

## AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS

(excerpt and edited from the Tuscola Saturday Journal, 1895)

The great wealth of Douglas County is in the productiveness of the soil. There are no mines within the country and the timbered interests are of little consequence. The wet lands, which were used for grazing, have become the most productive of any. Corn, oats, wheat, hay and broomcorn constitute the chief products, corn and broomcorn being the most prominent. Instances are abundant where crops have been known to more than equal the value of the land upon which they grew. Corn, however, is the great staple, and fully three-fifths of the acreage of the county is devoted to it. The average yield of the county is about fifty bushels per acre, and the average price near forty cents per bushel. Wheat and oats have been remunerative the past season, some fields of the former threshing out forty-five bushels per acre, and of the latter, eighty bushels. Considerable hay is raised; the price per ton ranging from \$7.00 to \$12.00. Stock-raising, especially the development of the better strains, has for some time received considerable attention. Hereford, Shorthorn and Jersey cattle, Norman, Clyde and Percheron draft horses and Hambletonian roadsters, Cotswold and Southdown sheep and Poland-China hogs have all been brought to the highest standard of excellence. The county is no better adapted to raising grain than stock, but the former has always yielded the best results.

Drainage – This subject has been given much attention with the past few years, and has resulted in bringing almost every acre of land within the county under cultivation. According to the assessors of the various townships, the percentage of swamp land in 1880 was five and in 1892 was not thought of enough importance to enter it upon the records. The tiling on many farms has been so thorough that every foot of land has been brought under its influence.

From the standpoint of agricultural pursuits there is no county on the face of the globe that is more responsive to the touch of industry. If a person cannot succeed here it is useless to go elsewhere. Harvest follows tillage and seedtime as surely as day follows night. The only demand that nature makes is for you to be industrious, and her richest blessings will be showered upon you. An investment in Douglas County, in real estate, is a veritable gold mine and a home in the country a haven of rest and quiet.

# FARMING INDUSTRY

Farming is a thriving business around Tuscola, benefited by the extremely fertile land of the area, and the nature of the terrain which permits full usage of all the land.

Census of 1870 reported 14,618 acres of Corn; 687 acres of Wheat, 2,411 acres of Oats.  
Improved land 36,262 acres; Unimproved land 1,605

White population – 2,835; Colored population – 28; Voters - 749

Horses – 1,125; Cattle – 2,236; Mules- 153; Sheep – 461; Swine – 3,774

Census of 1958 reported 256,000 tillable soil in Douglas County. The average growing season was 173 days. 436 farms raising livestock – 2,142 dairy cows; 3,368 sows with an average litter of seven pigs. Total agricultural income for the county between 1950-57 fluctuated between 13.3 and 15.2 millions of dollars. Of this, approximately two-thirds came from grain crops, with another third from livestock production. For the year, 1958 grain production averaged 65 bushels per acre of corn, 27 bushels per acre for beans, 60 bushels per acre of oats and 45 bushels per acre for wheat.

Market quotations from March of 1965 wheat – \$1.35 a bushel  
Corn - \$1.24 a bushel  
Soybeans – \$2.82

Market quotations from August 1, 2006 wheat – \$3.35 a bushel  
Corn - \$2.40 a bushel  
Soybeans- \$5.00 a bushel

2006 Douglas County yields for Corn: 153 bushels to the acre, Beans: 52 bushels to the acre, Wheat: 57 bushels to the acre.

## The Steven Farm

Alexander Grant Steven moved his wife, Edith, and sons Harold and Wayne to Douglas County around 1912 having purchased a 160 acre farm east of Tuscola on Route 36. It was a stock (cattle and hogs) and grain farm. He used draft horses to do the work. He added acreage to the adjoining east. A new brick home was built in 1916. The cattle barn with a windmill and the stone oval corncrib was built later. The crib was used to store ear corn shucked by hand by several hired men. The corncrib was used until 1950 when the combine was used for harvest.

Mr. Steven added the Conlin farm adjoining them on the west in 1925. Alexander passed away in 1928 at the age of 58 leaving his sons with a mortgage on 200 acres and lots of work. Harold was killed in an auto accident in 1933 leaving Wayne and his mother with the responsibility of the farm. They survived the depression continuing with cattle until 1945 and hogs until 1950. The farm is all grain now.

CIPS purchased 1 acre for a sub station in 1950 about the same time the city purchased acreage south of the ditch for a sewer plant and a park. The Elks Club bought 1 acre for a new clubhouse in 1956.

I-57 came through 53 acres of farm in 1990. McDonalds purchased an acre of property in 1991. Soon after, the city purchased 50 acres where the mall is located. The city purchased the remaining acreage in 1996. The Korean War Museum bought 22 acres on the east edge of the farm. Standard Oil purchased 10 acres for a service station.

Wayne married Leona Timmons July 25, 1948. They had two children: Ann Steven Leisner and James Steven. Ann is married to Eric Leisner and has two children: Johanna Morgan and Brendan Steven Leisner. Wayne passed away in 1996. The family continues to farm the remaining acreage.



**1<sup>st</sup> home on the Steven Farm when they moved from Champaign County in 1912.**



**Leona Timmons and Wayne Steven at Ervin Park the year before they were married in 1947.**



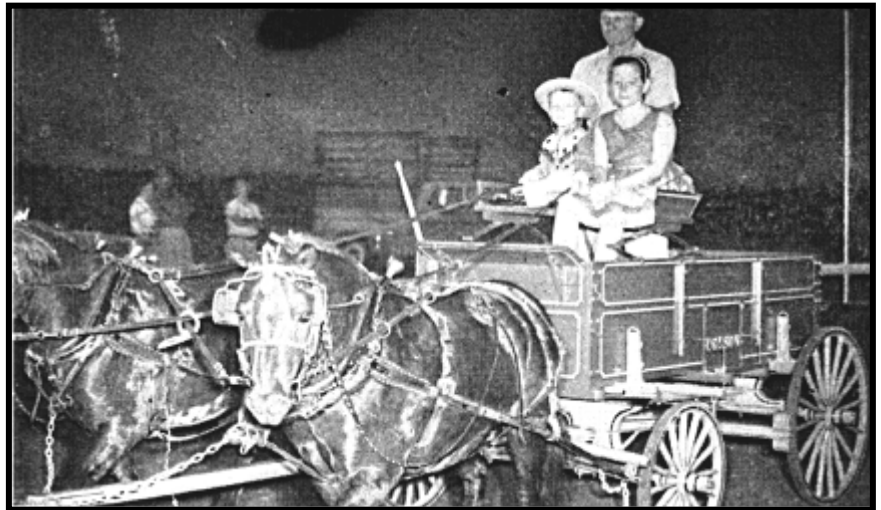
**Frank Walden and Wayne Timmons**  
at a carnival in Tuscola 1919.



**Beryl Lewis Timmons**  
**and Ivan Fullerton**  
at the Court House where  
they temporarily attended  
high school after the fire  
that destroyed the Union  
School in 1921.



**Evelyn Timmons Creager**  
**and Leona Timmons Steven**  
1941



**Jimmy and Ann Steven** under the watchful eye of their  
father, **Wayne Steven**, show their team of ponies, hitched  
to a miniature farm wagon at the Tuscola Pony Show.

**Earnest Houser at 85 Years Old and 70 Harvests!**  
1993 - (excerpts from an article by Doug Hettinger)

Ernest Houser remembered when U. S. 36 was a dirt path with grain fields stretched over the land on either side only brought to life by the wind.

He was there when the brick foundation for what Eventually became the highway was laid by hand. And like those bricks, sewn one by one into the dirt, Houser planted the seeds of 70 harvests into the earth, one by one for 70 years.

From age of nine, Houser worked at the Steven Farm east of Tuscola. During the 1920's, Ernest and his father, Orin, were known around Douglas County for their quality and quantity of their work. The owner of the Steven Farm, Wayne Steven, remembered, "We had 30-32 head of horses on the farm then. It was all done with horses. The equipment was really primitive; we didn't have any rubber-tired tractors. Shucking corn was done by hand. Ernest was known as the best corn shucker in this part of the country when he was in his prime. Workers used to compete to see how many bushels then could shuck. One week Ernest shucked 900 bushels in six days."

Ernest's work was the foundation for what is much of the Steven Farm. He hauled all of the brick and concrete that went into the Steven home, a big, solid structure, with a team of horses and a wagon and dug the basement of the home with a team and scraper. He also hauled most of the field drainage tile and helped to install it.

Ernest didn't have much education, nevertheless, his land-wise senses told him times were not so good. "Set me down for two weeks and I'll never get up," he said as the prairie winds whistled restlessly around the tractors and trucks. "I just hope to die with my shoes on." Ernest passed away March 17, 1998.



**November 13, 1930 – Oscar Decker, Mrs. Decker, Wayne Steven, Harold Steven, Ernest Houser**

## FARM BUSINESSES

Shannon and Havens Brothers conducted a general poultry and egg business on South Central Avenue. T. E. Dickson was manager and H. C. Shelton and W. Henson were in his employ. The company secured a lease from the C. I. & W. Railroad for the purchase of the C. I. & W. R. R. park ground and erected a poultry building.

Lester Implement Company for forty years was located on the corner, where Ervin Lester was located. This large three-story implement building was erected by the founder of the business, who was the father of Elmer Lester. Upon the death of the father, Elmer Lester succeeded him in the business. Mr. Lester carried a large stock of all kinds of farming implements and manufactured hand made harnesses. Paul Lester was the assistant manager and James E. Payne was the bookkeeper.

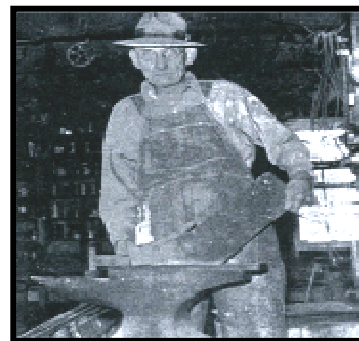
Another Tuscola businessman who deserves mention is I. L. Held, manager of the Minneapolis Threshing Machine Company. Mr. Held was among the city's most progressive men. He stood high in the esteem of the farmers with whom he dealt and was a strong advocate of every move of progress tending to benefit the farmer and the community in general.

F.E. Rose Grain Company conducted a grain, coal, and seed business and was the owner of what was probably the largest grain elevator to be found in Douglas County, having a capacity of 80,000 bushels. There was a modern grain office in a one-story brick building near the C. I. & W. Depot. F. E. Rose managed the company. He was born in Gallipolis, OH in 1878. Others persons connected with this grain company were: F. W. Read, J. K. Horton, J. W. Horton and F. L. Reader.

C. A. Vest was born near Greenville, IL on April 29, 1870. In 1909 he came to Tuscola and opened a harness shop and manufactured harnesses and sold buggies. He had a line of farm implements and tractors. In addition to his implement business he had an up-to-date shoe repair department. Harness repairing and harness manufacturing were also given attention by him.

H. L. Gates came from Gallia County, OH to Douglas County in and started farming five miles north of Tuscola in 1898. The first year he had a team of horses, a walking plow, a harrow, and used an uncle's corn planter to plant his crop. Forty-eight years later, a tractor, a three bottom plow, a four-row cultivator, corn-husking machine and many other modern machines were used on his farms. H. L. Gates, C. E. Gates and Arthur Walter founded Gates Seed Corn Company and incorporated into Tuscola in the early fall of 1937. Gates Seed Company produced its first seed crop in 1937. Fletcher A. Fox sold hybrid seed corn for Gates. Hybrids were little known and when farmers didn't realize the value of hybrids, Fox built up a good business. One of his greatest satisfactions was, "my customers profit every time they buy Gates Grown Genuine Pfister Hybrids from me."

Frank Firestone was the owner of the Firestone Blacksmith Shop. He was born in Marion County, IN in 1862. Frank came to Tuscola in 1900.



The Tuscola Grain Company was a co-partnership, consisting of Wilber F. Goodspeed, of Tuscola and W. Ernest Orndorff of Mattoon. They owned and operated both the large grain elevators in Tuscola, one at the east end of North Central Avenue, and the other on the I. C. railroad right-of-way, just south of the I. C. station. In addition to their grain business they had a large feed store house and did a general feed and seed business. They had a nicely equipped and modern office on Parke Street. Wilber Hopkins was in charge of the business for them.



**Tuscola Cooperative Grain Company  
Founded 1930**

Purchased the original Rice and John Ervin elevators at Tuscola and Hayes from the late Ernest Orndorff. "New" elevator built in 1946-47. New office building in 1950.

The Chicago Board of Trade had one of its members located in Tuscola. The J. L. Bush grain office was well and favorably known in every part of Douglas County. The office started on July 15, 1898. Mr. Bush was born near Buckley, IL on Nov. 18, 1873. After graduating from high school in Buckley, he came to Tuscola and opened a grain office and secured a membership in the Chicago Board of Trade. His offices were located on the second floor of the Star Store Building, where he had five assistants: E. E. Stalker, G. Raymond Muhr, Walter T. Schafer and Curtis Marsh. In addition with the grain business, Mr. Bush was associated with Clyde E. Wiley, who had established the Tuscola Radio Supply Station. This station installed a number of radio sets in and around Tuscola and many of the prominent farmers had radio sets in their homes. Messrs. Bush and Wiley were the first people in the United States to broadcast the grain markets. Beginning at 9:30 A.M. until 1:00 P.M. at periods of every 30 minutes, Mr. Bush broadcast the grain markets.

The Douglas County Bureau was one of the most beneficial organizations to the farmers of the county. It was organized in 1920 largely through the efforts of J. R. Clisby, John McCarty, W. F. Goodspeed, G. R. Helm, Grover McCormick and Edgar Morow. The association was very active in its efforts to better the condition of the farmers. The live stock department of the association was organized and enabled the farmers to sell their stock at advantageous prices and eliminate the middleman's profits. Great effort was spent by the management of the bureau to secure better sales for the farmers and to help aid them to raise better live stock and to enable them to secure the best kind of fertilizer.

Thomas Morris came to Tuscola in 1917 to set up an ice plant. After the completion of the ice plant, Mr. Morris set up his own blacksmith shop. He located a second time on E. S. Central just south of the elevator. Throughout the years, he became widely known among farmers around as being especially good with horses, fitting each shoe according to the needs of the horse. It was said he could shoe some spirited horses without even a hitch strap when other blacksmiths would have to use ropes and a switch. He was often called upon to make machinery parts in case of breakage since in those days of slow and uncertain delivery of parts, the blacksmith was the first to call in case of trouble.

## FROM THE 1895 SATURDAY JOURNAL HISTORICAL EDITION

### **Agricultural Products**

The greatest wealth of Douglas County is in the productiveness of the soil. Corn, wheat, oats, hay and broomcorn were the most prominent. The latter was introduced into the county about 1865 and has gradually grown into gigantic proportions especially in the Arcola area. Crops have been known to more than equal the value of the land upon which they grow. Corn, however, is the great staple, and fully three-fifths of the acreage of the county is devoted to it. The average yield of the county is about fifty bushels per acre, and the average price near forty cents per bushel. Wheat and oats have been very remunerative the past season, some fields of the former threshing out forth-five bushels per acre, and the latter, eighty bushels. Considerable hay is raised, the price per ton ranging from \$7.00 to \$12.00. Stock raising especially the development of the better strains, has for some time received considerable attention. Hereford, Shorthorn and Jersey cattle, Norman, Clyde and Percheron draft horses and Hambletonian roadsters, Cotswold and Southdown sheep and Poland China hogs have all been brought to the highest standard of excellence. The county is no better adapted to raising grain than stock, but the former has always yielded the best results.

### **Charles E. Smith**

This genial young man succeeded to the sole management of the Avenue livery barn. The barn reached the highest degree of popularity under the management of the Smith Bros. The large Callaway barn stood at the east end of the block and added to their quarters making it by far the largest stable in Douglas County. It was filled with good driving horses and new and stylish vehicles, sparing neither pains nor expense in making the barn thorough in its equipments and appointments.

### **Charles L. McMasters & Co.**

The large grain and seed business of this firm was established in 1861 by James Davis, one of the early residents of Tuscola, as well as one of the most progressive and public spirited men. About the year 1867, he associated with him in the business, Mr. E. C. Finney. Upon the death of Mr. Davis, in 1888, the firm became Finney and McMasters. This firm continued for three years when it was succeeded by C. L. McMasters & Co. The house has always commanded a large part of the business of the community and has enjoyed a reputation for prices and weights that could mean nothing less than the highest commendation of the strict probity which has ever characterized the men who have had charge of its affairs. During all the years which have brooded over its career, no circumstance has occurred which has compromised its honorable career or occasioned a shadow of doubt in the minds of the people that it had departed one iota from the high principles of rectitude of business transactions. In addition to this splendid monument of business integrity, which it has erected, is the fact that it has ever been ready and willing to give to its patrons every accommodation within its power. In assuming the management of the business, Mr. McMasters, though a young man, gave to it the impetus of a vigorous manhood, great personal popularity and the guarantee that its future methods would comport with its past. Associated with Mr. McMasters in the coal business was George D. Scott. They handled soft and hard coal from the Lehigh and Scranton mines. The firm carried a clean and reliable stock of grass, clover, millet, broomcorn and other seeds.



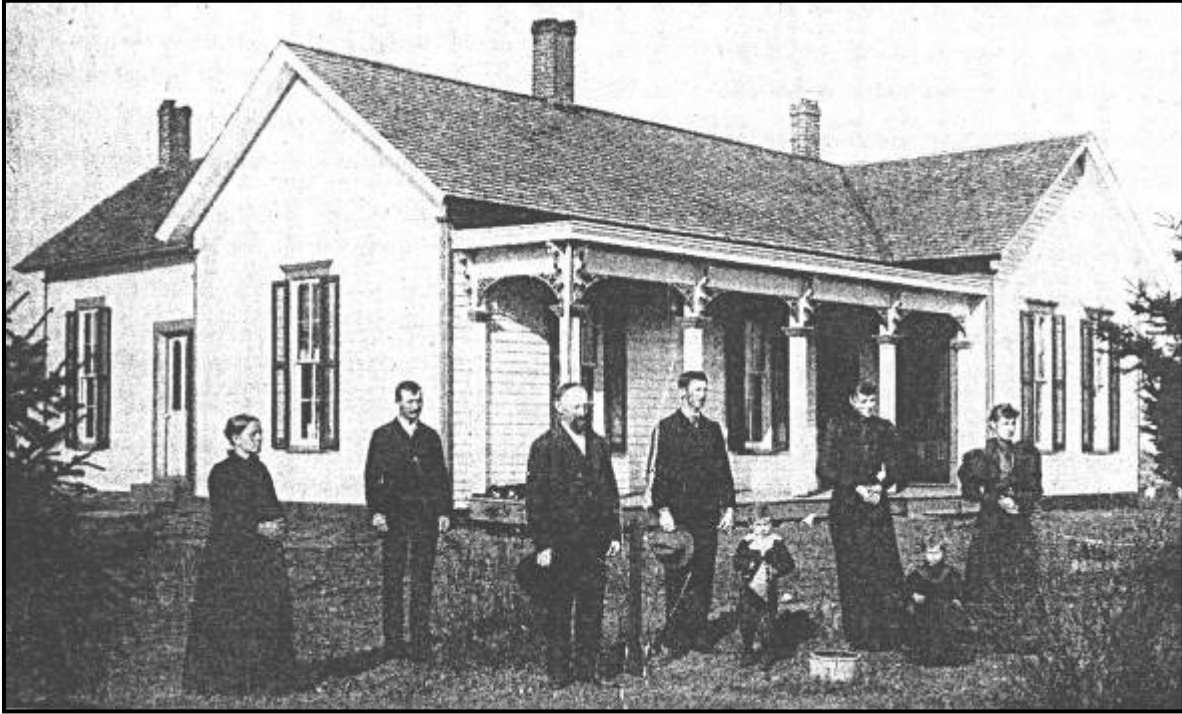


## Douglas County Roller Mills

The history of these mills is the record of an enterprise that has given the most substantial aid to the city, and has made for Tuscola the reputation for the production of the best bread for flour that is not surpassed by the records of any other mills in this part of the state, a reputation fairly won and honestly maintained. The first mill was a three-story frame, built by J. B. Wamsley and Co. in 1850 and continued as such until the building was destroyed by fire seven years later. For two years the city was without a mill until the citizens contributed toward the rebuilding and Mr. Wamsley was able to replace it with a three story brick building and equip it with the most improved roller process for the manufacture of flour, and the production of meal, feed, etc.

The flour capacity of the mill was 100 barrels, per day, and such was the demand for the product that it was run at full capacity, a portion of the year both day and night. Three brands of flour were made a specialty and were know as "Golden Flake," "White Spray," and Purity," and were placed upon the market with the absolute guarantee that they would give the best of satisfaction.

January 1, 1893, Mr. Wamsley was succeeded in the proprietorship of the mills by Francis McCarty, one of the most wealthy farmers and prosperous business men of the county. Mr. McCarty retained, Henry Wamsley, a son of the former proprietor and one of the most thorough millers in the state.

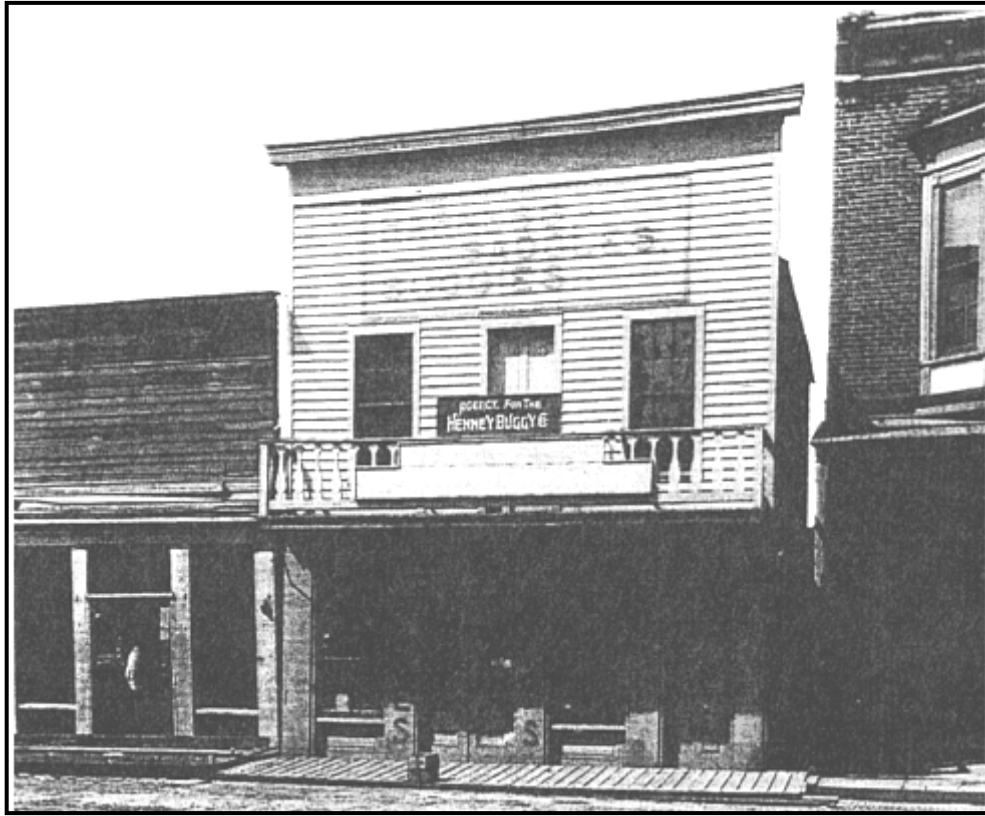


**Late 1800's farm home of Mr. and Mrs. John F. Schmidt.**

The 120 acre farm was later operated by their son, John P. Schmidt, father of Mrs. Anna Schaffer. Mrs. Schaffer remodeled the home in 1950. Shown at the home in the early 1900's are from left to right Mrs. John F. Schmidt, John R. Schmidt, John F. Schmidt, Bert Pound, Roy Pound, Amelia S. Brian and Ann Easterbrook. (Schmidt was later changed to Smith.) The farm (200) acres is now operated by Duane Brian and owned by Marilyn Foster and Lottie Brian. The farm is located two miles West and 3 ½ mile North of Tuscola. John F. Schmidt immigrated to Tuscola from Germany.

The hindrance of early settlement of this part of the state lay in the fact of the large preponderance of prairie, which seemed to impress those who came to spy out the land with the belief that, should they escape the heat of summer, they would be certain to freeze in the winter. Coming as they did from timbered country, they cared not to possess a land that was flat and too poor to grow a tree. As a result they clung to the wooded banks of the Embarras and Kaskaskia Rivers with a tenacity born of the conviction that life, health and prosperity were only to be enjoyed with their shadows. They preferred "felling" the forest and clearing the land" to going out on the prairie where nature had removed half the burden. William Brian came in the Spring of 1834 and for several years was the sole occupant of Tuscola township. After 1839 the settlement of the county was more rapid and permanent. The great fertility of the soil soon became known to the inhabitants, and the completion of the Illinois Central Railroad in 1855 caused a steady stream of immigration to flow into the new territory. The prejudice against the prairie land was quickly removed by the wealth of the soil and the natural adaptability for agriculture. The price of land rapidly advanced until in 1860 unimproved farms were sold for as high as \$21 dollars an acre.

## HARNESS AND CARRIAGE EMORIUM OF A. C. SLUSS



Located at 25 and 27 West Sale St. was the mammoth harness and carriage emporium of A. C. Sluss, one of the most complete and extensive of its kind to be found in this part of the state. The foundation for the harness business was laid in 1862 by Mr. Sluss' father, the late Judge Sluss, who was noted not only for his strict business integrity, but for his desire at all times to give to his patrons the highest grade of material coupled with the best workmanship. The firm name, T. S. Sluss, continued until 1891. If age in mercantile matters be any evidence of business ability, surely this firm possessed the features in a superlative degree, and the greatest compliment that could be paid is to state that during all these years no other harness business was able to be maintained in Tuscola.

He added a line of buggies and other vehicles, securing the exclusive agency for the Henney factory's vehicles – recognized by all dealers and purchasers to be second to no others made. His trade in this line was beyond expectations and more Henney vehicles were sold than any other make. For more than thirty years the house was proverbial for the high value of its hand-made harness, a distinction which merited the reputation and was rigidly upheld. This, together with a general line, carefully selected as to quality and workmanship, made it the leading stock in the county.