

LEVI CARTER PIONEER CAPITALIST AND PHILANTHROPIST

Character and Achievements of the Man Whose Interest in Omaha Bears Fruit Even After His Death and Whose Memory Will Be Perpetuated Through a Beautiful Public Park



ALONG THE SHORE AT LARSEN'S ON THE NORTHWEST SHORE.

A TALL MAN with long grey beard used to ride out on the street car daily in the early '90s from an office in the Mogue building to Sixteenth and Locust street and walk thence to the white lead works in East Omaha. The man seemed a personification of benevolence. His eyes were kindly and his mouth firm though easily breaking into a smile. He walked down across the bottom land where the wind blew among the sunflowers and brush that fringed the margin of the lake. Barefoot boys and laboring men were fishing there sometimes. It wasn't very exciting sport, but it was the best they had. Often the big man would stop and watch the boys and often he would talk to them about themselves and their families. Soon they all came to know him and to know him very favorably, indeed, for he quickly became famous as an inexhaustible storehouse of nickels and dimes. Not only was he a storehouse, but also a liberal and free dispensary of these little nickel and silver pills so efficacious as a cure for juvenile ill.

The boys fishing by the lake knew the pleasant man personally, but they little thought he was the president of the big white lead works in East Omaha. They little thought that the man who found time to stop and talk to them about fishing, who became enthusiastic when a small boy pulled up a line with fish on the hook, was the head of a great industry in which many thousands of dollars were invested and which depended upon himself for its prosperity and its very existence. They certainly did not think that through the munificence of this man the dingy, dirty lake, bordered with weeds and rusty railroad tracks would be converted into a beautiful park, a continuous green sward, dotted with flower beds and shade trees marked with winding driveways.

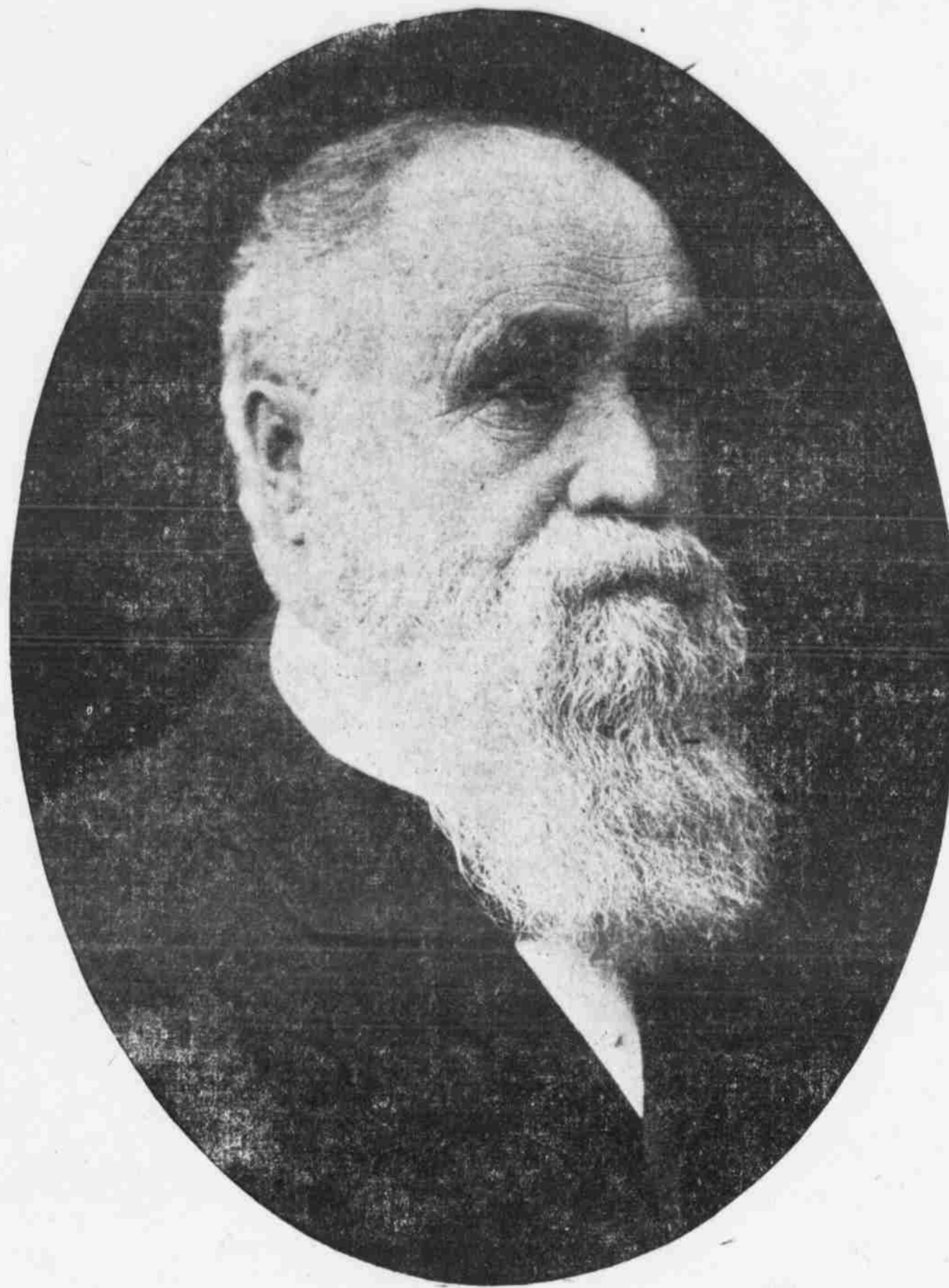
His Generosity Bears Fruit

That great man, simple and unpretending, as all great men are, who used to take daily walks down across the bottom land to the white lead works was Levi Carter. In his mind even at that early day had budded the plan for making a beautiful park at Cut-Off lake. Last Tuesday his widow, Mrs. Salina C. Carter, offered to the city \$50,000 for buying the land on the edge of the lake and improving it. The city accepted the money together with the conditions attached thereto and the result will be that within the space of a few years a beautiful metamorphosis will be wrought. Cut-Off lake, diamond in the rough, as it is and as it was seen long ago by Levi Carter to be, will be cut and polished until it sparkles with a dazzling beauty, until it is the largest as well as by all odds the most attractive park in the city. Indeed if the plans now being perfected are realized there will be no park west of Chicago to compare with it.

Levi Carter was a pioneer of Nebraska and of Omaha. He was one of those sturdy, broad-minded, courageous, indefatigable and philosophical men who braved all manner of dangers and endured all manner of hardships in the dual task of building a great commonwealth and carrying out their own fortunes. Much of his life is faithfully typical of the lives of all the pioneers, but he had many qualities which were not common and which are rare among men.

He came of a hardy and independent race, a race of freedom-loving men, a race which left its peaceful and secure firesides in England and ventured upon unknown seas in search of a land where God could be worshiped freely. Both his grandfathers fought for freedom in the continental army. One of them was with the "embattled farmers" at Bunker Hill and helped fire the "shot that was heard around the world." His paternal grandfather was Moses Carter, a native of Massachusetts, who removed to New Hampshire when he was 25 years of age, and lived there until his death. One of his sons, Levi, married Miss Polly Piper in 1805. She was the daughter of Stephen Piper, a revolutionary soldier, and had had extraordinary educational advantages.

Levi Carter, Nebraska and Omaha pioneer, was the son of these two. He was the seventh of their ten children and was promptly christened by his devout Baptist parents with the Biblical name long honored in the Carter family. He was born in 1830, on his father's farm in Belknap county, New Hampshire. He died in Omaha



LEVI CARTER.

November 7, 1908. He attended the district school near his rural home during his early boyhood, and then went to an academy in New Hampton, where he pursued his studies until his twentieth year. Upon leaving school he learned the trade of carpenter. Then, with his life before him, with his school education completed and his trade learned, he looked about the quiet village among the New Hampshire hills, and that something which seems instinctive in the human makeup bade him go west. He next appears on the frontier in Illinois and Wisconsin, working at his trade. Industry and frugality in two years gave him a little hoard of savings. With this he appeared in 1857 in Nebraska City. He quickly decided that freighting over the plains to Denver and Salt Lake City would be profitable. He invested his money and entered that hazardous undertaking. He continued in this work ten years. The last seven of these he was in partnership with General Isaac Coe. General Coe was a native of New England also. The two met in Nebraska City and though Coe was fifteen years older than Carter they found much in common. Coe had come to Nebraska City in 1858, and had invested his savings in government lands, which had increased rapidly in value. The partnership of these two men continued until General Coe's death in 1899. Together they made money in the freighting business, in developing Rocky mountain mines, in cutting ties for the Union Pacific railroad and in government contracting.

Carter White Lead Works

From 1867 to the time of his death Mr. Carter lived continuously in Omaha and he was closely and very actively identified with the upbuilding of the city. He was best known as the man who built the great Carter White Lead works. These were established in August, 1878, with a capacity of 600 tons a year and a capital of \$60,000. The plant was built at Twentieth street and the Union Pacific tracks. The incorporators were W. A. Paxton, Levi Carter, C. Hartman, W. B. Royal, C. W. Mead, N. Shelton, D. O. Clarke and S. E. Lock. It was the largest white lead works at that time west of Chicago and St. Louis. In 1881 the capacity was increased to

1,200 tons a year and the capital to \$90,000. In 1885 the very low price of white lead resulted in the shutting down of the plant.

Probably it would have remained shut down had it not been for Levi Carter. He had been doing more than visiting the office of the company occasionally. He had laid aside his long black coat and his white shirt and collar occasionally and had donned overalls and gone down into the works and studied the method of manufacture. He had utilized his time and opportunities to get an intimate knowledge of the process. Now, the process of making white lead used for several hundred years was that known as the "Dutch process." Sheets of lead were placed in vats where they underwent an extensive corroding process, which took a long time. Levi Carter had studied the problem and he had decided that if the lead were reduced to atoms instead of being allowed to remain in large sheets the corroding would take but a comparatively short time. He experimented and found that his theory was correct.

Courage Saved the Day

Then he proposed to buy the defunct works. The stockholders were glad to have him make a reorganization, which he did in January, 1889, under the name, Carter White Lead Works. The capital was fixed at \$150,000. Levi Carter was president, Henry W. Yates vice president, and S. B. Hayden, secretary. In 1889 the capital was increased to \$500,000 and Mr. Yates sold his stock to the other two. In the latter part of 1889 improvements costing \$60,000 were made and the yearly capacity was increased to 4,000 tons. The skill of Mr. Carter had been proven, for his new atomizing process was a grand success. White lead could be made at a much smaller cost than by the old process and it was better white lead. The firm was making money literally "hand over fist." Then, on the morning of June 14, 1890, Mr. Carter woke up to find that during the night the plant had been entirely destroyed by fire. How did he take this crushing blow?

"I went to his home the morning after the fire to condole with him," says E. J. Cornish, who was his intimate friend for many



ROAD THROUGH THE JUNGLE THAT WILL BECOME ONE OF THE POPULAR DRIVES.

years. "I found that remarkable man in his shirtsleeves in his library sitting before a table with a pencil and sheet of paper drawing plans for a new factory."

Before the ruins of the old one had ceased to smoulder these plans were completed. Less than one month after the fire the new works were begun and by the following December a new plant, costing \$200,000, had been constructed in East Omaha and was in operation. This is a typical example of the energy and the courage of the man. Achilles-like, he was proof against the arrows of misfortune. Once while he was engaged in freighting, his wagons were besieged by Indians for a number of days. Every day of delay meant a loss of about \$1,000 to Mr. Carter. Yet he slept every night as soundly, ate his meals as heartily and was as cheery as though he was having the most prodigious good luck.

The history of the Carter White Lead Works following their reorganization by Mr. Carter is well known. No enterprise has been more successful. It is now the largest independent manufactory of white lead in the United States, having a capital of \$750,000 and a yearly capacity of 30,000 tons. The branch in Chicago makes about 20,000 tons a year and the house in East Omaha about 10,000 tons. Through the astonishing process discovered by Mr. Carter there is a vast saving in time and labor.

One of Many Enterprises

This was but one of the many big enterprises in which Mr. Carter engaged. He and General Coe operated extensively in cutting ties in the mountains for the Union Pacific and Oregon Short Line railroads. They had tie camps in many parts of the mountains. Mr. Carter sold his interest in this enterprise to Frank Coe, son of General Coe. They also owned over 200,000 acres of land in Wyoming which were disposed of to the Colorado Fuel and Iron company. With General Coe and B. B. Crary he was engaged in furnishing hay to the government. It seemed a kindred fate must have brought these three together. They were all big men in body and broad in mind; they all had long white beards; they all had faces cast in the same mould of benevolence and good will. Often they used to sit together in their office discussing business, looking like three good-natured giant Druids.

"Fortune favors the bold," or, as Disraeli says, "success is the child of audacity." It is notable in all Mr. Carter's operations that he struck quickly and boldly. He "did not fear his fate too much" to "put it to the touch to win or lose it all." And when he lost he never stopped to mourn the past. When he was sure he was right he went ahead. Therefore at the time of his death he was a very wealthy man. Besides being president of the Carter White Lead company, he was president of the Equitable Farm and Stock Improvement company, which had over 200,000 acres of land in Keith, McPherson, Deuel and Lincoln counties, Nebraska, and great herds of fine cattle and horses. These holdings were traded for more than 2,000 acres of very valuable coal land and other property in Vinton county, Ohio.

A man who was very intimately associated with Mr. Carter was asked about his character. "Why, his character was just perfect," he exclaimed. At any rate, it was ideal and lovable. Pliny the Younger, said "The most perfect and best of all characters is his who is as ready to pardon the moral errors of mankind as if he were every day guilty of some himself, and at the same time as cautious of committing a fault as if he never forgave one." This is peculiarly apt in expressing the character of Levi Carter. Though his actions were always above reproach, he was not self-righteous; he did not parade his virtues and he had the charity which could forgive an erring brother. One of his employees in the Chicago house wrote him once stating that his wife was sick so that it would be necessary to perform an operation. He asked his employer for the loan of \$600. Mr. Carter sent the money. Before the check reached Chicago it was found that the young man had defaulted to the extent of more than \$1,000. The officers held the check and wrote the particulars of the case to Mr. Carter, returning the check. Mr. Carter wrote to the employe a letter mildly reproving him for the default, talking to him like a father and enclosing the check again. This treatment touched the young man. He subsequently paid all the money back voluntarily.

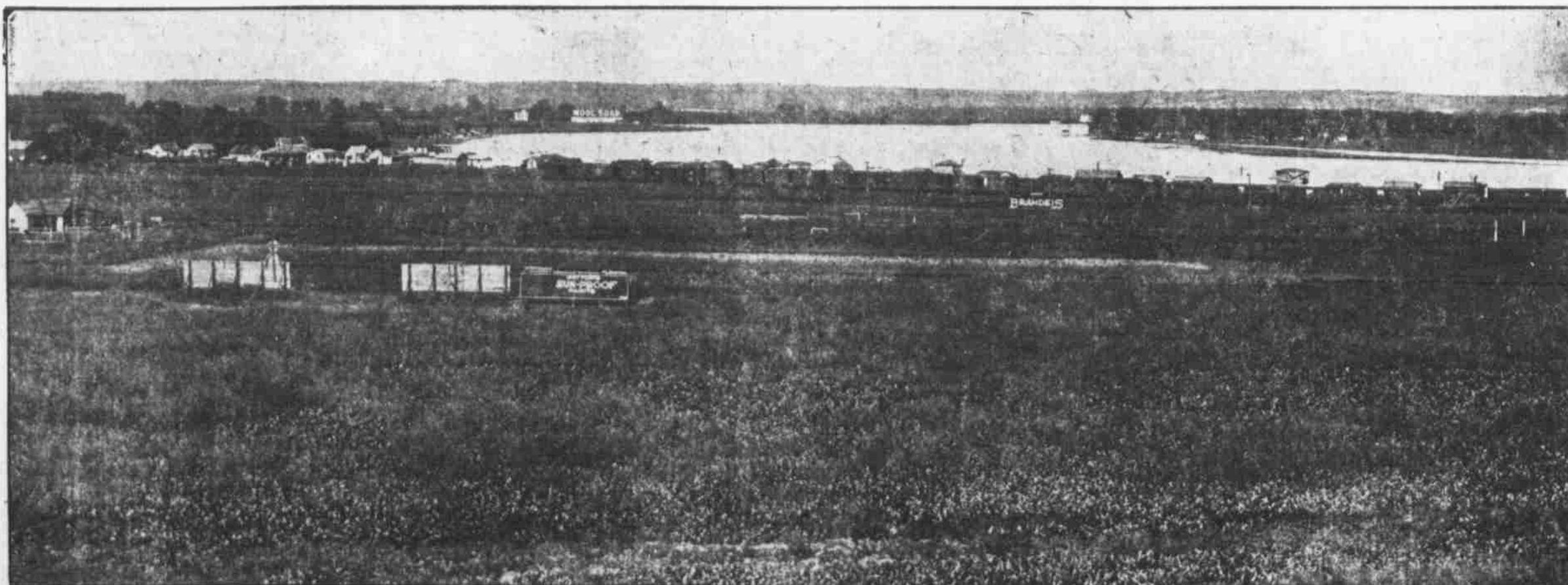
His Daily Walk

Mr. Carter married Miss Salina C. Bliss of Chicago, daughter of George Bliss and niece of General Isaac Coe. He was a man of very domestic tastes and though he was a member of the Omaha club and the Commercial club he preferred his home always and was always to be found there outside of business hours except when he and his wife went to social affairs, and they entertained also considerably in their home at Nineteenth and Chicago streets.

He was naturally a quiet man and extremely courteous. He never entered his office without passing the time of day with his employes. He took life seriously, however, and was not a man of much humor. This mildness of manner and speech caused some people who were poor readers of human nature to misjudge him. But they soon learned their error, for when firmness or drastic action were required none had more than he. Entirely without conceit, he treated all men alike. It made no difference in the cordiality of his greeting whether the visitor to his office was a collector for the Salvation Army or the millionaire president of some eastern bank. Levi Carter made no distinction between the two. System and thoroughness were a part of him. The latter quality is illustrated by the manner in which he studied the white lead manufacturing industry. The former is illustrated by his habits. He came and went with the regularity of clockwork. Every evening after dinner he smoked one cigar; every Sunday he smoked two cigars. He never drank liquor at a bar. He was never known to swear.

His big heart was deprived of the privilege of lavishing its affection on children of his own. His only daughter died at the age of 4 years. Many a child was made happy by him, though, and many a man raised up to a place of eminence through the aid of Levi Carter. "He was a great man to pick up babies on a car" said a man

(Continued on Page Two.)



GENERAL VIEW OF THE SITE OF CARTER PARK FROM THE SOUTHWEST SHORE ON CUT-OFF LAKE.