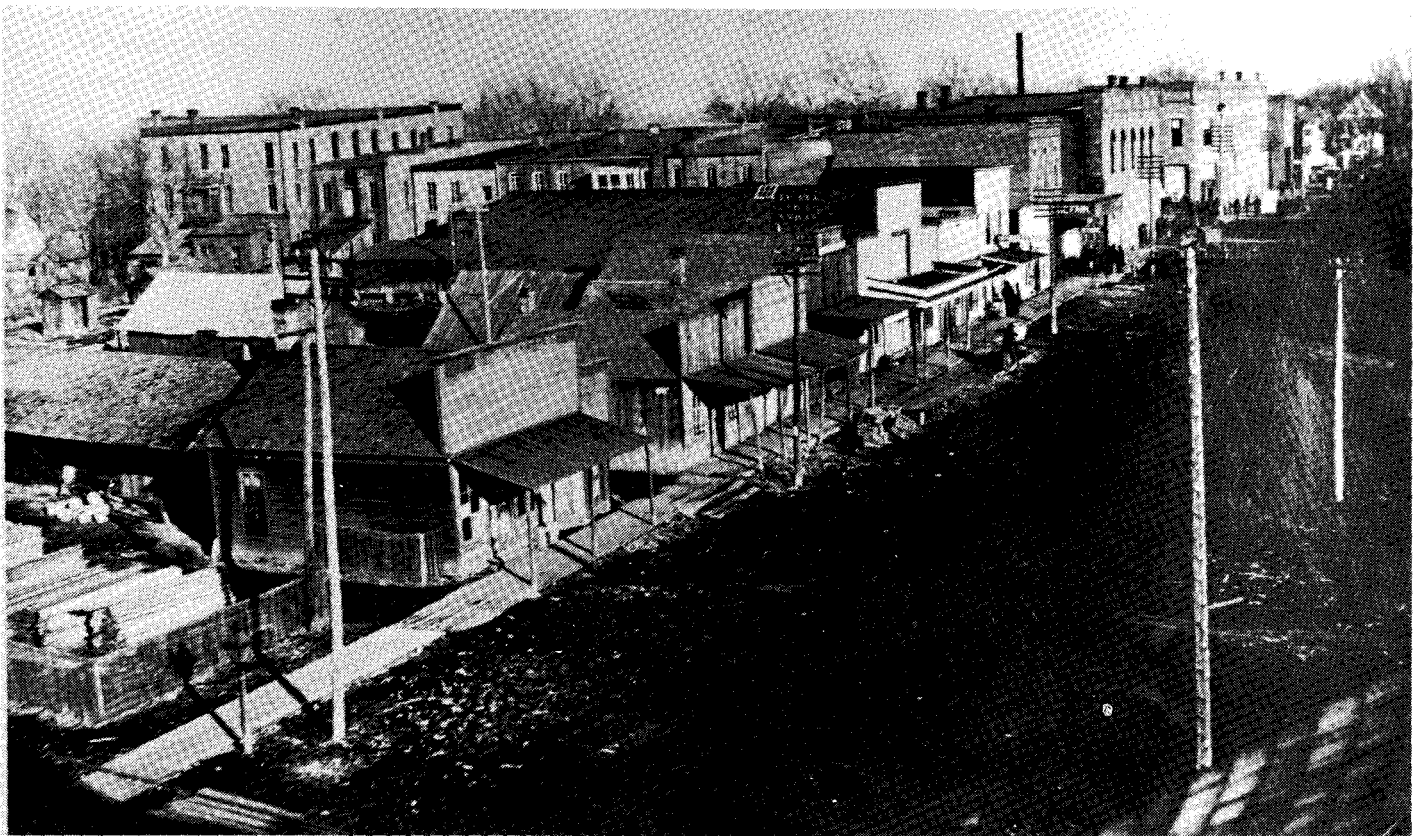


## CHAPTER 3

# *Businesses*



The above picture was taken in the 1890's. It shows the north side of the 100 block of West Main Street, looking east. The picture is courtesy of Josephine Coffman.

Captain A. C. Campbell was an early area businessman. He had a general store in Flat Branch Township which in 1851 included a post office. The post office later was moved to Moweaqua, and Captain Campbell also later located in town. Goods for his early store were delivered from St. Louis by ox teams. The store was housed in a log cabin. Captain Campbell was also responsible for building the first local school. He brought a Miss Akers from St. Louis to be the teacher and boarded her in his home.

In 1850, before the town of Moweaqua became a reality, a mill was built between what is now West Main and West Wall Streets. The mill was established by Simon Spears. About 1893 it was remodeled by Goodwin, Shay and Cowell, and at that time was considered to be one of the best modern rolling-process mills in this part of the state, having a capacity of fifty barrels a day. The Moweaqua Milling Company was leased from 1893 to 1900 by John T. Coffman. He then secured control of the mill and changed its name to Coffman's Mill, wherein he processed cornmeal, feed for livestock and flour known as "The Good-enough". He not only produced ample flour for local use, but also shipped one car load weekly to Decatur for trade. A few years later the brick portion of the mill was torn down and the brick was used to build a home for the Coffman family. This house, located at 117 West South Street, is still standing. Mr. Coffman, assisted by his sons Joe, Jay and Verne, continued the mill, although its business changed throughout the years. By the 1930's it had become a grocery and feed store operated by Mr. Coffman's sons. The mill closed in 1954 and was torn down to make way for what is now the Village Mall.

Twenty-seven years after the town of Moweaqua was laid out, its local newspaper, the *Moweaqua Register*, I. M. Hughes, editor, listed these businesses:

Chas. Bendsley — Ladies shoes \$1.00  
H. F. Day — Groceries and clothing  
L. Melcher — Undertaking  
A. P. Hoxey — Physician and surgeon  
B. B. Bacon — Physician and surgeon  
Gregory and Combe — Groceries and hardware  
S. G. Travis — Hardware  
Michael Erpelding — Tinner  
E. Prescott — Justice of the peace  
V. Snyder and Co. — Bankers  
Potter Hotel  
Geo. M. Keiser and Bro. — Druggists  
Bacon and Smith — Elevator

The livestock and commodity prices given for March 6, 1879 were:

Cattle .....	\$ 3.75 per hundred pounds
Hogs .....	3.25 per hundred pounds
Wheat .....	.80 per bushel
Corn .....	.25 per bushel
Oats .....	.23 per bushel
Flour .....	2.75 per hundred pounds
Hay .....	5.00 per ton

Comparative prices for March 19, 1976, as listed in the Decatur Herald:

Cattle .....	\$34.00 per hundred pounds
Hogs .....	47.00 per hundred pounds
Wheat .....	3.39 per bushel
Corn .....	2.53 per bushel
Oats .....	1.50 per bushel

Hay was unlisted, however, soybeans were added at \$4.53 per bushel and flour was available locally for .89c for five pounds.

Also in 1879 there were two passenger trains a day through Moweaqua. A Gilliland was the station agent.

Just eight years later numerous changes had been made according to information compiled from Mrs. Jane Stephens from the 1886-87 Moweaqua Calls, which were published by Charles M. Hiter, subscriptions \$1.00 per year.

H. F. Day — General Merchandise plow cut 16 inches with 2 horses.

Star Bakery and Restaurant — M. E. Connor, Prop., fresh homemade candies every day and tropical fruits

Forest Tile Works — Thomas Angel, General Merchant and Prop., Groceries, Dry Goods, Notions, Tile and Lumber, 7 miles southeast of Moweaqua

A. P. Hoxey, M.D. — All calls attended day or night

R. E. Tobey, Dentist — Charges reasonable and all work warranted

Tilman Weakley — National Mutual Accident Assoc.

Riley and Stine — Undertaker, hearse in attendance at funerals

Tom C. Ponting — Breeder and importer of thoroughbreds, correspondence solicited

M. Erpelding — Dealer in Stoves and Tinware

Eclipse Stables — N. R. Conner, Prop. — Gentlemen's roadsters, suitable drivers for ladies and children

Charley Keiser's Model Drug Store — Chemicals, Toilet Articles, Perfumery, Fine Segars! (sic)

Gents Furnishing Goods — Gaskill (Cheap Charley) Ah There! RUA were a "wee bit" will do wonders, a "whole heap" will work miracles.

J. E. Gregory — Sash, Doors, Hair, all building materials

E. Bendsley and Co. — Reliable Grocery and Boot and Shoe House. Prices lower than mercury in January

G. A. Snook and Co. — Prop. of Moweaqua and Radford Elevators

R. L. Hays and Co. — a dollar's worth of goods for 80 cents

N. Francis — Lumber in small or car-load quantities

Moweaqua Flouring and Saw Mills — Smith and Green Prop. Famous brands nickel plate, crystal and rising sun.

Gregory Combs and Co. — Fresh pure goods that will bear scrutiny

Oscar Frazee — Drain Tile

City Meat Market — W. P. Beaumont, Prop. Cash for hides, tallow and pelts.

E. C. May — Contractor and builder

Bakery and Restaurant — J. A. Hilsabeck — Malaga Grapes, Cape Cod Cranberries, Coa Coa Nuts

V. Snyder — Real Estate and Ins. Agt.

Potter House — Mrs. I. H. Potter, Prop. E. E. Potter Manager — Large sample rooms for commercial men

Hardware — Furniture — S. M. Adams, Prop.

Mr. Adams furniture business prospered three years later when he sold the entire bill of furniture and house fittings to H. B. Hawk for his new three story hotel. This included 31 chamber suites, one parlor suite, office, dining room and kitchen furniture. The city fathers took pride in the fact that Mr. Hawk believed in patronizing and encouraging local business and in the fact that Mr. Adams could compete with businesses in larger towns. This was said to be one of the finest and most complete hotels in central Illinois.

In 1887 a new "Calaboose" was built. It evidently didn't have much business, as when the local police took a prisoner down to lock him up, they found it full of bumble bees. The prisoner was released.

Also in 1889 the Mill had been improved and they noted that their business had more than doubled. Mr. J. G. Hudson built a brick store building for his meat business.

Ten years later Moweaqua was considered to be an "up to date town", at least by the local "Call Mail". It included two telephone exchanges, one for local and one for long distance calls used by nearly one hundred local businesses and houses; an excellent water system, both for fire protection and domestic use; miles of brick sidewalks which had replaced the rotting wooden ones; numerous stores brilliantly illuminated with incandescents; (private residences also were putting in electricity); a splendid coal shaft producing cheap fuel as well as steady employment; and trade from a good class of farmers amounting to thousands of dollars yearly.

By 1900 nearly every business building in town was brick. During the ten previous years the population had nearly doubled, totaling nearly 1600 people. It was generally conceded that Moweaqua was a good town. A building boom was in existence; a million bricks were contracted for local buildings. This boom was not all of a positive nature, however. The streets and alleys in the business district were considered horrid due to litter. Weekly complaints came from farmers due to lack of hitching conveniences. The water supply was said to be salty, filthy and stinking. These two articles from the Moweaqua Call Mail give no further explanations.

#### "Wednesday, June 21, 1899"

"The conditions that existed and the scenes enacted on the public streets of Moweaqua yesterday were a disgrace to the community and a blight upon the fair name of the town. Drunkenness, obscenity, brawls and scraps made the town for the first time a veritable hell on earth. Not the slightest effort was made to suppress it."

#### "Wednesday, August 22, 1900"

"The streets were enlivened considerable Saturday evening by several scraps. The fun was paid for later in the magistrate's office." Concerned citizens were apparently seeing to the town's needs.

In 1900 a handsome hose cart was placed in service by Fire Chief Wm. L. Morris. It was fully equipped with gong, axe, lamps and a patent self-reel, and cost \$100.

The Gregory and Combs Grocery and Hardware business started in 1877 was sold in 1903 to B. M. Maxey and Co.

By 1910 the population had leveled off at 1602, including 553 children of school age.

This listing gives us the locations of various commercial establishments in their geographical locations. The left column contains the businesses about 1915, the right column the present day establishments, in the corresponding place.

Main Street beginning at Elm Street and going to South Street on the east side of the street.

Belle McHenry Millinery . . . . .	Deibert Studio
J. T. Haslem, Clothing, Dry Goods . .	Northern Propane
Ben Hudson, Drugs & Ice Cream . .	Empty
Jeff Davis, Barber . . . . .	Empty
S. M. Adams, Hardware . . . . .	Fleetwood Oil Company
Elsum Grocery . . . . .	Johnny's Pro & Golf Shop
Butcher Shop . . . . .	Steve Tirpak, Barber
Drug Store, Commercial Bank . . .	Ayars State Bank
Leo Robinson Jewelry . . . . .	Bank Parking Lot
Ribelin General Store . . . . .	Bank Parking Lot

Corner of North Main and East Main:

Joe Miller, Men's Ware . . . . .	Hight's Delight Clothing
Jim Riley, Peanuts and Candy . . .	Hight's Delight Clothing
Colbert and Veech, Jewelry . . . .	T. J. Gorden, Insurance
Jim Smith, Barber . . . . .	Ethel's Beauty Shop
Firehouse with bell in front . . . .	Vacant Space
Tin Shop . . . . .	Colonial Apartments
Brown's Saloon . . . . .	Colonial Apartments
Nalbach's Harness Shop . . . . .	Stewarts Cleaners
R. G. Stine Funeral Director . . . .	Vacant
Garrett & McIntyre Restaurant . .	Curl & Swirl Beauty Salon
Trual Restaurant . . . . .	Novota's TV Service

Corner of South Main and Wall Street:

Webb & Pistorius, Livery Stable . .	Minott Shell Service
Two Empty Lots . . . . .	L & W Star Market
Barn for Livery Stable storage . . .	L & W Parking Lot

North Main and South Main, beginning at the northwest corner of North Main and Elm and going to South Street, West side of street:

Bromley's Studio . . . . .	Windel's Restaurant
Edna Sollars' Home . . . . .	Vacant Service Station
Dr. W. P. Buck . . . . .	Vacant Service Station
Dr. F. D. Pratz . . . . .	H. G. Ayars, Realtor
H. P. Hawk Hotel . . . . .	Long's Plumbing
Dan Stroh, Pool Room . . . . .	Pool Room
	Edwin W. Jokisch, Jr., Lawyer

J. C. Cheatham, Groceries . . . . .	Forston's Barber Shop
Bob Hamil Groceries . . . . .	Duez Shoe Store
Forbes Bakery . . . . .	Curiosity Shop
James Beard, Tailor . . . . .	American Legion Hall
Charles Keiser, Drug Store . . . . .	American Legion Hall

Corner of North Main and West Main:

Henry Day Grocery & Impl. . . . .	J & D Standard Service
Empty Lot . . . . .	J & D Standard Service
Town Hall . . . . .	Bradbury & Harrelson Antiques
Campbell Restaurant . . . . .	Callison Ford Sales
Farner Cobbler Shop . . . . .	Callison Ford Sales
Buckem Blacksmith . . . . .	Callison Ford Sales

Corner of South Main and Wall Street:

Sweeny Groceries . . . . .	Moweaqua Bowl
Stivers Livery . . . . .	Moweaqua Bowl
Poultry House . . . . .	Moweaqua Bowl
Vacant Lot . . . . .	Hall's Jewelry & Gifts
Myers Tailor Shop . . . . .	Hall's Jewelry & Gifts

100 block of East Wall Street, south side:

Chapman Poultry House . . . . .	Bud Bridgman, Welder
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100 block of East Wall Street, north side:

Lumber Yard . . . . .	Moweaqua Mall
Coffman's Mill . . . . .	Moweaqua Mall

West Main and East Main Street, beginning from the railroad and going to Macon Street, north side of street:

Lumber Yard . . . . .	Vacant Lot
Saloon . . . . .	Vacant Lot
Restaurant . . . . .	Carl Seifert Insurance
Lyric Theater . . . . .	Empty



Pictured is the 100 block of North Main Street looking south. This was taken around the turn of the century. Picture courtesy of Josephine Coffman.

Gregory's Hardware ..... Empty  
 Saloon and Brewery..... Necchi Sewing Machines,  
    Rita Saddoris  
 Dave Craven's Pool Room ..... Sew 'n Save Fabric Shop  
 American Legion Building.....

Corner of West Main and North Main Street:

Ribelin General Store..... Bank Parking Lot  
 (Opera House on 2nd floor)  
 Duboski Clothing Store ..... Wright Heating & Air  
    Conditioning  
 Ayars State Bank..... Claude Vollmer Garage  
 Moweaqua News ..... Printing by Elsie, Elsie  
    Snyder  
 Adamson Hardware Store..... Town Hall, Library  
 Storage Shed ..... Don Drew Apartments

West Main and East Main, beginning from the railroad and  
 going to Macon Street, south side of street:

Muller Ice Cream, 12 flavors..... Moweaqua Farmers Co-op  
    Grain Co.  
 Wetzel Garage ..... Post Office  
 Creamery ..... Post Office  
 Klump Blacksmith ..... Dairy Isle  
 Henry Day Grocery & Impl..... J & D Standard Service

Corner of West Main and South Main:

Joe Miller Clothing..... Hight's Delight Clothing  
 Barber Shop..... American Fixture Co.  
 Millinery..... American Fixture Co.  
 Gaskill Grocery and Dry Goods... Elene's Country Gift Shop  
    & Ceramics  
 Post Office ..... Rotary Building

Vacant Lot, Ribelin House..... Sherwood Funeral Home  
 Vacant Lot ..... K. L. Pistorius, M.D.,  
    Office

Establishments in Moweaqua Mall, 1976:

Mall Restaurant  
 Funk Insurance Agency  
 Lola's Fashion Shop  
 Amling & Beyers, Lawyers  
 Mental Health Center  
 Village Mall Beauty Shop  
 Decatur Danceville  
 Gina Lee Card Shop  
 Fathauer's Supermarket  
 Newton's Bookkeeping

Businesses scattered throughout the town, 1976:

R & W Body Shop  
 Hemer Fertilizer Company  
 Moweaqua Paint & Body Shop  
 Bohlen Seed Company  
 Imperial Service Station, H. Brooks  
 Moweaqua Packing Plant  
 Dawson & Wikoff Funeral Home  
 Vanco Service Station, Leto Voudrie

## BUSINESSES IN 1931

Ayars State Bank	Baird Anchor Farm
Brown's Garage	Dr. B. F. Hudson
Moweaqua Bldg. & Loan Assn.	Moweaqua Hatchery
State Bank of Moweaqua	Moweaqua Coal Mining &
F. G. Cheatham & Co.	Mfg. Co.
Joe Miller — Clothier	R. Marion Parrott, D.C.
Elite Beauty Shoppe & Cosmetics	Lyric Theater
Earl Jacobs Garage	Kroger Grocery Store
Coffman Milling Company	Home Oil Company

## LIVERY, BUGGY, HARNESS AND BLACKSMITH

Although progress has ended the need for these businesses in early times they were of utmost importance.

In 1898 the old "redfront" blacksmith shop, probably located at the southwest corner of Main and Wall Street, occupied by Buckem Bros. and the adjoining wagon making shop was sold to Lyon and Winchell for \$1,200. That same day Conrad Winchell bought his brother John's interest in the livery barn. John then ran the blacksmith shop while Conrad ran the livery barn. The next year Conrad sold the livery business to Charles Hipes, keeping only his stallion and jack, a team of horses and the street sprinkler.

On July 12, 1899, the following article appeared in the Moweaqua Call Mail: "James Russell, the blacksmith, who has been in Moweaqua a year or more, left town Sunday afternoon rather suddenly, buying a ticket to St. Louis. It is alleged that he left a large number of accounts unsettled, and his business affairs, so his partner, Elmer Snell says, were left in a sadly unfavorable condition. He has been in business for himself for several months and was an excellent mechanic."

R. E. Wetzel, in 1900, bought from Judge Ames the F. B. West Shop at 115 West Main Street for \$300. Mr. Wetzel converted it into a machine and blacksmith shop where he made his well known check valve.

After eighteen years in the harness business, Mart Miller sold out to J. D. Drew. Mr. Drew's son Posey, became the manager. The next month, however, the business was sold to William Waters.

After purchasing the L. P. Bullock Livery business in 1908, J. W. Webb became proprietor of both livery businesses in town.

Nicholas Nalbach came to Moweaqua before he was thirty and opened a harness and hardware shop at 129 South Main Street, which became a corner land mark for more than fifty years. Buyers came from afar to buy the hand made harness and Banner Buggies. Mr. Nalbach handled his business almost entirely by himself with the occasional help of his seven sons. He mended youngsters' skate straps and sewed their baseballs. His friends congregated in the store to discuss politics and religion. In 1948 Mr. Nalbach leased his building to the Parker Creamery, thus ending the local industries which had been so important before the advent of the automobile.

## Newspapers

Moweaqua's first newspaper, called the *Moaweaqua Register*, was printed April 16, 1873. It was published by John P. Marnel and edited by A.M. Anderson. The leading editorial stongly advocated the building of an east-west railroad. Over one hundred years have passed, but the railroad has never materialized.

In 1877 the *Register* was edited by Arnold Hughes. The leading article in the last edition that year details the foreclosure of a mortgage on the newspaper.

By 1886 the *Moweaqua Call* was in business at 117 East Main Street, shortly thereafter called the *Call Mail*. By 1910 the local paper was the *Moweaqua News*, a name that holds today. C. Eugene Snyder was publisher of it for 37 years, purchasing it in 1915. His son Claude became editor and

publisher in 1952. Claude's wife Elsie worked with him and upon his death in 1960 became the owner. In 1964 she sold the paper to Willard Raymond of Assumption, although she has continued to use the building as a printing shop. Mr. Raymond, who came to this area from Oregon, printed the *Assumption*, *Moweaqua*, and *Macon* papers separately until 1966 when all three were combined except for the front and back pages which contain local news of each town. This practice still exists today.

The history book committee and many contributors are deeply in debt to all of these papers, as this was often the available source for material.

## TRANSPORTATION

Knowing from first hand experience the difficulties of getting grain to market in St. Louis by ox cart, Michael Schneider was quite interested in encouraging the Illinois Central Railroad to build its track through Moweaqua rather than several miles east or west, as the railroad had planned. According to information supplied by Aileen Day, Mr. Schneider gave every other lot needed through town for laying of tracks. In 1854 the track was put in under the supervision of Mr. Eastman. Reed and Wells, whose daughter, Mattie, gave Moweaqua its name, sawed ties from trees in a woods a mile west of town. This area came to be known as "Stumptown." Because William and Valentine Snyder, Jr. took the engineer, Charles Tuttle, to "the swimmin hole" three miles west of town, Mr. Tuttle promised them free mileage on the railroad, but so far as is known this was not collected. One hundred thirty-six men came to town to build the railroad. Most of them stayed at the Schneider homestead, many sleeping in the barn. After the railroad was completed, a freight house was built and tickets were sold there. Mr. George Hardy was the first agent. Wood was used as fuel in the first engines using these tracks until a spark from a train ignited a large wood house near the local track, burning it to the ground. After that coal was used.

The day the first train came through town was an exciting one. Many rural people had planned to come to town to witness the great event, however, heavy rains the night before caused many to change their minds, for fear of getting stuck in the mud. Not all were deterred; Mrs. Nannie Worsham drove a team and wagon in from west of town. Although she tied the horses some distance from the track, the noise of the engine and sight of the train frightened them. They broke loose and ran away.

It is said that Mr. and Mrs. Prescott were the first local people to ride as passengers through town. They went to Pana and rode to Decatur, a trip taking twelve hours. Passengers sat on boards stretched across open mud cars.

By 1899 a depot had been built and a park area created around it to present a neat appearance to the passenger passing through. In 1900, however, the "fast trains" were discontinued through Moweaqua. Due to railroad consolidation shorter routes became available between metropolitan areas, bypassing the local tracks. Night service was discontinued, cutting off the supply of the St. Louis afternoon papers. Since the town did over \$100,000 worth of business annually with the Illinois Central, it was felt that more consideration was due. Whether or not this problem was solved is not recorded and trucks soon alleviated the need for more trains. Presently two freight trains pass through town daily.

The first automobile to be owned locally was bought by M. S. Ayars in 1908. It was a Schacht Auto Runabout geared to run thirty miles per hour. The second car in town was

purchased by Dr. W. T. Bowman. It was an Olds Runabout geared to run the same speed. In 1917 M. S. Ayars became the Overland Automobile Dealer in Moweaqua, selling the model 90 for \$695 f.o.b. Toledo. By then cars had become common enough that the Gregory and Tolson garage put in a larger gas tank, holding 550 gallons.

With the advent of automobiles, the community looked forward to the completion of the then State Route 2. During the summer of 1924 workers started pouring cement south of town to extend the highway northward. Sections opened during the fall and the road was completed to Decatur in October. A local celebration was held to herald this event. Later this highway was renamed Route 51.

Further signs of the times came in 1947 when Owen Hilvety opened his airport four miles northeast of Moweaqua. The airport and landing field located near his shop, covered 30 acres of land. Hanger space was available for rental, flying instructions were given and planes could be rented. The landing strip is still useable.

## MOWEAQUA PARKS

The city park of Moweaqua was once a wild mass of tangled thickets and vines. It was known, to pioneers far and wide, to contain the largest den of wovles in the county. The park came into being in 1853 when Michael Schneider donated that city block to the village for that purpose. The land was cleared and Charles F. Hardy and his brother, George, set out many trees. Charles had recently returned from the California gold rush area.

The park was often in use, but received little care. Occasionally a band stand was erected, only to fall into decay with the passing of time. In the 1920's the Shela Mo Club raised over \$3,000 through sponsorship of street carnivals. They used this money to beautify the park through the laying of concrete sidewalks, removal of trees which had been too thickly planted and improving the drinking fountain. A new bandstand was built. It was a handsome octagonal concrete structure with massive urns at the entrance. The bandstand was well used, especially by the children who found it a good place to romp and play, particularly when fairs and carnivals were held in the park.

In 1948 the Moweaqua Park District was formed through the passing of a referendum. The limestone columned pavilion was built in 1956 mainly through the hard work of Mrs. Zeva Snyder, the Women's Club, Community Club, businessmen and individuals. The building cost \$4,000, and has been used almost constantly in good weather ever since.

By 1969 the band stand had deteriorated badly and was removed. New rest rooms, constructed of cypress siding and cedar shingle roof, were built on the site of the band stand at that time.

In 1970 the commissioners of the park district, James Meredith, John R. Funk and Paul Duez, purchased forty acres of land two miles west of Moweaqua to be used as additional recreation facilities. Within six years it included a gun club for shooting skeet and trap, a saddle club, a ball field and a picnic and camping area. Improvements are still being made. The present park commissioners are Larry Hight, Aubrey Duncan and John R. Funk.

## MOWEAQUA FAIR ASSOCIATION

In November, 1886, several businessmen and interested parties met to organize a Fair Association. They sold sub-

scriptions, with the first fair being held in the fall of 1887 and the second in 1888. Since no local newspapers were published during those years, nothing much is known about them. The Moawequa (correct spelling) Call Mail had these accounts of the ensuing two years.

The fair grounds were located near Greaves Grove, a place where Fourth of July picnics and other affairs were held. This was just east of what is now Allen Drive. The fair included among other things farming demonstrations, livestock, and horticulture exhibits and horse racing, which seemed to be the big attraction.

On August 22, 1889, the Illinois Central Railroad authorized a 1/3 fare from all stations from Vandalia to Clinton to Moawequa to encourage people to attend the Moweaqua Fair. A special train was run at 6:30 on the last day of the fair. Accommodations for out of towners were available at the Palace Hotel, the Coombes House and elsewhere in Moawequa. The weather was good throughout the fair which lasted from Wednesday, September 11, to Saturday the 14th. The grounds were continually thronged with happy and interested people. Valentine Snyder, Jr., was general chairman. Wednesday the gate receipts were over \$200, and the day was filled with horse racing. Thursday was children's day. Children from all over the area marched behind the Moawequa band to the fairgrounds. On Friday more than 4,000 people were in attendance. Saturday the biggest day of the fair, brought the offer of a special "Citizens Purse" of \$100 to be given for the best trot or pace made in 2:35 or no money would be given. This was won by "Billy G", belonging to Gasaway of Niantic. Floral Hall had been filled with good exhibits and many animal exhibits attracted the attention of the orderly crowd. The various booths did a fine business throughout the fair. The association improved the grounds during the year and erected additional stalls and amphitheater room. They felt the 1889 fair had been a "daisy", but they hoped the next one would be still better.

The Moweaqua Fair of 1890 was held from Tuesday, September 9th to Saturday the 13th. This year's president was W. C. Miller, with Robert P. Duncan as secretary. On Tuesday rain fell nearly all day and all activities were cancelled. The directors met Wednesday to discuss a postponement, but decided to go ahead as planned, as the weather cleared somewhat. Parish's Military Band was given instructions to proceed to the grounds, the crowd followed and the fair was formally opened. This was F. M. B. A. day, and W. W. Bowles, the state organizer, made an interesting speech. Lodges for forty miles around had planned to attend, but since the weather was still bad the crowd was only of fair size. The track was useable, however, and the horse races began. Thursday brought continued bad weather, however, there was a fine display of livestock during the morning and racing continued the rest of the day. Floral Hall, contained magnificent displays of fancy work, paintings, flowers, garden produce and culinary arts. There were several interesting displays including an "elegant case of druggists sundries", fine stoves, and furniture. On Friday the weather was a bit better and a large crowd was in attendance. It began to rain again during the last race of the day. One horse fell in a pool of water on the track, but neither horse nor rider was injured. Saturday dawned raw and cold, which caused the size of the crowd to be disappointing. The total four days gate receipts were \$1,104; \$24 more than the year before. Had the weather been better throughout no doubt the proceeds would have been much greater. The association was not discouraged, however, and felt they would nearly make fair expenses.



Perhaps the Fair Association remained active after 1890, but no mention was again made of it in Moweaqua papers. It is probable that this was the last fair of that organization in Moweaqua.

## **SOUTH RACE TRACK**

Another horse racing track was located just within the present south city limits, just west of Route 51. This was a quarter mile track located on land owned by Zeke Prescott. Not much is known about this track as it had closed before 1892. The coal mine opened soon after that and this race track became the land on which many miners built their homes.

## **CREW'S RACE TRACK**

Late in 1905 a Driving Park Association was formed which saw to the building of a harness race track. This track located just north of the IOOF Cemetery was a half mile track used for harness racing, and known as the Crew's Track. The opening race was held July 4, 1906. In the Moweaqua News, August 8, 1906, the following item appeared:

"The management of the Moweaqua Fair and Driving Park Association wishes to apologize to the public for the disgraceful affair which took place at the races August 1st, and wishes to assure the public that such a thing will not be tolerated again. Ladies will be protected."

No information as to what had happened can be found.

In time two buildings were erected near the track, a grandstand on the south side and a long barn to the north. There was a cinder walk that went from town across a board walk bridge over the stream, along the cemetery and to the gate of the track just north of the cemetery. In June 1907, Ed Cole of Obed brought his horse "Nancy Hanks" to race. She set a three minute record, which evidently went unchallenged.

During the next two months the directors called three meetings of the stockholders to discuss a proposition to dissolve the association. Neither of the first two meetings attracted a majority and no information can be found about the third. In any event, the long barn remained until 1970 at which time it collapsed into a pile of boards. All that remains now are the boards and a faint ½ mile oval which sometimes can be seen in the nearby field.

## **PUBLIC UTILITIES**

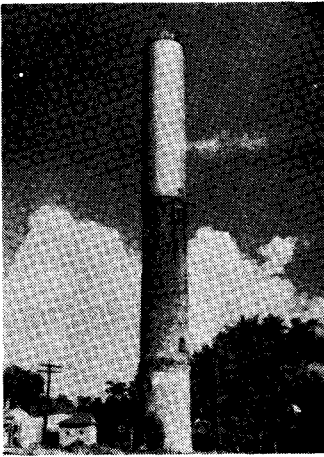
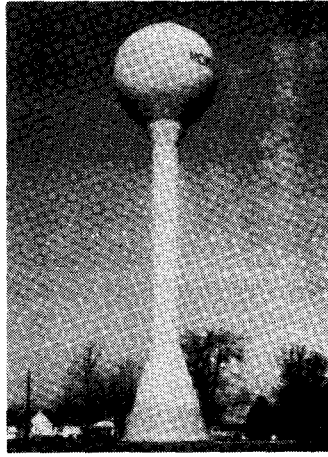
The following article appeared in the June 28, 1899, edition of the Moweaqua Call Mail:

"The public watering trough has been discontinued in the center of the street, and a place provided just south of Day's Store, where a large new trough has been located and it is supplied with city water from the mains. The public pump for drinking purposes has been located at Day's Corner, the well in the middle of the street being arched over with brick to make it safe, and the water conveyed from the well to the corner."

By 1917 the village replaced the wooden water mains with 3,000 feet of iron ones.

Pictured is the intersection of Main Streets. It was taken in the early 1900's.  
Picture courtesy of Josephine Coffman.



**OLD STANDPIPE—1906****NEW TOWER—1969**

An electric plant was built in 1899 to be maintained by John H. Culver. Ten arc lights lighted the town. Businesses were wired, and parts of the town electrified. The early service was available only from dusk till daylight. By 1908 a flashing sign had been placed above the Bowman and Hudson Store.

The first local telephone was installed in a grocery store on Main Street. It was used only to call places in Decatur and beyond. Charles Odell started the first telephone company for local subscribers in 1887. The office was located at 129 East Main Street. Rates were \$15.00 a year in advance, and there was no night or Sunday service for sometime. Daisy Kirkman was the first woman operator at a salary of \$6.00 a month.

This company was sold to John Mull who sold it to S. S. Clapper and P. L. Drew in 1909. Mr. Drew bought out Mr. Clapper the next year and in 1914 built a building at the corner of 129 East Main to house it. In 1958 the Drews sold the franchise to Inland Telephone which still operates it. A system, perhaps unique in the area, was installed whereby on all local calls a buzzer would sound after about three minutes and a second buzzer at the end of the next minute preceded disconnections of the lines. This was discontinued in 1976, much to most subscribers' relief.

By 1938 Moweaqua citizens could purchase ice for their ice boxes at the ice house or from the new insulated truck which delivered to private homes and businesses.

In 1941 the WPA Sewing Room upstairs at 129 South main, was closed due to lack of qualified workers. This sewing unit conducted by Helen Smith was outstanding in Shelby County due to its excellent products and production record. They made clothes for needy people.

One of the longest continuous businesses in Moweaqua was the barber shop operated by Jeff Jarvis. After 57 years Mr. Jarvis sold his shop in 1941. When the Hudson Hardware and Furniture Store at 114 North Main sold at public auction in 1941, a tradition started in the 1870's was ended. Although the store had passed through several owners, its type of merchandise had remained the same.

## POST OFFICE

After being housed in McHenry's Drug Store and the American Legion Building, the Moweaqua Post Office moved to separate quarters in 1959. It even provided an outside box for deposit of mail after hours. At the dedication on June 12,

a crowd of 350 people gathered. The Moweaqua High School Band, directed by Mark Gregory, performed. The ceremony also included the local scout troops. Several speakers were heard, and Postmaster Merlyn H. Reatherford received a flag which had flown over the post office in Washington, D. C.

## FUNERAL HOMES

Leonard M. Melcher II was the first area undertaker. He had come from Pennsylvania, where he was born in 1817, to a farm southeast of Moweaqua. His farmhouse was used as an inn on the Lincoln Trail. In 1870 he and his family moved to Moweaqua where he opened an undertaking establishment at 108 East Main. Mr. Melcher made his own furniture and caskets. His daughter, Mrs. B. I. Pontius, lined the caskets with white silk for ladies and children and black silk for men. Mr. Melcher had several partners at various times, Butler, Riley and Stine.

Samuel Riley and Robert Stine purchased the business in 1881 to become a part of their carpentry and building contracting business. Mr. Stine became the sole owner in 1887, and his sons Roy and Lloyd continued it after his death. In 1908 Roy G. Stine became the sole owner and in the mid 1930's moved the business from the downtown area to 314 East Elm Street. During the mine disaster in 1932 all fifty-four miners killed were prepared for burial by the Stine Funeral Home. Funeral directors from near and far volunteered their services to the Stines. Roy G. Stine passed away in 1938, after which the business was managed by his wife Essie, daughter Jean and son-in-law Chester B. Hodge. The Stine-Hodge firm was sold to Dawson and Wikoff in 1969 and is still operated by them. This sale ended the Stine family tradition which had continued for eighty-eight years.

In 1960 Lloyd Ater opened a funeral home in the 300 block of East Main Street, but this closed five years later. Orval Sherwood expanded his Assumption business to Moweaqua in 1970. This was located at 118 East Main Street, where it still operates.

## HISTORY OF MOWEAQUA BANKS

In 1874, Valentine Snyder, Jr., John M. Fribley, and George A. Kautz organized the V. Snyder and Company Bank. It was located at 115 North Main. They maintained this business successfully for forty-four years.

The First National Bank of Moweaqua was organized as a private bank in 1892, at that time known as the Commercial Bank. The sponsors of it were the Honorable D. P. Keller, State Representative, and his wife. This bank was located at 106 North Main. In 1905 it was reorganized under the National Banking Laws Act, then becoming known as the First National Bank.

Ralph and Martin S. Ayars worked in this Commercial Bank for many years and acquired a financial interest in it. In early 1900 a young man who lived south of Moweaqua took a trip to Springfield. Fearing the "sin and shadows" of so vast a metropolis, he folded his nearly one hundred dollars neatly and put them in his sock. After tramping about Springfield all day, he was amazed to discover that his bills were torn to pieces from having been walked on. He took these to Cashier Martin Ayars, who spent many a weary hour in putting together the fragments of the \$1, \$2, \$5 and \$10 bills. He finally got the entire amount, ninety-eight dollars in recognizable shape and sent it to the



treasury department in Washington, D.C., where it was promptly redeemed in usable currency. The Ayars brothers dissolved their partnership in the Commercial Bank in 1901, and on March 20 of that year the Ayars Brothers Bankers firm opened at 115 East Main Street. In 1904 a check written on a piece of pine board was presented at the Ayars Brothers' Bank. Since it was properly written and signed by the drawer and properly endorsed on the back side, Martin S. Ayars, cashed it. The only problem this presented was that it would not go on the spindle with the paper checks. In 1918 Ralph Ayars sold his interest to the First National Bank as he was in ill health. In this same year, V. Snyder and Company also merged with the First National Bank.

Due to this growth, the First National Bank purchased the adjoining building and did extensive remodeling, costing \$40,000. It was then considered one of the finest banks in central Illinois.

In 1920 a state law was passed demanding that every bank have either a state or a federal charter. The First National Bank was reorganized under the State of Illinois charter. At this time Martin S. Ayars was president.

On May 23, 1928, the First National Bank was closed by the Comptroller, stating that the bank was insolvent. This came as a great shock to the community. Six weeks later it appeared that a reorganization would be possible; however, this did not prove feasible, so on October 17, 1928, the First National Bank building and equipment were sold at public auction. The buyer was Martin S. Ayars, who purchased the structure for \$40,000 and the equipment for \$19,000. On November 1, 1928, the Ayars State Bank opened in the former First National Bank Building where it is still located. Martin S. Ayars was president of it until his death in 1945; at which time his son, Haldon, became president, a position he still holds.

During 1928, when the First National Bank was closed, a number of local businessmen got together and decided to open their own bank. This was called the Moweaqua State Bank and was located across from the Ayars Bank, later moving next door to them. The merchants employed two out of town men to manage the bank: Mr. Mohler as president and Paul W. Neff as cashier. It opened January 1, 1929 with a capital stock of \$26,000 and a \$10,000 paid in surplus. Most of the 44 stockholders were residents of Moweaqua. Neff, a young red-haired man, reported on November 19, 1930, that the bank had been robbed. He stated that shortly before noon when he was alone in the bank, a lone robber entered, pushed him into the vault, tied him up, took about \$5,000, locked the vault and left. About an hour later Mr. Neff said he got himself untied, unlocked the vault, and called President Mohler. Nothing more was ever heard of the robber.

On December 7, 1932, Mr. Neff reported that he had been kidnapped. He said he drove into his garage about 10:00 p.m. when someone got into his car, and forced him to drive west of Decatur, robbed him, and took his car. Mr. Neff found his way back to Decatur; however, no trace of the kidnapper was ever found.

In November 1935, Mr. Neff was again in trouble. He sent an envelope supposedly containing \$6,000 in government bonds to a Chicago bank. Instead of bonds, it contained a folded newspaper. He was arrested and tried. At which time he confessed to this fraud, having used the money from the sale of the bonds to pay various personal debts. On November 27, 1935, Judge Wham sentenced Mr.

Neff to the Federal Reformatory at Chillicothe, Ohio, for a year and a day. Shortly afterward the Moweaqua State Bank was forced to close due to financial problems.

A group of Moweaqua businessmen had an idea of practical benefit for the community in 1886 when they opened a Building and Loan Association. The first directors were A. J. Combs, V. Snyder, Jr., George M. Keiser, J. E. Gregory, C. F. Gaskill, Wallace Gregory, and J. M. Aydelot. This was a thriving business until the 1950's.

## HOTELS

Shortly after Moweaqua was established the need for a hotel became apparent, especially as the railroad brought salesmen to the village to sell their wares. The Potter House Hotel was started in 1853 by I. H. Potter, proprietor and Ed Potter, manager. It was located at 200 North Main Street. It had a large sample room for the commercial men and a dining room which served home cooked meals. No record of early prices is available, but the price per meal was later raised to 25 cents.

It was later refitted and renovated, and in 1887 a company partnership was formed between I. H. Potter, Jr. and Charles Bendsley. Mr. Bendsley also started a livery business in the Potter barn.

In 1889 The Palace Hotel, located at 119 North Main Street, was opened by H. B. Hawk. It was the largest facility between Decatur and Pana, boasting 31 bedrooms. It also had two parlors, one for ladies and one for gents, and a dining room which seated 50 people. The kitchen featured "an excellent eight hole wrought steel range." The entire building was lighted by gas. Two years later Mr. Hawk sold the entire hotel and furnishing to Mr. Scott Huston for \$7,500. In return Mr. Huston sold Mr. Hawk his 224 acre farm in Washington County, Ohio, for \$14,560. Information is unavailable concerning how the Hustons prospered, however, in 1901 Mr. and Mrs. George W. Shaffer sold the Palace Hotel to Charles H. Welman for \$4,000 including furnishings.

The Hotel Drew evidently opened at this same location in 1926. It was completely renovated with a cream colored stucco exterior, twenty-four bedrooms, complete with Simmons beds, cafe, banquet room seating 130 and a lobby. The decor throughout was lavish and complete down to monogramed linen napkins. Mr. and Mrs. Dallas Coburn leased the hotel for several years. In the 1940's the tourist business waned and the main floor was turned into Long's Plumbing Shop. The upstairs is now used as apartments.

## SALOONS AND RESTAURANTS

Although Moweaqua has been "dry" for many years, such has not always been the case. In 1903 the village voted in liquor and rumors were rampant as to where the saloons would open. It was fairly certain that six businesses would be converted for this purpose. Later that year licenses were issued to Weifel and Brown, George Crews, Edward Jackson and Jurica and Son. G. W. Swich was to be given a license later.

In 1938 Don Trulock opened the New Paradise Inn one and a half miles south of town. For the grand opening, radio artists Lazy Jim Day and Lulu Belle entertained. Three years later Moweaqua voted "dry" by 92 votes.

Many restaurants have served the town, dating back to 1911 when Mattie McHenry and Lottie Colbert opened an oyster parlor in the Prescott Building on West Main Street. They served short order lunches, home made ice cream and coffee "like mother used to make." Two months later G. A. Robinson opened a restaurant in the room vacated by the Oyster Parlor.

The Blue Grill Cafe opened in 1938 in the Hudson Building, located at 114 N. Main Street with Janes A. Ward as proprietor. The cafe was entirely decorated in blue. The next year Charles and Juanita Bilyeu purchased the Snyder Cafe in the Hotel Drew from the J. B. Snyders.

## FOOD SERVICES

Many people have been involved with providing Moweaqua with food. A bakery opened in 1901 run by James H. Sanders. His phone number was 3. Later that same year R. E. Roberts purchased the confectionery and bakery business of Mrs. Sarah Hempel. In 1910 C. M. Tade of Decatur bought the P. L. Drew grocery business. The next year W. F. Brookshier sold his meat market to Jerry Craycraft and moved to Springfield. Later that year Glenn Stump sold his grocery store to C. A. Hammil, and Roy Merryman opened a grocery business in what had been the McHenry Drug Store. Even the depression years did not dampen the local entrepreneur. Elmo Parker opened a Cash and Carry Meat Market at 128 West Main Street. However, seven years later Earl Muller installed a locker plant at this same location. Families took quantities of meat and produce to their "locker" in the store. It was a "chilling experience" especially in summer to stand in the freezing room filling or removing items from the locker. The locker plants provided a new and easier way of preserving meats and produce and led to the development of home freezers in the 1940's. Frozen foods were also sold at the Moweaqua Frozen Food Locker. This advertisement appeared in the February 5, 1941, Moweaqua News:

"Sunday dinner special includes 2½ lb. stewing chicken, 1 pt. green beans, 1 pt. rhubarb and 1 pt. strawberries, all for .89 cents, or 3 to 4 lb. beef roast, 1 pt. green beans, 1 pt. rhubarb and 1 carton of strawberries all for .99 cents."

## CLOTHING AND MILLINERY

One of the earliest and longest lasting dry goods businesses in Moweaqua was operated by J. T. Haslam. Mr. Haslam was born in Lancashire, England, in 1854. He came to Moweaqua in 1869, farmed for others and then himself, passed his teacher's examination at Normal, taught for nine years in area schools, and served as school principal in Moweaqua. He became a clerk in Aydelott's General Store at 120 North Main Street, bought the store and on Thanksgiving Day in 1895, moved the business to a building on North Main Street which he himself had built. He remained in business over twenty-five years.

In 1900 there was a doll millinery opened at the home of Oscar Frazee. Ten years later H. E. Graybill bought J. Scott Gregory's interest in a clothing business. He hired James E. Baird as his clerk.

Miss Belle McHenry was a prominent local businesswoman for 32 years, starting before 1900. She operated a millinery business, at 124 North Main beginning with an

original outlay of \$50 which she had borrowed. She was also said to have been an excellent organist and pianist. Her father, B. F. McHenry, had been appointed postmaster during the presidency of Abraham Lincoln, a position he held until the election of Grover Cleveland. He also operated a drug store and was a well known figure passing through the streets wrapped in a warm, gray shawl.

In 1939 Miss Leona Cooper of Decatur bought the Sub-Deb Dress Shop of Moweaqua. She had previously been employed by Marshall Field Co. of Chicago.

## THE VILLAGE MALL

Delbert, Margaret and Gary Fathauer have created the Village Mall in the 100 block of South Main through purchase of Portwood's Lumber Yard and the Coffman's Mill area. The Mall includes the Gina Lee Card and Gift Shop, Village Mall Cafe, insurance office, real estate and bookkeeping office, attorney's office, Standard Oil Office, two meeting rooms, a beauty shop and a dress shop, two apartments, a floral shop, variety and dry goods department and a super market, all under one roof. A hardware store and the ice cream shop are located nearby.

Various materials were used in building the Mall. Crib siding was used for the walls on the south side, the inside gates of the dress shop are hay barn track, the floors inside are of brick from the old water tower built in 1906, the porch posts are from the Christian Church parsonage, picket fence is from the Wallace Gorden country home. The lighting fixtures in the center of the Mall came from Pleak School and those in front of the dress shop are from the John Ondes home. The "coming events" sign was once used at the Lincoln Theatre in Decatur. The old railing process flour mill from Coffman's Mill is near its original location in the Mall, as well as pictures of the Mill. Local school class pictures, dating back to 1907 are on display. The ceiling fan was used in the Moweaqua Theatre and donated to the Mall by Mr. and Mrs. Karl Eckhardt. The crank type telephone came from Don Myers.

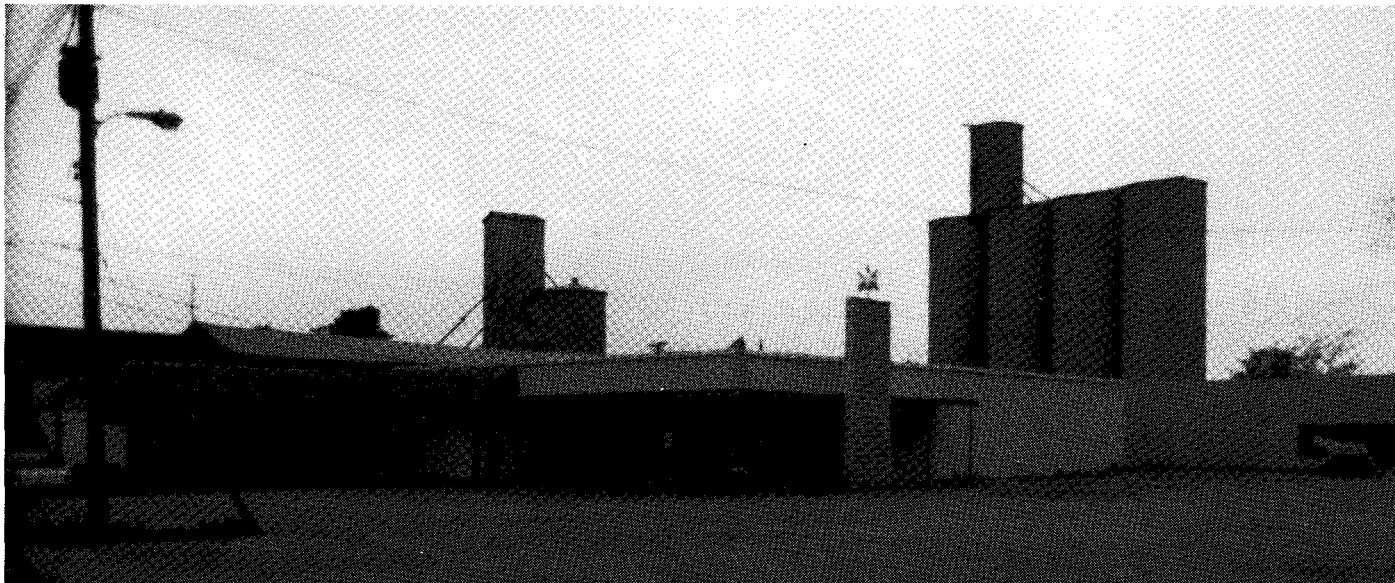
The Mall presently employs twenty-one full time and seven part time employees. Over three hundred young people have worked at the Mall, some having gone on to become professional people.

Thus the original site of Moweaqua's Mill continues to be a place of commerce where one can not only buy flour, but also nearly everything else necessary to sustain life.

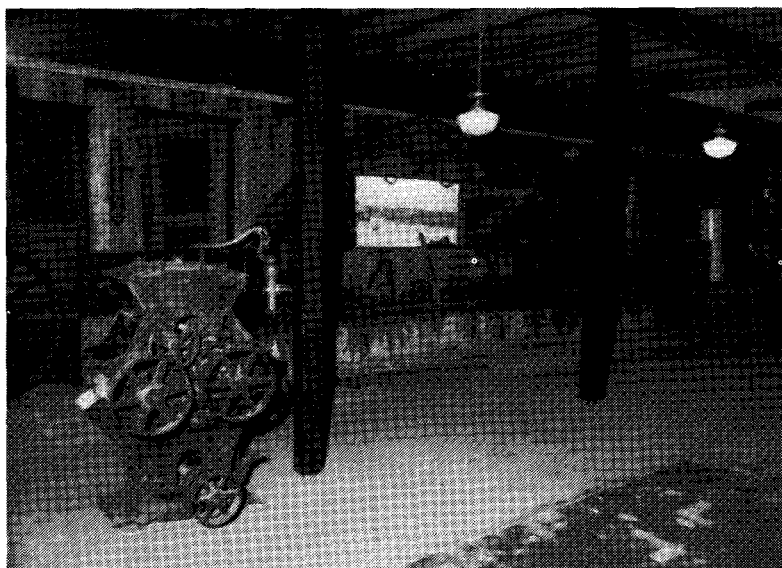
## THE MOWEAQUA HOSPITAL

The Moweaqua Hospital, dream of Mrs. James (Elsie) Sparling, became a reality September 18, 1924. The Sparlings and their devoted staff, of which one of the first persons was Mabel (Weber) Elmers, opened what was called a "blessing to the community." It was housed at 311 East Elm Street, later adding 309 East Elm.

In the beginning, they made do with things at hand like two boxes filled with ice, babies fed with milk from the hospital's Jersey Cow; meals cooked in the Sparling home (which later became the nurses' home), and hauled by little red wagon to the hospital. They maintained an acre or two of garden which provided fresh vegetables in season and food for canning. In 1924 they had 9 beds and during the year cared for 92 patients. The patients had little bells

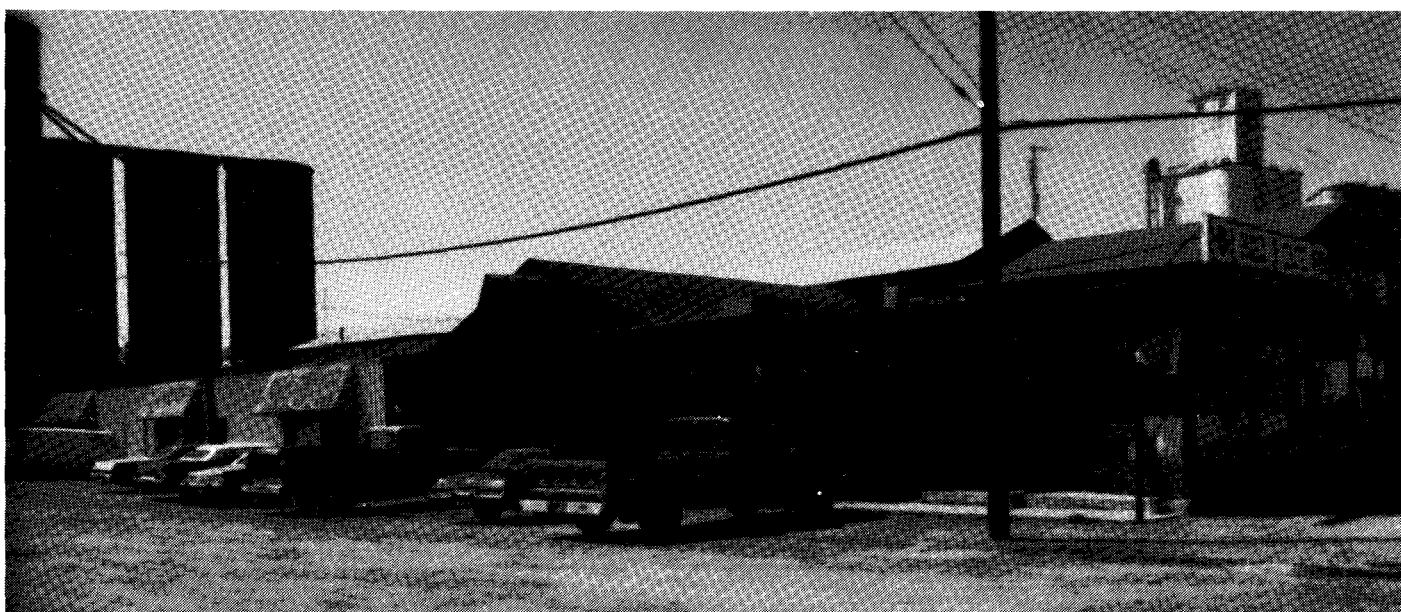


**The Village Mall**



**Rolling process  
flour mill from  
Coffman's Mill**

**South View of Mall**



to summon nurses. The cost of hospitalization was \$2 per day. Those who had no ready cash would sell the Sparlings chickens, ducks, beef, etc. or would work out their bills. The original building was square with beautiful hardwood floors. Dr. and Mrs. Sparling lived in the big room on the left with their two small children, Mary Jane and Jimmy. Minnie Scribner came after school to care for the children. The men's ward was the room on the right. Women patients were carried up and down stairs; the operating room was on the main floor.

In only 1½ years Moweaqua Hospital underwent a thorough remodeling and modernization, after having proved its worth and need. An addition to the back and west side joined an annex of "the Cole House," where Dr. and Mrs. Sparling moved. Although an elevator, refrigeration, modern laundry equipment, hot and cold rain and city water, and numerous other improvements were made such as electric patient bells. It was Mrs. Sparling's wish to maintain a homelike atmosphere. A nurses training school was established. Vera Supinie was first in training, followed by Rena (Elmers) Hoffman. The operating room was moved upstairs. Mine workers provided a new operating table.

When the "hard road," as the Route 51 highway was locally called, came through, they had many accident patients because Flat Branch Bridge south of town was very slick.

The hospital was now "A City Hospital in a Country Town" according to the Decatur newspaper, and physicians from all around used and recommended the facilities.

Gale Sarver was the hospital's first operative patient and Allen Buck Ayars was the first baby born there. David Gregory's was the first premature birth, weighing only 2½ lbs. In lieu of an incubator, he was placed in a cotton lined box, after being wrapped in gauze; he survived, aided by lots of loving care.

The hospital treated a wide spectrum of cases—everything from permanent convalescence (June Slaughter) to amputations, appendectomies, O.B.'s, serious burns, gall bladder removals, and mine accidents. The Watsons of Bethany had a six months old baby that was "given up on" by a Decatur baby specialist. They came through Moweaqua on the way home and decided to talk to the Sparlings. Needless to say, they answered the challenge, saved the baby and today she is a registered nurse herself.

May 12th was annually observed as National Hospital Day by Mrs. Sparling. She also saw that each room was appropriately decorated at Christmas.

At the time of remodeling, one room was furnished in memory of Dr. W. H. Sparling by Mrs. Elsie Sparling. It had walnut furniture and a cream and orchid color scheme. Little Flock Baptist Church furnished a room in ivory with embroidered scarves, pillow cases, hangings, and bedding.

The first floor now contained a reception room, an x-ray room, two electric treating rooms, two bathrooms, kitchen, drug room, six bedrooms, the nurses quarters and the men's ward.

Second floor had ten bedrooms, a ward for women, two baths and linen closets, and an 8 crib nursery, laboratory, sterilizing room, with an Auto Cleve Sterilizer, an operating room with modern devices making use of anesthetics, and two treating rooms.

Mr. R. G. Stine converted a seven passenger Nash into an ambulance, equipped with a "genuine Bomgarder chair cot." It also allowed space for three attendants.

One grateful patient said, "Moweaqua Hospital was a delightful place to lose one's aches and pains. Mrs. Sparling, superintendent, was not only an able executive, but soon established a personal relationship with her patients. No want or need was too insignificant for her attention."

Some of the personal recollections of former nurses attest to the efficiency of Mrs. Sparling's administration. Staff, of course, changed over the years, but the following list of hospital workers include: Mabel (Weber) Elmers, Minnie (Scribner) Allison, Rena (Elmers) Hoffman, Gladys Cowperthwaite, Mabel Cutler, Vera Supinie, Velma Budds, Delphine Dummermuth, Martha Bowden, Georgia Davidson, Ida and Charlie Smith, Shorty Doyle, W. N. Snyder, Elfreda (Patton) Hemer, Doris (Griffith) Duncan, Dorothy Housh, Agnes Federman, Eleanor Perryman, Verna Hawley, Oma Atchison, Chris Friedly, Doc McDaniels, Bob Schlagenkof (Mrs. Sparling's nephew), Will Herriot and sons, Margaret (Snyder) Stivers, Eva Walker, Flo Reighly (who was Dr. Sparling's faithful secretary over 40 years), Gracie Riley, Mrs. Chas. Jenkins, Helen Sims, Lois Richart, Lois McGrath and Pearl Bridgeman.

In 1936 Dr. and Mrs. Sparling moved to the Foster House east of the hospital, their former home becoming part of the hospital.

Mrs. Elsie Sparling's sudden death in February 1937, was a shock to everyone. In 1941 Dr. Sparling married Eva Smith, a Decatur nurse who had assisted from time to time with surgery and x-rays in the Moweaqua Hospital. She set up classes of home nursing and taught first aid. Some time later the Moweaqua Hospital became a nursing home where aging patients received the kindest care. It finally closed in the late 1940's.

Dr. Sparling was a "horse and buggy" doctor in the early days and recalled, in a newspaper interview, the hazardous days of the 1918 flu epidemic. It was fitting that his grandson, Jimmy Sparling, was one of the last (if not the very last) baby born in the Moweaqua Hospital.

In 1954 a "Dr. Sparling Day" was declared. Mrs. Wayne Lowe, Sr., headed the committee and a pageant of the highlights of Dr. Sparling's life was presented in the city park. All of Dr. Sparling's babies wore identification and a huge crowd paid tribute to their beloved physician.

## LIBRARY

The first local library recorded here was a subscription library in the 1890's.

Later the Moweaqua Woman's Club dreamed of establishing a local library. In 1925 the library became a reality through the efforts of the club and library chairman Mrs. Edna Sollars. Moneymaking projects resulted in the library's inception.

Miss Mattie McHenry presented the first books and the R. Gregory Company presented it with a handsome chair. On December 1, 1925, the library opened with Miss M. Moss as librarian. It contained 1,498 volumes. Within six months there were 2,175 volumes available.

## ENTERTAINMENT

Having fairly well taken care of the necessities of life by 1908, the local businessmen turned toward more frivolous ventures. The first motion pictures of record were shown in

Ribelin's Opera House at the north east corner of Main and Main Streets. Three years later Elmer Schenet rented the Prescott Opera House which he remodeled and used to present nickelodeon and other forms of entertainment. Admission to the "pictures shown on canvas" was 10 cents.

A pool room was converted into the Star Theatre in 1912. It was advertised as showing only high class dramas, comedies, westerns, educational, and feature films.

By 1914 Gene Snyder had secured control of the Prescott Opera House where he had nightly showings of films. H. R. Barricklow had opened the Lyric at 126 West Main Street which was reportedly one of the nicest theaters in the area. He showed licensed films made by the most famous actors of the day: A. V. Johnson, G. M. Anderson, John Bunny, Maurice Costello, Flora Finch, and others. Two shows were presented each evening. W. J. Hammon opened the Gem Theater in the Ribelin Opera House where universal pictures were shown, giving Moweaqua a choice of three different pictures most evenings. The Moweaqua News editorialized on the benefits these three theaters brought to town, not only as entertainment, but also for the fact that they attracted customers to other local businesses.

Until 1920 each local movie house had had just one projector which meant that the audience waited after each reel for the next to be prepared for showing. The Lyric changed all this, however, by purchasing a second projector.

The big news of 1930 was *The Kibitzer* which was the first talking picture shown in Moweaqua. Once again the Lyric Theater took the lead; however, the rates, too, jumped to 20 cents and 40 cents.

In 1949 the R. Gregory and Company set up a television set which people gathered to see. The reception was said to be good, but only St. Louis stations were available. As the local people bought television sets and T.V. stations appeared in Decatur, Springfield, and Champaign, the local movie houses closed.

In 1917 a village election was held to determine the future of pool and billiard halls. The vote was decided against them and so they were closed for a time.

The Moweaqua Country Club, located a mile south of town, operated from 1923 to 1934. The golf course was interesting and enjoyed by many. Jay Coffman was the first pro, succeeded by John Ondes.

Trulock's Skating Rink, which was on the second floor of the northeast corner of Main and Main Streets, opened in 1938, admission 25 cents.

After a hiatus of eleven years a Shelby County Fair was held in the Moweaqua Park in 1941. Many 4-H and individual exhibits were presented, and it was considered to have been a great success.

The Moweaqua Bowl at 200 South Main Street opened in 1960. It contained ten lanes and was used by several leagues. It has currently been remodeled and is a popular entertainment facility.

## MOWEAQUA OIL FIELD

On August 27, 1859, at Titusville, Pennsylvania, Col. Edwin L. Drake with his three man crew brought in the first oil well at a depth of 69½ feet. Drake had previously reported to James M. Townsend, who held the titles to some

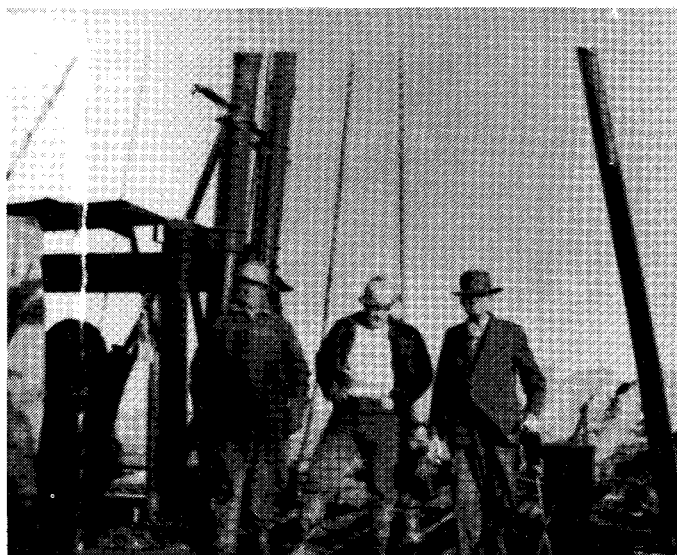
oil properties and leases, that he believed a fortune could be made by bottling the petroleum available and selling it for medicinal purposes.

Ironically Drake drilled only two wells the first which won him everlasting fame and a second which failed to produce more than a trickle.

Oil was first found in Illinois in 1879, when the "pay zone" was struck at a depth of 670 feet in the Litchfield Pool in Montgomery County.

The discovery well of the Assumption Consolidated Pool in Christian County was drilled in August 1948 and completed for production in October 1948 by the National Associated Petroleum Company on the Carl Simcox farm located in the NE¼ of the NW¼ of the NE¼, Section 29, Township 13 north, Range 1 east.

On October 22, 1948, the National Associated Petroleum Company began drilling for "black gold" three miles west and two and three-fourth miles south of Moweaqua on the John H. Lawrence farm in Section 9, Township 13 north, Range 1 east. This property is now in the Lane Reatherford Trust. Lane was a grandson of John Lawrence.



John Lawrence with two workers at the discovery well at the Assumption North Pool (Moweaqua Pool), October 1948

This first well in Prairieton Township, Christian County, was accredited as the discovery well of the Assumption North Pool. Area citizens usually refer to the Assumption North Pool as the Moweaqua Pool or Oil Field. John Lawrence, who was 76 years old at the time of the discovery, always described the first well as the "granddaddy of them all."

This well was placed on a pump in December 1948 and produced oil from the Devonian limestone formation, the top of which was reached at 2,282 feet. Subsequent drilling yielded production of oil from the Benoist sand formation at 1,050 feet and the Rosiclare sand formation at approximately 1,150 feet.

In December 1948 National Associated Petroleum Company sold half interest in its wells and acreage in Christian and Montgomery counties to the Continental Oil Company of Ponca City, Oklahoma. It was believed that National Associated held oil leases for about eighty percent



of the acreage in the oil pool structure between Assumption and Moweaqua. They did not hold the lease on the 240 acre Peabody farm located in the major structure area. It was leased by local residents. At some later date, National Associated sold the other half interest. The lease holders in 1976 are Continental Oil Company and Farmers Co-op.

National Associated, in partnership with Continental Oil Co., held open house in February 1949 for college students from the University of Illinois and Washington University of St. Louis, state Mines and Minerals department officials, businessmen and newspaper people. Over 500 persons saw a step by step completion of an oil well, beginning with the dynamite charge for a seismograph reading. One of the highlights was the actual striking of oil in a well on the John Lawrence farm.

The development of the oil pool was rapid. Sometimes the oil flowed in such force that drillers had to work in their helmets and coats. When one of the wells in the Rosiclare formation on the Haldon Bilyeu farm "hit," it blew in and was out of control for a short time before a pump could be put on. A large crowd of people witnessed the coming in of the well on the Edith Sherman farm, three-fourths of a mile south of Prairieton Townhouse. It blew in at 8:15 p.m. on a Friday evening in May 1949 shooting oil over the rig and crew. The crowd was pulling for the Collins Bros. and hoping that they would get a good well on their fourth attempt. The others had been dry ones.

As of August 1949 there had been 115 wells drilled, of these 92 were producing wells and 23 were dry ones. Of the 23 dry ones, 12 had been drilled around the edges of the Moweaqua Oil Pool in trying to establish its boundaries. The other 11 were wildcat wells being drilled several miles away, trying to find another pool. The Moweaqua Pool was approximately three miles long and one and one-half miles wide and lays in a southwest to northeast direction. The Assumption Consolidated Pool was the largest oil field this far north in Illinois.

The 100th producing well in the Moweaqua Pool was drilled in September on the King Reatherford farm. This made a total of 104 wells in both pools.

In October, one year after the first oil rig moved into the Moweaqua area, there were 112 producing wells. Ninety percent were drilled by National Associated. The other ten percent by J. W. Rudy, Collins Bros., and Harry Lippett. By November there were 121 producing wells in the Moweaqua Pool and National Associated had completed the drilling of

their 100th producing well. This was located on the Lawrence farm.

As of December 31, 1955, 171 wells in the Assumption Consolidated Pool had been completed as producers, 161 of which were still producing.

As of January 1976, there were 42 producing wells in the Moweaqua Pool pumping from all three pay formations. There are two double wells.

Triplet and twin wells were common sights. Instead of taking oil from the lowest statum first, then plugging back into the upward levels as the oil is exhausted, the operators sunk separate holes to each pay horizon. The wells were drilled approximately 50 feet from each other. The first triple well was on the Haldon Bilyeu farm.

At first the oil was transported by trucks to the Pana Refining Co. in Pana, Illinois. A pipe line from the Moweaqua Pool to the newly constructed storage tanks at the siding on the Illinois Central Railroad, one and one-half miles south of Moweaqua, was laid. In April 1949, the first ten tank cars of crude oil were loaded and shipped to the Wisconsin Oil Refining Co. at Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Now most of the crude oil is pumped by pipeline from these storage tanks to the refinery at Heyworth, Illinois.

In August 1949, a water disposal well was drilled on the John Myers farm to dispose of the salt water that some wells produced by pumping it back into the ground. This procedure was the beginning of the flooding process. Later a lake north of Prairieton Townhouse was dug to supply additional water for flooding. As of January 1976, there are twenty two injection wells.

The flares burning made a beautiful sight at night. When the pool was opened, the natural gas was used to run the gas engines on the pumps with the excess being burned. By 1963 and as the amount of natural gas decreased, all of the pumps had been converted to electric motors.

During the first year, there was much interest and excitement. The peaceful area of productive farmland was transformed to one of bustling activity. Two new houses were constructed by National Associated to be occupied by their production superintendents. Lighted oil rigs could be seen for miles around. On Sunday afternoons the traffic was heavy with sightseers.

Now, twenty-eight years later, the area is again quiet and peaceful. Accustomed to the sight of oil pumps, one hardly notices them—quietly working.