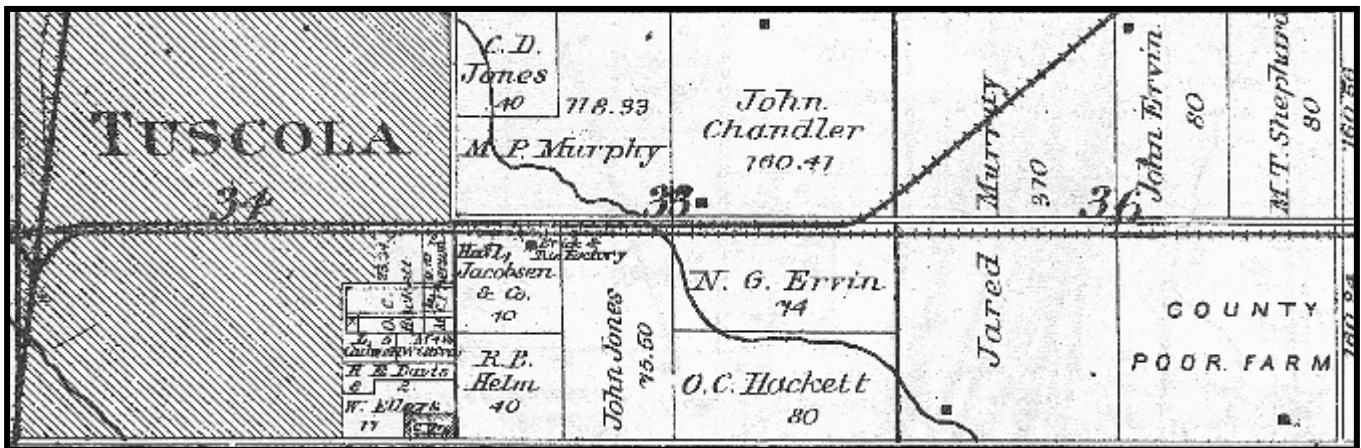


## THE ALMS HOUSE DOUGLAS COUNTY POOR FARM

Douglas County in 1859 had a multitude of tasks on its plate trying to set up the newly formed county. One such charge was dealing with the county's indigent population. The solution was far from satisfactory. One family in each neighborhood volunteered to take in the destitute assigned to them by their precinct officer. The county court paid the family in restitution for their care.

In December 1867, the southwest quarter of Section 36, township 16 north Range 8 east, was purchased by Douglas County from J. M. Maris as a poor farm, at a cost of some \$6,400. This farm was



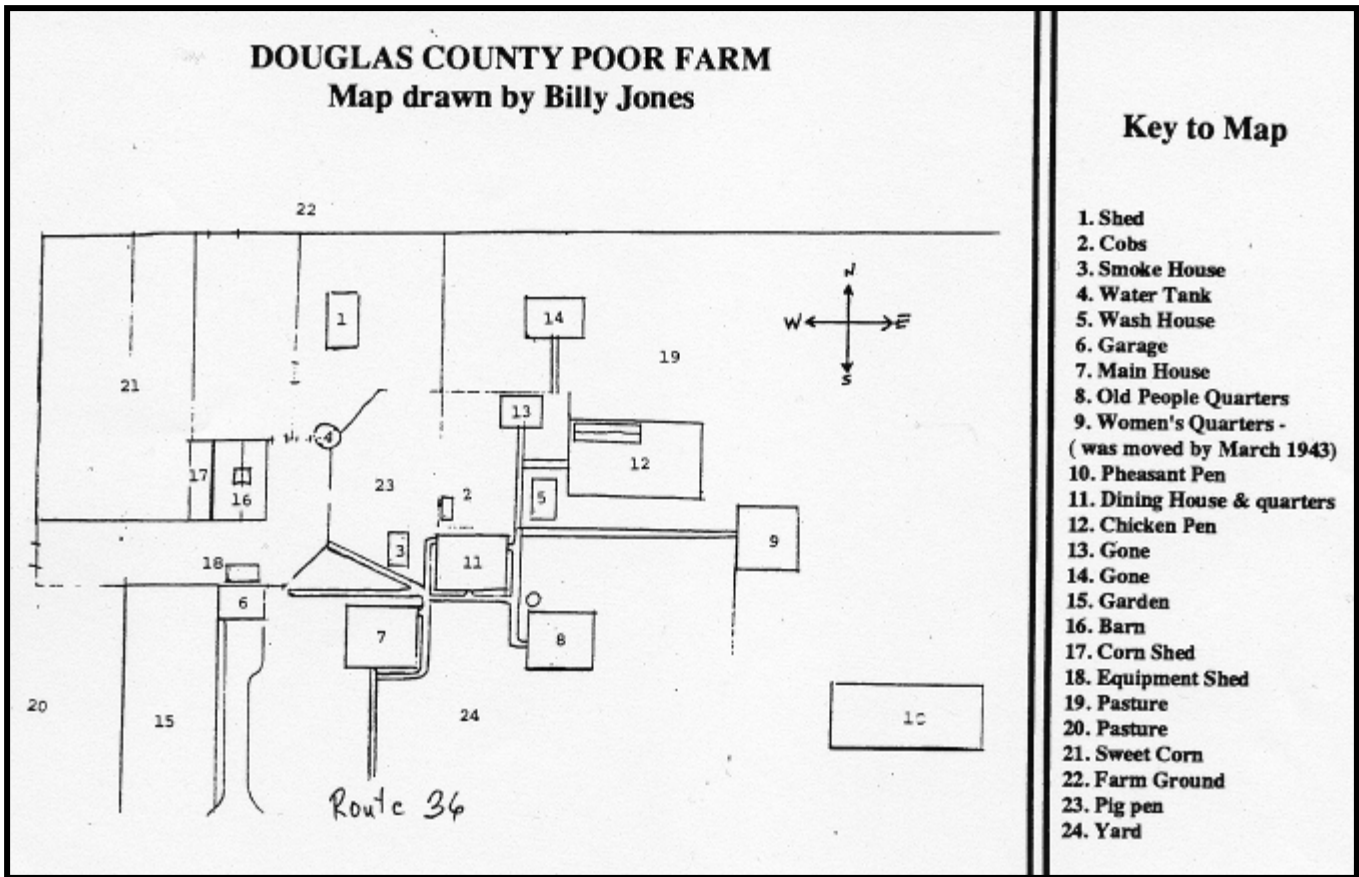
Let for one year "to the person who would give the most for the use of the farm, and would board and take care of the paupers of the county for the least amount per week each." This did not include clothing nor medical attention. The following January the farm was let to George Scott at \$3.11 per acre rental, \$2.87 each per week for the board of paupers. In the following year, the rental was increased to \$3.25 per acre, and the board to \$3.00 per week. There were but three paupers on the farm at this time, a large number still being provided for in the old way.

In September 1870, a report showed the total number admitted since March 1, 1868, to be thirty-seven; the number of births, two, a total of thirty nine; the total number discharged was thirty-two, with three deaths, which only left four occupants. From this date to December 1870, only three had been added to the number and yet the county was paying considerable sums for the maintenance of paupers elsewhere. Some of the board members were dissatisfied with the situation and made an effort to dispose of the farm. A better policy prevailed and all paupers were ordered to be transferred to the farm.

On January 3, 1883, the whole plan of conducting the farm changed. A contract was entered into with John Lewis for five years dating from March 1, 1883, at a cash salary of \$600 per annum. Lewis was to furnish one good team and implements to cultivate forty acres in corn, wheat and oats, and to cut hay and harvest the crops at his own expense; to superintend and manage the alms house, the county providing the furniture, for the entire care of the paupers and supplies for both the paupers and the Lewis family. A good two-story frame building was provided for the use of the farm.

Most people who remember the poor farm recall that there were three houses on the grounds. Folks traveling the highway in front of the main house remember old people in rocking chairs on the porch. But, there were more than three houses there. Billy Jones, of Villa Grove, who lived on the poor farm as a teenager because his parents Clint and Nora Jones took over the superintendency, recalls the main

house, dining house, and old people's quarters standing in 1943, but there were also foundations for three other buildings.



**Billy Jones drew this map of the farm from memory, donating it to the Douglas County Museum so that a piece of Douglas County history could be preserved forever.**

In 1945, the county farm was discontinued as a poor farm and was rented as a grain farm. In April 22, 1963, a tornado hit the property, doing extensive damage. Douglas County sold the poor farm to Victor and Lloyd Rahn in 1964.

During its lifetime, the poor farm had fourteen superintendents whose families lived in the main house. Family members helped cook and clean, look after the paupers, do chores outdoors and help with the farming.

**Superintendents of the Poor Farm**

George Scott 1869-1870  
 Wilford G. Buckler 1871-1874  
 Wiley Turbeyville 1875-1882  
 John T. Lewis 1883-1886  
 Oscar Maris 1896-1899  
 Joshua Cambridge 1900-1913  
 Franklin H. Toland 1914-1915

Charles L. Cambridge 1915-1921  
 I. H. Allison 1922-1924  
 L. C. Cox 1925-1930 (Cas Cox)  
 Charles A. Porter 1930-1935  
 Milton E. Billings 1935-1943  
 Clint Jones 1943-1956  
 Herbert Wright 1957-1963

Billy Jones was in sixth grade when his parents took over the superintendency of the poor farm. There were thirteen old men and women at the time, but ten months later, in December, there was only one woman remaining, and she left shortly after that. Billy remembers that there was indoor plumbing in the dining room and main house only. In the other remaining houses, chamber pots and wash tubs were used. The water was carried to the tubs from other buildings, and it was heated on a big stove. Billy also remembers getting \$2.00 a week for feeding and watering 500 pheasants for the county.

During Billy's time on the poor farm, two houses were moved off the grounds. The dining house was moved into Tuscola by Bob Burgett and is located at 110 E. Barker Street. The second house removed from the poor farm was cut in two. The two sections sit side by side at 604 and 606 S. Indiana Street.

Exerpts from *History of Douglas County*, J. H. Battle, 1884 and Douglas County Museum *Cabin Chatter*, Lynnita Aldridge Brown. Photos courtesy Douglas County Museum, *Cabin Chatter*, Lynnita Aldridge Brown and Anna & Peg Billings.



Pauline Maris (Baker) was born at the poor farm July 25, 1899 when her father Oscar was superintendent.



These two pictures were taken at the time Milt Billings was the farm superintendent. They were taken on the occasion of an official inspection and annual dinner prepared by the superintendent's family. Among the people in the top photo are Harley Helm, Esther (Peg) Billings, Everett McCumber, Emma (the cook), Mrs. Russell Parish, Mr. & Mrs. Milt Billings, Mrs. Russell Swisher, Luther Black, Clyde Larimer and Will McCarty. The bottom photo shows the roof of the men's quarters (right hand corner).

