I much dislike to refer to myself in this narrative; but from the year 1857 to 1862 circumstances forced me to take a leading part among the Belgian settlers, and the truth must be told. On our arrival in New York in 1853, I had gone directly to Philadelphia, and there I remained until to a certain extent I could understand the English language. Having remained four years in that city, upon the urgent request of my parents I visited my countrymen on the then frontier. When I left Philadelphia, little did I think that I should be induced to remain among them — much less so, when I saw the condition of the settlers on my arrival.

As I was well known among the people, the news of my visit to the settlement made some noise, chiefly because it was known to them that I had received an English education in Philadelphia. Knowledge of the English language was an accomplishment so rare, that among the 15,000 Belgian settlers it was said not one could converse in that tongue.

I found the people apparently very poor, but a more industrious crowd of men, women, and children I have never seen. Many of them were felling trees and clearing land; others were busy shaving shingles by hand, while women were splitting the blocks, and the children were packing the shingles; old people were cooking meals; some men were hauling shingles to Green Bay in lumber wagons drawn by oxen; some men were harvesting, others threshing with flails, others burning logs and branches; many were making or brewing their own beer, and nearly all the men were smoking tobacco which they had raised on their own land. Many of them had cattle, some of them had wagons and yokes of oxen, a few had teams of horses; many raised their own pork; those having maple trees on their land would make their own sugar from maple sap; and all or nearly all of them had patches of from five to twenty acres under cultivation.

Such was the condition of the settlers when I came among them in 1857. They were emerging from their first