

The Sohn and Rentschler Co.

Gray Iron Founders.

IN 1875 Henry Sohn was book-keeper in a Hamilton Brewery, Adam Rentschler was foreman in the foundry of the Variety Iron Works of Hamilton, and John Balle was a machinist working at the Niles Tool Works. These men were cronies and were anxious to go into business together, and the more they talked about it the more anxious they became, especially Balle who was thoroughly enthusiastic. None of them had ever been in business and all had been working for the sure thing of daily wages. They had twenty-nine hundred dollars in money between them. Their idea was to start a foundry with a small machine shop attachment and manufacture shelf hardware, and at the same time, furnish the castings and machine fittings required by numerous makers of agricultural implements, who were not themselves prepared to do their cast metal work.

Job Owens had built a factory designed for felt making, but for some reason the project had never been carried forward and the factory had been used for various purposes and was at this time vacant. Sohn, Rentschler and Balle threw up their jobs and rented the Owens factory and started in business as Sohn, Rentschler & Balle, calling their concern the Ohio Iron Works.

These men began to find out what real business was. The enthusiastic Balle began to appreciate the sterling merits of a regular pay-day at the Niles Works, for the boot was now on the other foot, and serious problems arose as to how to scare up the money to pay the men. No paying business had been established and what little there was produced a loss instead of a profit. Everything was mortgaged up to the neck and finally Balle's enthusiasm gave entirely out and he incontinently quit and returned to his first love, study work and a sure pay-day.

Sohn and Rentschler assumed the load, and the heavier the load pressed the harder they worked. They pushed out for trade and they got it. They sought for customers seeking the finest grade of castings and they found those customers and they made those castings and they made money, and they have made money ever since and to-day are looked upon as two of the wealthiest men in the city. They own lots of real estate and are interested in numerous manufacturing enterprises, and in the language of the street, they have money to sell. But no men have worked harder or given closer attention to business. To-day, or any day, Adam Rentschler will be found in his foundry with his coat off and Henry Sohn will be found digging at his

office work. They still occupy the same shop, which has been much enlarged. They bought the place once but it was impossible to get a deed and so they remained tenants.

There is something peculiar about the history of this institution and its product. Iron foundries are the commonest kind of institutions and if you want to buy castings the woods are full of places where you can get them and get them at any price you desire to pay. But there are castings and castings. Some castings are hard and some are soft; some are rough and some are smooth; some are round cornered where they ought to be square cornered, and some are square cornered where they ought to be round cornered. There are situations where any kind of castings will answer and there are situations where the castings must be just so. Sohn and Rentschler early found out that there was a large class of customers wanting small castings true to pattern, neither larger nor smaller nor more crooked nor less crooked. They accordingly gave special attention to matters of shrinkage and strains in small castings and became able to sell a reliable product. It has been the universal custom in foundries to buy the pig iron and then to mix as much scrap iron with it as the castings would stand. This, in small castings, yields a hard product. Sohn and Rentschler found that there was a large demand for small castings, requiring considerable drilling and other work, which should be pure and soft and they accordingly cut loose from the usual plan of mixture and adopted pure iron regardless of cost, and the writer well remembers visiting their shop within the last year and not finding any scrap iron in the yard. They were working on mixtures of pure pig. If customers want their small castings cleaned up cheaply Sohn and Rentschler rattle them in a tumbling barrel, which is the usual cheap process, but this has a tendency to round off the sharp corners of delicate castings. If customers want the sharp corners left on the castings Sohn and Rentschler clean them up in pickling vats. The difficulty of procuring the class of castings which Sohn and Rentschler supply to the trade may be judged from the fact that they are continually making large shipments to New York, Chicago and other distant points where iron foundries can be found by the hundred. They send to New York gray iron castings for electrical apparatuses which is so soft that it can be slightly riveted. Quite a number of very extensive manufacturers of small machinery, using castings by the car load, have long ago concluded that the success of their business rested too much upon the perfection of the castings to justify them in erecting their own foundries. It is easy to build foundries and make castings, but it is extremely difficult to make the quality of small castings called for in some line of manufacture. It is the satisfactory supply of such demands as this that has formed the basis of the success of Sohn & Rentschler.