

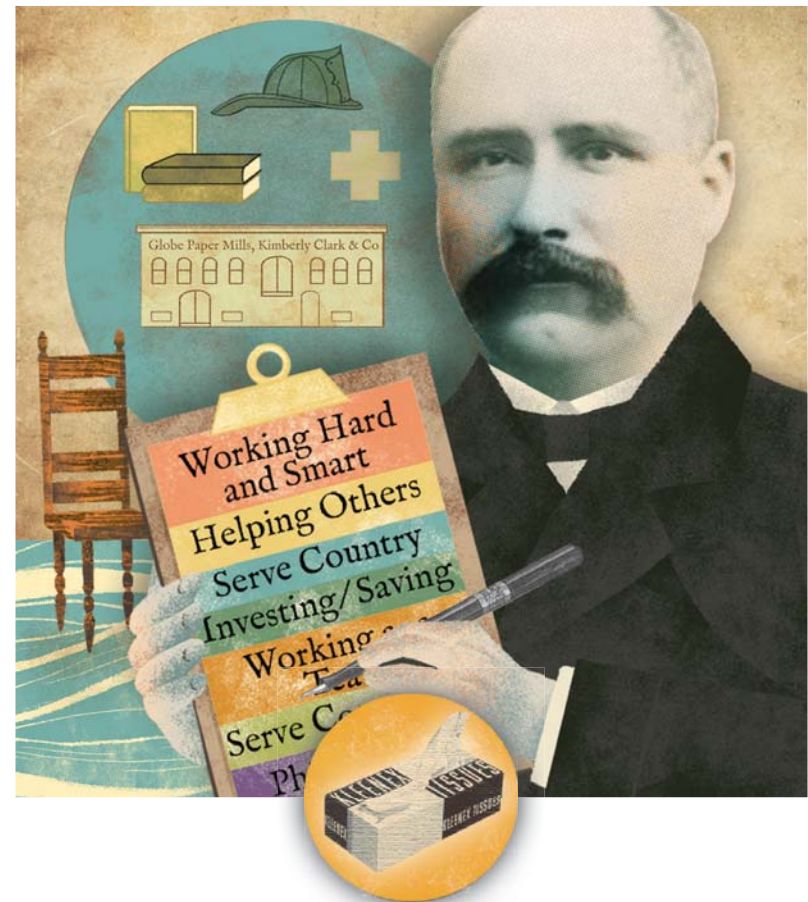
WISCONSIN BIOGRAPHIES

CHARLES CLARK

From Rags to Riches

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GLOSSARY

- Civil War (n): a US war from 1861 to 1865 between the Union, or Northern states, and the Confederacy, or the Southern states
- corporation (n): a type of business with partners
- devote (v): to give attention, effort, and time to a purpose
- land grab (n): the unfair gain of land
- persevere (v): to keep trying and not give up
- philanthropist (n): a person who helps others by giving time or money to causes or charities
- representative (n): a person who is chosen to speak or act for others
- ton (n): 2,000 pounds
- US House of Representatives (n): a government group that helps create and regulate US laws and regulations
- Wisconsin State Legislature (n): a government group that helps create and regulate Wisconsin's laws and regulations

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INTRODUCTION

Sometimes a brief life can have long-term impact. This is especially true if that life is dedicated to serving others. Charles Clark made serving others his foremost goal during his life.

As a child, Charles served his family by earning money to help support them. He also served his country during the Civil War. Charles went on to serve his community as a councilman, a mayor, and both a state and a United States **representative**.

But one of his most lasting gifts was helping to create a large paper business that was founded in northeast Wisconsin. You may have heard of it. Today it is known as the Kimberly-Clark **Corporation**. This company produces items such as Kleenex® and Huggies® and has lasted for over 145 years.

Courtesy of the Neenah Historical Society.



Charles Benjamin Clark

O'Regan, Suzanne Hart. 1983. "Family Letters."



The home Charles built for his family at 561 East Wisconsin Avenue in Neenah, Wisconsin.

Theda Clark

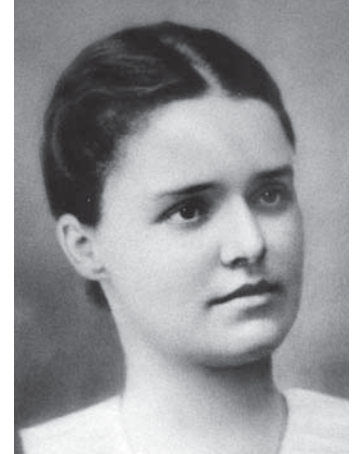
Theda Clark was born February 13, 1871, and was very close to her father, Charles. He taught her the importance of being a **philanthropist** and caring for others.

On December 23, 1899, Theda invited children from Neenah to her home for a Christmas tree party. She decorated her home and provided food and gifts.

The party was a success, but Theda became upset when a newspaper reporter only told how Theda invited poor and needy children who wore ragged clothing. In reality, Theda invited children rich and poor. Her goal was for all children to enjoy themselves. "I particularly asked him not to mention poor people, and there was not a ragged child among them!" Theda wrote in a letter.

Theda died at age 32, three days after the birth of her daughter. In her will, Theda left a large sum of money to be used for a community project. Her family honored her wishes and built Theda Clark Hospital, which is now known as ThedaCare Regional Medical Center.

Courtesy of the Neenah Historical Society.



Theda Clark attended school in Neenah before going to Wells College, an all-women's school in New York. Seven women were in her graduating class.

Photo Credit: Debra Burmeister. (2017).



The home Theda's father built was moved to 583 E Wisconsin Avenue. In its spot, her mother built this home, which is where Theda lived. The house still stands.

CONCLUSION

In September 1891 while visiting his hometown, Charles died approximately 55 feet from the spot he was born. He was about 49 years old. Historians believe he died from a kidney condition called Bright's Disease.

Charles's life began humbly and he died a millionaire. Not only did his business succeed, but Charles himself succeeded in serving his family, community, and country. He started earning for his family as a child, continued as a Civil War soldier and officer, and even served as mayor and in the Wisconsin State Legislature.

But the success he held dearest was teaching his children the importance of giving back. In a letter to his daughter he wrote, "Theda, the best happiness we get in this world is in making someone other than ourselves the most happy." Theda carried this value with her throughout her life. She helped raise money for the Neenah Public Library and the city's opera house.

Giving, not getting, was the cornerstone of Charles's life. Think of ways you can give, to your family, friends, school, and community. Don't ask what they can do for you, but what you can do for them.

Photograph courtesy of the Neenah Public Library.



Charles Clark saw serving others, the community, and his country as a way to be successful in life. *What do you want to do in your life to be successful?*

EARLY YEARS

Around 1842,* Luther and Theda Clark welcomed their son Charles Benjamin Clark in Theresa, New York. To some, Charles was known as C.B. Clark. As a youngster, Charles cut wood to earn money for his family.

After his father died in 1853, Charles and his mother went to live with Charles's older brother, Luther. They traveled by steamer along the St. Lawrence River and through the Great Lakes to Neenah, Wisconsin. But Luther died shortly after the family came.

Photograph courtesy of the Neenah Public Library.



Neenah was once known as "Winnebago Rapids." The name Neenah is said to have come from the Winnebago word *nina*, which means water. This illustration shows what downtown Neenah looked like in 1856, the year it became a village.

*Charles let reporters use whatever year they wished when writing a story about him. That is why we do not know when he was born, but historians believe it was around 1842.

On the day he arrived, Charles went to Robert Hold's furniture factory looking for a job. Mr. Hold told him no work was available. Charles stood firm. He was convinced there must be work for him to do. Impressed by Charles's grit and spunk, Mr. Hold told the black-haired, gray-eyed youth that he could begin bending wood for chairs the next day. Charles **persevered**. He wanted to begin work that very day. And he did.

Charles earned \$7 per month there. It bought necessities for him and his mother. The work was dangerous at times. Charles found that out when a saw cut off two of his fingers. That didn't stop Charles.

Theda and her son lived a frugal life, saving more money than they spent. The pair depended on each other for both financial and emotional support.

Work and School

Children did not always have to attend school in Wisconsin. Some children worked to earn money for their families. They would work in factories or shops. Others sold items like newspapers or gum.

The first Wisconsin law requiring children to go to school passed in 1879. Those ages seven to 15 were supposed to go to school at least 12 weeks per year. Laws like this were to help increase the number of children who went to school. A law in 1889 stated those younger than 13 years had to have a permit to work.

Courtesy of the
Neenah Historical Society.



The Jacobson children helped in their family's meat market called Nelson and Jacobson in Neenah, Wisconsin.

SERVING OTHERS

Despite his demanding business and family life, Charles found time to serve his community. He became a Neenah City Council member and the city's mayor from 1880 through 1882. Charles was elected as a representative to the **Wisconsin State Legislature** in 1884 and then to the **US House of Representatives** in 1886 and 1888.

Charles didn't always enjoy the political life, especially living away from Wisconsin. In a letter to his daughter, he wrote, "Theda, this politics is not to my liking and I am going to get out of it, if I possibly can." Only his strong sense of civic duty kept him involved.

While in office, Charles successfully fought for Wisconsin flood victims and protected Oneida Indian land from the **land grabs**. He stood strong for women's suffrage even though most of the bills he voted in favor of were unsuccessful.

Library of Congress. Digital ID: cph 3c18607.



Charles (lower left) traveled between Washington, DC, and Neenah to keep up with his duties to Kimberly, Clark and Company when he was a member of the US House of Representatives.

Kimberly, Clark and Company was more financially successful than its area competitors. This was partly because the Big Four drew modest salaries and reinvested their earnings into the company.

The business quickly expanded. It constructed new mills and expanded others. Kimberly, Clark and Company had operations in Neenah, Appleton, De Pere, and Kimberly. That last town was named after John Kimberly. By 1885, the company could produce over 70 **tons** of paper each day. The types of paper made included newsprint, wrapping paper, and book paper. The company's success created a nickname for the area: the Paper Valley.

The Big Four were equal partners in the company. Each man taught the others what he learned and any special skills he had to make their company successful. As a born leader, Charles became manager of operations, directing the mills' activities.

Photograph courtesy of the Neenah Public Library.



Kimberly, Clark and Company partnered with Minnesota investors to own the Atlas Mill in Appleton.

Courtesy of the Neenah Historical Society.

RAGS!
3¼c. RAGS!
 —WE WILL PAY—
Three and One-Quarter Cents per Pound
 For Country Mixed Paper-Rags, delivered at our mill.
 Rag Dealers may ship direct.
 Remittance promptly on receipt of stock.
KIMBERLY, CLARK & CO.,
NEENAH, WIS.

At first, Kimberly, Clark and Company used rags to make paper. Women separated the rags and cut off any hard objects like buttons. The rags were then shredded, boiled, and made into a pulp. The pulp was then put into a mold and pressed until paper was formed.

CIVIL WAR

The **Civil War** between the northern US and southern Confederate states broke out in 1861. When President Abraham Lincoln asked for volunteers to support the North, Charles answered the call. In August 1862, Charles enlisted in the 21st Regiment of the Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry as a wagoner. He earned \$14 per month and had to buy his own food and clothing from it. But Charles often went without and sent the money home to his mother instead.

Charles later advanced from wagoner, ultimately becoming first lieutenant of his company. He participated in many battles and traveled through much of the eastern and southeastern US. He visited states including Georgia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Virginia, and Tennessee.

In June 1865, Charles returned home to a surprise. His mother had saved the money he'd sent her. She'd supported herself doing domestic tasks such as sewing. Charles invested that saved money to become a partner in the H.P. Leavens Hardware Store.

Courtesy of the Neenah Historical Society.



Charles was a soldier until the war ended in 1865. This photograph of Charles in his Civil War uniform is one of the earliest photographs of him.

FAMILY LIFE

Two years after he arrived home from the Civil War, Charles married his sweetheart of six years, Caroline Hubbard. Charles's mother, Theda, lived with them.

The young couple's family grew. First, their daughter Theda arrived in 1871, then Caroline in 1880, and finally Charles (Billy) in 1883. Shortly after little Theda was born and 18 years to the day after his father had died, Charles's mother passed away.

As a family man, Charles was a dominant force in his children's lives, especially his daughter Theda's. He wanted her to be strong and independent. He wrote in a letter to her: "... for the young women of the times must be more than their mothers—or as men. They must be more. The spirit of the times calls on women for a higher order of things and the requirements of the women of the future will be great."

Not only was Charles **devoted** to his family, but he also had a great sense of civic duty. He served as a Neenah firefighter beginning in 1869 and assisted in Neenah's first efforts to form a public library. In addition, Charles supported building Appleton's Prescott Hospital, the area's first hospital.

O'Regan, Suzanne Hart. 1983.
"Family Letters."



Caroline Hubbard Clark
(around 1889).

O'Regan, Suzanne Hart. 1983.
"Family Letters."



Theda (center) was nine years older than her sister, Caroline, and 12 years older than her brother, Charles.

KIMBERLY, CLARK AND COMPANY

In 1872, Charles began a new business venture — a paper mill. He sold his share of the hardware store and pooled his money with John Kimberly, Havilah Babcock, and Frank Shattuck. They became known as "The Big Four." They named their business Kimberly, Clark and Company.

The Big Four's first purchase was a flour mill on Neenah's Fox River. They tore the building down to build a two-story factory called the Globe Mill. On October 22, 1872, the mill created its first sheet of rag paper. The mill could produce two tons of paper daily and employed about 40 people. As none of the Big Four had experience making paper, they hired expert papermaker Myron Haynes as the company foreman.

The Globe Mill was not the first paper mill in the area. Six Neenah residents had formed the Neenah Paper Company in 1866. Appleton also had a mill. This area was ideal for papermaking. The Fox River supplied the power needed to run the mills. The river also provided the 30,000 to 50,000 gallons of water required to make each **ton** of paper.

Photograph courtesy of the Neenah Public Library.



The Big Four (clockwise, beginning in lower left): Havilah Babcock, Frank Shattuck, Charles Clark, and John Kimberly