

The Early Days



TOWNSITE OF THE FUTURE

Mary (Erickson) Dokken (1869-1954) stood atop a sod house at a site near the Leonard Erickson farm south of Wheaton and saw the first train steam to the site where Wheaton now exists. There ceremonies were held marking the spot as a townsite of the future.

Mrs. Dokken came to this country from Sweden in the early 1870's on a sailing vessel. The voyage lasted six weeks. Her father homesteaded the farm near Wheaton now known as the Ed Mielke place.

These early settlers endured the rigors of pioneer life. Before Wheaton was founded, it was necessary to trade at Herman. One of the most feared weather conditions of the prairie was a blizzard. On one trip to Herman her brother, John Erickson, and another man were caught in such a storm. They managed to find an abandoned shack and somehow survived the long, cold night along with their horses despite the fact that they could not light a fire. When the storm abated, they managed to get home unharmed.

DECEMBER 1884-MARCH 1885

A reprint from the *Dakota Sun* appearing in the June 19, 1885 *Wheaton Gazette* described the writer's view of early growth of Wheaton as follows: "In the latter part of December (1884) we passed through what is now Wheaton. Then there was a side track

and part of a hotel there. Our train at this place passed the passenger (train) going south. As our train carried no dining car, while waiting we concluded it to be the part of wisdom to get something for dinner. We went to this piece of a hotel and ordered a lunch for four put up. The proprietor told us he had just arrived and didn't have much of a variety. He showed us the provisions, and we took all he had. This was Wheaton in December. In March (1885) we were traveling over the Fargo and Southern road when the whistle blew and the brakeman called W-H-E-A-T-O-N! Looking out we saw a town with its stores, saloons, hotels, papers, etc., a town in the fullest sense."

AN 1885 PIONEER MERCHANT

The village of Wheaton was but a cluster of frame buildings with a scant population when T. O. Thorson came here in 1885. At that time the business district boasted only eleven establishments and the residential district was comprised of two sod shanties. Other residents of Wheaton all lived in the two hotels.

Born in Wisconsin in 1858, Mr. Thorson and family moved to Pope County in 1868 and to Benson in 1873, where he worked as a clerk in a store. There he met Andrew Peterson. They decided to pool their savings and start a store in Wheaton. Their general store was called Peterson & Thorson and handled a wide variety of merchandise including groceries, dry goods, hardware, furniture, clothing, and other items. The partnership dissolved in 1888



A look at the downtown Wheaton area in the very early part of the 1900s. Note the dirt streets and wooden sidewalks, but the city already had electricity, with lines running along the side of the streets and a round street light globe appearing over the intersection.

when Peterson started the first bank, The Bank of Wheaton. Thorson continued alone in the store until 1923, when he sold the remaining business to Oscar Schumacher.

The two "claim shacks" in Wheaton in 1885 were owned and lived in by Hilmer Benno and N. F. Schroeder. At that time the county was dotted with sod shanties of claim holders who planted only small patches of ten to twenty acres of small grain for a livelihood as they continued to break up the prairie sod. Transportation was furnished for the most part by oxen and carts. According to Thorson, Wheaton did not make much progress until 1889 when the county seat was moved here. It really started to boom in 1892 when the Reservation opened up.

PRAIRIE FIRES AND RUNAWAYS

The two great scourges of the early prairie pioneers were prairie fires and run-

aways. In this flat, open countryside, fires had nothing to stop them. Vast acreages of hay and crops and many buildings were destroyed. Examples of each in this immediate area follow.

With one or two exceptions, the first breaking of virgin soil in Clifton Township was by the Collins brothers. The first work on their claim was the erection of a large sod barn. When they built the barn in about 1879, there were only three or four shanties visible in any direction. On May 1, 1885, when a wild prairie fire consumed the combustible part of this pioneer landmark and also destroyed the granary, not less than fifty homes were visible from that same spot. Also visible was the steam of the engine on the Fargo & Southern Railroad and the new town of Wheaton. In six short years that area of the prairie had become well populated.

The June 5, 1885, Wheaton newspaper reported the following story on runaway

horses, a frequent occurrence, often resulting in injury to the driver: "For stayers, Andrew Rose, of the town of Monson, has the best team on record. Almost two weeks ago they got away while hitched to a harrow, and ran twelve miles before they could be stopped. Strange to say, they were not injured in the least by the harrow and were but very little the worse for the run. On Monday last they succeeded in getting another start while attached to a load of hay. After running some distance the load was upset and the wagon pretty well smashed up. With part of the wagon still hanging to them they ran eighteen miles before they stopped and were again so lucky as to receive no injuries whatsoever. We would advise Andrew to get an air-brake attachment for those horses or they will be running away with his farm some day."

LOST IN A BLIZZARD

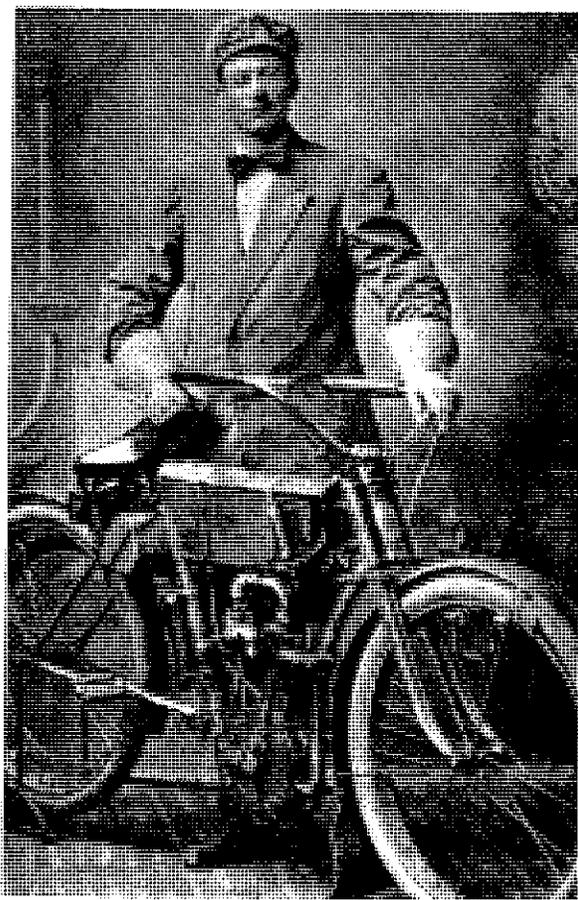
The big blizzard of January 1888 had tragic results for a couple from Leonardsville. Mr. and Mrs. Wm. Rixe, who had started from Graceville about five o'clock, became lost and let the team take their own course until the harness broke. The couple wandered about all the rest of the night until noon the next day, when Mrs. Rixe became too exhausted to go farther. Mr. Rixe stumbled on and was found by J. F. Toner, who took him home. As soon as Rixe revived sufficiently to talk, he explained about his wife, and Mr. Toner started to look for her. He saw her once staggering along and falling but could not get to her before the blizzard blotted everything out. He became lost and wandered about until eleven that night, when he accidentally ran up against his mother's house. The morning showed that he had been within twenty yards of where Mrs. Rixe's body was found.

Earlier, in the year 1880, a severe blizzard had struck this area on October 15 and continued through October 17, during which time there were several deaths, cases of severe frost-bite, and loss of livestock. The Peter Johansons sat out this storm in a single-wall homestead shack on the northwest quarter of Section eighteen in Clifton Township. When the storm subsided, it was necessary to remove a roof board to get out

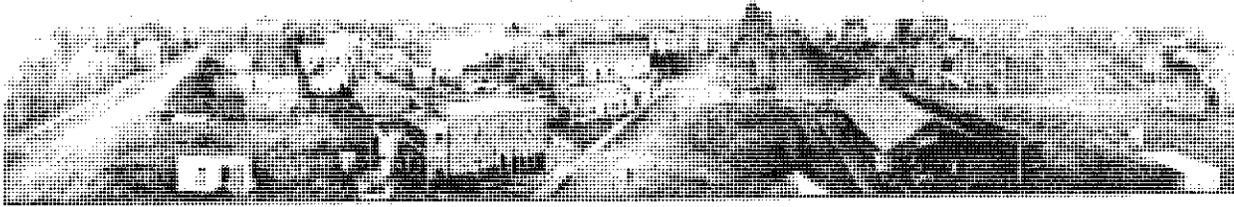
and then Johanson tunneled into the barn to milk the cows. The fact that the storm struck so early in the fall was devastating, since people were not yet prepared for the rugged winter on the prairie.

REAL HORSE POWER!

The first grain elevator in Wheaton actually used horses in elevating grain. The power mechanism had three poles attached to which horses were hitched, but one horse was sufficient to do the work. A box containing oats was placed just in front of the horse. The horse would plod around and around striving to get at the oats, and in doing so the grain was elevated. The scheme was devised in order to dispense with an extra man, it acted as a driver, and the horse kept up a good pace.



Albert Nelson, called "Photographer Nelson" and considered by many a genius, posed for a postcard photograph with an early motorcycle. This card was mailed from Brandon, Minn., in August, 1910.



A "bird's eye view" of Wheaton shortly after 1900.

A COMMUNITY OF SWEDES

In the late 1800's many families from Jarna, Sweden, sailed for America with their first destination Cokato, Minnesota, where some relatives and neighbors had already settled. Hearing about free government land to the west, they left Cokato for western Minnesota. There were no roads and only a few people lived along the way. They settled in the area close to what is now known as Mud Lake.

The first to arrive from Jarna in 1879 were Myrback Lars Halvorson with two sons and one daughter. The daughter Greta was 13 years old at the time, and she was later to write the following description of their first home. "You asked if I could tell you about the first place we lived and the dugout where we struggled when first we came. It wasn't a real dugout. It was on the land sloping toward the lake on the western quarter. There was a little digging in the highest part of the hill. It was dug into the slope. The lower part was two feet deep on the end. It wasn't bigger than we could sleep under there. We lived on the whole prairie and had everything under the bare heavens. We cooked, ate and worked under the same roof. We dug into the ground a little way, and broke up part of the land and used this earth to build walls on the sides. We could walk almost straight in the middle without bending. The roof was the cover that we used on the wagon when we came. We drove with a horse team and oxen, and it took us more than a week from Cokato."

Families continued to come from Jarna to the settlement on the shores of the lake until it was like a large town with people all from the same part of Sweden. It was wise

for them to settle by the lake, as it provided income for the new settlers and there was also a good supply of fish, fowl and animals for trapping. Income was generated from hunters who came to the area. The farmers met them at the train depot, returned them there when the hunt was over, rented out boats, acted as guides, and provided board and room.

It was written, "A place in America, with only Jarna folks, is of interest in many ways. It tells of peaceful conquest in a new land without aim to subdue and tramp on other people's rights, instead of wasting and destroying. Instead these Jarna people made useful fertile land through their efforts, lots of work, and willingness."

SOD HOUSES

The first people on the prairie built their homes from the sod. The upper few inches of the virgin land was tough and strong from countless seasons of wild grass. With a spade or any other tool available, the homesteaders cut out pieces of the sod about a foot wide, a foot and a half or two feet long, and of the thickness of the turf. These were laid up as would be bricks or blocks. The inside wall might be plastered with a mixture of clay and buffalo grass. Holes were left for a window or two, a door and a chimney. When poles were available, they would be used to help frame the house or form the support of a roof of straw or prairie grass. Such homes served well for a short time. In a few years they became piles of dirt, but by then the men who had built them either had homes of lumber or had moved on.

WHEATON'S FIRST JULY FOURTH CELEBRATION

Wheatonites wasted no time in establishing an Independence Day celebration. The first one was held in Wheaton on July 3, 1886. By noon there were between 1500 to 2000 people present, most of whom had come in from the surrounding countryside.

Festivities started by 9:00 a.m. with a ball game which was won by the Taylor Nine (34 -0). Next came an amusing "procession of ragamuffins", and at 12:00 noon the Declaration of Independence was read and an oration given. A trotting race, a pony race, and a free-for-all running race followed. Next there was a foot race. A heavy thunderstorm interrupted the festivities until after supper. Then there was a glass-ball shooting contest. A minstrel show following that had a standing-room-only capacity crowd. The day concluded with fireworks and a dance.

PART FIRST.

SUNRISE—Salute to "Old Glory."

10:00 a. m.—Magnificent street parade, containing business floats and numerous other attractions.

10:30 a. m. Patriotic exercises at the pavilion as follows.

Song by School Children.

Music by the Band.

Address of Welcome by Rev. Scanlon.

Music by Double Male Quartette.

Reading Declaration of Independence.

Song by the School Children.

Oration W. W. Erwin.

Music - Double Male Quartette.

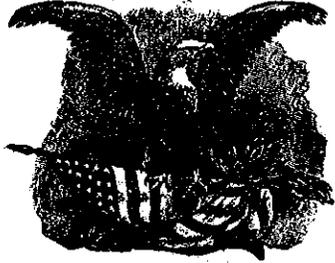
Benediction— Rev. W. T. Williams.

11:30 a. m. Base Ball Game between the Wheaton and Graceville High School Clubs. Two well matched teams.

12:00 m. Intermission for dinner.

1:00 p. m. Base Ball game between Wheaton and a St. Paul team, claimed to be the best amateur club in the state. Do not miss it.

Vest Pocket Program.
—FOR—
JULY 4TH, 1898,
WHEATON, MINNESOTA



Compliments of
SORENSEN & BAILEY,
The Enterprise
Hardware and Furniture
Company.

PART SECOND.

3:00 p. m.—The races will be called and will consist of the following:

Free for all run, half-mile and repeat, purse \$75.00.

Free-for-all trot, one mile and repeat \$75.00.

Farmers' running race, half mile and repeat, \$30.00.

Free-for-all bicycle race, two miles, single dash, \$35.00.

CONDITIONS—In all races five must enter and at least three to start. An entrance fee of ten per cent of purse will be charged in all races. All entries must be made before noon of day of race. All purses divided 60, 30 and 10 per cent.

8:30 p. m.—A grand display of fireworks of unrivaled magnificence.

9:00 p. m.—Until morning. Grand ball at the Court House Hall will be in full progress with good prompting and first class music by Bach's orchestra.



A crowd gathered for an early day parade in downtown Wheaton. Date of the parade was not evident from the photograph, but it was prior to the coming of the automobile. Many of the buildings in the photo have since been replaced. The big brick building on the left front is the site of what is now First Bank.

PUBLIC LIABILITY WORRIES IN THE 1880's

A team of runaway horses created the first fears of liability for the very young Village of Wheaton in August 1887. Background for the situation was centered around the first town well. Almost at once there had been concern about the unsanitary conditions around the well. One of the first appointments made by the village fathers after the village was organized was that of health officer, Dr. C. A. Lampanius, M.D., and one of his first accomplishments was to cordon off the well. The story follows:

"A team belonging to T. E. Dunn's Livery Stable made things lively on the street for a few moments one morning. While standing near the depot, they became frightened by the train and started up the

street at full speed. About an hour previous to the occurrence, the town pump standing in the middle of the street had been enclosed with chains attached to posts for the purpose of compelling parties to keep their horses away from the pump while drinking. The runaway team came tearing up the street, and being unable to avoid this, went crashing into it, taking chains, posts, pump, and everything with them. The horses fell to the ground and were caught before they could regain their feet. Both were cut and bruised considerably but otherwise were apparently unhurt. It was later found, however, that one horse was hurt internally."

The article in the August 19, 1887, *Gazette* concluded as follows: "The question arises, and is being pretty thoroughly discussed, is the village liable for any damage the animal may have sustained. It

is claimed by some that the well, located in the center of the street, is an obstruction to the public highway, and the village by allowing it to remain there is liable for any damage occasioned thereby."

Outcome of the liability question and condition of the horse were unreported. However, a move was then on to move the pump for greater convenience and better appearance of the village.



The O. H. Hellekson residence, constructed in the late 1890s, displayed the ornate wood-working of the day. Hellekson was one of the founders of Erickson-Hellekson-Vye Lumber Company and an early Wheaton mayor.

MARKET HUNTERS

A little known aspect of early hunting is that of market hunters. As early as 1892 market hunters were shipping large quantities of game from this point to eastern markets.

In reminiscing about those early years the late Franz Johnson, whose home was on Mud Lake (now the Waldo Johnson farm), recalled that these hunters would come to Wheaton by train, stay on farms along the lake for several weeks, and shoot ducks all day long — there was no limit in those days. At night they would "gut" the birds and pack them in barrels, which the farmer

would haul to town in a wagon to be shipped off to such cities as Minneapolis, St. Paul and Chicago on the train. In the evenings they would load their own shells.

One such market hunter who came to this area and stayed was O. J. Spafford, father of Oscar Spafford. Spafford and his partner Charley Sweet, both "crack shots", would come to Wheaton by train, rent a horse and buggy, buy two cases of shells, and proceed to the slough area in the southern part of the county where they did most of their market hunting. They would pile up their ducks as they shot them. At the end of the day they would go around and pick up the piles. In a three-day period they would shoot up a case of shells apiece and return to the city by train with 500 to 600 ducks to be marketed.

Eventually Spafford bought a farm in Windsor Township on the shores of Lake Traverse and remained there until his tragic death in a farm machinery accident when Oscar was four years old. Spafford's Landing was a landmark on the shores of Lake Traverse. Many people from Wheaton owned cottages in that area.

THE OPENING OF THE RESERVATION

The opening of the Reservation was a very important event in the development of Wheaton, as it greatly increased the trade territory to the west. The Sisseton-Wahpeton Reservation was a large triangular piece of land containing over a million acres extending from Richland County, North Dakota, where it was some fifty miles wide, and converging to a point at Lake Kampeska, South Dakota. Prior to the opening of the area to white settlement, entrance had been forbidden, and the government had sent soldiers to patrol the borders to enforce this edict.

Although it was illegal, many people had come ahead of time to scout out the territory. They rented horses and buggies from the local livery stables and crossed over to the Reservation to look over the land ahead of time and plan their strategy for the BIG DAY!

The occasion was widely advertised. Brown Valley's **Footprints** alone had sent out 50,000 copies of a special sixteen-page



With the land rush on the Sisseton-Wahpeton Reservation scheduled to begin at 12 noon on April 15, 1892, settlers on foot and horseback gathered at the Wheaton Bridge on the Reservation border, awaiting the signal for the start of the stampede.

illustrated edition advertising the event, and prospective settlers came from near and far. At the stroke of noon on April 15, 1892, the soldiers patrolling the borders fired their guns denoting the start of the stampede for the land. Some of the settlers were on foot, some on horseback, but most had horses and buggies, and all had the required spade and a placard of entry to nail up on their claim. It was a mass race as they spread out fanlike on the dead run, disappearing in the distance, with many collisions and wheel shatterings at the start.

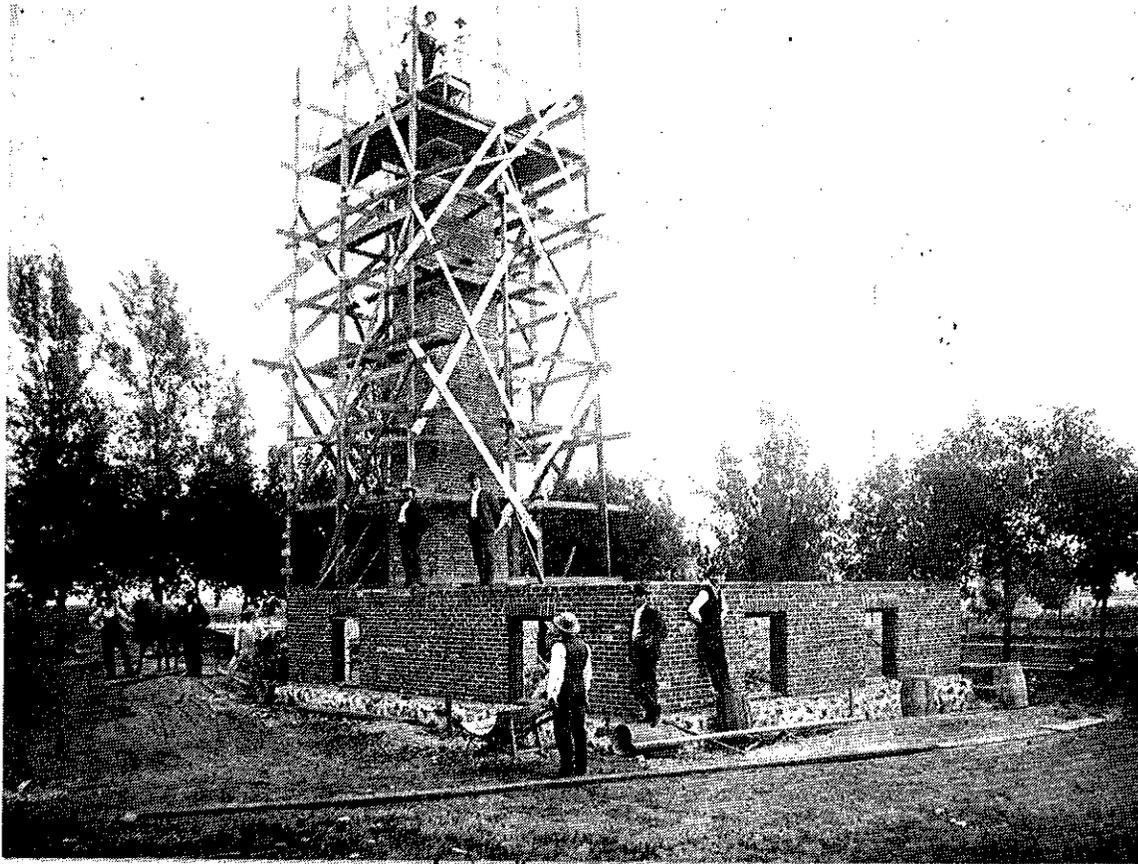
A MARSHAL'S WORK IS NEVER DONE!

The March 12, 1898, Council minutes describe the duties of the village marshal as follows: "Preserving the peace, lighting street lamps, taking care of engine house and fire engine, ring curfew at 9:00 p.m. daily, repair sidewalks and pumps, act as street commissioner and pound master, collect dog tax, assist in superintending sewer construction, and perform all other work which may properly come within the jurisdiction of a village marshal, and to be at all times subject to the order of the village council. Hours of duty to be from 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. All money collected by him to be paid into the village treasury."

Furthermore, the marshal was instructed to see that all streets and alleys were immediately cleaned up by the removal of all machinery, rocks, and debris in accordance with the provisions of an ordinance relating thereto. He was also instructed to investigate reported violations relating to draying, enforce the ordinance relating to bicycle riding and permit no such riding on the sidewalks within the village, impound all livestock found running at large within the village and keep same in custody until the penalties provided were paid.



A Little German Band entertained people in this area in the early 1950s. Pictured from left are Leonard Anderson, trombone, Ernst Lindig, French horn; Horace Amidon, trumpet; Dave Ranney, trumpet; Hubert Grosland, clarinet; George Zentgraf, bass horn.



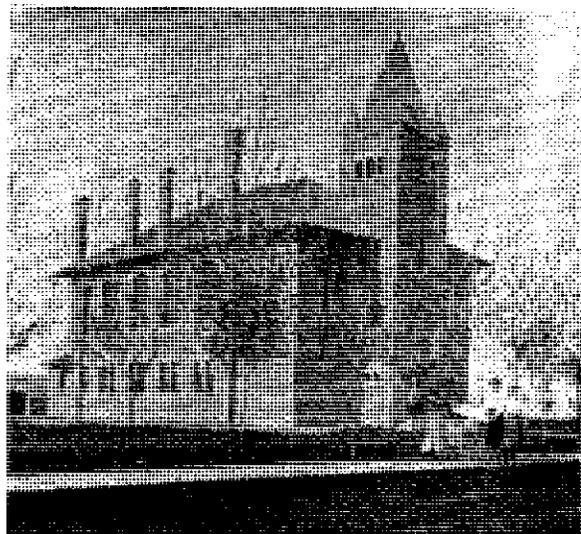
Construction of a courthouse for Traverse County began in 1892 when members of the Al Setterlund contracting company began work on the boiler room.

TRAVERSE COUNTY COURT HOUSE A LANDMARK

One of the oldest remaining buildings in Wheaton is the Traverse County Court House. Built on a square block of land donated and deeded to the county by O. C. Odenborg, the building was erected in 1892 under the direction of Al Setterlund, a local builder, with H. W. Jones of Minneapolis the architect. The original building was almost square with a one-story jail on the north. The base contract was \$10,300.00 with \$600.00 allowed for extras, cells and corridors \$1100.00, vault fixtures \$581.95, office furniture \$557.00, and \$250.00 for a coal shed and outhouse.

The court room occupied nearly the entire second floor, which was also used for public meetings, dances, and other entertainment for several years. However, there was opposition from many parts of the county to this usage, and such use was

abandoned in 1898, despite the fact that the village of Wheaton had made a generous



The Traverse County courthouse as it appeared shortly after its completion in the 1890s. Note the four smoke stacks along the side of the building.

contribution to the original building in exchange for using the second floor as a public area.

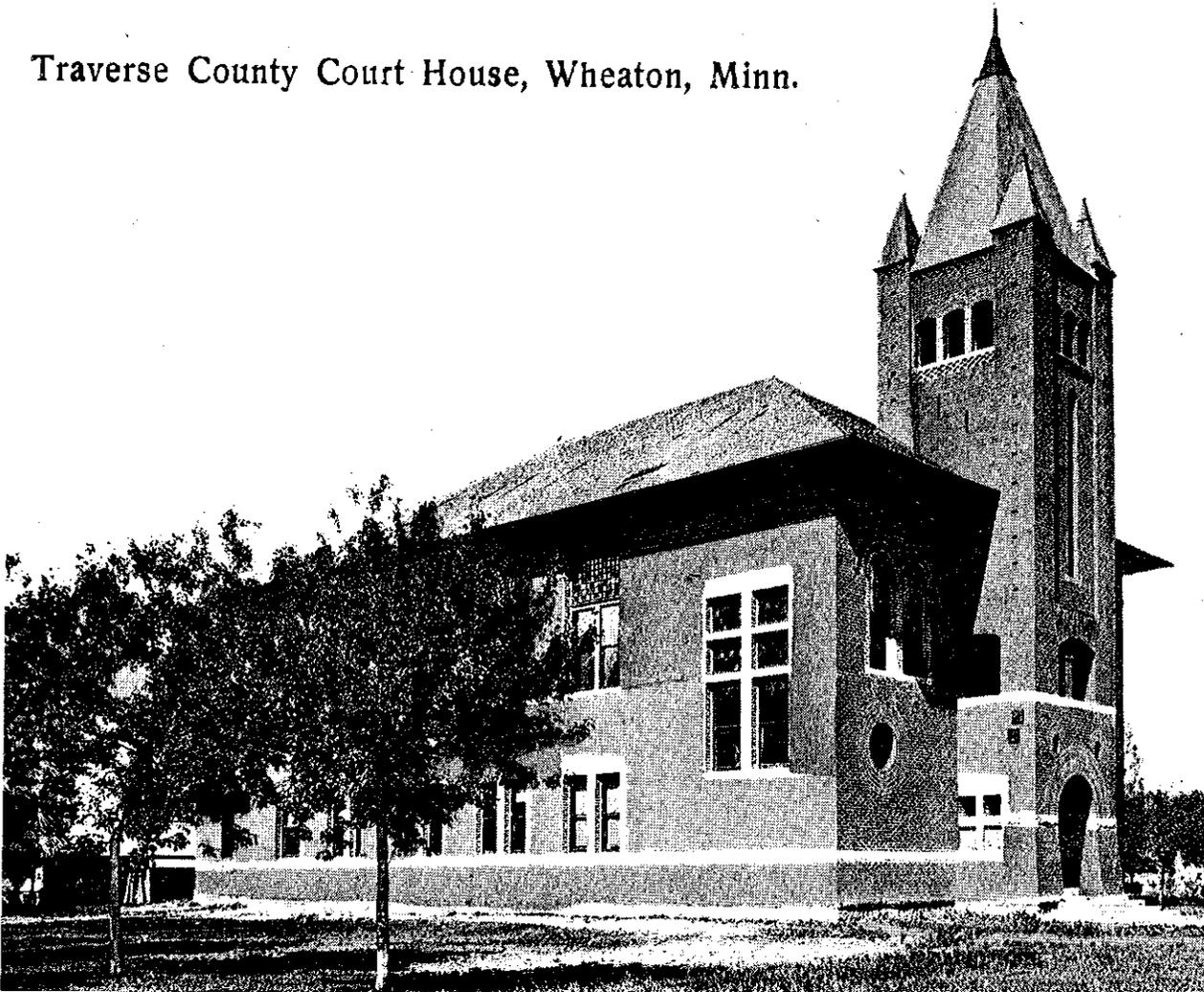
Electric lights were added in 1905, and in 1906 the court room was made smaller by sixteen feet. That space was utilized for the hallway, broom closet, and two small rooms housing the jury and the county superintendent of schools. Not until 1916 were the court house and jail connected with a water and sewer system.

Because it was necessary in 1927 to wreck and remove the tower, which had settled away from the building to a dangerous degree, a two-story 20x50 foot addition was added to the south end at a cost of \$10,038. The first floor space

extended the auditor's office and added the office now housing the deputy registrar. The second floor space was utilized for the clerk of court (now the court administrator). It now also includes the probation office. This addition provided more vaults for county records on both levels.

In 1938 an effort was made to build a new courthouse, utilizing WPA funds for forty-five percent of the cost and raising the balance of \$60,000.00 through three percent bonding by the county. However, the bond issue failed to pass and the government grant was rescinded. Instead the court house was again enlarged, with a one-story addition built on the east side providing the vault now being used by the county

Traverse County Court House, Wheaton, Minn.



The Traverse County courthouse as it appeared in the early 1900s. Some remodeling had already taken place. Smoke stacks along the side of the building are gone, but the front tower remains in place.



The Traverse County courthouse as it appears today. A portion of the building, a new wing to house the engineer's and sheriff's offices and to provide space for a jail, are not visible in the photo.

recorder and county extension agents. P. C. Bettenburg was the architect. Included in the project were courtroom fixtures and furniture and electric light fixtures for the court house. Total costs ran to \$20,079.95, with forty-five percent of the cost paid from WPA funds.

A quarter million dollar building and reconstruction program was carried out in 1973. Included in the program was a two-story major addition to the northwest providing new office space for the county engineer, an office for the sheriff and the village police, a new lockup, and a commissioners' room. Also included in the project was a new highway garage and some remodeling of the existing court house. The architect was Glenn Cording.

A three-phase, second floor alteration planned by Red River Design, architects, was begun in 1985 to again update the court room, improve acoustics, add air conditioning, improve ventilation, lower ceilings, and make other improvements in the area of the

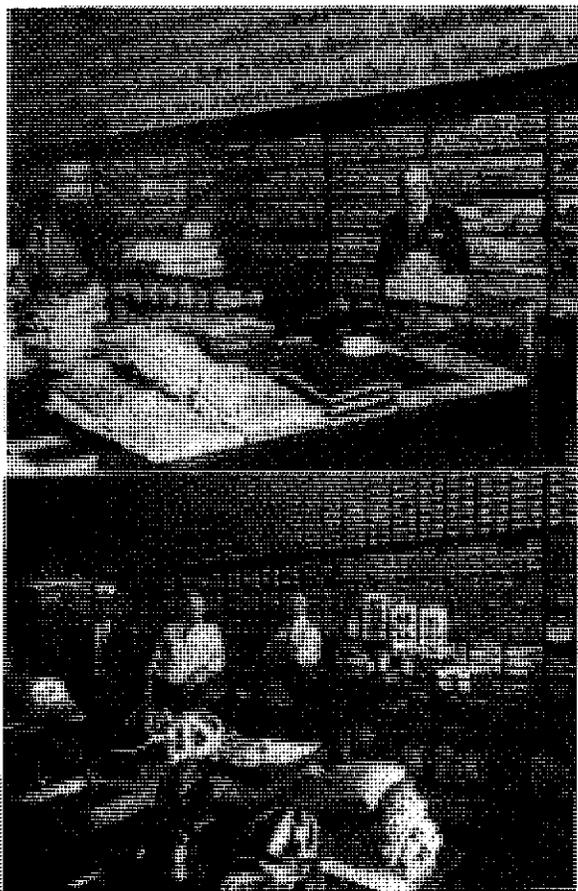
jury room, law library, and judge's chambers. Bracing was added to the attic area earlier in 1985 upon the advice of a structural engineer.

EARLY MERCHANDISING

Albert Olin (1868-1964) remembered Wheaton from the days when the main street was peppered with hitching posts in front of every business house. The sidewalks were planked and the streets were dirt (mud streets) and had to be graveled every year.

"When I first came, we had seven saloons, seven churches, and seven elevators," he recalled. "The payoff came but once a year. The farmers did their business on credit until the fall of the year, when they came around and paid off their debts, only to be charging their clothes and whatever else they were buying the very next month."

Olin opened his store in September 1902.



Top photo shows Albert Olin in his clothing store in 1952, marking his 50th anniversary in business in Wheaton. Below is the same store more than 30 years earlier, with Dan Turpena and Guy Kuhn at right and a younger Olin behind the counter.

His first site was in a wooden building flanked by a saloon and a combined print shop - post office operated by Ed Joubert.

His was the first business to have an electric light. A private individual started Wheaton's first generating plant in a house and wired the store with a lone bulb. This was soon augmented by four more bulbs. Preceding that, it was lit by kerosene lamps and then by a gas lamp fueled from a hand pump and tank device.

Recalling business of the early days, Olin said the clothing modes were much simpler than they were later. The men wore felt boots and two-buckle rubbers in the winter. He recalled the first dress shoe he ever sold came in a wooden box, and was a neat calfskin upper with buttons and a nailed sole. The typical suit of clothes came in two colors, blue and black. Each

garment featured small yellow dots to break the monotony of constant color. Suits were piled on the counters and had no buttons sewed on. When a sale was made, the clothier placed the buttons according to the size of the individual customer. The hats were all alike, too. They were black with high top and wide brim, known as Montana style.

"We didn't handle ready-made shirts, and no one ever sold women's dresses," he added. "We sold the material and such things as shirts, dresses, undergarments, and the like were made by the wives. We handled cotton and wool work sox, but most of these were knitted for the men by the wives, who also knitted the mittens."

Olin was in partnership with Martin G. Olson, who died in the 1920s. He carried on alone until joined by James Lundstrom in 1946.

HIRED HANDS

Hired hands were transient and most picturesque in the early days. Hundreds of them would come into town atop freight cars when harvest season would begin. Many of them were rugged and hardy lumberjacks. Merchants would recognize them by their characteristic mackinaws, boots, and very noticeable pine smell when they came in to be outfitted with proper work clothes.

These individuals would work long and hard on the harvest and then would fill the bars at night. They loved a good time and loved to fight. One could hardly go down main street without encountering two to a half dozen fights. When the harvest was over, many had to borrow money from the saloonkeepers, with whom they had spent so much, so they could have enough to return to Minneapolis and be reassigned to the lumber camps where they worked after harvest time.

THE LAMPLIGHTER

Emil Sorenson (1896-1980) on his 80th birthday recalled Wheaton when he was a boy, reminiscing about passenger train service, seven elevators, and street lights that needed to be lit. One of his first jobs

was riding on the shoulders of local policeman John Heldt and lighting the street lights when he was three or four years old. He spent many hours as a young boy rolling cigars in his father's cigar shop

and then using a horse and buggy going to sell them in nearby towns. He operated a cafe in Wheaton and later operated Shady Dell Resort on Lake Traverse until retirement.

Broadway, Wheaton, Minn.



Two views of downtown Wheaton right around the turn of the century.





“The Lake Traverse”, a tugboat with stern-wheel propulsion, moved grain up and down Lake Traverse in 1900.

LAKE TRAVERSE A MAJOR WATERWAY FOR GRAIN TRANSPORTATION

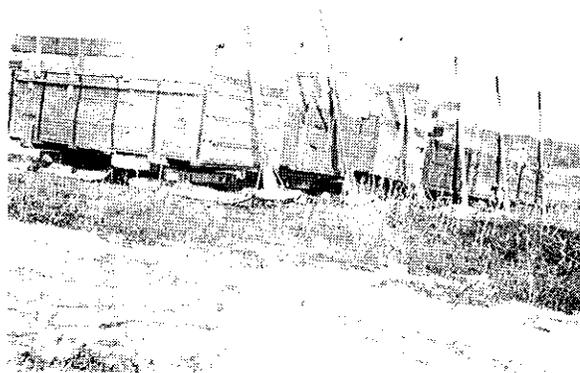
At the turn of the century people from both sides of Lake Traverse were looking for an easier way to get their produce to market. In 1900 the Lindquist Brothers started a barge line called the Diamond Line with a Mississippi River stern-wheeler tugboat, named “The Lake Traverse”, which was powered by an enormous upright gasoline engine. The tugboat, which was used to push barges of grain from the elevators along the lake to the Browns Valley Landing elevator, carried a crew of six. The grain was elevated out of the barge and into the elevator and then loaded into boxcars and shipped. The tugboat was used until 1917 when the Veblen-Fairmount Railroad was built, which cut off the supply of grain that moved to these elevators.

In winter a fleet of large logging sleds with 400-bushel boxes were pulled down the lake by horses. If they started breaking through the ice, a draw-pin could be pulled quickly to save both men and horses.

Kerosene lights with five-gallon tanks were put on steel towers situated on stone

piles to serve as guides for the boats going by, as a lot of grain was moved at night during the summer months.

There were several elevators located around the lake. One was located at the town of Diamond, others were at Jim Creek and Jenson’s Island, all on the South Dakota side of the lake. Directly across the lake from Diamond there was an elevator at Dakomin in the area of the Bill Hall landing. Remnants of the old foundation at the Dakomin site can still be found.

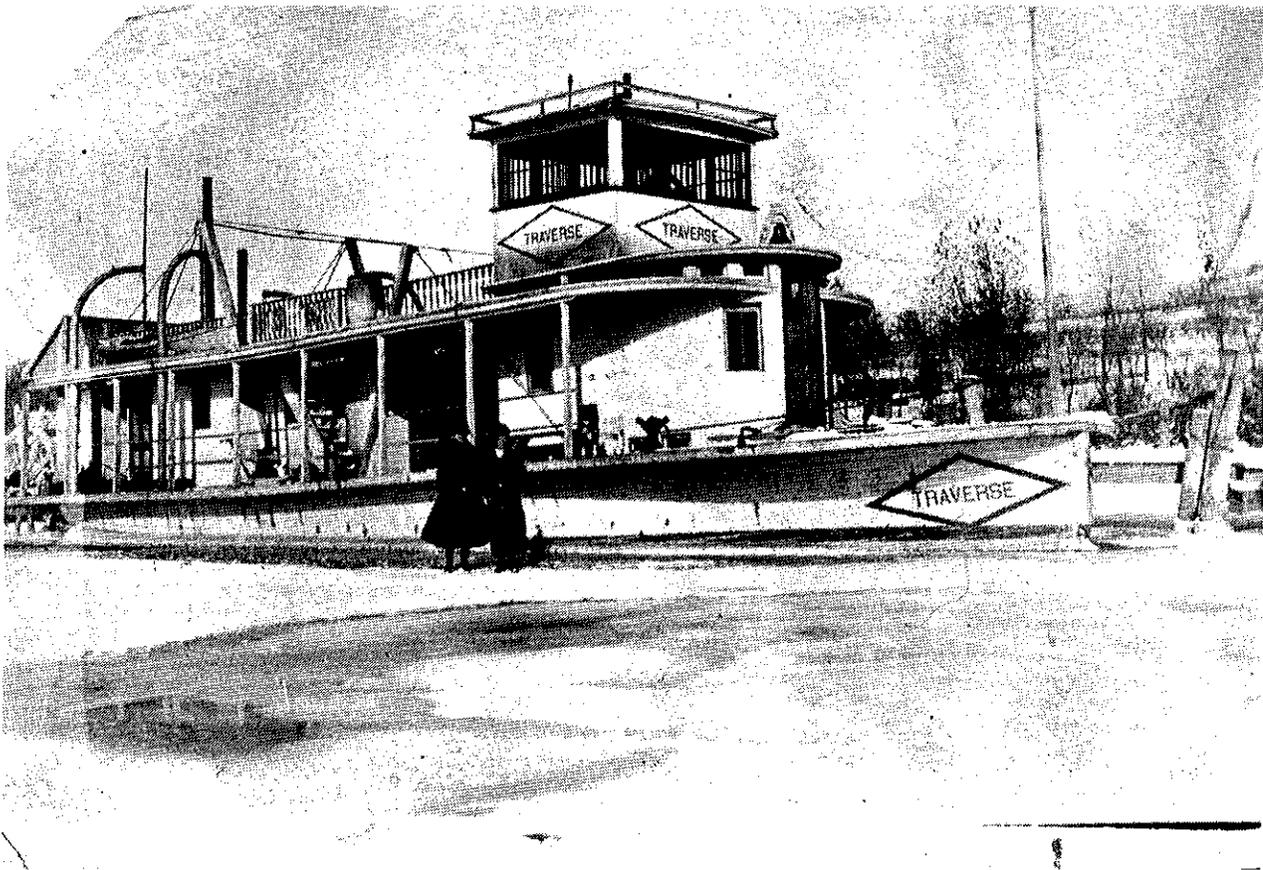


This fleet of logging sleds, pulled by horses, were used to haul grain down Lake Traverse during the winter.



This was Diamond Lake as it appeared in approximately 1909. This community was located along the north end of Lake Traverse on the South Dakota side. Another view of Diamond Lake, below, taken in 1909, shows waves sweeping into shore from Lake Traverse. Diamond Lake, built on a peninsula, has completely disappeared.





The stern wheeler "Traverse" docked at the Browns Valley landing in 1916, awaiting the spring breakup. The "Traverse" was quite a luxury cruiser in its time, providing passengers with entertainment and a relaxing journey up and down the Lake, although its main function was that of pushing grain barges.

ELECTRIC LIGHTS - 1901

The summer of 1901 marked the time when the old kerosene lights in the home were replaced by electric lighting. The first street lights were four arc lights on the Broadway intersections. A few incandescents were also in use. Frank Murphy and W. I. Gray had the franchise and built the first plant on the Mustinka River slope north of town.

Shortly after the installation of the plant, there was a railroad strike, which caused a shortage of fuel. Coal was scarce and the price prohibitive. As the electric light plant required a lot of fuel to keep its engines going, it resorted to the use of manure for fuel. This did not make for a very dependable lighting service and proved exciting to those who liked variety and surprise, as it was a case of "off again,

on again, gone again, Finnegan" with the lights.

TRIALS OF AN EMIGRANT FAMILY

The following account of his family's move from Holcomb, Illinois, to their farm north of Wheaton is given by Les Hartwig.

Fresh fallen snow came to his knees when fourteen-year old Walter Hartwig stepped from one of the two emigrant cars loaded with all the Hartwig belongings which the Milwaukee Road had just dropped off at the Wheaton siding in early March 1907. Within the two cars, accompanied by Walter and his father Bill, were eight horses, several brood sows, a number of cows, chickens, farm machinery, and all the family household goods. The cars had

been loaded at Holcomb on February 27 and 28. They had been taken to Davis Junction

and added to the emigrant train which brought them to Wheaton.

Food for Walter and his dad on the week's trip had been prepared in advance and stored in the churn and wash boiler. Milk from the cows added to their food supply during the long journey.

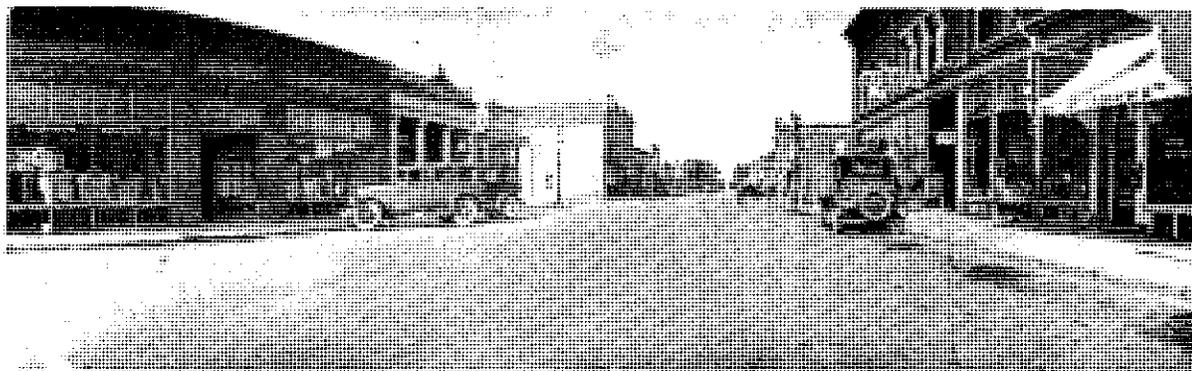
Love of fine horses had run in the Hartwig family, and they had brought along eight of the best. Unfortunately, moving the horses from the tightly closed, hot car to the chilled outdoors and into the cold livery stable resulted in their coming down with pneumonia and the death of one.

The mother and eight children had left Illinois on a different train. It was already overloaded when they boarded, and no seats remained for the new passengers, who traveled more than two days before arriving in Wheaton. They found housing in a small fire-damaged house which they shared with a bachelor for three weeks. The house was rebuilt to its present size in 1914.

The Hartwigs had been farming successfully on a fertile rented farm in northern Illinois but in the spring of 1906 were induced to visit the Wheaton area by longtime real estate salesman Carl O. Saterbak, with promises of rich land at low prices. Despite the fact that every time they put a shovel into the ground, they struck rock, Bill Hartwig bought the half section of land two miles north of Wheaton, and his brother Gust bought the adjoining quarter section immediately to the south. Linton, Bill's youngest son, still resides on the family farm with his wife Ruth.



Walter Hartwig, pictured in 1974, with grain shovel purchased by his father in 1903 in Holcomb, Illinois. The shovel was still being used at the Hartwig farm north of Wheaton.



Wheaton parking was plentiful during the early days of the automobile.



This downtown view on a postcard mailed in 1911 showed roads to be a problem at times. Note the field stone in the wall of the State Bank building at left, a wall that still stands strong today.



**G. L. Mowery Construction Co. of Ortonville, Minn.
lifting the City of Wheaton out of the mud.**

With the coming of the automobile in the early 1900s, Wheaton embarked on a downtown street paving program under Mayor Frances Lewis, Wheaton's only woman mayor, pictured second from left. The G. L. Mowery Construction Company of Ortonville was hired to "lift the city out of the mud."



By the mid-1920s the automobile had completely replaced the horse and buggy for transportation in the Wheaton area. Downtown streets of Wheaton were usually lined with bright new cars, parked at the time vertically to curbing.

THE FIRST AUTOMOBILE IN WHEATON

A man named Blodgett brought the first automobile into town in 1902. Mr. Blodgett was a millionaire who came here frequently on hunting trips. The car had tall wooden wheels with solid rubber tires. The motor was a "one lunger" placed under the seat and was cranked from the side to start it. It had a chain drive with no steering wheel, guided by a stick similar to a rudder handle on a boat except that it was in the front instead of the rear. Its speed was about eight miles an hour.

The only "critters" not interested and who seemed to want to give the contraption a wide berth were the horses. One of the first automobile laws on the statute books was one requiring the driver of an automobile to stop when a horse got to "acting up" and help lead the horse past the car.

C. H. Colyer fell heir to the Blodgett car. It spent the balance of its life in Wheaton. The car was very temperamental, but one

of the local saloonkeepers managed to keep it operating by means of a shoe string, a bent horseshoe nail, or a piece of wire in the way of repairs.



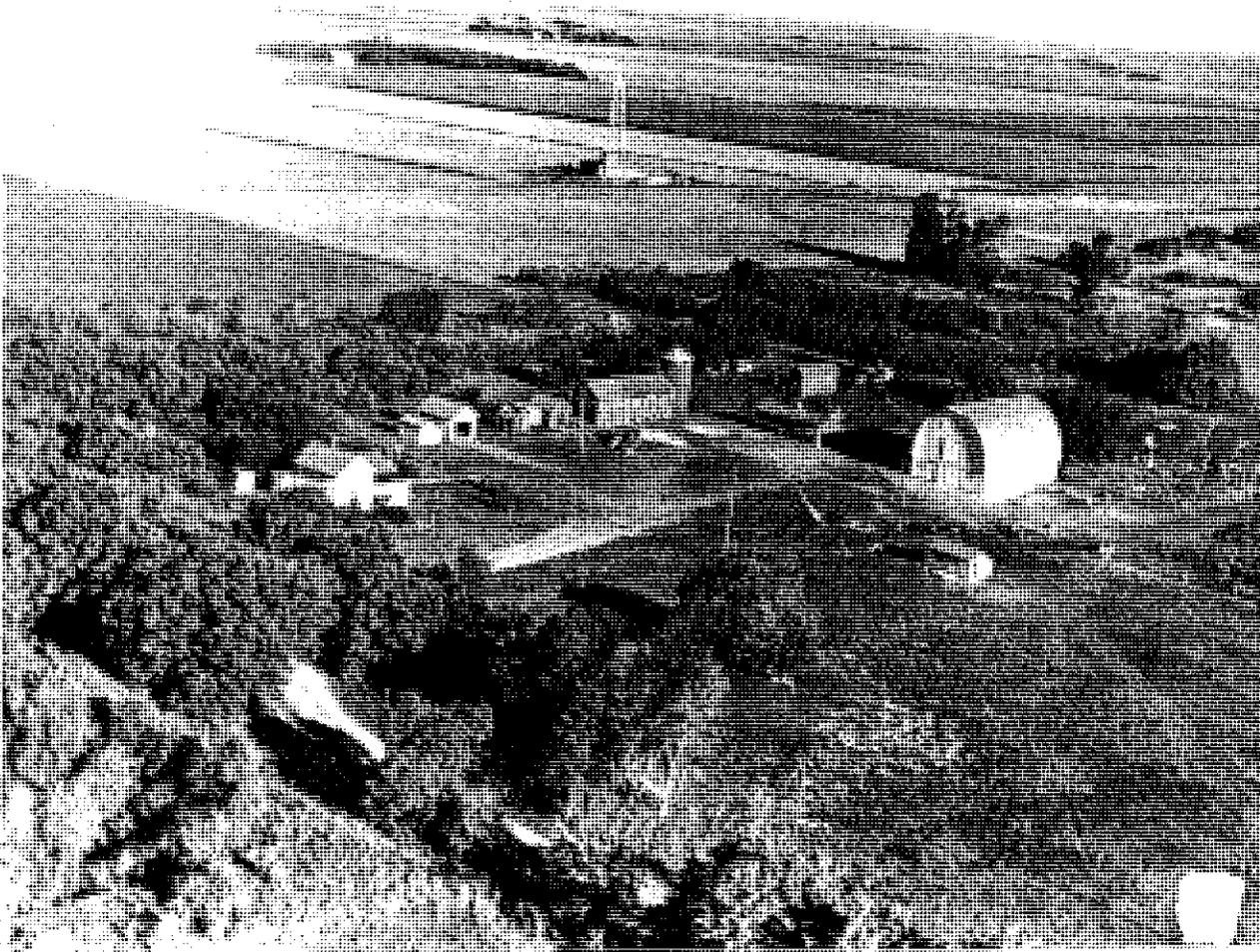
Alvin Dehlin, one time Traverse County commissioner, with his one man band. The instrument is now on display at the Traverse County Historical Society Museum.

WHEATON OIL FIELD

"OIL FIELD IS DISCOVERED" was the headline in the May 21, 1937 edition of the *Wheaton Gazette*, an announcement which was to bring oil "experts", geologists, major oil company representatives, and investors to Wheaton for the next couple of years. The discovery of Minnesota's first oil field followed the find of natural gas on the Arnold Marxen farm two years perviously while the Whaley well drillers were sinking a water well. Robert Lent, a former Greybull, Wyoming, oil operator, heard of this and sank a gas well about 100 feet from the water well. He claimed to have struck natural gas at a depth of 304 feet and at once drilled three

more gas wells to prove the field and establish what he believed to be a pocket of more than 20,000,000 cubic feet of gas, the minimum amount needed for utility companies to undertake distribution from a site. Upon testing it was determined that this was high quality gas, and Lent became convinced that this gas came from a field of petroleum. After months of drilling, oil described as "Pennsylvania green, free from water, and with a paraffin base" was discovered. George Schild was in charge of the drilling.

Plans at this time even included erection of a refining plant in Wheaton, and the village council gave a franchise to C. I. Tenney of Minneapolis to distribute gas in



The only oil discovery ever made in Traverse County came in 1937 at the Arnold Marxen farm southwest of Wheaton. Although the oil supply never materialized, a derrick was raised and stood on the Marxen farm for many years.

the village of Wheaton.

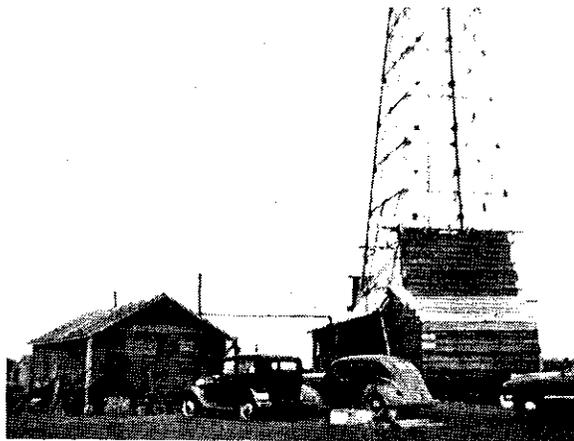
In November, 1937, the Securities Division of the Department of Commerce, State of Minnesota, investigated the oil drilling enterprise near Wheaton at the request of Governor Elmer Benson and found that only four sales of any interest in the Wheaton field had been made in Minnesota, but sales had been made in other states, chiefly in Wisconsin. There were many Wheaton people who purchased \$25.00 a share stock in the venture. A report indicated that the possibility for commercial oil or gas in western Minnesota was extremely remote. Further, a geologist with the Minnesota Geological Survey reported that this whole area was underlaid with granite and that it was impossible to dig as deep as 500 feet anywhere within ten miles of Wheaton without striking solid granite — oil well No. 1 on the Lent field was reported to be 864 feet deep. Mr. Lent, through his attorney A. E. Kief, refused permission to have the depth of the well measured. Shortly thereafter the well was abandoned after the pipe was broken off while being worked on.

Lent claimed that as a result of the information which had been published in the **Wheaton Gazette**, several prospective investors had been discouraged from investing in the enterprise. He was called before the Commerce Commission in St. Paul by subpoena for a hearing, but did not furnish proof that he had drilled through the granite and was into oil.

By May, 1939, Lent had resigned and A.



The O. N. Bjorcan Well Company of Appleton was drilling at the Arnold Marxen farm near Wheaton when they hit what was determined to be natural gas.



When it was believed that a strike of natural gas on the Marxen farm would lead to an oil discovery, drilling continued and a big derrick was erected.

E. Kief was managing the operation. In October, 1938, a well had been dug to a depth of 486.5 feet, which was measured and attested to by Wheatonites Oliver Haugland and E. E. Howard. As late as March, 1939, oil experts were still predicting that oil prospects were excellent after testing the Wheaton Oil Field by a secret process. Ultimately a total of thirteen or fourteen gas wells were sunk, but no marketable supply of gas or oil was ever found. The oil derrick, the last visible reminder of the Wheaton Oil Field, was removed from the Marxen farm in 1985.

TRIPLETS!

Dr. A. L. Lindberg, who practiced in Wheaton from June 1, 1924, until September 1, 1961, delivered 1900 babies during his years of practice and had the experience of delivering triplets at a farm home the year after coming here as a young doctor.

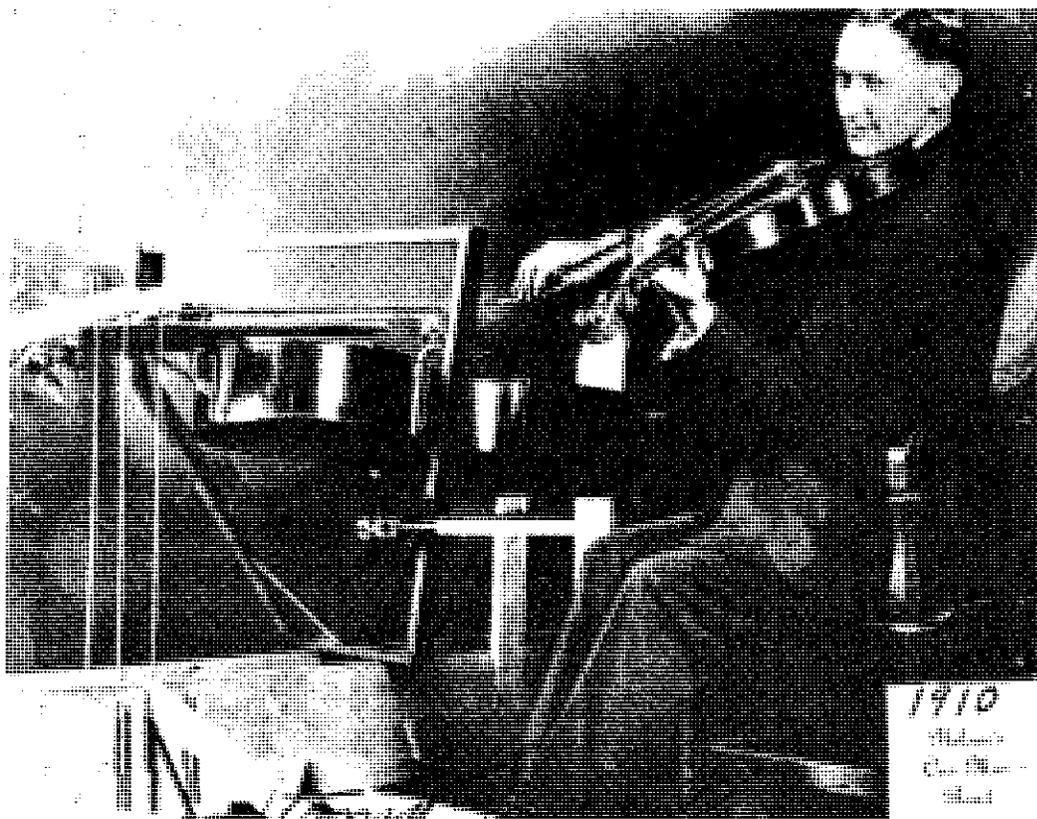
Responding to a request for a house call and not knowing the nature of the case, he arrived at the Olaf Larson farm west of Wheaton with only his small medical bag. When he arrived and assessed the situation and the urgency, he sent a boy of the house to town for his larger bag. Needing assistance, he called upon Mrs. Larson, who was seventy years old, to help in the difficult delivery.

The triplets were born to Mrs. Leonard Kerling of North Dakota, who had come to

her parents' home for the delivery. Home deliveries were not uncommon and involved a lot of responsibility and uncertainty in those days when there was generally no electricity, transportation was difficult and conditions were primitive. Despite all obstacles, young Dr. Lindberg delivered the triplets, two girls and a boy.

In a record book of babies he had

delivered, Dr. Lindberg noted that according to the portable scale carried in his bag, the boy in the group weighed fourteen pounds. He helped care for the children through the difficult first weeks. Later, back in North Dakota, one of the triplets, the boy, died at the age of eight months from illness, but the girls flourished and still survive. They were the only triplets he ever delivered.

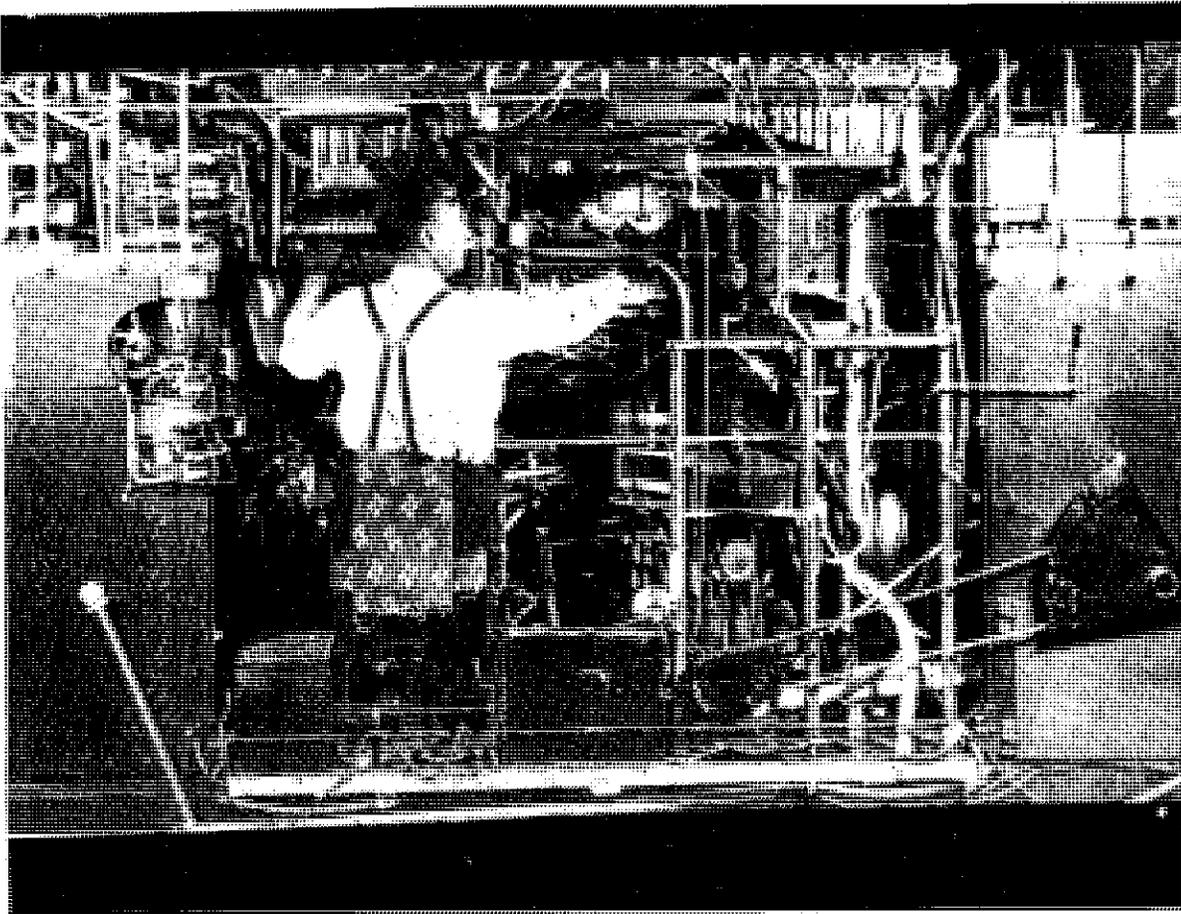


They called him a genius — and he probably was. Albert Nelson, the Wheaton photographer in the early 1900s, invented a number of things, one of which was an astounding one-man band. Above is the start of that instrument, yet to grow substantially in time.

A WHEATON GENIUS

Judging by the outstanding careers of many Wheatonites as they went out into the world, Wheaton has produced many geniuses. One who spent many years in the community in the early 1900's was one Albert Nelson, also known as "Photographer Nelson" and long remembered for his Nelson's One-Man Band, which he started when he was in Wheaton and which grew to thirty-two pieces.

Mr. Nelson and his wife Jennie were the local photographers for many years, with Jennie continuing the photography business long after Albert had left Wheaton in 1926. He was also an inventor and a musician of great talent. In the area of photography he perfected a machine for marketing pictures. A glass displayed the pictures in a machine, and a picture could be obtained by depositing a nickel for each picture desired. Later Nelson perfected a very



Before Albert Nelson was done with his one-man band, it had expended to the very complicated instrument in the photo above. He not only could play the instrument, but composed many of the songs he played on it.

complicated machine for printing pictures. Paper and negatives were placed in the machine, the number desired was indicated, and the machine produced the pictures completely finished. In the early twenties he made a moving picture camera entirely without assistance and without the aid of instructions. In order to make the moving pictures lifelike, his machine had to take sixteen pictures a second. That meant that the film must stop and start sixteen times every second and that the shutter opened and closed sixteen times a second. His camera worked perfectly.

Nelson's inventions were diversified. A piece of farm equipment which he worked on to develop was a grain shocker to be attached to a grain binder. In his latter years in Wheaton he assembled a one-man band on which he performed at the county fair and elsewhere. The band is now located in a museum in Cokato, Minnesota, and was

no doubt similar to the Dehlin One-Man Band which can be seen at the Museum in Wheaton. Albert was also a composer of music and composed many selections for band and orchestra.

NEW BLOOD FOR THE DEMOCRATS

You have heard of "new blood" for clubs, organizations, and so forth, usually meaning new members, new ideas, new enthusiasm. A Wheatonite had the REAL THING!

Carl Swedberg, a true Swede, then chairing the Traverse County Democratic Party, went to Mayo Clinic at Rochester for a checkup. Doctors there told him they planned to draw off a major portion of his blood and replace it. Carl indicated approval with two limitations, it must not be Norwegian blood, nor could it contain any Republican contamination.

Scene on the road near Wheaton, Minn.



While Wheaton may have been selected for a trophy for its good roads early in the century, travel was not always easy going in these parts. This photo with type imprinted on it, marking the location near Wheaton, proved that on some days roads were not fit for travel by even a dog, let alone a horse or automobile.

GLIDDEN "GOOD ROADS" AWARD

When the nationally famous Charles Glidden Automobile Tour, which began in Washington, D.C., stopped in Wheaton in 1906 or 1907, Glidden was impressed with the good roads and the general clean appearance of the town. As a result Wheaton was awarded the Glidden "Good Roads" trophy. This beautiful piece of sculpture was in the Court House for many years, but was moved to the new City Hall in 1975 and can be seen there.

The tour had come at just the right time to find dry-weather, prairie roads which had been rolled down by wide-wheeled, heavily laden lumber wagons. Shortly after the Glidden tour and following a heavy rain, a visitor on business from the eastern part of the state got on a road under construction and found that the clay was bottomless. He had spent most of the day traveling just a few miles and had to be pulled out several times. What a surprise when arriving at the Court House, he asked about the statuette and learned that it was a "good roads" award!



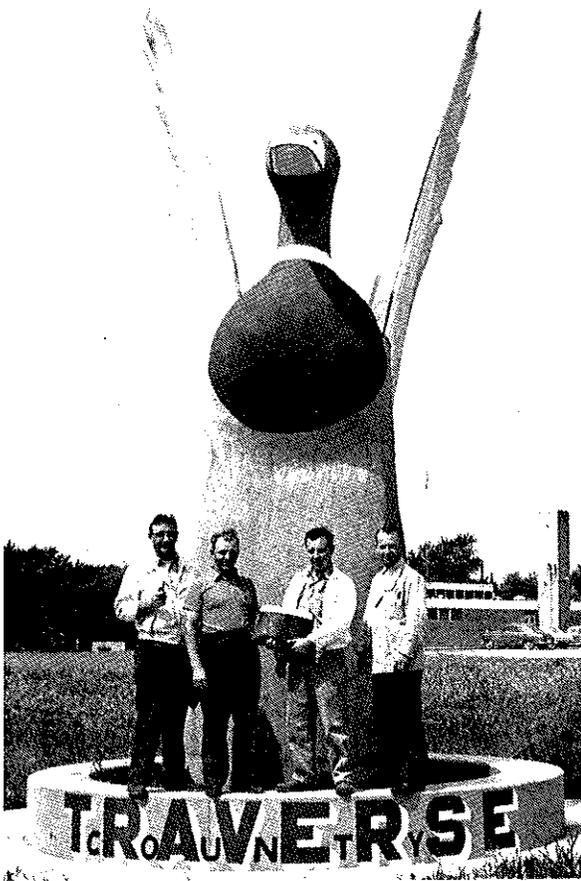
The Glidden Automobile Tour arrived in Wheaton at "just the right time" for the well-maintained community to attract attention and garner the trophy above, now on display at the City Hall.



Trees, paved streets and plenty of new buildings added to the appeal of downtown Wheaton in 1932. Despite the tough times of the depression, the streets were lined with new cars.



In July of 1937 downtown Wheaton took on a carnival atmosphere. The community halted traffic on Broadway and made room for rides and carnival stands as people here celebrated the 50th anniversary of the town.



Shortly after its construction in 1960 the Wheaton Mallard became the center of a good deal of attention. Wheaton Jaycees, bidding for a state convention here, posed in front of the Mallard to advertise the community. Pictured from left are Jaycees of the day John Hagberg, Edgar Johnson, Bill Keaveny and Don Bluhm.

THE CANDIDATE

Albert Falk, a bewhiskered world traveler some considered a hobo, was a candidate. He held ideas different from the run-of-the-mill politicians of his day — ideas which most thought absurd, many of which are now general practice supported by a multitude of political figures.

Falk has the distinction of being the only man from Wheaton who ever actively sought the office of President of the United States. He lost, as he lost a great many other election campaigns.

Falk, in his life, was ridiculed by some, jailed by authorities, and confined. He led a lonely life. But he left a legacy to the young who understood him least. Today the kids of Wheaton enjoy that legacy each time they romp around the grounds of Falk Park — his gift to the city.

THE MALLARD

The large mallard located along Highway 75 on the south side of Wheaton was constructed in 1960 to proclaim the "Land O'Ducks" theme for the Wheaton area. The project was spearheaded and designed by Robert Bruns, at that time a teacher in the Wheaton school system. (A year or two later two energetic high school students decorated the duck on Halloween with a huge banner saying "Made in Japan" — the banner was short-lived.)

Set on a circular concrete base, the mallard was constructed by Elmer Olson, a local contractor. It was constructed of concrete and steel and stands more than twenty feet high. Originally actual rushes were planted within the base, but did not survive long outside their natural habitat.

The statue "weathered" well, but in August, 1982, it was given a complete new paint job and refurbished. There had been one interim paint job by members of the Agassiz Art Club.



PLEDGE YOUR GOP DELEGATION TO
ALBERT S. FALK

of Wheaton, Minnesota

Favorite Son Candidate

Choose Between:

Creeping Fascism

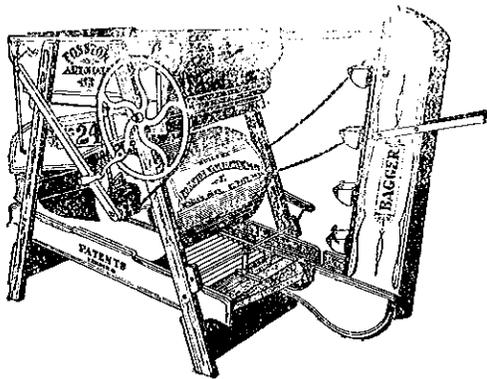
(Iodine in the Water, Enriched Bread, Vitamin D. Milk, etc.)

— or —

America's Greatest Plan for World Peace & Prosperity

(Prepared by Albert S. Falk, GOP Candidate for President, Wheaton, Minn., 1960)

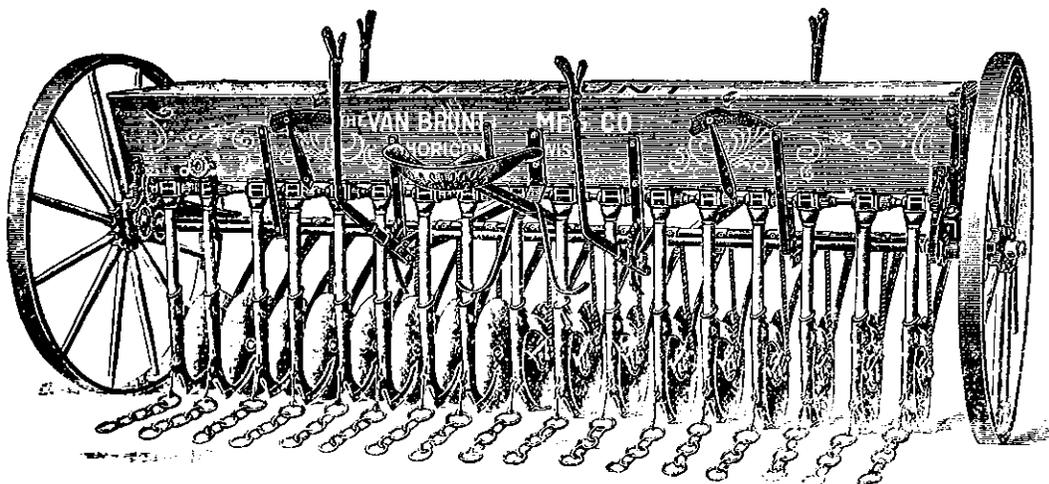
Fosston Fanning Mills



ARE THE BEST
Grain Cleaners

ON THE MARKET

STOP! And look at the Fosston Fanning Mill. You will never buy any other make after you have seen the work the FOSSTON will do. We guarantee them to do more and better work than any other mill on the market. We also handle Grain Drills, Disc Harrows, Boss Harrows, Steel Harrows, Gang and Sulky Plows, Manure Spreaders, Wagons, Buggies, Etc. In fact every thing you need to carry on your farming operations.



By fair and square dealing, we hope to gain and retain your patronage.

WHEATON IMPLEMENT CO.,

W. C. PLANALP, Manager

The business will be carried on in the same building as formerly occupied by W. C. Planalp.