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PAST AND PRESENT OF THE CITY OF SPRINGFIELD AND SANGAMON COUNTY ILLINOIS

**By Joseph Wallace, M. A.
of the Springfield Bar**

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JOHN BRESSMER. - To say of him whose name heads this sketch that he has risen unaided from comparative obscurity to rank among the most successful merchants and capitalists of Springfield, is a statement that seems trite to those familiar with his life, yet it is but just to say in a history that will descend to future generations that his business record is one that any man would be proud to possess. Beginning at the very bottom round of the ladder, he has advanced steadily, step by step, until he is occupying a position of trust and prominence reached by very few men. Through his entire business career he has been looked upon as a model of integrity and honor, never making an engagement that he has not fulfilled, and standing today an example of what determination and force, combined with the highest degree of business integrity, can accomplish for a man of natural ability and strength of character. Since 1860 he has been a member of mercantile circles of Springfield, and today is the leader in the dry goods line of this city.

A native of Wurtemberg, Germany, Mr. Bressmer was born June 8, 1833, a son of Philip and Julia (Follmer) Bressmer. He spent the first fifteen years of his life in his native country and then accompanied his parents to America, for the father, desirous of providing a comfortable living for his family, resolved to take advantage of the better business opportunities of the new world and sailed from Havre, France. The voyage, covering sixty days, was terminated at New Orleans, whence the party of father, mother and two children proceeded up the Mississippi to St. Louis, and thence across the country to Pekin, arriving there July 4, 1848. By wagon they continued the journey to Mount Pulaski, Logan county, Illinois, and for a brief period the family visited there with an uncle of our subject. The father was not long permitted to enjoy his new home, for his death occurred in October of the year of their arrival.

Since July, 1848, John Bressmer has been a resident of Springfield and his first wages were earned in grading the street in front of the residence of Abraham Lincoln. While thus employed he often watched Lincoln go to and from his home and says that he learned to love the man even before he was able to converse with him, for at that time Mr. Bressmer could speak nothing but the German language. It followed as a natural sequence that he supported him by his ballot when his hero became a candidate for the presidency.

Earning his living for a time by working on the roads at fifty cents a day, he was employed to haul rocks and mortar for a distillery at Carpenter's Mill, and then spent two winters in the employ of S. M. Tinsley, for whom he sawed wood, curried horses and built fires. A step in advance was made by him, when in October, 1854, he entered the grocery store of Hurst & Taylor as a clerk, and when two or three years had passed he entered upon the position of salesman in a dry goods store, thus for the first time becoming connected with a business in which

he was destined to rise to splendid success. About 1856 the firm of Hurst & Taylor dissolved partnership and Charles W. Matheny became associated with Mr. Hurst, Mr. Bressmer remaining with the new firm as a clerk for two years, when he and B. C. McQuester purchased the interest of Mr. Hurst and the firm of Matheny & Co. was formed. From that time on Mr. Bressmer's rise in the business world has been continuous, and in 1868 he became sold proprietor of the store, remaining on the old site until 1881, when he removed to his present location, where he has a substantial four story business block, well equipped for the conduct of a dry goods trade and well supplied with a large and carefully selected stock of dry goods, carpets and curtains. His carpet establishment is unsurpassed by anything of the kind in the state. A large hall on the upper floor has been provided for the purpose of fitting carpets of any size that may be ordered, and as they are sewed and placed just as they will be on the floor for which they are designed, there is no danger of misfits. The volume of trade has assumed extensive proportions, making the establishment the leading dry goods house of Springfield.

In 1855 Mr. Bressmer was united in marriage to Miss Mary Weiss, and unto them have been born four children: Charles, who has charge of the carpet department and is manager of the store; George, who served as bookkeeper up to the time of his death; and Julia and Emma, who aid their mother in dispensing the hospitalities of their beautiful home.

Mr. Bressmer holds membership in the German Lutheran Church and has always been an earnest Republican in politics, but has had no time for active political work, his attention being given to the control and enlargement of his business, which now covers over twenty thousand feet of floor space and necessitates the employment of more than fifty people, to whom he is kindly, liberal and just. He always appreciates faithfulness on the part of employees, is quick to reward good service, and today stands a prominent figure in the mercantile world - an honest, upright, self made man and a thoroughly progressive merchant.

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