

# Farming top occupation in the 1850s

Census takers, who made their rounds of Monroe County households in 1850, found that by far the most prevalent occupation of its residents was farming.

The men who did the federal tally in that year divided the county

into two parts, which they called districts 74 and 132. The former included part of Bloomington

Township and Benton, Marion (now

part of Benton), Bean Blossom, Richland and Washington townships. The person in charge of statistics for that portion of the county did not present a summary of the various occupations it contained.

Fortunately, the district 132 census-takers did. Thus we get a glimpse of what Monroe Countians in the remainder of Bloomington Township and Clear Creek, Indian Creek, Perry, Polk, Salt Creek and Van Buren townships were doing for a living.

**THE CENSUS SUMMARY** — hand written in the fancy script of the period — lists the adult population by occupations. Of the 5,837 residents in district 132, 1,133 (or 19 percent) were engaged in farming.

The second highest group included persons working in the following essential services and products: millers, engineers, coopers, peddlars, shoemakers, saddlers, millwrights, laborers, weavers, wool carders, tanners, tinnerns, printers, tailors, hack drivers, cabinet makers, wagon and carriage makers, tabacconists, merchants, mail contractors, teamsters, butchers and traders. Apart from the category of laborers, the largest group of persons in the services/products classification was blacksmiths, who were essential in a largely horse-powered economy.

**EVIDENCE THAT BLOOMINGTON** and the county were growing rapidly can be seen in the large number (52) of persons in various aspects of the building trade. The largest group of those workers was carpenters (31). The others were plasterers, bricklayers, stone masons, painters, brick makers and stone cutters.

The names of Bloomington merchants and businessmen of the 1850s can be found in *Couriers of Morgan, Monroe and Brown, Indiana*. Among them were some steam-driven establishments such as a grist mill and a carding mill.

Augustine Holtzman, a German immigrant, operated a woolen mill. In a newspaper advertisement he urged Monroe Countians to bring their wool to his establishment to be carded and spun. He

(Page 2, col. 3, this sec.)

## Looking Back

By Rose H. McIlveen