

Saturday evening May 26, 1906

Mr. Sanford's Speech

" To the members of the Board of Trade, to the gentlemen from New York and all those present who have come here tonight to congratulate me upon my eightieth birthday, the eightieth round in the ladder of life, which I have reached, I thank you all. I thank you beyond my power of expression. I really don't know what to say I am so overwhelmed-so overwhelmed with praise, with the many kind things said about me. I cannot understand it; I don't know how to reply; I am only glad I am with you and thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I don't know what I have done to deserve this. Many years ago – sixty two years ago- my father placed me in his carpet mill. I had no choice; I had no selection. It was no preference of mine. I knew nothing about it, but his interest required me and I left the studies through which I was preparing for the vocation I expected to serve in, to aid him. It is a long time ago, many changes have taken place, many conditions have arisen. I met them as they came the best way I could. I have only done what every other man would do – the best he could. Often difficulties, often obstacles which seemed insurmountable, and serious problems would spring up, but I met them overcame them as best I could.

As I told you, my father placed me in the mill and it was the custom at that time for a manufacturer's son to work in the various departments and learn all about the business. I served in each of the departments and learned the practical and technical methods of weaving and dying, the spinning of yarn, and the various parts connected with the manufacture of the carpets then made. More than all, however, to me, it brought the acquaintanceship of the men, which I acquired during the five years I served in the mill. I learned to know the men in the mills, and formed friendships that have lasted during their lives. It produced confidence in me and confidence in them, and that confidence has stood. When difficulties come it is absolutely necessary to have your men with you, and I see before me

some of those men and their sons who are yet in our employ. They rendered invaluable assistance and I could always rely on them. Their best ability, their best judgment, helped me in times of difficulty. I am more indebted to them than to any other influence for the success you credit me.

Now, then, gentlemen, I will refer further in evidence of this, to your worthy president, Mr. McCleary, of whose acquaintance I feel proud. He is the president of the Board of Trade, member of the Board of Education and director in the bank. He and his partner were in my employ for many years. Today they stand at the head of one of the largest manufactories in the outer ward of this city, adding prosperity and growth to Amsterdam. All of these men stood by me and aided me when troubles and competition beset me, and the competition we meet in business is sometimes terrible. It is not the competition of the great corporations which bothered me, but it is that of the man who understands his business. When I have seen, down in Philadelphia and other places, a dozen hand looms, where the owner was the overseer and his wife wound the bobbins, I couldn't stand that kind of competition, as they were satisfied with their wages. Corporations had their presidents and treasurers, and all the other departments, and not one understood their business. I was not afraid of them.

Now, then, gentlemen, it is necessary for me to recapitulate or mention here the experiences of my sixty-two years of business life. I have always been able, fortunately, whether it was in New York, where I went to buy wool and meet my brother manufacturers, or here at the mills, to get some pleasure out of my business. I made the acquaintanceship of pleasant men in these travels, and found bright spots which kept me up during times which seemed discouraging.

The next thing necessary- if I were to advise anyone- is to be industrious and to have pleasure. I was always well received by my brother manufacturers, by the wool and yarn merchants and the manufacturers of machinery, and was always able to obtain some pleasure out of my dealing with them.

Gather as you go on your way through life. Don't expect some future day to bring success or pleasure, but take it as it comes, take it on the wing; find it as it comes and enjoy it as it comes. If you miss an opportunity for pleasure it is a lost opportunity, and you have all heard about this lost opportunity.

Give your business your best interest and attention. Learn above all things that for that which cost you a dollar you must get a dollar and one cent or there will be a red flag over the shop. It is only careful attention and looking to expenses that assure success. What kept me in trouble was a little too much enterprise. If I was flourishing and made a little money out of a good year I built another mill and put in a little more machinery, and then it required a little more capital and I was always hard up. I have often gone to the bank with fear and trembling and presented a note not knowing whether they would look at me or not. Once many years ago I was offered more money than I could use. I paid three, or two one per cent a month, and remember the lenders as friends, not as extortioners. They aided me and I could afford to pay it.

Once I went to a note broker and said: "I have three notes of \$2,500 each, payable at the old Tradesmen's Bank in New York". He replied, "There is no use in your presenting those notes, you are not known, the public will not buy them. Only the notes of Claflin & Co., or Hoyt, Sprague & Co., and such houses will sell". Then I pleaded with him and prevailed on him to keep them and try to sell them. I had a friend who was once a partner of my father. He lived in Brooklyn and was a man of wealth. I knew he bought paper and I went to him and told him I had left notes with the broker and that if he would buy them it would put me on my feet.

He called on the broker, and on looking over the paper offered to him said, "I see a couple of Sanford's notes, I will take them. When the broker reported to me that he had sold them, I sent him some more.

There was another old friend of my father's, W.W. De Forest. I revere the name. I never hear it spoken but in my heart I say, "God bless you". He was an old bachelor and always set his table with twelve covers and my father sat before one of them. He wrote me a letter, saying: "I see your notes are in the market. I buy notes sometimes". I answered that I had to sell the notes to build new mills, and he wrote back to me, "I will buy them; and so he did. In four or five years, I had floated \$400,000 to \$500,000 of these notes. I had friends who stood by me. Call it good luck; it was good luck. Then I built another mill and added more expense, but always took care of the notes and watched when they came due. It was activity and anxiety constantly and would have been trouble to some, but not so much to me, as I had friends to help me, to welcome me, and extend the glad hand. But I am bothering you with things which are not interesting, but it was trouble, trouble for many years. No one, except he had good health, good courage, lots of hope and plenty of good friends, could have pulled through it.

Take the bad times during the fifties and during the war with its great decline in the trade. The government wanted blankets and coats and everything for the army, but it didn't carpet the soldiers' tents and it left our trade in a very bad condition. Gradually the government issued bonds, the national banks were established, money became more plenty and business greatly improved.

Now, even to this day I sell carpets over the whole of the United States. There is hardly a village; there is not a city of the size of Amsterdam in which I have not customers. I want to say to you something you can hardly believe. Take years of prosperity with careful management, the loss is but little. People on the whole are honest, and the greatest danger to society is in those agitations which encourage envy and which produce discontent and dissatisfaction. I have seen years and years when I scarcely lost through bad debts one-half of one percent. Then when I came to such a year as '93 I could stand it. The merchant said "I can only pay fifty

cents “, And I would reply at once: “Let me have it; get started again, I want to sell you more goods”. Then they let in foreign good and it hurt the manufacturers of this country. That is the worst kind of competition and a blow to the country, for when goods come from the other side the money goes to the other side; but I am making a political speech which is not proper.

I have had a little experience in politics, and believe that no man’s education is complete without it. No man knows the real people and conditions as well as one who has had a little experience in politics. It is the duty of every citizen to take an interest in politics. I have devoted a little attention to politics in this district. I have been a delegate to the county convention, where they nominated supervisors and members of the Assembly; to the conventions which nominated governors of the state, to conventions which nominated Presidents of the United States, and always found it interesting. I look back with very great pleasure and satisfaction to the time I was in politics. I was never in office but once and would have liked to have been in oftener. They sent me to Washington, but I had to get back to attend to business and leave the interest of the nation to other people. Speaking of serving your country, and when you wrap a flag around you and charge, remember that in sixty days your widow will be taking in washing.

However, serve your country, serve yourself, serve the community in which you live and always do the best you can. If you cannot die for your country you have to fight for your country, or bleed for your country. Sometimes you have to bleed tremendously. (Laughter)

They are shouting about insurance companies because they contributed little money to help the nation. Presidents are nominated; the public have to assemble and be aroused, and the cry is, “Save the nation”, “Save our party”, “Save the state”, until we are all excited about it and are going to stand by Henry Clay or some other statesman. I believe it is necessary to preserve the institutions and policies which have so greatly aided our growth and prosperity, and when these

men have done all they could to save the nation it is not very nice to have people go back on them.

In my canvass for Congress I went to an old friend, a dyed –in-the –wool Democrat, and asked him to help me. He said, "They are ruining the Constitution and if you promise to stand by the Constitution I will help you, and I promised and he helped me. The district included Saratoga, Schoharie, Hamilton and Montgomery counties. They asked me up north:- "How do you stand on the road? We don't care about anything about the tariff or any other questions, but we want a military road to the St. Lawrence River". Well, gentlemen, I was in favor of that road, and made it a subject of my speeches. I got every vote in the neighborhood. When I went to Congress I offered a resolution for a road to the St. Lawrence. It was referred to a committee, and the road is not built yet, and probably never will be. (Laughter) I also tried to stand by the Constitution, the old Constitution, which my fried thought would be torn into fragments.

Thirty years ago I got over worked, had dyspepsia, and felt badly, generally. A wise old doctor in Amsterdam told me: "You don't need my medicine, go buy a farm", and I bought a farm. I sent abroad and bought Percherons and several other kinds of animals and bred them, and their blood is scattered over the surrounding country. They made me president of the Agricultural Society and elected me honorary member of other societies. I am proud of it. Then my son bought a jumper, and I bred them and sold them. As I bred them, why shouldn't I race them? So I took them over to Saratoga and saw them run, and it gives me as much satisfaction as anything that has happened in my whole life to see their colors go to the front. I can't help it, I like it. I read in the papers about General Sanford, the sporting man. I never presumed to be a sporting man, but I am proud of it. Call me a sporting man if you like. My health improved, I had no more dyspepsia, and I have enjoyed every part of my life since. I recommend to you as the best thing you can do- go buy a farm.

Although eighty years have passed, sixty –two years of it in business, I have more business today than I had in any period of my life.

As our ex-president said about turning back the hand of time, as I look upon the time past, it is a dream, it is a vision; it seems but a short period after all. Now, I would say I have enjoyed the whole of it, and I wish the wheels of time could be turned back and place me again at twenty-one. I would go over again with the greatest pleasure, and enjoy it.”

Round after round of applause followed the conclusion of Mr. Sanford’s remarks...

...And thus the eighty-first year of Amsterdam’s grand old man was auspiciously begun, with honors graciously borne.