

History of the Northwest Corner of 4th Street & 13th Avenue

By Barbara Mask

One of the early workers on the corner of Base and Prairie used the motto, "I WILL FIX IT" on his sign. It appears to have become the modus operandi for all the businesses that have existed on this site. There has been a 'service shop' establishment at this location for over 125 years; 100 of those years in the current concrete-block building.

In 1886, Thomas McEnery had a smithy on the site. Sometime in the 1890s, Jacob J. Sikkema rented the building for his horseshoeing business. On a busy day on December 5, 1905, Will Coffey fitted, set and nailed on eighty horse shoes, which was equivalent to shoeing twenty horses. Sikkema bought the property, with a wooden building, from Mrs. Mary Fischer in 1899 for \$700. On March 20, 1908, the Fulton Journal reported, "that Sikkema erected a wooden addition forty by sixty feet at the rear (west) to be used as a machine shop. Then, on October 20, 1911, announcement was made that, "Sikkema put a force of men at work excavating for the foundations for a new shop building. The new structure will be two stories high, with a front forty-eight feet on Fourth Street and forty-two deep. The three new walls will surround the present shop. The rear part remained as it was when built in 1908. The new building will be erected in the spring." And on March 29, 1912, the Journal reported on the new building made of concrete blocks; locally made by the John Bly Block Factory. "The first floor will be used for a blacksmith, repair and carpenter shop and the second floor for paints, oils and carriage trimming." The same issue of the newspaper stated that, "Roy Sikkema is now employed by his brother, J.J. Sikkema, in his blacksmith and machine shop.

Jacob Sikkema worked as an apprentice in the Hellerstedt carriage shop for four years. At the age of 20, he established this blacksmith shop and continued in business there for 55 years. He was a former alderman who resigned in March, 1902, "because he is not pleased with the way things have been run on the council and he has business enough of his own to attend to..." He was a charter member of the Fulton Kiwanis Club which will be celebrating its 90th anniversary in November, 2012.



circa 1910: Note the horseshoe-shaped sign on the building and the 1908 addition in the rear.



1912 - L-R Standing: 1. _____ Decker; 2. Pete Smeltz, horse-shoer; 3. Jacob J. Sikkema; 4. Louis Wiersema; 5. _____; 6. John Schaver; 7. _____; 8. Maze Rush; 9. Amos Miensma; 10. Roy Sikkema; 11. George Wiersema, Chicago contractor; 12. _____; 13. _____ Schaver; 14. _____; 15. Charles Grimes, hauling blocks for Bly's Block Factory. J.J. Sikkema is third from the left. The small cart was the delivery truck for the Kadyk Third Ward Grocery.

A SAD DAY NOVEMBER 16, 1915

Walter M. Rush, 50, was a wood-worker in the J. J. Sikkema shop, when a stick of wood struck him above the heart. The thrust broke two ribs which paralyzed his heart and caused sudden death. Roy Sikkema, the owner's brother, who was in the vulcanizing plant upstairs in the building and other employees rushed to him when they heard a painful cry, but he was killed instantly.

Rush and his wife had a special birth-

day dinner and cake for their son, Stephen, who celebrated his birthday during the lunch hour that day. The father was killed at 1:05; right after returning to work.

The coroner's jury ruled that the fatal injury was caused by being struck with a pine stick one and one-half inches by two and one-half inches and three feet long hurled from the fly wheel of a 12-horse power gasoline engine. Rush had been a ten-year employee.

Continued

THE LINCOLN HIGHWAY GARAGE

In the fall of 1912, Roy Sikkema and Claus Bruins bought a half lot to the north for \$900, and also used the concrete blocks, to erect a garage. They sold it within two years for \$4000. They sold Reo automobiles.

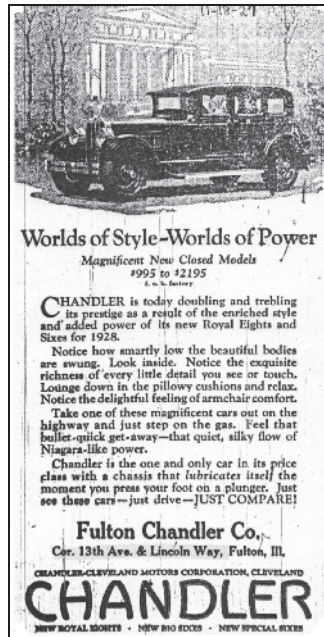
On May 19, 1914, Adams & Bennett, who named it the Lincoln Highway Garage & Livery, became the agents for the Cass cars. Four months later, they sold the repair and auto service business to Thomas Musk. He was the agent for Maxwell automobiles. In 1921, George Stuart assumed the mortgage of \$6100 and operated the garage business. John Brondyke was the next operator of the garage and he opened a showroom and was the agent for the Chandler cars. (See photos). He also was a dealer for Oakland Pontiacs. Ralph Schepler owned the business in 1930 and sold Dodge automobiles.

Ed Noble and Jack Pessman were the next owners to run the garage business. They continued to offer repair services and became the Ford dealership. (Noble built a new building, 1201 4th Street, on the southeast corner of 4th Street and 12th Avenue in 1944.) The garage was not attached as each building had its own walls. They were removed by Bert and Martin Merema in 1965 and the garage building was incorporated into the Merema Brothers Massey-Ferguson Implement Inc.'s main building.

MEREMA BROTHERS: TWICE

Roy Bronkema and John E. Housenga operated an implement dealership in the front (east) part of the J. J. Sikkema building beginning in the early 1940s. Housenga moved to Michigan and Bronkema was forced to sell the implement business because of illness that resulted in his death at the age of 43. Bert Merema purchased it on December 15, 1951 and his brother, Martin, became an official partner a couple of weeks later. They signed a sales agreement with the Massey-Ferguson Company on January 1, 1952. Arie Post had been the owner of the building in 1951 and his son-in-law, Robert Campbell, had a repair shop in the rear or west section. The Merema Brothers' firm continued to grow and expand its operation offering full services in sales for the Massey-Ferguson line of farm implements. They also offered a complete line of parts and service for farm implement repairs and garden tractor lines.

In 1975, Merema Brothers erected a warehouse south of the main building and near the bridge approach to accommodate



circa 1927--John Brondyke and Les Hurlbut sold Chandler automobiles in addition to auto repair work.



1977 - Merema Brothers times two. Stan and Bob, along with Martin and Bert, receive an outstanding sales award from a Massey-Ferguson officer.

an increase demand for parts and supplies. It is currently owned by Company One.

The ownership passed from brothers, Bert and Martin Merema, in 1980, to Bert's sons, Bob, Stan and a year later, Roger joined his brothers as a partner.

In 1997, Merema Brothers Implement, Inc. moved from the concrete block building at 1218 4th Street to an all-metal 25,000 square-foot building at 2900 Waller Road.

WENDEL AUTO REPAIR

In August, 1999, owner Joe Wendel moved his Wendel Auto Repair business from Clinton, Iowa to Fulton, Illinois and

set up shop at 1218 4th Street. He was only the third owner/operator. Continuing the motto of the first handyman, Harris, who ran a repair business on this corner in the 1890s, "I WILL FIX IT," Joe Wendel provides professional and prompt auto and truck repair services. Joe states, "We offer full service: bumper to bumper, but not including the bumper, as we don't do body work." In its 100-year history, there have been three primary owners, each and all have preserved the historic integrity of the building and, for that, the Fulton community is grateful.

---End---