worked on for the next four years. The new firm, which was established as a legal entity, under a partnership certificate authorized by P. E. Hanson, Minnesota secretary of state, under date of April 26, 1894 was capitalized at one hundred thousand dollars.

The terms of the partnership were broad indeed.

It said:

"The name of said corporation shall be Butler Ryan Company and the general nature of the business shall be contracting for and doing public and private work of all descriptions and furnishing materials therefore whenever required and the acquiring, holding, owning, improvising or disposing of real estate in such instances as may seem desirable."

The agreement provided that the highest amount of indebtedness or liability to which the young corporation should at any time be subject shall be seventy five thousand dollars.

This is not intended to either suggest or infer that Butler Brothers as a construction firm were not imminently successful long before the advent of Jaeger and Ryan. During the late 1880's and early 1890's Butler Brothers had executed what even today would seem like a fabulous amount of contracts. The Noyes Brothers and Cutler Building, six stories high, and the Hackett, Gates and Hurty building also six stories high each had been built at a cost of 90,000 dollars. Contracts for the power houses, sub power houses and extensions of the then infant street railway system had aggregated ~~had~~ an excess of 300,000 dollars.

We had built the German Lutheran Church in St. Paul for sixty thousand dollars, four apartment buildings on Summit Avenue for another sixty thousand dollars, eight St. Paul public schools at an aggregate of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. The Freeman Mills at Superior, Wisconsin had run well over a hundred and ninety thousand dollars and the Russell Milling Company development at Superior had cost in excess of two hundred thousand dollars. And in our spare time we built a considerable number of homes and small store buildings in the Twin Cities and the Twin Ports.

In its day the construction methods employed on the smokestack of the power house ~~of the power house~~ of the St. Paul City Railway Company on East Seventh street were unique. I say that it was unusual because it was the first time that a brick smokestack of this height was constructed without the use of outside scaffolding. Brick masonry required in the construction was done from the inside of the smokestack and moved by staging set on a three inch pipe and as the work reached toward the sky the inside scaffolding was jacked up along the pipe. The scaffold itself had no contact with the walls whatsoever, and we used a block and tackle to hoist the scaffold to levels comfortable for the bricklayers to work.

Brick and mortar were brought up on the outside. With a base of twenty four feet in diameter and an inside flue of eight feet in diameter the flue tapered to six feet in diameter one hundred and fifty feet above the ground. IN devising construction of that kind, we had ~~in~~ in mind both the safety and effeciency of the men doing the work. At heights ranging from seventy five feet and higher wind is always a hazard factor and with the men working inside it obviated the normal necessity of an outside scaffold wall for their protections. At a point forty feet above the surface of the ground where the inside flue began to narrow there was only room for two bricklayers one of them brother Cooley and a bricklayer's helper to work. It was a matter of record that that method of building brick smokestacks prevailed and was generally acceptable after 1890.

After we completed the smokestack the Street Railway Company gave us new contracts one of them for the underground construction and brickwork for the cable ways along a section of the Selby Avenue Cable Car System. A part of the work entailed the construction of three man holes to the city block by which the cable system could be serviced when it went out of order. and in those early days it seems to me now it was always out of order.

The cable cars were equipped with a spring clutch which grabbed on to or let go of the endless cable as the cable operator directed. The cable itself was geared to a speed of about eight miles an hour and all cable cars moved along at the same speed naturally. Hand brakes were used by the operators. That was Butler Brothers first attempt at public utility construction as such.

The records pertaining to operations of Butler Brothers during the two decades after 1884 that it was engaged in the building construction business have become somewhat obscured by time. But nearly every major project that we undertook stands out sharply now fifty and sixty years later in my memory. The more than forty of them that I do remember gave Butler Brothers more than thirty million dollars in gross business.

The following is at least a good partial list of them.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Type or location</u>	<u>Approximate cost.</u>
Noyes Bros. & Cutler	6 story bldg.	290,000
Hackett, Gates & Hurty	6 story bldg.	90,000
Street Railway Company	St. Paul	300,000
German Lutheran Church	St. Paul	60,000

Four Apartment Buildings	St. Paul	\$ 60,000
Eight schools	St. Paul	250,000
Fergus Falls Insane Hospital		90,000
Freeman Mills	Superior, Wis.	150,000
Freeman Mills Elevator	Superior, Wis.	60,000
Russell Miller Milling Co.	Superior, Wis.	150,000
Russell Miller Elevator	Superior, Wis.	50,000
Board of Trade Building	6 Stories, Duluth	125,000
Provident Building	5 Stories, Duluth	60,000
St. Louis Hotel Building	6 Stories, Duluth	60,000
Wisconsin Central Ry.	Approach	40,000
Wisconsin Central Ry.	Ore Docks	160,000
Wisconsin Central Ry.	18 Bridges	300,000
Northern Pacific Ry. Co.	9 Stories Gen. Of.	250,000
Cherokee Insane Hospital	3 Stories	300,000
N. W. Ry. Co.	Ore Docks	250,000 250,000
Milwaukee Ry. Co.	Summit Ave. Bridge	90,000
Federal Courts Bldg. and Post Office	St. Paul 5 Stories	150,000
Grand Forks Post Office	4 Stories	250,000
Iowa City Post Office	1 Story	50,000
National Candy Company	4 Stories	42,000
Hackett, Gates, Hurty	Additional 6 Stories	60,000
Lindeke Warner Building	6 Stories	330,000
Patterson Bldg.	6 Stories	60,000

Soo Railway Freight Houses		\$150,000
Minnesota Club	3 Stories	150,000
Hill Reference Library	4 Stories	500,000
Detroit River Tunnel		7,500,000
New York Central Railway		4,000,000
Endicott Bldg,	Boston 14 Story Office & Bank Bldg.	1,250,000
North Dakota Capitol	Bismarck, N.Dak.	250,000
Store Building	Bismarck, N.Dak.	60,000
N.P. Ry. Co. Shops	Brainerd, Minn	300,000
Essex Building	3 Stories St.Paul	100,000
Train Sheds Union Station	St.Paul	60,000
Herzog Iron Works	St.Paul	40,000
Breakwater Duluth Harbor	Duluth	300,000

John W. M. to Range

LIST OF BUILDINGS BUILT
BUTLER BROTHERS

NAME	Type or Location	Approximate Cost
Noyes Bros. & Cutler	6 story bldg.	\$90,000
Hackett, Gates & Hurty	6 " "	90,000
City Street Railway Co.	St. Paul	300,000
German Lutheran Church	St. Paul	60,000
Four Apartment Bldg <i>Buildings</i>	Summit Avenue	60,000
Eight Schools	St. Paul	250,000
Fergus Falls Insane Hospital		90,000
Freeman Mills	Superior, Wis.	150,000
" " Elevator	"	40,000
Russel-Miller Milling Co	"	150,000
" " Elevator	"	50,000
Board of Trade Bldg.	6 Stories, Duluth, Minn.	125,000
Provident Bldg.	5 " "	60,000
St. Louis Hotel Bldg.	6 - " "	60,000
Wisconsin Central Ry.	Approach	40,000
"	Ore Docks	180,000
"	18 Bridges	300,000
N.P. Ry. Co. St. Paul	Gen. Office 9 Stories	250,000
Cherokee Insane Hospital	3 Stories	300,000
N.W. Ry. Co.	Ore Docks	280,000
Milwaukee Ry. Co.	Summit Ave. Bridge	90,000
Federal Courts Bldg & Post Office St. Paul	St. Paul/ 5 Stories	150,000
Grand Forks Postoffice	4 "	250,000
Iowa City "	1 Story	50,000
National Candy Co.	4 Stories	42,000
Hackett, Gates, Hurty	Addn. 6 Stories	60,000
Lindeke Warner Bldg.	6 Stories	330,000
Patterson Bldg.	6 "	60,000*
Soo Ry. Freight Houses		150,000
Minnesota Club	3 "	150,000
Hill Reference Library	4 "	500,000
Detroit River Tunnel		7,500,000
New York Central Ry.		4,000,000
Indicott Bldg. Boston	14 Story Office & Bank Bldg.	1,250,000
North Dakota Capitol	Bismarck, N.D.	250,000
Store Building	"	40,000
N.P. Ry. Co. Shops	Brainerd, Minn.	300,000
Essex Bldg. St. Paul	3 Stories	100,000
Train Sheds Union Station	St. Paul	60,000
Herzog Iron Works	"	40,000
Breakwater Duluth Harbor		300,000
Booth Cold Storage	13 Stories	150,000
Norfolk & Western Ry.		500,000
State Capitol Bldg.	St. Paul	3,500,000
N.W. Ry. Co.	Council Bluffs, Iowa	150,000
Nicols, Dean & Gregg	St. Paul	125,000

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The two decades following 1884 represent I believe the greatest era of building construction in the history of the United States. In order to secure these and other contracts Butler Brothers had to compete on an equal basis at one time or another with every major contractor in the country. Many of them old, powerful, and well established. Our major competition came from such construction giants as John Agnew, Pat Hennessey, James Cox, and George J. Grant. At its peak Butler Brothers employed in excess of seven hundred and fifty men representing every one of the building trades including a hundred and twenty five bricklayers. At that time all public work was advertised and a certain amount of private construction was done by invitation only. It would be only fair to attribute a large degree of Butler Brothers' success to a German mechanical genius by the name of August Lenzer, who had the capacity to estimate within a minute fraction of error the amount of materials and the cost of the labor which would be required to erect a building. He had a photographic memory for blue prints and specifications. Lenzer could make a seemingly casual inspection of a half-finished building, quickly scan the blueprints and specifications and tell you in a matter of minutes whether the building crews were running ahead or behind, over or under his prior calculations, Lenzer never left anything to chance.

Because of Lenzer's genius it was always possible for Butler Brothers to underbid a competitor by as much as five to ten percent whenever Butler Brothers needed a contract. As head of the firm, Walter had had a buzzer system installed in the company's offices so that he could summon at will his subordinates, including Lenzer. Everytime Walter buzzed for Lenzer, the estimator would come out of his office with fists flying and shouting.

"Walter, how many times do I have to tell you never to buzz me? It disturbs me. You intrude on my calculations. If you want to talk to me, you come to my office."

While Butler Brothers were engaged in the construction of office buildings, churches, schools, street railways, ore docks and other construction, our competitors in St. Paul were building New York Life building, the Ryan Hotel, the Pioneer Press building the Manhattan building, the Globe building, and out of the profits building contractors waxed rich.

It may have been that Butler Brothers individually and collectively, worked a little bit harder and were a little bit more diligent to business than our neighbors, but this narrative is not intended to suggest that we were not apace of the now fabulous gay nineties era in which we lived.

Romance flowered in the same colorful intensity then as now. If my numbered days at the Curtis Business College in St. Paul didn't give me anything else it did provide me with my first quaking introduction to the opposite sex. It was there that I became enamoured of a young lass named Annie Manke, a fellow student, and several other young women, among them Edie Barbeau and a charming Golden Louise Bagley, a demure Miss whose Superior, Wisconsin parents had determined that Louise was to carve out for herself a business career. This noble parental predilection for higher education for the Bagley Miss might not have gone awry subsequently had not my own parents and my brothers insisted that they were going to make a business man out of me, somehow, at the same school. Louise was the daughter of John Bagley who operated a wholesale candy business at Superior. This was gaily such as I had not known at Waterford. Several evenings a week, in the spring of 1890, I used to borrow a span of driving horses from brother John, hitch them to a buckboard and take Louise and her girl friends on tours of St. Paul. After my own school days were so abruptly terminated, I didn't see Louise as frequently as I might have wished. But I can remember riding a freight train the following year from Fergus Falls to Superior to see her.

Brothers Walter, Bill, John and Cooley had only recently formed a partnership with Mike Ryan under the name of Butler Ryan Company, when on June twenty third, 1894 Louise and I were married at Superior. It was my twenty fourth birthday and I was earning sixty five dollars a month. I remember we were married on a Saturday afternoon, and I was back on the job Monday morning.

Walter, with an understanding of my added responsibilities, promptly raised my salary to seventy five dollars a month.

End Chapter Four.