

Bradley City

Taken from the Bradley Centennial book 1992 by Vic Johnson

On Thursday evening, April 11, 1895, the engineer of an Illinois Central train approaching Kankakee from the north saw an ominous orange glow on the southern horizon. Had there been a wreck? The engineer eased back on his throttle and reached for the brake lever. Then he realized the fire appeared to be floating in the air above the rails. As the train closed the distance, the engineer saw that flames engulfed something on the Court Street viaduct. The Friday *Kankakee County Democrat* gave an explanation:

"Hurrahed For Bradley: Last night the enthusiasm over the decision of the Bradleys to locate in Kankakee burst forth in a huge bonfire upon the Court street viaduct. The pile of boxes and barrels was fully twenty feet high. Dick Stoa turned out with his trucks, and Lecour & Son gave a wagon load of boxes and other merchants in proportion, and while the flames reached their highest point the large crowd hurrahed with all its might for the Bradleys. The heat from the fire melted the rubber insulator which supported the trolley wire, and let the wire fall part way to the ground. The 3-I car was detained on its trip over a half hour. If the Nickel Plate band had turned out and made some music, the celebration would have been complete."

After many visits to the office of J. Harley Bradley in Chicago, John Herman Hardebeck had finally succeeded in bringing the David Bradley Manufacturing Company to North Kankakee. As Bradley would tell a welcoming rally on Friday morning:

"Some three years ago he came to my office, and his card was sent in and business explained. I told him it would hardly be necessary for him to wait, as I was busy, and I had no thought of coming so far from Chicago. He took it very good naturedly, and I told him he could come again, and he kept it up for three years..."

The final act in Hardebeck's triumph began in early January when he became receiver for the failed Demme & Dierkes factory. This was the second time the factory had been in receivership. Hardebeck told the *Democrat* that he intended to either sell the property or place it in the hands of someone who would resume the manufacture of furniture.

On Saturday, January 12, 1895, the day after becoming the court appointed receiver of Demme & Dierkes, Hardebeck rounded up a platoon of Kankakee's most influential business men (Haswell C. Clarke, a director of the First National Bank, and Emory Cobb's brother in law; Solon Knight, quarry owner and one time mayor of Kankakee; Fred Legris, banker; Daniel H. Paddock, attorney and recent Illinois state representative; Solomon Alpiner, cigar manufacturer; Celestin Graveline, Bourbonnais merchant; James E. Reed, businessman; James C. Mateer, real state agent; August D. Ehrich; Clarence E. Holt, son of *Kankakee Gazette* publisher Charles Holt; Elias Powell, farmer and politician). Carriages took them to the David Bradley plant located between Canal and Desplains streets. They spent two hours conferring with J. Harley Bradley and touring the two 6 story factory buildings.

Bradley told them he had plans for expanding his market, adding new machinery to the Bradley catalog and for jobbing other items manufactured by independent companies so that the David Bradley Company could supply a farmer with a complete package of farm implements. But the Chicago site was too small and Chicago property values too high for local expansion.

You can imagine Hardebeck rubbing his hands together and saying, man, have I got a deal for you. There was some talk of building eight 1-story buildings, 100 x 300 feet in size that would have a capacity of 600 workers. This plant would be located south of East Broadway, between the Illinois Central tracks and Schuyler Avenue. But with the old Demme & Dierkes factory burning, a hole in his pocket, Hardebeck could only look upon the eight-building plan as a generous but impractical gesture of good will to the Kankakee businessmen whose intentions were to locate the Bradley factory "as near to the old town as possible."

The Bradleys wanted \$100,000 up front to cover the costs of moving. In return they would employ 5- to 600-men with an annual payroll of approximately \$300,000. And then there would be those other farm machinery manufacturers that Bradley predicted would congregate around their factory.

It was a magnificent, irresistible scheme; the ultimate dream of all boomers, a great manufacturing town springing full blown (as did Athena) from the head of — or perhaps in this case, from the collective heads — of the architects.

"An influx of this kind would bring in its train fully 1,500 more [people]," the *Democrat* said, "while the contemporary factories would bring 3,000 more. This would mean work for carpenters, masons, and all classes of labor, and lots of it."

By April 5, the North Kankakee syndicate had raised \$40,000 and bought the Demme & Dierkes property; enough North Kankakee lots had been sold so that half the \$100,000 moving money needed by the Bradleys was in the bank, and 60 citizens had guaranteed more than the balance in subscriptions of \$1,000 each. A telegram sent from Chicago and put on display in the Kankakee Post Office at noon on the 5th read: "*Deal ransom-mated. Bradleys will locate in North Kankakee at once. .J. H. Hardebeck.*"

"The news flew like wild fire, and in less than an hour it was known from one end of the city to the other. People would meet each other in the street and shake hands over a result so devotedly looked for."

The morning after the bonfire on the viaduct, Friday, April 12, a hastily called meeting at Kankakee City Hall enlisted about 50 citizens in a welcoming committee. Hardebeck and J. Harley Bradley were due on the 10:30 train from Chicago. The *Democrat* faithfully printed a roster of the chosen:

"Mayor Leonard called the meeting to order and was elected chairman and J. J. Bott and H. J. Legris were the choice for secretaries. After some discussion as to the best method of entertaining, it was decided that in consideration of the very short time for makin^g arrangements it would be best to appoint a committee of business men who could meet at the train in the mornin^g and be introduced to Mr. Bradley and extend to him what courtesies the circumstances and surroundings would allow. The following gentlemen were chosen for that committee with the understanding that every citizen of Kankakee was expected to be out, if possible as a committee of one, to meet the two gentlemen upon whom the public mind is centered at present, waiting to hear what has been done and what will be done by the decision of the Bradley's to locate in Kankakee.

"A. T. Cross, Louis and Albert Schneider, Ben Alpiner, Richard Lavery, H. H. Troup, Len Small. W. H. Sanders, John McDonald, Wm. Kruger, Christian Ruehle, W. H. Smith, Thomas S. Sawyer, M. J. Hanley, T. Conners, Mike Coughlin, W. A. McGillis, M. T. Baker, H. M. Stone, W. T. Gougar, J. B. Brosseau, H. Drolet, T. F. Donovan,
I. B. Hanna, H. A. Magruder, Fred Nordmeyer, N. W. Grinnell, Jos. Barnes, John Paulissen, Chas. Childs, A. T. Keeble, F. L. McLaughlin, Ed Schumacher, W. W. Huckins, B. L. Gibbs, Frank Turk, J. W. Fiddler, Col. H. W. Snow, R. L. Cox, Chas. T. Laing, Chas. Wertz, J. K. Eagle, J. H. Shafler, R. Murphy, H. Ruder, Joseph Gelino, T. Dorion, Geo. R. Letourneau, J. H.

Speicher, Wm. Frith. H. D. Whittemore, Wm. Fraser, A. L. Granger, N. B. Pratt, A. A. Davidson, Hon. H. K. Wheeler, D. H. Paddock, J. H. Brayton, J. J. Bott, H. J. Legris, Chas. Holt, J. B. Smith, H. J. Dunlap, H. L. Sammons, R. J. Hanna, H. C. Clarke, Emory Cobb, Jas. Little, L. Babst, F. D. Radeke, F. D. Hatch, H. Kramer, D. L. Durham, Solon Knight, August D. Ehrich, Elias Powell, J. H. Hardebeck, L. P. Lecour, H. Beckman, C. H. Cobb, C. F. Smith, J. C. Mateer, J. J. Scubert, C. E. Swannell, H. Umbach, Amos O. Cole.

"Another committee consisting of the following gentlemen was named to take dinner with the visitors at the hotel:

"J. F. Leonard, J. H. Brayton, H. C. Clarke, D. H. Paddock, Solon Knight, H. K. Wheeler, J. H. Hardebeck, Elias Powell, Chas. Holt, Joseph Barnes, F. D. Radeke, Emory Cobb."

One can sense the excitement loosed on Kankakee by the expectation of the arrival of the new factory from the *Democrat* article:

"The interest which everybody is feeling in the location of the Bradley plant at this point, was very clearly manifested this morning. Many of our business houses were decorated with bunting, and every outward evidence was given that the people appreciated at its full value, what the removal of the mammoth Bradley plant to the city meant to its manufacturing interests.

"The train arrived from Chicago on time and an immense throng filled the depot platform. As the train slowed up, the Nickel Plate band began playing. When Mr. Hardebeck made his appearance on the platform of the car he was greeted with prolonged cheers, which were repeated when J. Harley Bradley followed him. As great a man as Wm. McKinley, his ovation did not exceed that of which was tendered to J. Harley Bradley and J. H. Hardebeck as they stepped from the Central train this morning. It should certainly demonstrate to Mr. Hardebeck that the efforts that he has made toward benefiting Kankakee by the location of manufacturing industries in our midst is indeed appreciated by the majority of our citizens if not by all. A large delegation of North Kankakee had boarded the train at that point and joined the outside throng.

"Hon. D. H. Paddock was the first one to step up and shake hands with Mr. Bradley, then followed a few introductions, and the party started for the carriages. When the procession started the carriages were occupied as follows:

"First carriage — Mayor Frank Lenoard, Hon. D. H. Paddock, Harvey J. Legris and Elias Powell.

"Second carriage — J. Harley Bradley, J. H. Hardebeck and wife, Emory Cobb.

"Third carriage — Joseph Barnes, A. B. Holt, Dr. J. J. Schubert, Joseph Hardebeck.

"Fourth carriage — C. H. Cobb, M. Coughlin, F. Radeke, Solon Knight.

"On the sidewalk was the Nickel Plate band, and behind that was a banner on which was a picture of J. Herman Hardebeck and underneath it the words: 'The Workingman's Friend,' and such he assuredly has proven himself to be, and because the times and other things which he could not foresee or prevent have served to militate against his success in this line, blame should not attach to him. Many a dollar have the working men [of North Kankakee] got through the efforts of J. H. Hardebeck, which they would not have got except through his efforts. A short distance behind the banner came another, 'Welcome to Bradley, the Pioneer Western Manufacturer,' and over forty years ought to entitle the Bradleys to this distinction among western manufacturers. Following the banners were vast crowds of people who filled the walk. All were anxious to see Mr. Bradley, to hear him talk, and to do honor to Mr. Hardebeck. In this order this procession proceeded to the Armory where the reception exercises proper took place."

Hardebeck and Bradley were lavishly praised during the reception by a series of speak-

ers. Solon Knight declared the Bradley works were the "greatest things ever secured by this city." Paddock was quick to give credit to Hardebeck. "I have lately been associated with him somewhat, and I know the anxieties of his mind. I know the hardships he has undergone, I know that if it had not been for him this grand work would not have been accomplished." When it came Hardebeck's turn to speak, he seemed too full of emotion to get his thoughts in order. "There is so much said at present that I don't know that I can say anything to benefit you," he began. "I will say that I have had good soldiers and good officers to help me fight this battle..."

Hardebeck had snatched North Kankakee back from the brink of disaster. The David Bradley Manufacturing Company was the town's salvation and in gratitude, on July 13, 1895, the board of trustees passed the following resolution:

"Whereas: — A petition signed by the required number of legal voters of the village of North Kankakee, Illinois, has been presented to the President of the board of Trustees of said village praying that the name therefore be changed to Bradley City and

"Whereas: — Notice of the presentation of said petition has been published for three consecutive weeks in a newspaper published in said village according to law and no objection to the proposed change of the name having been presented to the said President and Board of Trustees and

"Whereas: — The said President and Board of Trustees deem it to the best interest of all concerned that the prayer of said petition be granted.

"Therefore be it

"Ordered by the President and Board of Trustees of the village of North Kankakee that the name of the said village be and the same is hereby changed to *Bradley Cite*. Passed."

(In March 1896. another petition would shorten the name to *Bradley*.)