

Register of Old Buildings
Macon County Historical Coordinating Council

Address: *715 E. Whitmer

Legal description: Whitmer Place
W44' of Lot 16 & E 16' of Lot 17

* According to Mrs. Margaret McNabb Lyon (Mrs. Paul Lyon, Sr.) in 'phone conversation January 13, 1975 the address of this house when built by her grandfather in 1866 was 700 S. Webster. There was no Whitmer Street at this time; however, Mr. Whitmer may have had the Whitmer Place plat in mind, for later his acreage was subdivided, and his house which he had faced to the north, then fronted on what is now Whitmer.

Date of original construction: 1866 - See the 1893 biography of Henry Whitmer attached.
1895 - est., Macon County assessor's office.
Note: Mrs. Lyon says her mother was born in the house in the 1860's.

Name of original owner: Henry M. Whitmer, carpenter, contractor, brick manufacturer.

History:

1. An incomplete chain of title follows: (Source - abstract)
 - April 27, 1829 United States of America, Andrew Jackson, President to William Foren (also listed as Forin and Torin), General Land Office, Vandalia (80 acres)
 - March 19, 1852 William Forin to William Martin (\$5800)
 - Sept. 1, 1866 William Martin to Henry Whitmer
 - Sept. 8, 1892 Henry and Anna Whitmer to Samuel S. Jack and Charles M. Allison (\$9000). (Mr. Whitmer died November 3, 1899)
 - Sept. 10, 1892 Approval of Whitmer Place plat of S. J. Jack and C. M. Allison by City Council of City of Decatur
 - From
 - April 24, 1894 to 1903, five changes of title, some related to mortgages and foreclosure.
 - Sept. 8, 1903 Olive Wornick and Major Wornick (who gained title May 16, 1903 for \$4500) to Joanna Catherine Condell (\$5000)
 - Nov. 12, 1923 Joanna Catherine and Albert Condell to their daughter, Emma M. Condell, spinster.
 - July 21, 1942 Emma M. Condell to Ralph E. Brown and Blanche H. Brown.

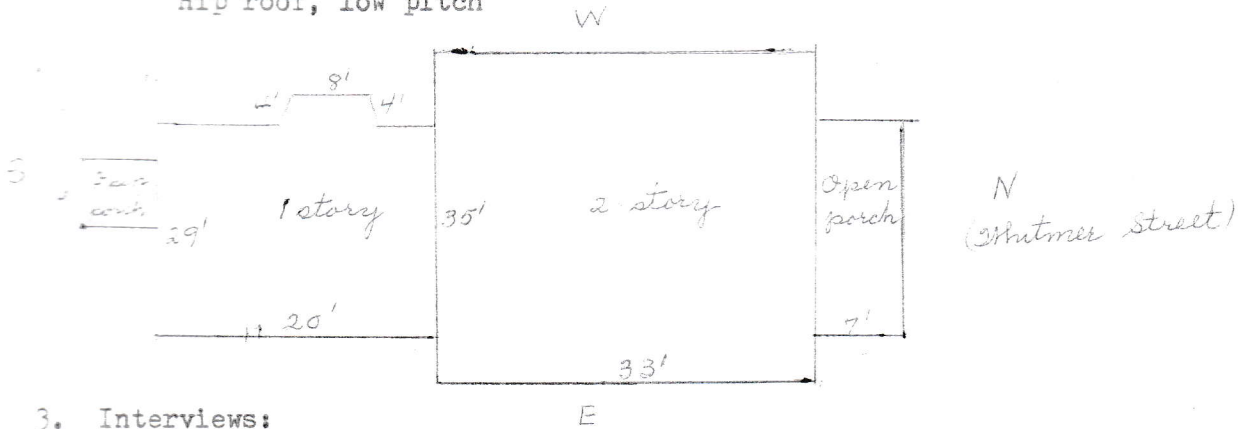
Note: A description of the Whitmer Place plat shows that what is now Maffit Street was then Peake Street.

Present owner's name: Mrs. Blanche Brown, widow of Ralph Brown.

History Cont'd.:

2. Data from the Macon County assessor's follows:

Building class - C
2 stories, 10 rooms, 2 bathrooms
Frame construction, brick exterior, brick foundation
Hardwood floors
3 open porches
Hip roof, low pitch



3. Interviews:

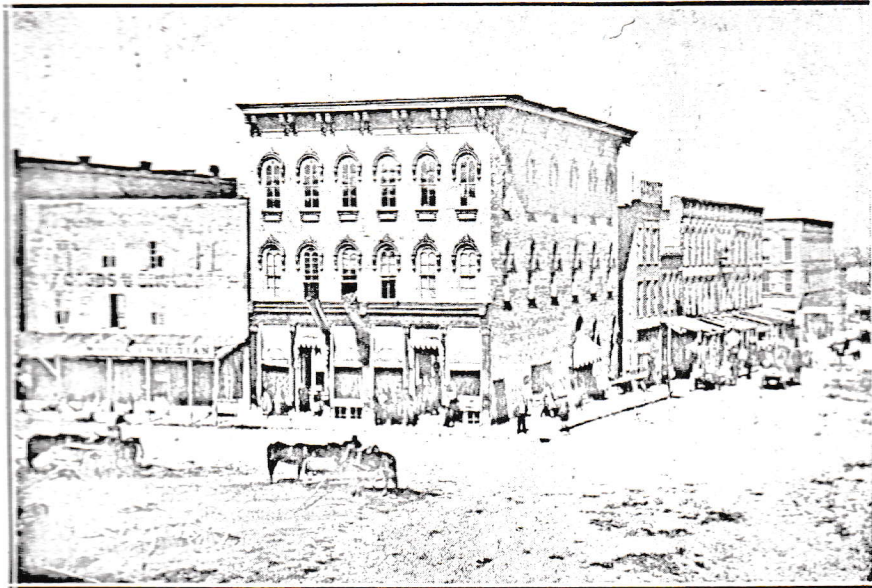
- a. January 13, 1975 in a phone conversation with Mrs. Margaret McNabb Lyon, granddaughter of H. M. Whitmer, these facts were learned:
- 715 E. Whitmer was 700 S. Webster in 1866.
 - all of the carpentry work in the house was done by Mr. Whitmer, for he was a carpenter and contractor.
 - the stair rail of solid walnut was carved by her grandfather.
 - the two-story part of the house was square, or almost so, with a central hall and a room on each corner, this arrangement on the second floor as well as the first.
 - to the rear of the two-story part, was a one-story portion originally used as a kitchen and which they called the lean-to.
 - Mrs. Lyon recalls her mother telling that she and a sister of hers used to climb out their rear bedroom second floor windows to lie down on the lean-to roof.
 - Mrs. Lyon believes the exterior of the house has been changed very little since it was built.
- b. January 14, 1975 with Mrs. Blanche Brown, present owner, at 715 E. Whitmer:
- the lean-to kitchen was modified by the Condells, probably, at least when the Browns bought it, the west portion with bay window was used as a music room. Mr. Condell and his

History Cont'd.:

3. Interviews Cont'd:

b. Interview with Mrs. Brown Cont'd.:

- daughter, Alberta, were musical, and Mr. Condell during most of his later working years was a piano tuner. The east part of the lean-to was probably the kitchen, with outside door on the east wall.
- a passage from the lean-to kitchen probably also served as a pantry and passage-way to the dining room - the southeast room of the square two-story portion.
- there are two fireplaces at present, one each on the west outside wall of both west first floor rooms. The rear west room has a mantel of dark grey marble with a greenish cast. In the front west room is a wooden mantel now painted white, with ceramic tile of a Grecian design around the grate.
- the walnut balustrade was painted white when the Browns purchased the house. Mr. Brown removed the paint from the railing but the balusters are still white.
- the Browns converted the upstairs into two two-room apartments, one on the east and one on the west.
- Mrs. Brown occupies the entire first floor, although it is equipped to be used as two three-room apartments, each with bedroom in front, then living room, bath and kitchen.
- the rear window in the west downstairs apartment was converted to a back door with a small porch outside.
- to the east of the back porch referred to above is an outside cellar door.
- windows and doors have rounded arches, ceilings are high - 11-1/2 or 12 feet - and sills are deep.



STAMPER & CONDELL'S STORE IN THE '60s
Picture taken about 1862. Present site of Bachrach store on Lincoln Square.

*Richmond, Mabel, Centennial History of Decatur and
Wacon County, The Review Publishing Co., Decatur,
page 267*

*Albert CondeLL, of 715 E. Whitmer, was a brother of
William J. CondeLL of the firm, Stamper and
CondeLL. Albert CondeLL came to Decatur from
Philadelphia drawn by the fact that his brother
was here.*

715 East Whitmer



Photo, Margaret M. Meyer, Jan., 1975

war democrat during the rebellion, he came to act with the republican party, of which he has since been a strong supporter. Since 1861 he has been a member of the Presbyterian Church. He has had a large medical practice, and is well known throughout the county. The republicans in 1876 made him their candidate for prosecuting attorney. His genial disposition and fine social qualities have secured him numerous friends, while his attainments as a physician have won success in his profession.

A. R. ARBUCKLE,

EDITOR and proprietor of the Decatur *Tomahawk*, is a native of Guernsey county, Ohio, and was born on the tenth of March, 1851. His father, Robert Ar buckle, was born and raised in Pennsylvania, and when a young man went to Ohio, where he married Charlotte Freeman, a native of Guernsey county. The first fourteen years of Mr. Ar buckle's life were spent in Ohio. His father was a farmer. In 1864 the family moved to McLean county in this state, and settled on a farm near Le Roy. On the first of July, 1869, he entered the law office of General Ira J. Bloomfield at Bloomington, with the purpose of fitting himself for the legal profession. He was admitted to the practice of the law in June, 1871, and opened an office at Le Roy, where he remained one year. He became a resident of Maroa in the fall of 1874, and for about two years was occupied in legal practice. Having a taste for the journalistic profession he became connected with the *Maroa News*, which he published six months. In the spring of 1876 he was elected justice of the peace, which office he filled till his removal to Decatur in September, 1878. For about a year he engaged in the practice of law at Decatur, in partnership with S. C. Clark. On the eleventh of May, 1880, he issued the first number of the Decatur *Tomahawk*, which has since rapidly increased in circulation. It is conducted on an independent and liberal platform, both as to politics and religion, and is the only journal occupying this peculiar field published in Central Illinois. He was married in September, 1873, to Miss Anna Moore, of McLean county. In his personal political views he has always been a member of the republican party.

E. McNABB.

E. McNABB, architect and builder, was born in Centre county, Pennsylvania, on the seventeenth of September, 1823. His ancestors were Scotch, and emigrated to the north of Ireland at the time of the religious persecution which drove so many Protestants from Scotland. His grandfather came to America shortly after the Revolutionary war; he married a woman of Irish descent, by the name of Mitchell. John McNabb, the father of the subject of this sketch, was born in Pennsylvania, and married Mary Young, a native of the same state. John McNabb was a mechanic, but after his removal to Richland (now Ashland) county, Ohio, in the year 1834, he engaged in farming. He died in that county, as did also Mr. McNabb's mother. The subject of this biographical sketch was the seventh of ten children. He was eleven years old when he came to Ohio. He was raised on a farm, and obtained his education in the ordinary district schools. Two of his brothers received excellent educations, and were ministers in the Methodist Church. When seventeen he began to learn the trade of a cabinet-maker at Ashland, Ohio, and followed it about five years. He then studied architecture under O. S. Kinney, a prominent architect, who resided at Cleveland, Ohio, and became a builder. He resided a short time in Cincinnati and Cleveland.

In 1854 he came to Illinois. His first work in this state was the building of a church at Mechanicsburg, in Sangamon county. In the spring of 1855 he settled at Decatur, where he had purchased property the previous year, and has since been continuously occupied as an architect and builder. He has either designed or constructed a large proportion of the buildings which have been erected during his residence in Decatur. The evidences of his taste and judgment may be seen in some of the most prominent buildings in the city, which have been erected according to his designs and under his supervision. Among these are the First and Fourth ward school-buildings, the residences of L. L. Haworth, J. L. Fenton, H. W. Hill and George D. Haworth, the store of Linn & Scroggs, a block of three stores on Merchant street and the Christian church. He was married on the twenty-seventh of April, 1845, to Maggie B. Heller, a native of Huron county, Ohio. He has four children living; Mrs. Mary Irene August; Willie O. McNabb; Mrs. Emma F. Landis, and Arthur L. McNabb. He has always taken an active interest in politics and public affairs. In early life he was a democrat, but when the question of the extension of slavery came to be agitated, he stood with those in favor of free soil, and was one of the earliest members of the republican party. He was elected a member of the city council from the Second ward in the spring of 1860, and altogether has served four times, or eight years; in 1860, 1861, 1867, 1869, 1877, 1872, 1879 and 1880. He has been one of the active members of the Council, and his practical business experience has been of service in assisting to manage the affairs of the city. In 1878 he represented Decatur township in the Board of Supervisors. He has been a member of the Christian church for a period of thirty years. He has been a public-spirited and progressive citizen. He was one of the original advocates of the establishment of water-works, and has always been on the side of public improvement.

GEORGE S. DURFEE.

THE birth of Mr. Durfee occurred at Marshall, Michigan, on the thirteenth of March, 1840. From Thomas Durfee, who emigrated from England and settled at Fall River, Massachusetts, in 1860, the Durfee family is descended. The parents of the subject of this biography were Nathan and Margaret (Kirk) Durfee. His father was born at Fall River, Massachusetts; went to Ohio with his father's family when quite young; in that state married Margaret Kirk; soon after his marriage removed to Michigan, and in 1857 became a resident of Macon county. George S. Durfee was seventeen when he came to Decatur. He principally obtained his education at Battle Creek, Michigan, and in the high-school of Decatur, which he attended two winters after coming to this place.

At the beginning of the war of the rebellion, on the seventeenth of April, 1861, he enlisted under the three months call for troops, in a company raised at Decatur, and attached to the Eighth Illinois infantry as company A. He was mustered in the United States service on the twenty-fifth of April. The regiment lay at Cairo till the expiration of their three months' term of enlistment. Mr. Durfee at once re-enlisted for three years in the same company and regiment. The regiment was commanded by Colonel (afterward Governor) Oglesby. He had enlisted as a private, and was elected sergeant, to which position he was re-elected after his re-enlistment and was appointed by the colonel commissary sergeant. His regiment took part in the battles of Fort Henry and Fort Donelson. Just before the battle of Shiloh he returned to his company as orderly sergeant, and in that fight received a wound in the hand.



HENRY M. WHITMER has been a resident of Decatur since 1860, and is widely known throughout his adopted county. He is prominently identified with the business interests of the city, being a carpenter and contractor and a leading brick manufacturer. Evidence of his busy and well-spent life is shown in many substantial buildings which he has erected, some of which were made from the brick from his yard. Mr. Whitmer is a native of Pennsylvania, having been born in Northumberland County, January 11, 1833, and is one of eight children whose parents were Benjamin and Lydia (Mitchell) Whitmer.

The paternal grandfather, Henry Whitmer, came from an old family of Swiss origin, that was founded in the Keystone State about two hundred years ago. He was born in Lancaster County, Pa., and removed to Northumberland County, where he died in 1876, at the age of ninety years. He was a stone mason and farmer, and was a soldier in the War of 1812. His family numbered two sons and a daughter. The Mitchell family is of Pennsylvania ancestry, and the grandfather was a Pennsylvania cabinet-maker. The parents of our subject were both born in that State, and lived upon a farm in Northumberland County. The

father died about 1878, at the age of sixty-four years, but his widow is still living in Millintown, Pa., at the advanced age of eighty-six. She is a member of the Lutheran Church, to which her husband also belonged. Of their family, consisting of seven sons and a daughter, three died in infancy. The others were: Reuben W., Henry M., Isaac, Samuel H. and Mary. All are now deceased with the exception of our subject and his brother Samuel, a physician of Newport, Pa.

*From Portrait and Biographical
 Record, Macon County,
 Illinois, Lake City
 Publishing Company,
 Chicago 1893*

When our subject was quite small, he removed with his parents from Northumberland County to Juniata County, Pa., where he acquired his early education in a log schoolhouse. In 1850, he commenced serving an apprenticeship to the carpenter's trade, which he has followed more or less continuously since. On coming to Illinois in 1860, he located in Decatur, and began business as a carpenter and contractor. This he has carried on continuously since in connection with the manufacture of brick. He does an extensive business in the latter line, turning out twenty thousand brick daily. In the home and foreign markets he finds a ready sale for his product, as is shown by the large production needed to meet the demand.

December 17, 1857, Mr. Whitmer married Miss Anna A. App, daughter of John and Catherine (Gross) App, who were natives of Pennsylvania. Seven children were born of their union, but Ida, the eldest child, died in infancy, as did also one son. Edward, who has a large plant and is engaged in the manufacture of brick in Jacksonville, Ill., as a member of the firm of Whitmer & Son, married Miss Ida Mitchell, of that city, and they have two children. Howard, of Decatur, married Miss Josephine Kerney, of Jacksonville, by whom he has one son, Harry Myrle, who is a partner of H. M. Whitmer & Son and superintendent of the yards. Alberta, who is a teacher of the piano, a student of Prof. Liebling, of Chicago, and a member of the Woman's Club, is at home. Cora is the wife of Arthur McNab, of Decatur, and unto them have been born two children, Anna and Margaret. Frank is the next younger.

The members of the family all belong to the Presbyterian Church. Socially, Mr. Whitmer is

connected with the Masonic fraternity, being a member of the Chapter, and in politics is a Republican. He owns a good farm of one hundred and forty acres in Decatur Township, besides some small tracts of land and some real estate in the city, including his home at No. 700 South Webster Street, which he built in 1866, when it was at the extreme outskirts of the town. He platted Whitmer Addition, and three additions have been made from the original ten acres. From the time he entered upon his life work his career has been a busy one. He has devoted himself assiduously to its interests, and his diligence and enterprise have won for him prosperity. He is now at the head of an important industry and is ranked among the successful and substantial business men of Decatur.



Resolved, That in cases of suspensions from the schools all appeals from the decision of the superintendent shall be heard and determined at a meeting of the board. This action was taken because the son of a prominent citizen had been suspended for absence as the rule of the board provided; the father, to whom the superintendent was "persona non grata" determined not to ask the officer to reinstate the boy but finding two members of the board in a private office appealed directly to them. Without thinking what effect their action would have upon the authority of the superintendent they reinstated the pupil. When their attention was called to the matter, the above rule was at once passed. It is perhaps fair to say that this is the only instance in thirty-eight years where there has been any difference between the board and the superintendent concerning his duties.

Early in 1866 the superintendent was authorized to buy ink for the use of the schools and to spend not exceeding five dollars in the purchase of books for poor children. He was also directed to purchase five globes for the schools, at a cost of not more than twelve dollars each. It was about this time that a boy appeared at the superintendent's office one afternoon and said that his teacher had sent him to get a lamp chimney. The puzzled superintendent declared that such an article was not kept in the office. "But my teacher told me to get one," declared the boy. "Oh, didn't she tell you to get a globe?" queried the superintendent. "Yes, yes," answered the happy youth as he gathered one in his arms and departed.

The duty of beautifying the school grounds was early recognized by the board and in the spring of 1866, a number of "silver maples" were purchased at sixty cents each of one Smith, a Bloomington man, which he set around the Church street school. C. D. Humphreys was paid the same price for boxing them.

June 5, 1866, Caleb C. Burroughs was reelected a member of the board for three years.

June 21, 1866, the board accepted the plans prepared by Ebenezer McNabb for a two room schoolhouse in the fourth ward and ordered that bids should be received until July 7th for its erection.

Bids were received from Messrs. Whitmer & Campbell and E. McNabb, to whom the contract was awarded for the sum of \$3,876.96.

August 6, 1866, ordered that the board purchase of Messrs. Durfee & Warren lots 11 and 12, of the resurvey of block 7 of Read & Company's addition, for the sum of \$2,400. Also lot 10 of the same block of Thomas H. Read for \$1,000. The high school stands upon these lots.

September 14, 1866. A petition was presented asking that German be made a part of the course of study in all the ward schools. The question was fully discussed and it was decided that it was not practicable to do this. This question was finally settled in 1874, when Miss S. Alice Judd was appointed a teacher in the high school, with the understanding that one-half of her time would be given to the teaching of German.

October 28, 1866. On the request of Miss Mary E. Baker, assistant principal of the high school, the superintendent was directed to purchase a table for the reference books and a case for geological specimens. This was the

*Nelson, Hon. William E., Editor, City of Decatur
and Macon County, Illinois, The Pioneer
Publishing Co., Chicago, 1910. Volume I*

beginning of the collection of specimens of natural history for the illustration of the statements made in the text books. The case is still in use in the front hall of the high school.

It was also ordered that the rent received from a circus company for the use of lots purchased for a site for a high school be expended in securing books for the use of poor children.

January 1, 1867, the superintendent was authorized to introduce United States history into the upper grades of the grammar schools. He was also directed to change the exercises in the primary department of the Church street school, Miss Mattie Beman, teacher, so that half of the children would attend school in the forenoon and the other half in the afternoon. This was the beginning of the half day system in the first primary departments of our schools. It met with considerable opposition at first but for many years no complaints have been heard against the plan from thoughtful parents.

April 16, 1867, the clerk was directed to have one hundred blank bonds printed, forty for \$500 each, thirty for \$250 each, and thirty for \$100 each. He was also directed to have a bond book made and to register in it all bonds that might be issued. The bonds were printed and the book made by William J. Usrey. It is in the safe in the office. It contains a full history of every bond issued by the board.

May 3, 1867, the superintendent was directed to introduce at the beginning of the fall term Hilliard's readers in place of McGuffey's, if the teachers favored the change and if it could be done without expense to parents and children. It has always been the policy of the board to make changes in text books only when the teachers who were using such books favored a change.

May 7, 1867, the following bids were received for erecting a schoolhouse in the first ward according to plans and specifications prepared by G. P. Randall, of Chicago, in 1865:

D. C. Shockley	\$11,588.74
McNabb & Bishop	10,950.00
James Simpson	11,626.75
H. M. Whitmer	9,440.00
Andrew Martin	13,700.00

The contract was awarded H. M. Whitmer on condition that he give a bond for \$5,000 with good security and that he forfeit twenty-five dollars per day for every day after September 1st that the house remained unfinished. He declined to comply with the conditions and the contract was awarded to McNabb & Bishop, who filed a bond and contract conditioned as above.

May 29, 1867, ordered that the board purchase of Henry B. Durfee lots 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10, in block 3 of Durfee & King's addition for \$2,400, and that bonds bearing ten per cent and maturing in ten years be issued to pay for the same. The present Marietta street school is erected on a part of this purchase. No use was made of the lots for seventeen years.

On the 20th day of June, 1867, the first class graduated from the high school, having completed a three years' course. The following is the programme:

*Nelson - 1910 - Volume I
(See reverse side for complete title)*

Ralph E. Brown

March 3, 1968

Decatur Township Clerk Dies

Ralph E. Brown, 68, of 715 E. Whitmer St., Decatur Township clerk for 20 years, died at 7:18 p.m. Saturday in Decatur and Macon County Hospital.

Brown became township clerk when he was appointed to fill the vacancy created when Henry M. Novak was elected county auditor. Brown was re-elected to his fifth term in 1965.

Brown, a Republican, unsuccessfully ran against the late Laurence Tangney for the county clerk's post in 1954.

Before becoming township clerk he was production manager for the Grigolet Co. He was also superintendent of construction with the Illinois Department of Architecture & Engineering for 12 years and was superintendent of construction for the Federal Housing Administration.

In 1953, he was elected president of the County and Township Officials Association of Macon County. He was re-elected to that post in 1954.

In 1966, he was elected to the board of directors of the Township Officials Association of Illinois.

Mr. Brown was the center of a two-year controversy about per diem payments for meetings of the town board of auditors. In 1969, he repaid \$2,256 to Decatur Township. The amount was determined by an audit of fees paid for the meetings from 1948-1957. Brown



Ralph E. Brown

had stopped receiving payments for the meetings in 1957 when the practice was questioned.

He was born Jan. 28, 1900, in Peoria County, a son of Frank and Anna Romine Brown. He had lived in Decatur approximately 35 years.

He was a member of the Westminister Presbyterian Church and was an active member of Stephen Decatur Rose Society.

He married Blanche Brown May 14, 1927. She survives. He was preceded in death by one sister.

Funeral arrangements are incomplete at the Dawson & Wilkoff Funeral Home.