

John W. Vail.

During the more than thirty years that he has been a resident of the community, John W. Vail has written his name in clear and legible characters upon the pages of Decatur's business history. For the most part he has been engaged in manufacturing ventures, but his enterprises and interests have been so extensive and far-reaching that the title of capitalist or general business man would be one much more fitting than that of merely manufacturer. Also, he is identified with various other matters of interest in the life of his locality and is generally conceded to be one of Decatur's most prominent and representative citizens.

Mr. Vail was born in Ossian, Wells County, Indiana, May 10, 1859, and is a son of Thomas and Martha J. (Shepard) Vail. His parents, natives of New Jersey, came to Ohio as young people and met and were married at Bucyrus, Crawford County. Several years later they came to Indiana, locating at Fort Wayne, where Mr. Vail took a contract for building a section of the Pennsylvania Railway, known at that time as the Pittsburg, Fort Wayne and Chicago Railroad, with which he was engaged from 1849 to 1852. Subsequently he went to Ossian, Wells County, where he built a large section out of that place of the Lake Erie Railway, known at that time as the Fort Wayne, Muncie and Cincinnati Railroad, north from the station at Ossian through the swampy tract known as "Old Eight Miles," and beyond. In the meantime he had conducted a cooperage business. He started this railroad contract in 1868, but did not live to see its completion, as he died in 1869, at the age of forty-seven years, although the road was completed by others in 1871. Mr. Vail was a republican in politics, and while not prominent in public affairs was a man of influence, well known and highly respected for his integrity and probity in all the walks of his life. He was a member of the Presbyterian Church, as was also Mrs. Vail, a woman of many excellencies of heart and mind, who died at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Daniel Spruang, of Decatur, in 1911, having reached the age of eighty-eight years, seven months. They were the parents of the following children: Rev. Solomon N., a retired minister of the Presbyterian faith, now residing at Washington, D. C., married, but without issue; Ephraim A., who is engaged in the manufacturing business at Paulding, Missouri, married but without children; John W., of this notice; Joseph, of Bryan, Ohio, married but without children; Aaron T., of Fort Wayne, Indiana, married and the father of three daughters and one son; Angeline, who died as the wife of Thomas Wanson, leaving two children; Elizabeth, the wife of R. M. Donaldson, living at Marmaduke, Arkansas, and the mother of two sons and two daughters; and Lucy, the wife of Daniel Spruang, of Decatur, no children.

John W. Vail was reared in Wells County and educated in the public schools there, coming to Decatur June 21, 1881, since which time he has been actively identified with the interests of this thriving community. Various enterprises occupied his attention until 1898 when he developed the Decatur Egg Case Co.'s plant and business at Decatur and continued in that line from time to time until 1911. In that year he built the large hoop plant located at this time at the G. R. & I. tracks and Adams Street, and conducted it until June, 1916, when he sold to the Bluffton Hoop Company. In 1916, Mr. Vail bought what is known as the Decatur Straw Board Company, which is operated at Marion, Indiana, and of which he is general manager, his son, Daniel R. Vail, being president of the concern. John W. Vail is also manager of the Delphi Strawboard Company, which was purchased by him in 1912, and this, like the other concern, is

a closed corporation, all the stock being owned by the family. He is one of the leading business men of Decatur, where his company has its fillers and cases and this is the distributing point for the Egg-case business, handling from three to four hundred carloads of cases and fillers per year. Likewise Mr. Vail is interested in the Cardwell Stave Company, of Missouri, a large enterprise which has owned many thousands acres of land, which, as the timber has been cut off, the land has been sold for farming purposes. This latter company manufactures 40,000,000 staves annually. The manufacturing point for the egg cases is also at Cardwell, although the distributing point remains at Decatur, from whence they are sent all over the country, enough being handled yearly to ship 45,000,000 dozen eggs. The company owns twenty-eight miles of standard gauge railroad, known as the Paragola & Memphis Railway, which, in addition to caring for its own large interests, also does an interstate business. In all of his ventures Mr. Vail has shown a spirit of progressiveness and a striving for high business ideals. His excellent standing in the business world, both materially and in the opinion of his associates, has been gained by a career of strict integrity and honorable dealing, and at the same time his good citizenship has never been doubted.

In 1882, at Decatur, Mr. Vail was married to Miss Christina B. Railing, who was born in Adams County, Indiana, July 1, 1863, and grew up and was educated in that county. She is a daughter of Daniel and Elmina (Kern) Railing, natives of Pennsylvania, who were married in Fort Wayne, Indiana, at the old Methodist College and took up their residence in Adams County on a farm east of Decatur, but later Mr. Railing became one of the leading horse buyers and shippers in Indiana, if not in the country, securing his stock all over the Central West and shipping it not only to Philadelphia and other large points, but to England, Germany and Havana, Cuba. After a successful career he retired from business and lived quietly at Decatur until his death when he was past eighty-five years of age, his wife having passed away two years previously, at the age of eighty-one. They were devout members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and Mr. Railing was a republican and prominent in the ranks of his party. They had two children: Mrs. Vail, and Saloma, who is the wife of J. B. Rice, has no children.

To Mr. and Mrs. Vail there have been born the following children: Daniel R., of Marion, Indiana, president and manager of the Marion & Delphi plants of the Decatur Strawboard Company, married Blanche Carroll, daughter of E. L. Carroll, and has one daughter, Mary Louise: Hugh Thomas, at the head of his father's Decatur office, married Frances Ward, resides at Decatur and has no children, and Forest E., like the other sons, well educated, secretary and treasurer of the two strawboard plants, a resident of Marion, married Grace Butler, of Decatur, and has no children.

All the members of this family are active in the work of the Methodist Episcopal Church, where Mr. Vail has for years been president of the board of trustees. For forty-one years Mrs. Vail has been a member of the choir, a record in both city and state, and her voice has been heard at the funerals of many of Decatur's foremost people who have passed away during this time. She has been treasurer of the Woman's Home Missionary Society of the North Indiana Conference for twenty years, and in various other ways has been a useful worker. Fraternally Mr. Vail is connected with the Masonic Order at Decatur and Commandery at Bluffton, and the Knights of Pythias and Improved Order of Red Men.