

HISTORY OF TUSCOLA

Social, Political & Businesses

1857 – 2007

...it is hoped that this attempted compilation of township history may at least amount to an interchange of knowledge, which being collected and refreshed shall put all upon equal footing for a new beginning, in keeping up the chronicles of our "little Utica."

*Henry C. Niles
Historian*



William Brian and his horse Tymo
The earliest settler in Tuscola Township, having moved here in 1834.

Tuscola's Best Historian

Tuscola and Douglas County are indeed indebted to the late Henry Clay Niles, Douglas County's first surveyor.

Mr. Niles made the first surveys of the county and assisted in laying out the town of Tuscola in 1857.

However, it is in the role of historian that the people of today owe him the greatest debt of gratitude. Had it not been for him, Tuscola would be able to learn but little of its earliest days.

Mr. Niles was the author of the first complete Douglas County history, published in 1876. This was known as the centennial history, the word "centennial" referring to the centennial of American Independence.

In 1876, the Congress appropriated \$200 for each county in the nation to pay for the writing and publication of a "centennial" history.

Mr. Niles was chosen to write this work.

J. T. Williams and B. J. Parks went to the printing office of the Illinois Industrial University at Urbana to set the type and the history was printed and bound there.

Mr. Niles as surveyor, drew most of the maps for the historical atlas, which was published by W. R. Brink and Company, Chicago, in 1874.

He also drew a fabulous map of the city of Tuscola as it was in 1884. This map hangs in city hall today.

An infinitely meticulous work, the map shows ditches, boardwalks,

drainage and all manner of intricate detail.

Mr. Niles was the principal author of the Douglas county history published in 1884. This is without doubt the best work on county history as subsequent publications were in the main based on this one.

Mr. Niles was born in Baltimore, October 12, 1827. His father, Hezekiah, was an intimate acquaintance of Henry Clay and editor of the Niles Register, a publication of strong Whig leanings.

Young Mr. Niles came to Douglas County in 1856 and clerked for his brother-in-law, L. C. Rust, for a time. In 1859, when Douglas County was formed, he became the first surveyor and served until 1881 when he was made master-in-chancery of Douglas County.

He was serving in this capacity at the time of his death on September 21, 1901 and was buried in Tuscola cemetery.

He was married to Miss Rebecca Brown of DeWitt County in 1858. They had five children.

From his background as a surveyor, he brought quality of accuracy to his writings, which were characterized by high standards of literary excellence. Any compiler of Douglas county historical material soon comes to sing the praises of this prolific and proficient author of earlier days.

