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THOUGHTS CONCERNING
THE 60th ANNIVERSARY OF
SHOWERS BROTHERS COMPANY

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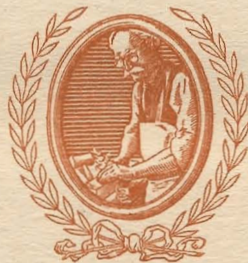
*"after all there is a lot of Romance in
that humdrum thing called Business"*

THOUGHTS CONCERNING
THE 60th ANNIVERSARY OF
SHOWERS BROTHERS COMPANY

BLOOMINGTON, IND. BURLINGTON, IOWA BLOOMFIELD, IND.

by

DALE DILLON



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PUBLISHED AT BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA

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"When the lumber was delivered and the mill started up, the boiler would not draw . . . Then came a trip to Cincinnati, and the purchase of a second-hand horizontal boiler off a river packet"

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Thoughts Concerning the 60th Anniversary of Showers Brothers Company

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THIS is a plain tale—simply told—of how the sons and grandsons of a pioneer wood-worker took a precarious little business started just sixty years ago—and made a go of it—not merely kept it alive, but made such a go of it that today it is the largest business of its kind in this country—and that probably means it is the largest business of its kind in *any* country.

However, big as is this accomplishment, the really *big* thing about the business is the sheer romance of the achievement—the way in which tireless human persistency overcame obstacles and nursed an idea from nothingness until it became a tremendous accomplishment.

There are in our country today only a mere handful of business firms old enough to celebrate a sixtieth anniversary. Of these few, still fewer can truthfully claim that during all that

trying period the business has been under the same management and in the hands of the same family. Showers Brothers Company is one of those few of the few.

Ever since that day in 1868 when the sons of C. C. Showers started their tiny wood-working shop in the little hill town of Bloomington, his sons and grandsons have been at the head and helm of the enterprise, building business volume and strengthening the good will created by the policies on which the business is founded.

Sixty years is a long time for any firm to be in business, not because sixty separate years placed end to end reach so far across the wide gulf of time, but because so many difficulties and obstacles made those years seem so much *longer* than years go, as we know them today.

Consider, for instance, how conditions have changed—how much has happened in those sixty years.

In 1868 the railroad was so young that passengers were accepted with equal pleasure aboard freight trains and passenger trains; most of the commerce of the country was via the flat-boats and side-wheelers which navigated streams long since considered unnavigable.

The little town of Bloomington, now the seat of one of the country's great state universities, was so primitive and small that it had not a single square yard of pavement. From early fall to late spring, ox and horse-drawn vehicles brave enough to appear on the streets about the courthouse square would sink hub-deep in mud.

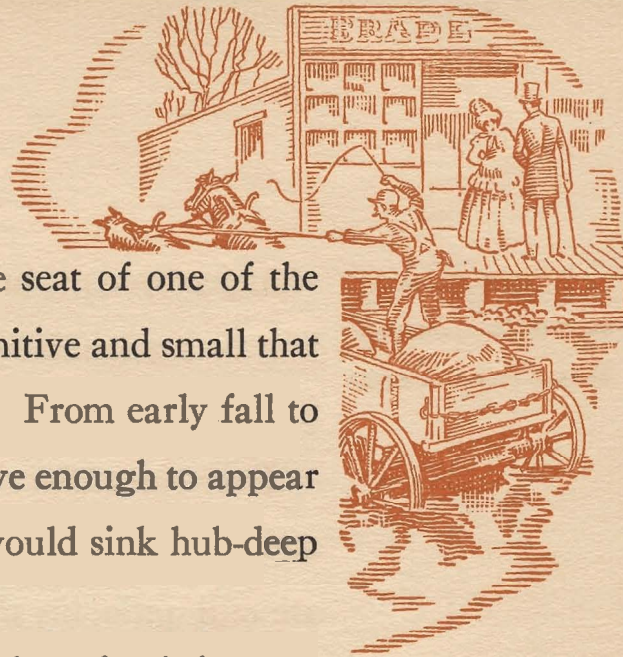
Where today the modern maidens slosh along in their open galoshes—worn largely as a matter of style—the pioneer social leaders of sixty years ago sometimes trudged in hip-boots—purely as a matter of necessity.

Illumination was still by tallow-dip, kerosene lamp, and the tin lantern.

Instead of basking in the glow of the first trans-Atlantic airplane flights—the nation then was agog over the completion of the first trans-continental railroad.

The civil war was still a bitter memory—but a few years in the difficult past—and the trying reconstruction period was at its height.

That was the time when, driven by hard necessity, two boys, W. N. and J. D. Showers, started the firm known then as now, as Showers Brothers Company.



A few years later their younger brother, C. H. Showers, joined them. Of this group, only J. D. Showers, who retired from active business some twenty-one years ago, is alive.

Two sons of the original founders—W. Edward Showers, son of W. N. Showers, and Erle Showers, son of C. H. Showers—are still active in the business, the former as president of the company.

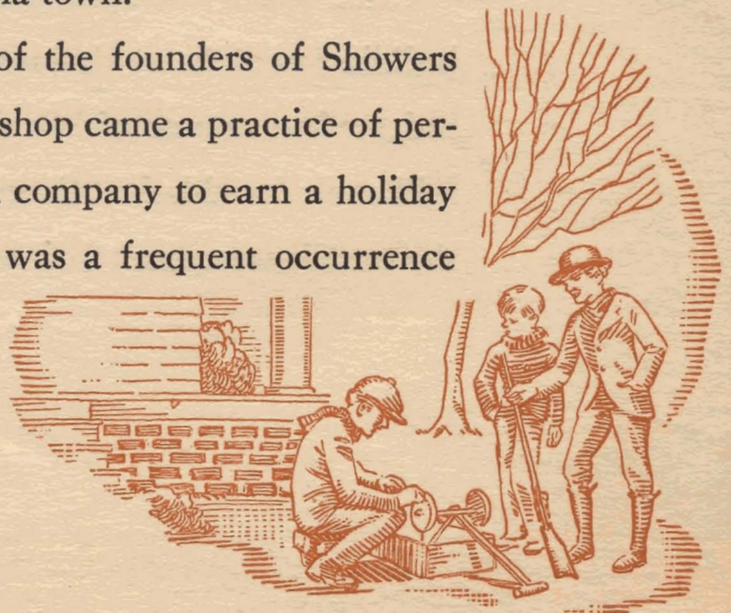
C. C. Showers, the grandfather of the present generation, was a circuit-riding minister of the gospel, and a splendid craftsman in wood. In partnership with two of his fellow townsmen, he became one of the founders of a coffin factory—back in those days when the red exigencies of civil war made coffin-making a prime necessity.

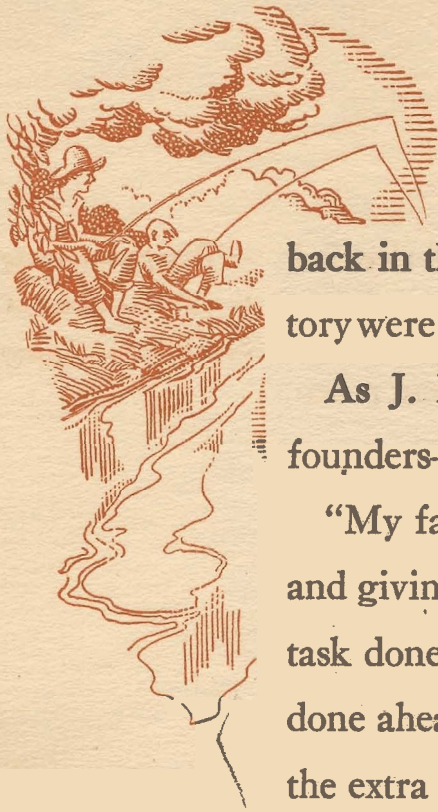
It was in this little shop, known at first as Showers, Hendrix & Kimbley, and later as Showers & Hendrix, that the three boys got their early love for the feel of wood and the smell of sawdust. Here, too, they got, first hand, valuable lessons in management which later stood them in good stead. By this time, the war having ended and coffins being in less demand, the father's little shop was busying itself with bedsteads and dressers and similar equipment for homes of peace.

As a matter of fact, the boys just grew up in the wood-working industry. At as tender an age as six they had the run of the shop. They were never denied the use of the finest tools in the place. In lieu of spending-money—for times were “tight” in those days—they would fashion for themselves little benches and wagons and other odds and ends. These they would trade off to other boys for such knick-knacks as might be had from the offspring of wealthier families.

However, not all the practice which the boys got came as a result of their spare-time manipulation of the tools. For instance, W. N. Showers, who later became president of Showers Brothers Company, and whose son, W. Edward Showers, now occupies that position, was taken out of school while still studying short-division and bound out to learn the cabinet-maker’s trade at the munificent stipend of \$6 a month, board thrown in. Slender as this wage was, it helped to relieve the strain of those hard, hard times in that little Indiana town.

From the boyhood experiences of the founders of Showers Brothers Company in their father’s shop came a practice of permitting the employees of their own company to earn a holiday by speeding up production. This was a frequent occurrence





back in the early days when the employees of the Showers factory were numbered by tens rather than by the present thousands.

As J. D. Showers—the only living member of the trio of founders—tells it:

“My father had a pleasant habit of setting a task for us boys and giving us a stated period in which to finish it. If we got the task done in the allotted time, well and good. And if we got it done ahead of time—and it was still well done—we might have the extra hour for our own. Many a fishing trip was earned in this way. And many times we learned lessons in speed and proficiency that later contributed to the success of our own company. This was the beginning of the idea of the straight-line production method as it is today applied in the Showers factories. It was the beginning of our standardization of *quicker* and better ways of doing tasks that others were content to do by slower and more expensive methods.”

Once when J. D. was a boy his father gave him the task of building two cherry dressers in a week. This was a pretty big order when one considers that the only machinery was a saw-mill and a hand-lathe. Everything had to be done by hand after the boards were cut to dimension.

The boy cut his planks of fragrant cherry wood and dressed them down. Then his father came to him and asked if he would mind setting the dresser job aside and substitute for them a bureau and a corner cupboard. He agreed to the change and started his new task, only to be told by a transient journeyman carpenter who happened to be working in the shop that a corner cupboard alone could not be built in less than a week.

But already the trait of finding labor-saving short-cuts had become a Showers habit—and both bureau and cupboard were completed far enough ahead of time, to the satisfaction of the customer who had ordered them, to give the boy the hour or two he had planned to devote to fishing.

Later, even when hundreds of men were employed in the factory established by the sons of C. C. Showers, it was common practice to lay out a certain amount of work for the plant to do in a period of a week or two, and announce that if all this work were accomplished in less than the allotted time, the plant would be closed and a general holiday declared.

It is a matter of record that as late as 1910—forty-two years after the founding of the business—week-end holidays of this nature were sometimes earned by the entire employee group.

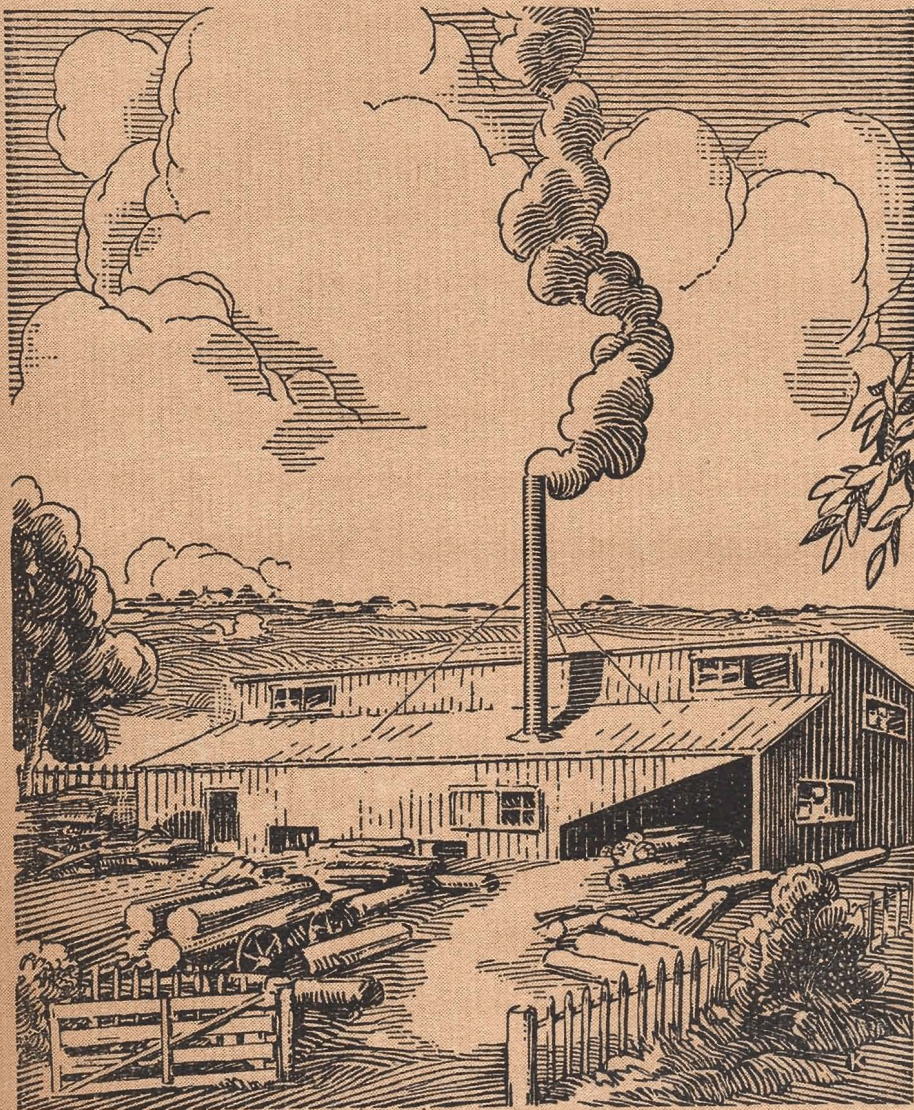
It is told around Bloomington, too, of how at one time when his boys were still young, C. C. Showers brought an experienced wood-turner up from Cincinnati to help get out an order of beds which had to be completed in a certain time. In those days \$2.50 a day was the accepted wage for a turner—an especially handsome wage in a day when common labor was glad to get half as much.

The little wood-working plant of Showers & Hendrix was paying its journeymen sixty cents for the turnings on each bed—four turned posts and two turned stretchers. But the out-of-town journeyman threw up the job, because he could not produce enough turnings for four and a fraction beds a day and thus earn his \$2.50 per.

But the Showers boys—the ones who later founded the present company—had learned so many short-cuts and had so mastered the art of wood-turning that one of them several times reached the peak of \$6.60 a day—the scale for the turnings on eleven beds.

And now we come to the founding of the present firm of Showers Brothers Company in the year 1868. It was started by the two older boys, J. D. and W. N.

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Showers Brothers Company



The first business was nothing more nor less than a little two-story planing mill

These two were closer to each other and more intimate than even most brothers usually are. They had but one pocketbook, into which went their common earnings and to which each had equal access.

As the years went by they managed to lay aside a little over \$300. This was their capital. With part of it they started up business in a little old ramshackle shed in the eastern part of Bloomington. The balance they invested in a lot on which they built a cottage. Then both were married and took their brides to the little home which they owned jointly.

In those earlier days it was J. D. Showers who did the most of the selling—W. N. stayed home and looked after the factory. But both rolled up their sleeves and did much—if not most—of the work when it came to producing the merchandise.

That first business was nothing more nor less than a little two-story planing mill, thirty by forty feet in size, with a small shed in the rear housing a single wheezy donkey engine that would work well only when the wind was favorable. The plant was not even large enough to saw its own logs. Lumber was purchased already cut—at the rate of \$1 to \$1.20 a hundred. And from this cheap lumber the little plant produced unfinished beds as low as

\$1.25 apiece. At one time an entire three-piece bedroom suite with plate glass mirrors was sold in quantities as low as \$7.50.

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But we are getting ahead of our story.

In the beginning all work was done on order for carpenters in the neighborhood who might need such services as could be rendered by a plant of this character.

Eventually their decision to set up in housekeeping jointly in their own home proved a profitable business venture. For after about a year they were approached by a minister who had taken a fancy to the cottage. He offered to buy it from them for \$150 in cash and a half section of wild land in a neighboring county. They accepted, and in less than a year they sold the land for \$2,700. With part of this money they improved and enlarged their plant.

But the enlarged facilities demanded more business. No longer could they wait for carpenters to drop in occasionally with work to be done. Heroic measures were called for. It was decided to make a trip to St. Louis to see if an advance order could be obtained for an appreciable amount of merchandise.

The ride from Bloomington to St. Louis on the jerky little railroad train was quite an event in those days. But it was ac-

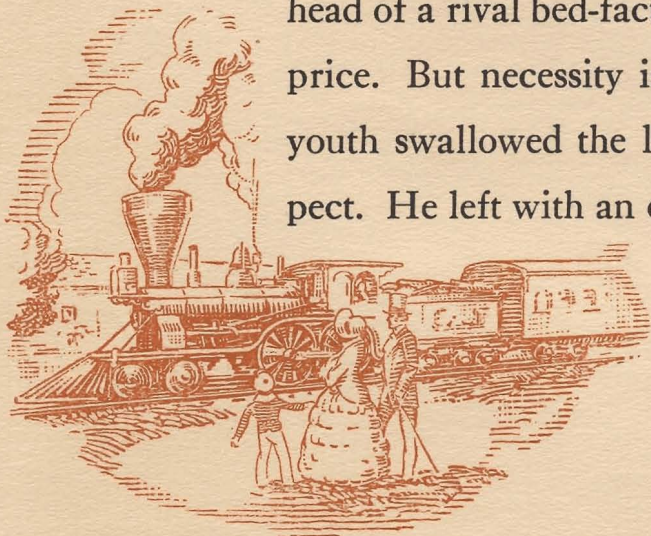
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And so, also, was its mission. An order was secured from a single jobber for all the unfinished common beds the firm could turn out—these to be delivered as rapidly as completed.

Scarcely were operations well under way on the strength of this order when word came to stop production, as the buyer was overstocked. Since the order was purely verbal, there was nothing else to do. And so the little mill found itself stocked up with lumber to be made into hundreds of beds—and no one in sight to take those beds off its hands.

The two boys pitched in and worked up that lumber. When it was gone they had three hundred beds, no customers, and no money with which to find customers. "Willie," as he was affectionately known, scurried around and borrowed \$35—a little here and a little there. Then J. D., pocketing this meager expense money, drove to a near-by town in the hope of making his first sale.

He entered the door just in time to hear the merchant tell the head of a rival bed-factory that he could not use any beds at any price. But necessity is also the father of salesmanship, so the youth swallowed the lump in his throat and bearded his prospect. He left with an order.



1868	Cash		179
Jan	10	By Cash from Page (177)	105.95, 91
"	11	" " " to H. H. H. H. H.	1.00
"	"	" " " for stamps ¹⁵ of H. H. H. H. H. ²⁰⁰	21.15
"	"	" " " to W. T. Showers	2.50
13	"	" " " to W. T. Showers ^{changed at 11⁰⁰}	2.50
"	"	" " " to H. H. H. H. H.	21.50
15	"	" " " to G. L. Allen	5.00
"	"	" " " for White Lead ¹⁵ Packing Jan ¹⁵	3.0
"	"	" " " " Leathers ¹¹⁰ for stamps ¹⁰	1.210
"	"	" " " " Leathers ²⁰ for van Buren ¹⁰	1.00
16	"	" " " for feather ²⁰ & ²⁵ & ⁷⁵ & ⁷⁵	20.75
"	"	" " " to Kuhn Bros & Co	10.00
"	"	" " " to J. J. DeHaven's ¹⁰ & ¹⁰	21.00
17	"	" " " for Sew Buttons ²⁵ for ¹⁰ & ¹⁰	5.0
"	"	" " " " Lot ¹⁰ & ¹⁰ of ¹⁰	6.00
"	"	" " " to H. H. H. H. H.	2.75
18	"	" " " to Geo Small for ¹⁰ & ¹⁰	16.50
"	"	" " " for stamps ¹⁵ & ⁵ of ¹⁰ & ¹⁰	2.70
"	"	" " " to W. T. Showers	21.50
"	"	" " " to W. T. Showers	10.00
"	"	" " " for ²⁰ & ²⁰ for ²⁰	4.0
20	"	" " " " Leathers ¹¹⁰ & ³⁵	1.35
"	"	" " " to H. H. H. H. H. for ¹⁰ & ¹⁰	1.75
22	"	" " " for White Lead ¹⁰ Matches	2.5
23	"	" " " " Leathers ⁵⁰ & ¹⁶⁰ for ¹⁰	16.75
24	"	" " " " & ¹⁵ for ¹⁰ & ¹⁰	2.60
"	"	" " " to J. J. DeHaven ¹⁰	21.50
			56.65

A page from the journal of Showers & Hendrix, January, 1868

The passenger train for the next town would not leave until morning. But he knew that his competitor would be on that train, so he hopped a passing freight train and had closed a sale in that town before the passenger train carrying his competitor arrived.

In this way, riding freight trains and hand cars, accepting "lifts" in buggies and farm wagons, and in one case trudging from one town to another on foot, he made a complete circle of the southwestern section of Indiana, always keeping ahead of the competitive salesman. He sold a few beds here and a few beds there. When the last bed was sold he came back to Bloomington—penniless, but with orders for the stock of beds.

The next task was to collect in time to enable the plant to resume operations. Laying all their cards on the table, the boys wrote each purchaser, frankly confessing that they needed the money, and offering an extra 10% for immediate payment. Every one of the purchasers paid at once. And immediately another three hundred beds were put in work.

Then one memorable day an advance order for sixteen hundred dollars' worth of finished beds was taken in the neighboring town of Terre Haute.

That was the largest order ever taken by the youthful business men and seemed to portend a roseate future.

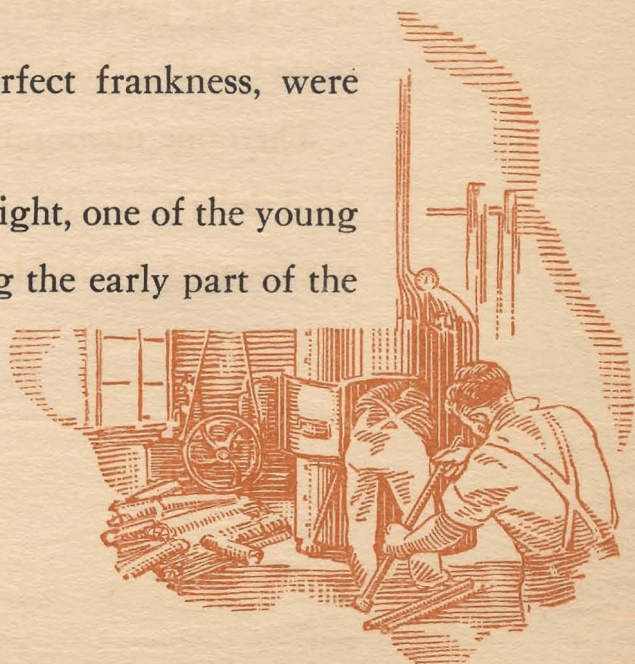
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But when the lumber was delivered and the mill started up, the boiler would not draw. This was not unduly alarming, since the wind was from an unfavorable direction—it must be remembered that the boiler only worked at its best when the wind came from a certain quarter. However, next day, when the wind had shifted and the boiler still refused to draw, conditions became alarming. The boiler was dismantled and it was discovered that a boiler-tube had collapsed.

This was bad business. A new boiler could not be procured and installed in less than a month—even if the money was at hand with which to buy one—which it was not. The young men decided that at least \$500 would be required to finance the purchase. A trip to the local banker—at no time friendly to the enterprise—revealed the terse information, “too bad you didn’t call yesterday—I had the money then.”

Again drastic measures, involving perfect frankness, were decided upon.

Figuring his time so as to arrive at daylight, one of the young men snatched a few hours of sleep during the early part of the



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night. Arising some time before midnight, he hitched up a horse and buggy and made the long, dark, cold drive to Terre Haute.

His destination was the place of business of the customer to whom that sixteen hundred dollars' worth of beds had been sold. He reached it just as the shutters were being taken down and the place opened for the day. Approaching the man in charge, he explained that due to the collapse of the boiler it would be necessary to delay shipment of the first lot of beds at least a month.

"Oh, that is all right," said his obliging customer.

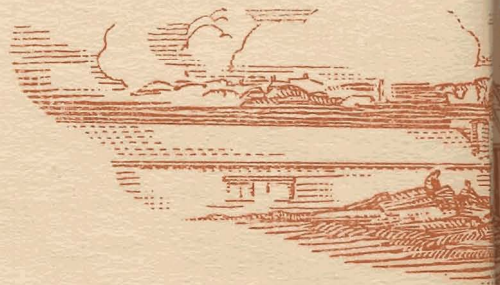
"But that isn't all," went on young Showers, "we won't be able to deliver them at all unless you can lend us \$500 to buy a new boiler."

This happened to be a matter beyond the premise of the young man in charge of the place and had to be referred to his uncle, who looked after all matters relating to finance. Soon the uncle arrived.

"What kind of a boiler do you expect to buy?" he asked.

"We figure on getting a horizontal boiler this time."

"Well, if that's the case, and you intend to buy a real boiler instead of another of those infernal upright contraptions, I'll let you have the money."



And so the money to make the beds was borrowed from the man who had bought them.

There followed another long, hard drive, this time back to Bloomington.

Then came a trip to Cincinnati, and the purchase of a second-hand horizontal boiler off a river packet.

And after that the job of erecting the new machinery. The boiler had a forty-foot metal stack. The firm possessed no derrick. Neither could it afford to rent one. So by dint of ingenuity and much muscular exertion the tall stack was pushed up into the air between improvised scaffolding, and eventually the business was going once more.

The beds were made and delivered.

Thus things went on. One difficulty after another was encountered and overcome.

In the early seventies a young lad of eleven was employed to mark out stuff for the scroll saws—band saws were unknown in those days. This boy's name was Charley Sears. He did his work well and as he grew older became quite an authority on furniture building and factory methods. Today, some fifty-five years or so later—he is still in the harness, with the title of Vice-



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Risen from the Ashes !

Showers' Factory

To start at 4 O'clock.

The Riley Dramatic Band will play, the whistle blow, and a Flag
be raised 100 feet in the air. Also good Speaking.

ALL ARE INVITED.

Thursday, Oct. 9.

*Facsimile reproduction of invitation issued to celebration following the
rebuilding of the factory destroyed by fire in 1884*

President and General Superintendent, a power for constructive methods in the Showers factories.

About the time that the Sears boy was hired business had grown so much that a better plant was needed. One was built in 1872—not much of a factory, but an improvement over the original little shed.

However, life was not all easy sailing. Capital was so scarce that it was frequently necessary to suspend operations for want of cash. A carload of beds would be shipped—and then no more could be manufactured until that carload had been paid for. Things went on in this way for a number of years. But by 1880 business had improved so greatly that a three-story brick building was constructed.

And then came the memorable fire of 1884. The factory was gutted—and, unfortunately, the insurance covered only one-fifth of the loss.

But the brothers were not to be daunted. With characteristic determination they moved across town to another site, where they immediately started the construction of a new plant. This was completed in record-breaking time, and on October 9, 1884, within a few weeks after the disaster, the new factory was for-



mally opened with appropriate exercises, as forecast in a quaint handbill—a copy of which is still preserved in the Showers' archives. This handbill read as follows:

RISEN FROM THE ASHES!

Showers' Factory

To start at 4 o'clock

The Riley Dramatic Band will play, the whistle blow, and a Flag be raised 100 feet in the air. Also good speaking.

ALL ARE INVITED

Thursday, October 9

As is indicated by the manner in which those three pioneers in the Showers business capitalized this re-opening of the business following disaster, the family has always had a keen sense of the dramatic. Many times since they have had the genius to focus attention on their business in a big, dramatic way.

The new factory over which that flag was "raised 100 feet in the air" was in reality three detached buildings, each separated from the other by an open space a hundred feet in width. This separation of the plant units was a precautionary measure to

prevent the spread of fire from one building to another should such a catastrophe again threaten the factory.

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By 1893 the business had increased so greatly that more space became imperative, and it seemed but natural that the addition should take the form of a single long unit touching each of the three original buildings, and thus connecting all of them.

The year 1897 was, of course, a critical one in the history of Showers Brothers Company, just as it was a most critical year in the life of the nation.

Something of the spirit which animated the men back of the company can be gathered from a story which is told of W. N. Showers, who by that time had risen to the presidency of the company.

When things began to grow critical in that year of national panic, a single furniture store was owing the company something in excess of \$16,000. A few months later, although that debt had been reduced to \$9,000, that store collapsed. But W. N.'s comment on reading the news of the failure was: "We can at least be thankful they didn't fail when they owed us the whole amount."

It was a year of many failures—but by dint of such optimism

and exceedingly careful management Showers Brothers Company was one of the fortunate concerns that managed to weather the storm.

Years pass, each with its own group of problems met and overcome. Styles in furniture change. Quaint old designs of the Victorian era, with their ungainly, unwieldy weight, began to be replaced by lighter construction of a more modern school.

But while that dreary, burdensome type of construction still prevailed there came an event which still brings chuckles from reminiscing employees of the older group.

You know what beds were in those days—with their monumental headboards, 70 inches high, square across the top and nearly as wide as they were tall.

One day the Showers brothers, looking out of a window, happened to see a negro employed in the plant who was trying to steal such a bed—fully crated—by carrying it out of the factory, single-handed.

Then and there the decision was made that if the thief could carry the bed all the way to his home he would not be molested. And—so far as any one knows—that husky darky, if he lives, is still reposing on the bedstead which he was permitted to keep be-

cause of a certain human quality in the breasts of his employers.

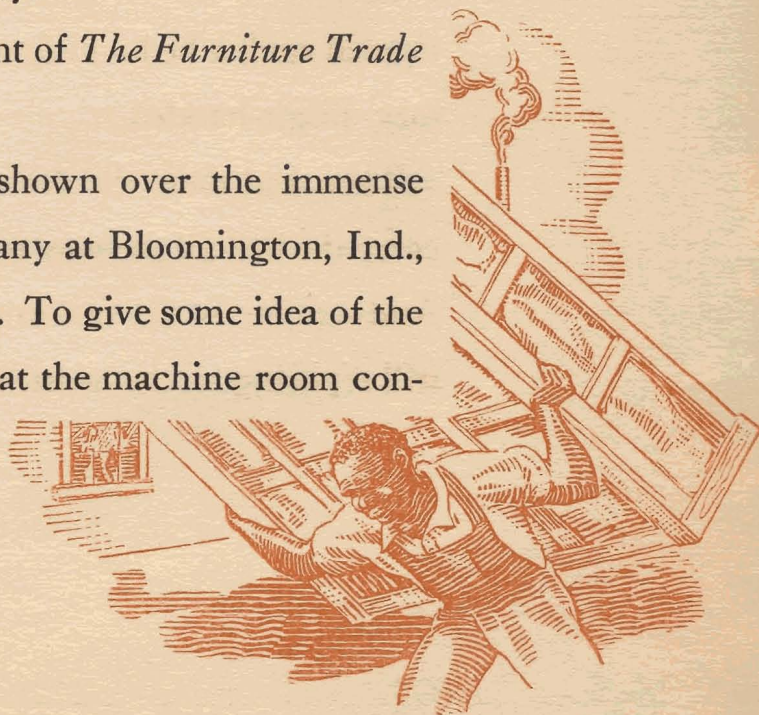
But—as was said—that heavy type of furniture had to go. By 1904 Showers was advertising suites of solid oak, surfaced with rotary oak veneer—a type of veneer which was pioneered by this company.

In 1909 came a forceful trade announcement of the new laminated construction. Incidentally, this use of the word “laminated” as it applies to furniture made of built-up stock, was coined in the Showers factory. It came from the fertile brain of Sanford F. Teter, since retired because of ill health. At that time he was secretary and treasurer of the company, and one of the most popular men in the furniture industry.

It was in 1909, the year of the introduction of this word “laminated,” that the Showers plants were augmented by the addition of a veneer mill of tremendous capacity.

Writing at that time, a correspondent of *The Furniture Trade Review* said:

“*The Review* representative was shown over the immense plant of the Showers Brothers Company at Bloomington, Ind., by S. F. Teter, secretary and treasurer. To give some idea of the immense capacity, it may be stated that the machine room con-



tains 111 woodworking machines; all of the buildings are only one story, so that no time is lost in hoisting or lowering from one floor to another. The company has its own timber lands, its own sawmill right at the plant, and within the last year has erected a veneering plant at a cost of over \$100,000; all of which go to make it one of the most complete establishments of its kind in the country. There are excellent shipping facilities, with tracks on both sides of the furniture and the veneering plants.

“The company is making a line of laminated wood chamber suites, and has something excellent in this new construction. The tops, ends, fronts, backs, drawer bottoms and sides, and every part but posts and parting rails are of three or four-ply stock, showing a fine figure, and which cannot be broken or injured in any reasonable way. The goods are not only pleasing at first sight, but will endure for a lifetime. It is claimed by the management this is the only medium-priced case goods factory in the United States which can afford to use such stock on this grade of product. The company believes this to be the furniture of the future, and having recently equipped the most complete veneering plant possible to make this perfectly matched, beautifully figured, cross-banded stock, it has since July been putting

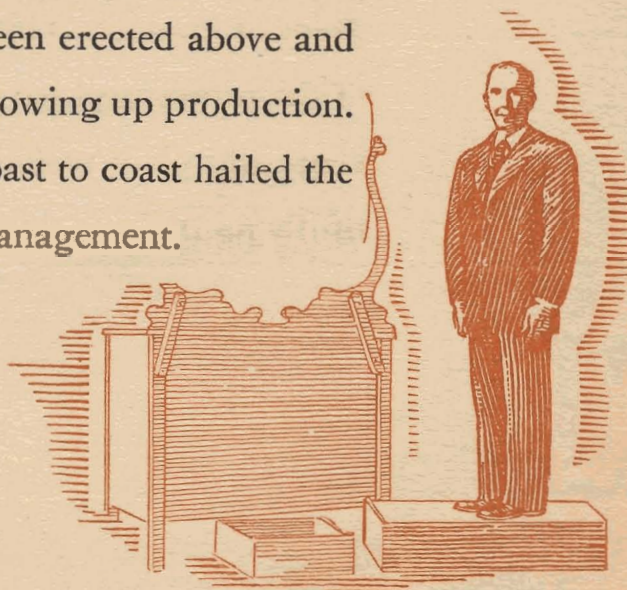
out a line of cheap and medium-priced goods in this high-grade material.”

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Those who attended the furniture markets in that year of 1909 will remember the sensation which was created when Showers salesmen demonstrated the great strength of the then new type of construction by turning dresser-drawers upside down and actually standing on them. A photograph of Mr. W. N. Showers standing on one of these inverted drawers was one of the features of all Showers publicity that year.

But 1910 saw two events of even greater magnitude. One of these was the erection of a complete new plant surrounding the old factory—without in any way interfering with operations. The other was the discovery that the center of population of the United States was located at the very door of the new factory building.

Work on the new plant—now known as Plant Number One—began on March 1st. By the middle of September the job was done—the mammoth new building had been erected above and around the old one—without in any way slowing up production. Newspapers and trade magazines from coast to coast hailed the achievement as a new record in factory management.



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The world-famous Louis Ludlow, whose latest book, a satire on American politics, created such a stir this last summer, wrote a month before the building was completed:

“Before the carpenters and brick masons began their work Mr. Showers called his men together and told them he realized the difficulties under which they would labor while a new building was being erected over their heads, but that it was necessary that he should have the usual factory output. He asked them if they would see that he got it, and they promised with vim and enthusiasm that they would. How well they kept their promise is shown by the fact that the factory’s output for the six months from January 1 to July 1 of this year was greater in value by \$68,200 than the output of any previous six months in the history of the concern. As fast as a section of the new structure was completed the men would move into it, and every plan that ingenuity could devise was utilized to prevent the work from halting.”

The buildings of this plant covered seven acres of floor space. About 1,250,000 bricks and 1,750,000 feet of lumber went into it.

So much for the first big event of 1910. Pages could be added detailing the improvements which went into the plant, and still

other pages covering the added efficiency which resulted from these improvements. But we must move on to the second big event in the year. It came shortly after the new factory had been completed.

W. N. Showers, Sanford Teter and J. M. Smith were looking out of a factory window one day when they happened to see a group of serious-looking men carefully scanning the ground adjacent to the window which lighted the work-bench of one of their finishers, Joseph Daniels by name.

“Have you lost something?” asked Mr. Smith, at that time in charge of the shipping department, and still a big factor in the Showers success.

“No”—came the answer—“but we have just found something. The center of population is located right here.”

The speaker was Professor Wilbur A. Cogshall, head of the department of astronomy of Indiana University. His companions included his assistant and a number of other interested scientists who, basing their survey on the calculations of the U. S. Census Bureau, had discovered that the exact population-center of the country had chosen the Showers factory-yard as its home.

Following that precedent of raising a flag into the air which

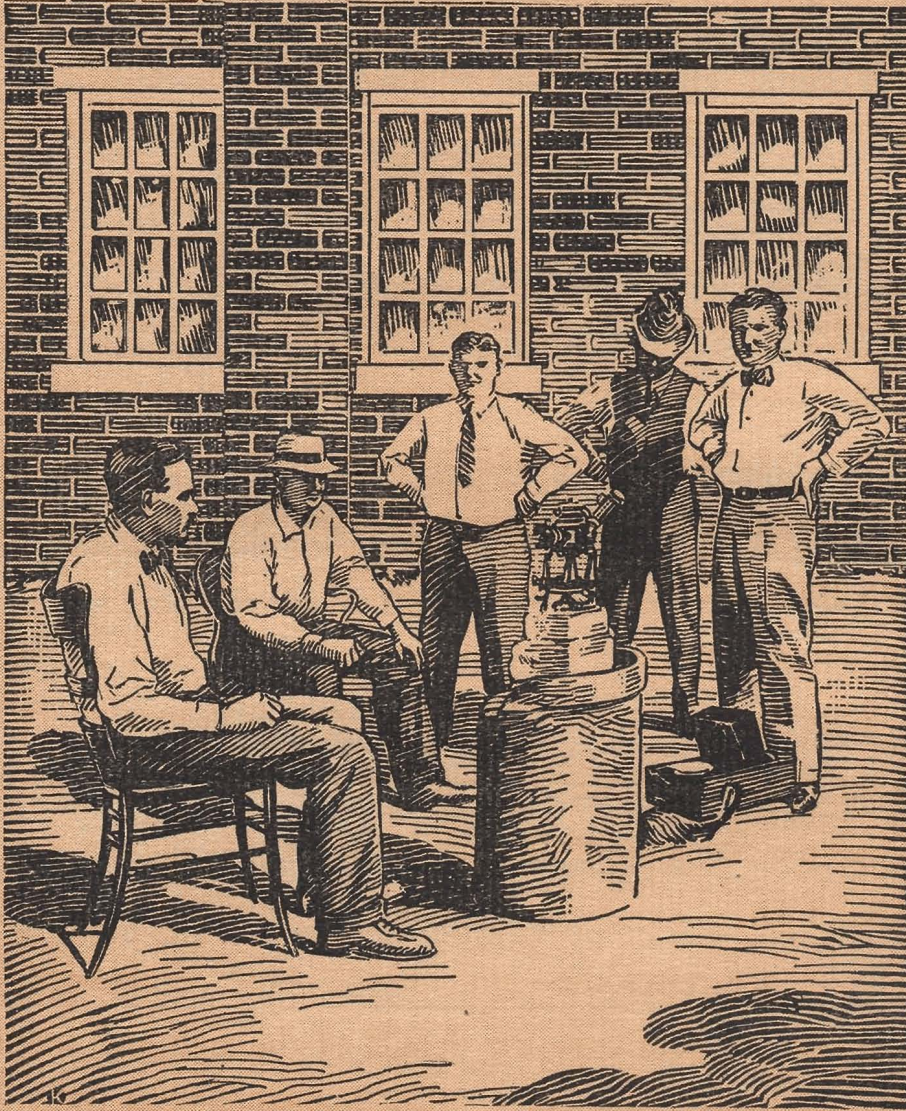
had been set in 1884 when the Showers factories arose from the ashes, a tall flag-pole, suitably marked, was erected on this site and the marker dedicated with appropriate ceremonies.

Again newspapers, magazines and trade publications carried the Showers name to the smallest village and hamlet of the country, with the explanation that if all the people of the United States should decide to meet at one point, each traveling the shortest possible distance to that predetermined point, the lines would converge at that tall flagstaff beside the window of Joseph Daniels, in the factory of Showers Brothers Company at Bloomington, Indiana.

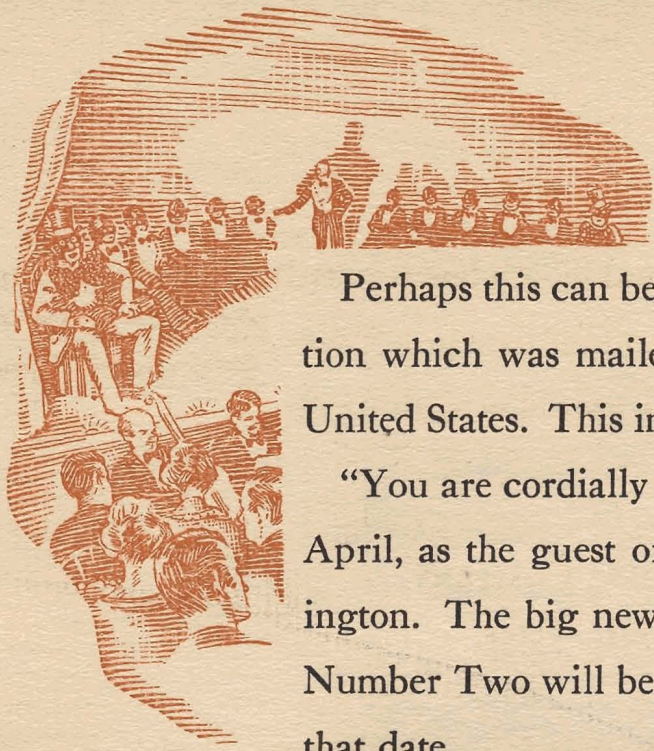
The largest business of its kind continued to grow larger. Two more years elapsed. And 1912 saw still another factory building required to take care of the ever-increasing demand. This was the occasion of the rearing of what is known as Plant Number Two.

Statistics are boresome—and nobody ever remembers them anyway—so we pass over the details of the size and scope of the new unit and come to another incident which illustrates how the Showers family has always succeeded in dramatizing its progress.

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Locating the center of population in front of the Showers factory



Perhaps this can best be done by quoting verbatim the invitation which was mailed to all Showers dealers throughout the United States. This invitation follows:

“You are cordially invited to spend Friday, the eighteenth of April, as the guest of Showers Brothers Company, in Bloomington. The big new addition to our plant known as Factory Number Two will be formally opened and put in operation on that date.

“The wonderful machines and the splendid manufacturing facilities of this plant will fill you with enthusiasm and selling ideas that will repay you a hundredfold for the time spent here, and the new patterns in the Showers Line that will be manufactured in the new factory will be on exhibition.

“The occasion will be consummated by a big Minstrel Show and reception to our customers and friends in the evening. This entertainment will be provided by the men in the Showers Organization, and will be given in a specially constructed theatre in the new factory. It will be a Notable Event in Furniture History.

“Showers Brothers Company takes this opportunity to extend grateful thanks for the immense volume of business which your

continued patronage has made possible, and which has resulted in this wonderful factory—the largest and best case-goods factory in the world—and we are hoping to have you with us on this occasion.

“Very cordially yours,

“SHOWERS BROTHERS COMPANY,

“S. F. Teter,

“April 12, 1913.

“*Secy.-Treas.*”

By a peculiar trick of fate the very invitation from which the above is copied bears on its reverse side the penciled notation:

“Kahn’s Annex—Fit out the following boys with dress suits, shirts and ties.”

Kahn’s Annex, be it known, is a Bloomington clothing store. Apparently somebody had started to make out an order for the costumes of the factory’s employees who were to take part in that memorable minstrel show.

A minstrel show to celebrate the opening of a new factory. Hundreds of customer-dealers from all parts of the country to applaud the Thespians. And a special stage built right in the factory on which to perform. This was an event!

The factory kept open house from ten until six that day. From seven to eight the Bloomington band entertained guests and citi-

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zens with a concert just outside the factory walls. And at eight W. N. Showers himself opened the minstrel show by blowing the whistle of the old plant by means of a cable stretched from the stage. A moment later the machinery in the new plant was under way—and the minstrel show was on.

It is significant that W. Edward Showers, who later succeeded his father to the presidency of the company, made the opening address.

When the last black-face jokes had been told and the curtain had been rung down, the guests danced in the spacious new display room. Three orchestras furnished the music.

And so another mile-stone in the history of the world's largest furniture factories had been reached.

But the growth continued without stop, and in 1915 another great unit was added to the factories. This new addition contained five dry-kilns and a large dimension mill, expansion made necessary by a rapid increase in the demand for Showers kitchen cabinets, which had been introduced a few years before.

By 1919 the kitchen cabinet business had grown to such proportions that an independent plant, sixteen blocks distant from the main properties, was built and put into operation.

In 1920 a still further onrush of business and the company's entry into the field of low-priced furniture of authentic period design was responsible for the erection of still another plant at Burlington, Iowa. This unit was especially located to serve the western trade. Its tremendous size can be realized when it is remembered that ever since the erection of the mammoth Plant Number One at Bloomington, Showers Brothers Company had been the largest case-goods manufacturers in America. Yet the plant at Burlington is even larger than Plant Number One.

In 1923 further expansions in the company's business called for still greater expansions of facilities. Again the feat of 1910 was duplicated, and several of the Bloomington plants were materially enlarged without disturbing production.

With hammers pounding and concrete mixers coughing almost at their elbows, the Showers workmen continued at their labors, working double shifts in order to keep the output ahead of the demand.

Every step in the growth of the Showers facilities has been but a logical progression in the business of making it easy for furniture dealers to meet the demands of the largest number of American home-makers—the great middle classes.



It was decidedly logical then that in the year 1924, W. Edward Showers, president of the company since 1920, conceived the idea of manufacturing chairs to match the bedroom and dining-room suites designed and produced in the Showers factories in the company's own plant.

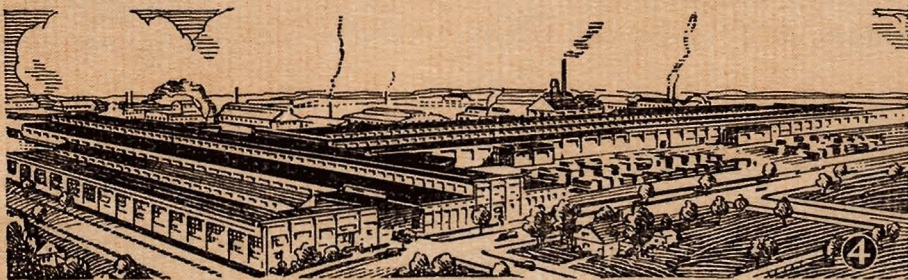
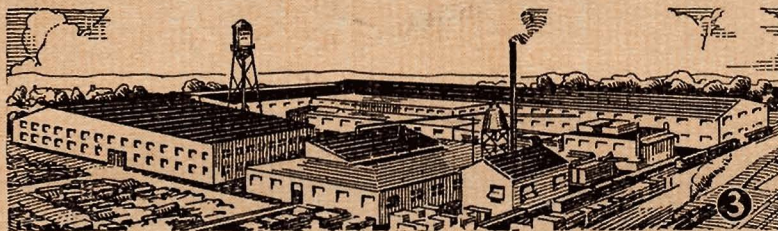
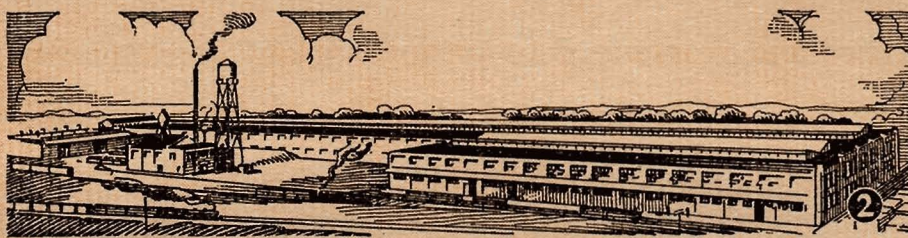
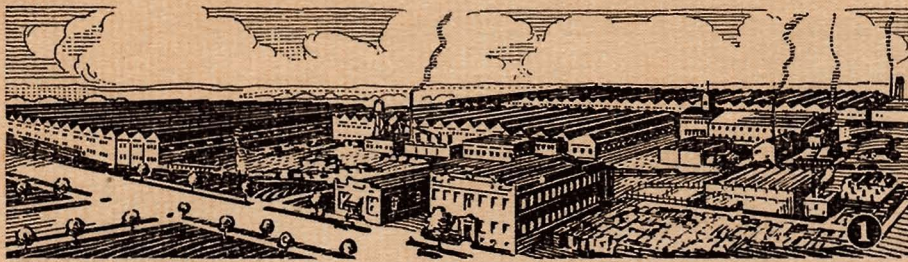
A going chair-plant at Bloomfield, Indiana, was purchased, enlarged and rearranged to conform to the Showers policy of straight-line production methods. That the idea was sound is proved by the fact that the facilities of this factory have had to be increased several times since.

And again we get a glimpse into the human quality which makes it so easy for the Showers family to get along with its employees and customers—and which has been a Showers trait from the very start.

It so chanced that the writer was in conversation with W. Edward Showers shortly after he had decided to take over that Bloomfield factory and bend it to fit the Showers program.

"So your new factory is to be at Bloomfield?" he was asked. "Oh, yes," he said, "we already had plants at Bloomington and Burlington and we couldn't think of locating a new plant anywhere except in a town beginning with a 'B'."

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(1) Office and Main Plants, Bloomington, Ind.; (2) Kitchen Cabinet Plant,
Bloomington, Ind.; (3) Chair Factory, Bloomfield, Ind.;
(4) Western Plant, Burlington, Iowa

There is vision and daring and decision back of the Showers plan. It was these factors that caused the Showers group to pioneer in the introduction of the once daringly new laminated construction in inexpensive furniture—now an accepted principle of modern furniture building.

The same kind of vision sees the Showers name definitely identified among the leaders in the Better Homes Movement—for the good of the American Home and the betterment of the furniture industry.

It sees the Showers name on the directorate of the American Furniture Mart.

And it caused in 1924 the creation of a publication, totally sponsored and produced by the Showers organization, in order to overcome a weakness in the distribution of furniture. This weakness, as seen by the Showers organization, lay in the fact that a new generation of furniture salesmen had arisen in America—a generation for the most part unschooled in the fundamentals of furniture production and unlearned in the art of selling furniture that would conform exactly to the needs of the customer. Then, too, according to an analysis made late in 1923, most of the salesmen in furniture stores over the country



were working on a hand-to-mouth, time-serving basis. They were uninspired with the great possibilities that lay latent in the furniture business. They were not working to the best interests of themselves and their employers.

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And so—to meet this great new need of the industry—to overcome this inertia on the part of retail furniture salesmen, to awaken and inspire them, and to help them better their own condition, a publication known as “The Man on the Floor” was put into circulation.

From first to last it was entirely a Showers enterprise—produced and paid for by the Showers organization. Yet it paid practically as much attention to other types of furniture as it did to those produced in the Showers factories. It conducted a course of instruction in Period Designs. It discussed the problems of Interior Decoration. It gave the uninitiated a glimpse into methods of construction. And, by publishing a series of biographies of successful retailers, it sought to inspire its readers into an appreciation of the opportunities still to be had in the retail furniture business.

The circulation of this magazine, which was distributed absolutely without cost to salesmen in all parts of the country, even-

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tually reached over 30,000—nearly 10,000 more than has ever been secured by any other monthly publication issued to the furniture trade.

Nearly two years after its inception so great an improvement was seen in the attitude of salesmen toward their tasks that the publication was suspended as having served its purpose.

An inspection of the pages of several furniture trade publications of the present year will show that the editorial policy of that magazine, which was inspired and paid for by the Showers organization, has definitely influenced the kind of material that is today being printed for the good of the industry.

And so we come down to date with what seems to be one of the truly interesting commercial romances of the times.

1868 to 1928, full sixty years, and this firm which was but the germ of an idea back in those old cold days of the civil war reconstruction period has grown and grown.

But the idea back of it is the same.

Always the idea of giving service—of dealing squarely—of putting all of the cards on the table—face up!

Always the idea of building furniture in a price class in harmony with the pocketbooks of the greatest number of families.

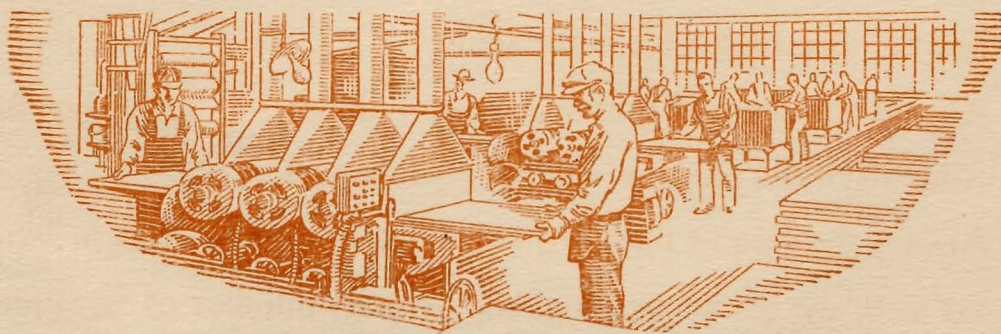
And in these later years the added idea of making that kind of furniture as good looking as it could possibly be made, and giving dollar value or more.

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Sometimes we hear remarks about the "Showers luck"—but when one reviews the history of the company, and becomes aware of the dire sacrifices made in the old days and the daring advances made in the new, he is inclined to attribute this success to the Showers pluck.

And when one goes out into the factories and sees the same faces that were there ten, twenty, and even thirty years ago, he realizes that there is something also in surrounding a business with faithful employees who will stick with it and stand by it through thick and thin.

After all—there is still a lot of romance left in the humdrum thing called "business."





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