

Register of Old Buildings  
Macon County Historical Coordinating Council

Address: 412 W. Prairie Avenue.  
Northwest corner, W. Prairie and N. Edward.

Legal description:  
Western Addition  
S76' of Lots 11 and 12  
Blk 5

Date of original construction: 1887 - estimate, assessor's office.  
1883 - picture in 9/4/1935 Decatur paper...  
house under construction, November,  
1888, that of John Culver.

Name of original owner: Joseph M. Clokey et al  
(Begun by Clokey who could not afford to  
complete it. Taken over by J. H. Culver,  
according to Elizabeth Culver Shellabarger.)

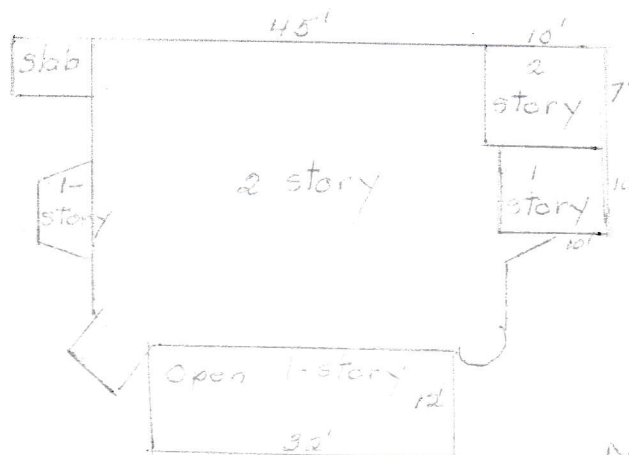
History:

1. A partial chain of title follows:

Sept. 15, 1865 Thos. O. Smith to Chas. A Tuttle.  
Aug. 1, 1881 Charles A. Tuttle to Josiah M. Clokey et al.  
Sept. 18, 1901 Josiah M. Clokey to Florence H. Culver.  
June 16, 1950 To Elizabeth C. Shellabarger.  
Oct. 23, 1950 To Roy Phillips and Minnie I., hus and wf, JT.  
Nov. 17, 1964 To Wayne B. Phillips and Anne T. Phillips, hus  
and wf, JT.

2. Macon County assessor's office data, August, 1974:

Masonry construction                      6 apartments  
2 stories                                      Gable roof-medium pitch  
9 rooms                                        2 open porches  
Face brick



Not drawn to scale

Present owner's name: Wayne Mercer (Not yet listed in Recorder of Deeds  
or Assessor's offices)

History Cont'd.:

3. Decatur city directories, chosen at random, contain this data:
- 1895 Josiah M. Clokey, Lawyer, 312 N. Water, res 412 W. Prairie.
  - 1901 John H. Culver, Pres, Culver Electric Co. and Sec. F. M. Young Co., res 412 W. Prairie.
  - 1917 John H. Culver (Florence H.), Pres, Douglas Telephone Co. Miss Ruth Culver res, 412 W. Prairie.
  - 1935 John H. Culver, Vice Pres, Shapley Drug Co. Miss Ruth Culver res, 412 W. Prairie.
  - 1941 No occupants.
  - 1951 Apts.
  - 1961 Apts.
4. Mrs. Elizabeth Culver Shellabarger who lived at 412 W. Prairie states that -
- there were five rooms and five fireplaces on the first floor
    - hall                      parlor                      dining room
    - library                      living room                      kitchen
  - when something came down the dining room chimney (probably a bird), that fireplace was ripped out.
  - the woodwork is of the period, in oak.
  - there is a turret on one side (west front) and a tower on the other (east front).
  - the exterior remains much as it was when constructed; however, two stone urns have been removed.
- 4b. Fred Salogga reminisced (10/25/74) over seeing Mr. Culver reading in his library as he would walk by the house, reading, apparently, books from his extensive collection.
- 4c. Mrs. Anne Phillips (11/26/74) stated that -
- the stone urns were gone by the time her husband's parents purchased the house in 1950; however, she recalls them very well.
  - the house now has seven apartments, including one on the third floor where there was a ballroom, beautifully paneled, with a skylight. There were enough smaller rooms around the main ballroom (some rounded) to convert nicely into an apartment.
  - the library was to the left (west) of the front door... a large room, ample in size to have housed Mr. Culver's five thousand volumes. There is a gorgeous fireplace of stone and marble, in this former library, with a huge mirror over it, in what she believed to be a frame of sculptured plaster, gilded over. Unfortunately a tenant painted over the gilt frame some years ago.
  - the rooms are unusual in shape, adding interest to the house.
  - the center hallway has ornate woodwork of oak.

412 West Prairie



Photo - Lynn Bohon, 1972



MACON COUNTY historical society members look at Wilson, Minnie A. Dill, Mrs. McCoy, A. Webber Borchers and Fred Sibthorpe. From left are Mabel W. W. Doane, Mrs. J.H.

Feb. 14, 1971

## Historical Society Began in 1916

By Cheryl D. Peck

An interest in collecting and preserving local history brought a dozen persons together in the Decatur Public Library in May, 1916, to organize the Macon County Historical Society.

A constitution was adopted, temporary officers were elected, and a committee to nominate permanent officers was appointed.

Much interest was taken in the purposes of the society, and many plans were suggested for collecting and preserving local history and objects of historical interest.

The first president of the society was John H. Culver. The first secretary was John F. Hicks.

The first donation to the society was a framed picture of John Trainer who was the originator of the course of study used in the common schools, not only of Illinois but of the country.

Another interesting relic was a horn from one of the oxen with which Abraham Lincoln plowed the ground on his small-farm south of Harristown.

In order to bring the society before the old settlers of Macon County, Owen Scott was named to make an address at the Old

### Decatur Diary

Settlers' picnic in Fairview Park in August, 1916.

He made an appeal for membership in the society and for relics of all kinds — documents, books and anything else of historical interest.

The public library was the first meeting place of the society and the depository of what was contributed.

In December, 1920, the society found a permanent home by voting to accept the offer of quarters in the Decatur Art Institute, the old Millikin Homestead.

The room assigned the society was on the second floor in the south room. It served as a place for meetings and afforded space for historical relics and for records and archives of the society.

County Judge J. H. McCoy was the last president of the society before it became inactive in 1923.

It continued to be inactive until June, 1933, when 13 persons gathered in the public library to reorganize the society.

It was then decided that original documents would be housed in the public library, where the society in previous years assembled such material.

Officers of the society at that time were A. Webber Borchers, president, and Mabel E. Richmond, secretary-treasurer.

The first meeting of the society after its reorganization in June was in the public library in October, 1933. Paul M. Angle, librarian of the Illinois State Historical Society, was the speaker.

Angle, an authority on Lincoln

lore, spoke on the preservation of Lincoln relics and the marking of historical spots in connection with his life.

J. H. McCoy again was elected president of the society in 1940, succeeding Borchers.

Again in the late 1940s, the society became inactive. In September, 1953, 10 persons met in Borchers' home to revive the society. However, the attempt was unsuccessful.

Not until April, 1962, did the society become active again. A group headed by Mr. and Mrs. William Millhorn Jr. of Argenta contacted several persons in the area to attend a meeting in the public library to discuss reactivation.

Until the spring of 1970 the society held meetings in the Boyd Room of the old Decatur Public Library Building at 457 N. Main St.

At that time the society purchased the North Fork Presbyterian Church, 5326 North Fork Rd., for use as a historical museum and meeting place.

George W. Newlin, who has been president of the Macon County Historical Society since 1967, said there are about 170 members in the society who meet once a month in the North Fork Museum.

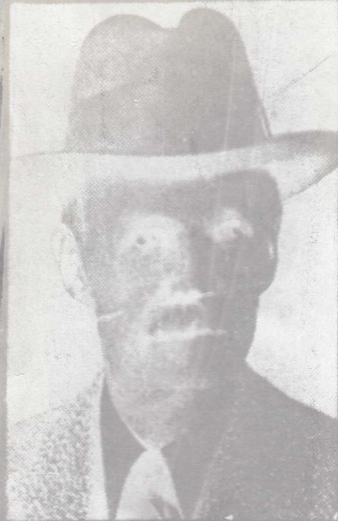
The society republished the "History of Macon County" in 1969 which was published in 1876 by attorney John W. Smith.

This gives the people of Macon County easy access to the history of the county, Newlin said.

Among other projects, the society was responsible for placing the Lincoln heritage marker on Lincoln Square and marking historic sites in Macon County.

"We are working on the opening of the North Fork Museum this spring," Newlin said.

## UTILITY MAN DIES



JOHN H. CULVER

## Culver, Utility Builder, Dies

Private funeral services for John H. Culver, 84, prominent retired public utilities operator who died at 11:50 a. m. Monday in his home, 412 West Prairie avenue, will be held at 11 a. m. Wednesday in the Dawson & Wikoff chapel. He had been ill more than a year.

Mr. Culver and his brother Col. James Culver operated a construction company, and in 1902 they rebuilt the Abraham Lincoln tomb in Springfield. In 1889 he came to Decatur and set up a small monument shop.

When Ford Platt of Monticello established an electric light plant here, Mr. Culver and two former fellow country school teachers became associated in the business and organized the Municipal Electric Light Co., building a power house on the corner of Edward and Cerro Gordo streets.

### Operator of Utilities

Mr. Culver later installed a water works system and operated it in Tuscola. He built and operated an electric light plant in Moweaqua. Through a trade of property, he obtained the Douglas County Telephone Co. Besides owning farm land, he was owner of two Water street buildings, the one occupied by Blakeney & Plum clothiers and the building now occupied by the Reed and Hecht stores, which later was sold. In 1903 he was elected secretary of the Decatur Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Culver was well known for his extensive library. He was known to be fond of books about Napoleon and had more than 100 volumes concerning him.

### Collected 5,000 Volumes

A Decatur newspaper account in 1930:

"John H. Culver is rather doubtful to the belief that to secure knowledge and become well read one has to go to school and be graduated from college.

"For John Culver has perhaps the largest, most complete private library in Decatur. It contains approximately 5,000 volumes on practically every conceivable subject by practically every writer in the world's history."

Mr. Culver was born in Christian county, the son of farm parents Edward and Elizabeth Scott Culver, Dec. 26, 1858. He attended only a country school.

### Favorite Author Dumas

However, he taught himself to read Latin. He has said that his father liked to read, and that he became a reader early in life. His favorite author was Alexander Dumas, and his favorite book was "The Three Musketeers" by that author.

In his reading Mr. Culver followed a schedule. For example, one winter he devoted his time to Russian literature and history, and another year it was French writings. He expressed the opinion that few if any modern novelists would be remembered long.

On March 11, 1886, Mr. Culver and Miss Florence Hight of Macon township were married in Macon county. They lived in Decatur since 1890.

### His Survivors

Besides his wife, he leaves two daughters, Mrs. David Shellabarger and Miss Ruth Culver of Decatur. There is one grandson, David S. Shellabarger of Decatur, and one sister, Mrs. Edith Mossholder, Pasadena, Calif.

Mr. Culver was a member of the Masonic lodge and of the Decatur Club.

The body will be placed in the Fairlawn Mausoleum. Mr. Culver requested that no flowers be sent.

*Decatur Review*

Tues., July 6, 1943





**J**OHN H. CULVER is known to many of Decatur's citizens through his extensive trade connections. He is a man of excellent business and executive ability and is at the head of two of the leading industries of the city, being President of the Culver Monument Company and also of the Municipal Electric Company. Almost his entire life has been passed in Macon County, whither he came when a lad of five years from Christian County, Ill., his birth having there occurred December 26, 1858. His parents were Edward and Elizabeth (Scott) Culver, the former of whom was a farmer and stock-raiser and land-owner in Nebraska. He made his home in Macon County until 1891, when he died in Blue Mound at the age of sixty-two years. His wife passed away in 1884.

The subject of this sketch at the age of sixteen entered the Normal School of Taylorville, and pursued a thorough business course of study, after which he accepted a position in the office of his brother, J. S. Culver, of Taylorville, and soon became superintendent of that branch of his brother's

extensive monument establishment. On attaining his majority he returned to Macon County, and for the succeeding five years engaged in teaching. He then rejoined his brother, whose headquarters were at Springfield, Ill., and devoted his entire attention to the mastery of all the details of monumental work, excepting only the strictly mechanical. His brother had establishments at seven different points in Illinois and did an extensive business. J. H. finally became a partner in the business and soon closed out all the branch yards, but increased the capacity of the central house. This partnership continued for four years, when our subject sold out, and in 1889 came to Decatur, opening the present business, which he continued one year before the incorporation of the Culver Monument Company in 1890. It has a capital stock of \$15,000, and its officers are, J. H. Culver, President; J. S. Culver, of Springfield, Vice-President; J. M. Willard, Treasurer; and J. H. Rainey, Secretary. About \$25,000 are invested in the business, and its annual sales, extending over a large area in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and Iowa, amount to upwards of \$50,000. The company does monument work exclusively, using only the finest granite from the best quarries of Vermont and Georgia, and turning out only the highest grades of work. Mr. Culver attends personally to the purchase of the granites and gives his personal supervision to the business.

Other interests also claim the attention of our subject, who, as before stated, is President of the Municipal Electrical Company of Decatur, which was incorporated in 1893 with a capital of \$25,000. The plant has just been completed at a cost of \$27,000. The Wood arc lights and Slattery incandescent lights are used. They have sixty of the former and about one thousand of the latter now in use. The incorporators of the company are, J. H. Culver, President; J. M. Willard, Vice-President; and E. E. Gibson, Secretary and Treasurer. This promises to be a paying enterprise and will prove one of the city's leading industries.

On the 11th of March, 1886, in Macon, Ill., Mr. Culver wedded Miss Florence, daughter of R. W. Hight, of Macon Township. Their union has been blessed with a little daughter, Bessie, now two

years old. The parents hold membership with Grace Methodist Episcopal Church. In politics, Mr. Culver is a supporter of Republican principles, and in his social relations holds membership with Ionic Lodge No. 312, A. F. & A. M., Macon Chapter No. 21, R. A. M., Decatur Council, and Beaumanoir Commandery No. 9, K. T. He takes quite an active interest in Masonry and also belongs to Chevalier Bayard Lodge, K. P., and the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. The Culver Monument Company has met with a marvelous degree of success, a fact which is due to the able management of its president. Through his thorough understanding of the business and personal supervision, he knows just what is going on and can suggest improvements and lay plans for further perfection. He has thus won a liberal and ever-increasing patronage as the reward of his own labor.



*From Portrait and Biographical Record, Macon County, Illinois, Lake City Press, Chicago 1888 page 362.*





**D**ECATUR has an electric street railway of which the citizens are proud, and with good reason.

This was the first system in the state to adopt electricity as a motive power for street cars, and at the time of its installation ten years ago it was one of the twelve or fifteen electric lines in the country. Although the oldest system in the state, it is the most modern. Within the last few months a total of \$175,000.00 has been spent in modernizing it, and as it now stands, with the extensive plan of reconstruction almost completed, the road is pre-eminently the superior of street car lines in other cities of the same rank and size in the state, and there is nothing better in Chicago.

The name of the present corporation is the Decatur Traction & Electric Co. Although there have been several changes of names, marking different periods in the history of the line, the present owners of the system are substantially the same as the original promoters.

The capital stock of the company is \$225,000. The officers are: B. W. Campbell of

Cincinnati, president; D. S. Shellabarger of Decatur, vice-president; W. L. Shellabarger of Decatur, secretary and treasurer. C. N. Wilcoxon is manager.

### The Crack

The present street car system consists of fourteen and a half miles of track, twenty-seven cars, a first-class power station, a thoroughly adequate car barn, a handsome transfer station, and all the other necessary incidentals.

The track deserves especial mention. During the last few months the track has been rebuilt at an expense of \$70,000.00. Five miles of the tracks in the paved streets have been relaid with 62-lb. Shanghai T rail in 60-foot lengths. The steel is laid on 5 inch by 8 inch ties two feet apart, the ties

resting on a bed of thoroughly tamped gravel 8 inches deep. The track is, in fact, built as well as the owners, with their ten years of experience, and the construction company, who did the work, knew how to build it. There is nothing superior in street car track construction. Two miles of other lines have been relaid on new ties and new ballast, while



Residence of J. H. Culver