

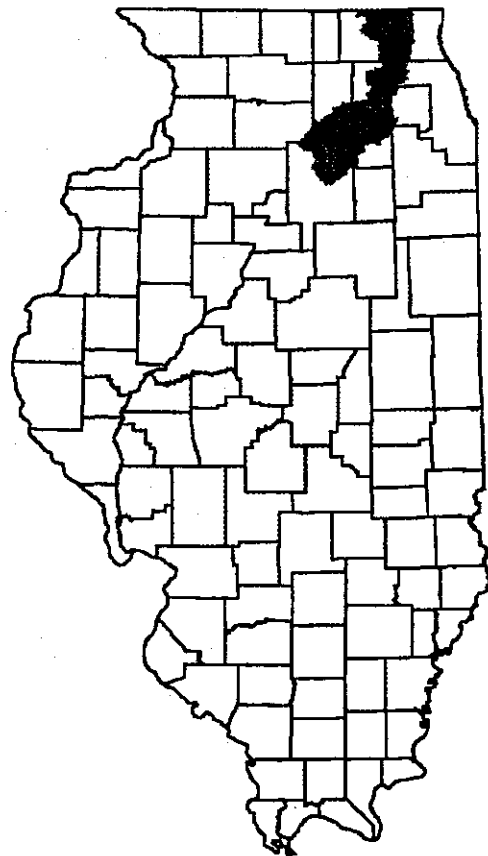


Volume 5

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Early Accounts of the Ecology of the Fox River Area

# FOX RIVER AREA ASSESSMENT



# **FOX RIVER AREA ASSESSMENT**

## **VOLUME 5: EARLY ACCOUNTS OF THE ECOLOGY OF THE FOX RIVER AREA**

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October 2000

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## ***About This Report***

The Fox River Area Assessment examines an area situated along the Fox River which spans eleven counties in north-eastern Illinois. Because significant natural community and species diversity is found in the area, it has been designated a state Resource Rich Area.

This report is part of a series of reports on areas of Illinois where a public-private partnership has been formed. These assessments provide information on the natural and human resources of the areas as a basis for managing and improving their ecosystems. The determination of resource rich areas and development of ecosystem-based information and management programs in Illinois are the result of three processes — the Critical Trends Assessment Program, the Conservation Congress, and the Water Resources and Land Use Priorities Task Force.

### **Background**

The Critical Trends Assessment Program (CTAP) documents changes in ecological conditions. In 1994, using existing information, the program provided a baseline of ecological conditions.<sup>1</sup> Three conclusions were drawn from the baseline investigation:

1. the emission and discharge of regulated pollutants over the past 20 years has declined, in some cases dramatically,
2. existing data suggest that the condition of natural ecosystems in Illinois is rapidly declining as a result of fragmentation and continued stress, and
3. data designed to monitor compliance with environmental regulations or the status of individual species are not sufficient to assess ecosystem health statewide.

Based on these findings, CTAP has begun to develop methods to systematically monitor ecological conditions and provide information for ecosystem-based management. Five components make up this effort:

1. identify resource rich areas,
2. conduct regional assessments,
3. publish an atlas and inventory of Illinois landcover,
4. train volunteers to collect ecological indicator data, and
5. develop an educational science curriculum which incorporates data collection

At the same time that CTAP was publishing its baseline findings, the Illinois Conservation Congress and the Water Resources and Land Use Priorities Task Force were presenting their

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<sup>1</sup> See *The Changing Illinois Environment: Critical Trends*, summary report and volumes 1-7.



respective findings. These groups agreed with the CTAP conclusion that the state's ecosystems were declining. Better stewardship was needed, and they determined that a voluntary, incentive-based, grassroots approach would be the most appropriate, one that recognized the inter-relatedness of economic development and natural resource protection and enhancement.

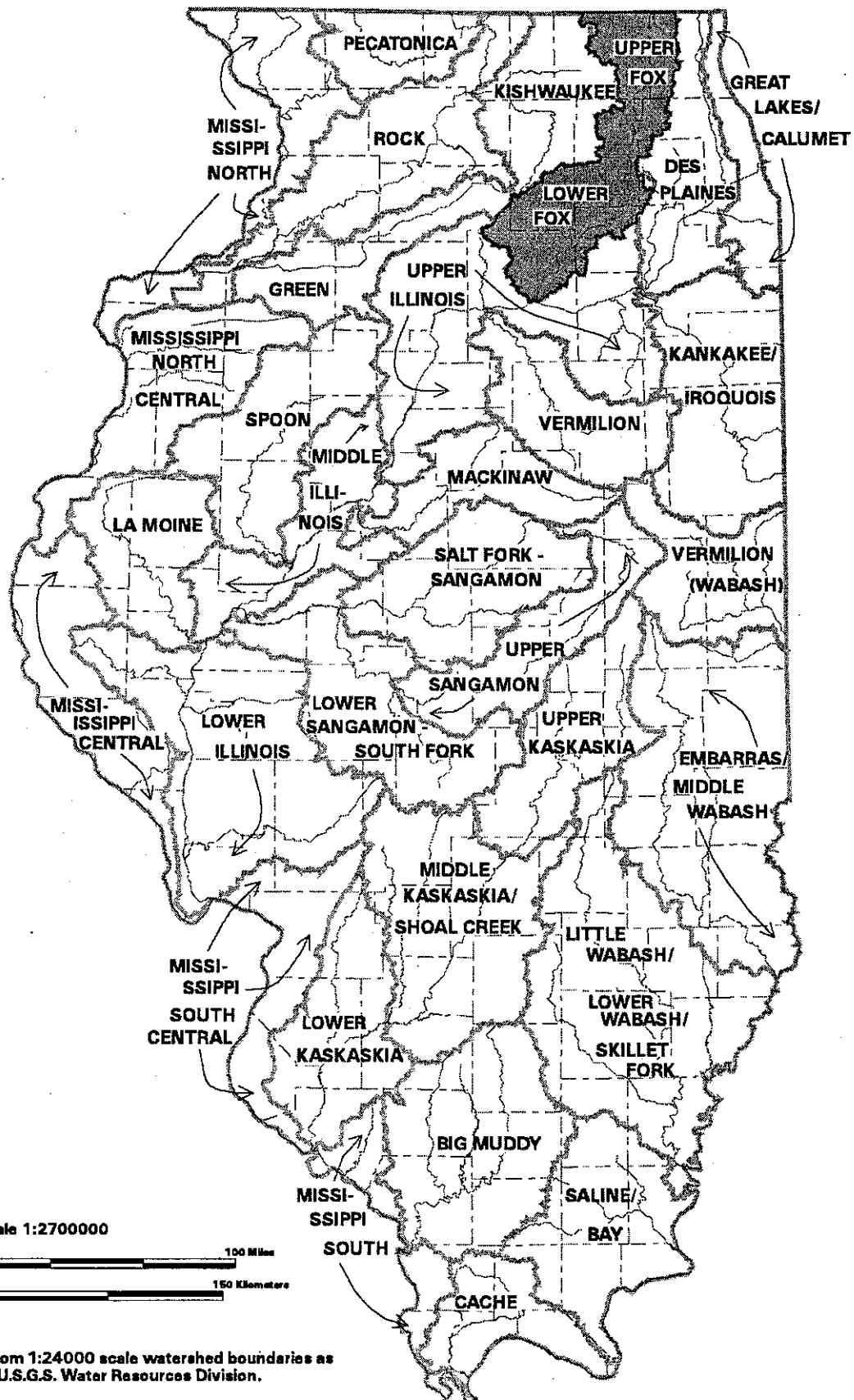
From the three initiatives was born Conservation 2000, a program designed to reverse ecosystem degradation, primarily through the Ecosystems Program, a cooperative process of public-private partnerships that are intended to merge natural resource stewardship with economic and recreational development. To achieve this goal, the program provides financial incentives and technical assistance to private landowners.

At the same time, CTAP identified 30 Resource Rich Areas (RRAs) throughout the state. In RRAs where Ecosystem Partnerships have been formed, CTAP is providing an assessment of the area, drawing from ecological and socio-economic databases to give an overview of the region's resources — geologic, edaphic, hydrologic, biotic, and socio-economic. Although several of the analyses are somewhat restricted by spatial and/or temporal limitations of the data, they help to identify information gaps and additional opportunities and constraints to establishing long-term monitoring programs in the partnership areas.

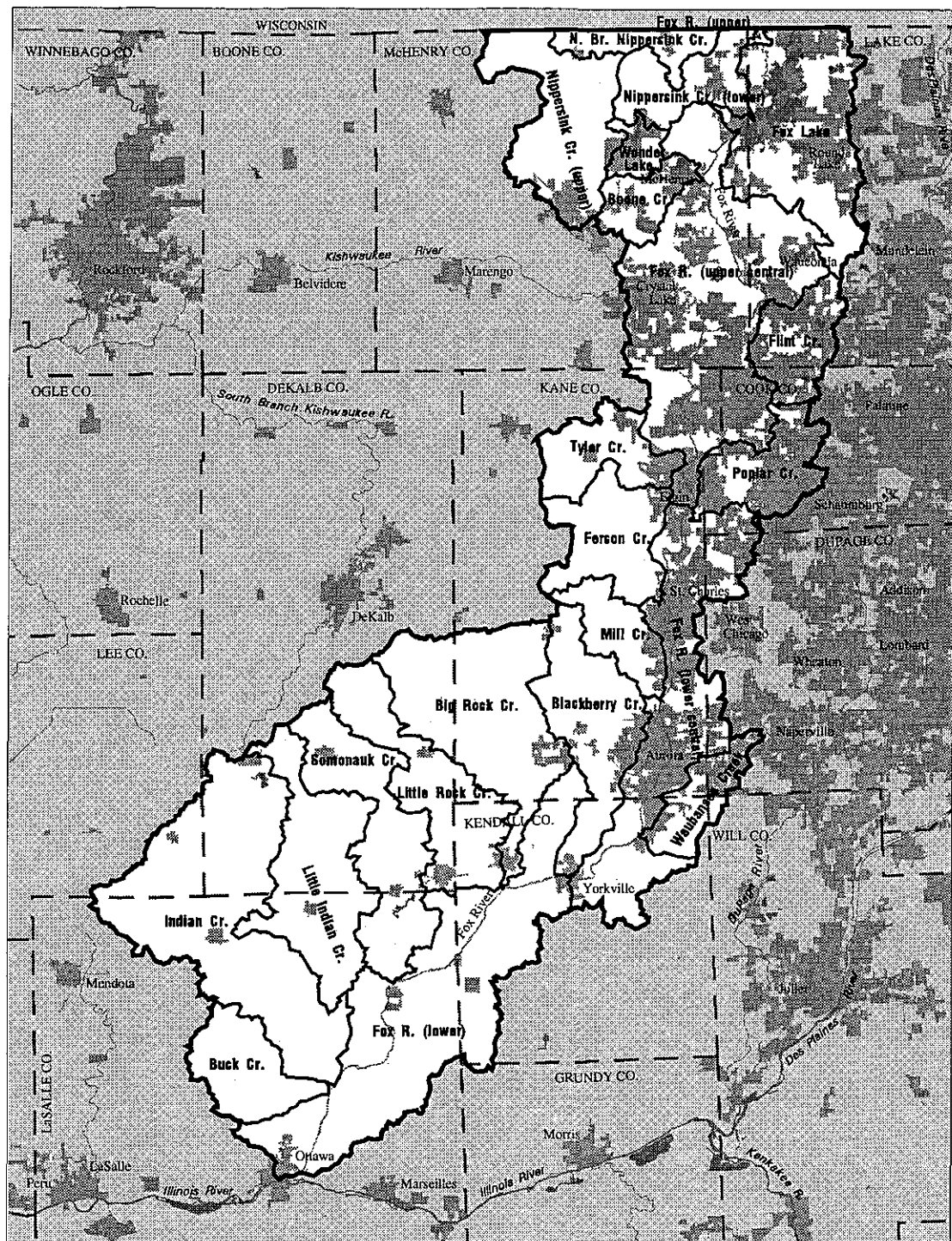
### **The Fox River Area Assessment**

The Fox River assessment covers an area of approximately 1,720 mile (1,092,874 acres) spanning eleven counties in north-eastern Illinois, including parts of Lake, McHenry, Kane, Cook, Kendall, DeKalb, and LaSalle counties, and small parts of Lee, DuPage, Will, and Grundy counties. The boundaries of the assessment area coincide with the boundaries of the Illinois portion of the Fox River Basin. This area encompasses 22 subbasins of the Fox River watershed (identified by the Illinois Environmental Protection Board), from the Illinois-Wisconsin border to the confluence of the Fox and Illinois Rivers at Ottawa, Illinois. This is a distance of 115 miles along the river. The northernmost eight subbasins, totaling 285,844 acres, have been designated as a "Resource Rich Area" because they contain significant natural community diversity. The Fox River Ecosystem Partnership was subsequently formed around this core area of high quality ecological resources.

This assessment is comprised of five volumes. In Volume 1, *Geology* discusses the geology, soils, and minerals in the assessment area. Volume 2, *Water Resources*, discusses the surface and groundwater resources and Volume 3, *Living Resources*, describes the natural vegetation communities and the fauna of the region. Volume 4 contains three parts: Part I, *Socio-Economic Profile*, discusses the demographics, infrastructure, and economy of the area, focusing on the six counties with the greatest



Major Drainage Basins of Illinois and Location of the Fox River Assessment Area



Subbasins in the Fox River assessment area. Subbasin boundaries depicted are those determined by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency.



amount of land in the area — DeKalb, Kane, Kendall, Lake, LaSalle, and McHenry counties; Part II, *Environmental Quality*, discusses air and water quality, and hazardous and toxic waste generation and management in the area; and Part III, *Archaeological Resources*, identifies and assesses the archaeological sites, ranging from the Paleo-Indian (B.C. 10,000) to the Postwar Industrial (A.D. 1946), known in the assessment watershed. Volume 5, *Early Accounts of the Ecology of the Fox River Area*, describes the ecology of the area as recorded by historical writings of explorers, pioneers, early visitors and early historians.



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# INTRODUCTION

## *Scope and Sources*

The Fox River enters Illinois from Wisconsin in the Chain of Lakes region of Lake and McHenry Counties. The river drains parts of 11 counties along its course to the Illinois River at Ottawa.

Early descriptions of the ecology of the Fox River Area have come largely from explorers, missionaries, travel writers, local residents, engineers, scientists, and historians. \* Eye-witness narratives on pages 32 to 385 have been arranged according to the year of the observation. Retrospective accounts that look farther back on the past are presented in the order of their publication date. The source of each quotation is cited with a number that corresponds to one of the references on pages 386 to 404.

Quotations are true to their sources: spelling, punctuation, and grammar have not been corrected or standardized, but obvious typographical errors (not misspellings) have been edited. †

## *Terminology*

Immigrants who came to the Fox River valley during the 1830s through the '50s have been termed *settlers*, but the region had long been settled by the resident Potawatomi, their neighbors, and their predecessors. As a chronicle of central Kane County in 1835 states, "Indians were plenty in the country at the time of the early settlement of the township." The "first settlers" sometimes moved into recently abandoned Potawatomi homes.

A few terms that have fallen into disuse may require explanation. The word *since* was often used as we currently use "ago" or "previously" (not "subsequently"): e.g. a century since, the Midwest was known as the *West* or *Northwest*. Humus-rich soil was called *mould*. A herd of animals was a *drove*. Townships were often called *towns*. A factory was a *manufactory*. If something was termed *peculiar*, it was distinctive or special—not odd. "Etc." was commonly written &c. A *mill privilege* is the legal right to build and operate a water mill on a stream.

The length represented by a French *league* can generally be assumed to be about two and one-half miles. Nineteenth-century farmers commonly stated distances by the *rod*, which is 16.5 feet.

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\* A few descriptions have been selected from the Fox valley of Wisconsin—particularly the area around Lake Geneva, which is four miles north of the state line.

† Words such as *waggon*, *dryest*, and *hay'd* are archaic, not misspelled. Spelling of proper names was not well standardized in the past: *Potawatomi* is spelled 10 ways on these pages, and the name of the Sauk tribe ranges from *Saacks* to *Ousakiouek*.

Many well-known animals and plants were once known by names that are no longer familiar. The most common of these species are discussed in the following paragraphs rather than being footnoted each time they appear in narratives.

The coyote was known as the prairie wolf during the 1800s. The great majority of wolves mentioned in the Fox River Area are coyotes rather than timber wolves.

The bobcat (*Felis rufus*) was formerly called the wildcat. Early quotations about the Fox River Area include eight references to wildcats. Although six of these references mention the lynx in addition to the wildcat, the Canada lynx (*Felis lynx*) is a northern species that has never been scientifically documented from Illinois. The issue is further clouded because the bobcat has been called the bay lynx.

The greater prairie-chicken was called the prairie chicken, prairie hen, prairie fowl, prairie grouse, pinnated grouse—or quite often, simply a grouse. Both the ruffed grouse and bobwhite quail were sometimes called partridges. Passenger pigeons were called wild pigeons. The name “brant” formerly referred to geese other than the Canada goose. The name “snipe” was applied in a general way to members of the sandpiper family.

Both the largemouth bass and smallmouth bass were known as black bass during the 1800s. Bass were sometimes called trout.

The identities of “pike” and “pickerel” are often unclear. Any of four species might be called a pike: the northern pike, grass pickerel, muskellunge, and walleye. All but the muskellunge might also be called a pickerel. The northern pike (a favorite sport fish) was generally called a pickerel. The grass pickerel (a small, bony species) probably was rarely mentioned. The muskellunge was often mentioned by name, but it may also have been called a pike. The walleye went by several names: wall-eyed pike, pike-perch, jack salmon, pickerel, and pike. If an early account mentions pickerel, they are most likely northern pike but might be walleye. If both pickerel and pike are listed, they may be northern pike (“pickerel”) and walleye (“pike”).

Early descriptions of the Fox River Area mention black ashes. The green ash and red ash (two common varieties of *Fraxinus pennsylvanica*) were often called black ash during the 1800s. Current botanical manuals restrict the name “black ash” to *Fraxinus nigra*, which is limited to small stands in the Fox River valley and is not likely to have been included in early descriptions of the region. The “black ash” of early writings is apt to be green ash and red ash.

The sugar maple and black maple were called hard maples and sugar trees. The silver maple was known as the white maple or soft maple. The butternut was often called the white walnut. The American basswood was called the lynn, linn, and linden. Both big bluestem and bluejoint grass were called blue joint grass. The shellbark hickory of the 1800s is the shagbark hickory of today.

Fox River counties have a number of early catalogues of plants and animals, but these lists have many mistakes ranging from misspellings to misidentifications. Questionable identifications that stem from archaic names have been updated by studying old reference books.

If a quotation in the historical accounts on pages 32 to 385 includes a plant name that is likely to be confusing or obscure, a currently accepted common name and scientific name are given in a footnote. If a quotation has an outdated or incorrect scientific name for a plant, the current and correct scientific name is in a footnote. \*

If the common name of an animal is likely to be unfamiliar, a newer name is provided in a footnote. † Outdated or incorrect scientific names of animals have not been updated or corrected: instead a current common name is given in a footnote if necessary. Because present-day common names of vertebrate animals are well standardized in field guides and other references, these common names usually serve to identify each species without resorting to scientific names. ‡

### *Geographic and Historical Context*

The Fox River originates northwest of Milwaukee and enters Illinois at the Chain of Lakes on the boundary between Lake and McHenry Counties. The Fox River joins the Illinois River at Ottawa. Its largest tributaries in Illinois are Indian Creek, Somonauk Creek, Big Rock Creek, and Nippersink Creek.

The earliest written narratives about the general region are by French traders and missionaries who first came to the upper Illinois River valley in 1673. The French traded with the Miami at the village of Meramech—said to have been somewhere on the banks of the Fox River—but the French left no writings to describe the Fox valley.

In 1763 governance of the region passed from the French to the British, who ruled for less than two decades until the American Revolution. During this era a British exploratory party crossed the south end of the Fox River valley and briefly described it.

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\* Jones and Fuller's *Vascular Plants of Illinois*,<sup>164</sup> Lyons' *Plant Names*,<sup>186</sup> and an early Gray's *Manual* (such as the fifth edition<sup>108</sup>) are indispensable references for sorting through old naming riddles. Updated scientific nomenclature for plants follows Mohlenbrock's *Guide to the Vascular Flora of Illinois*.<sup>201</sup> Common names of plants in footnotes do not follow any single published authority, but they are names in general use in the region.

† The best references for past names of fishes are *Contributions to North American Ichthyology*,<sup>161, 162</sup> "A Partial Catalogue of the Fishes of Illinois,"<sup>208</sup> and the 1908 version of *The Fishes of Illinois*.<sup>97</sup> Troves of old bird names may be found in *Birds of America*,<sup>219</sup> *Local Names of Migratory Game Birds*,<sup>195</sup> *Descriptive Catalogue of the Birds of Illinois*,<sup>243, 244</sup> *The Birds of North America*,<sup>13</sup> and *Life Histories of North American Birds*.<sup>36</sup>

‡ Common names of animals have been standardized in footnotes according to the following references: *The Fishes of Illinois*,<sup>275</sup> *Field Guide to Amphibians and Reptiles of Illinois*,<sup>226</sup> *The Birds of Illinois*,<sup>48</sup> and *Mammals of Illinois*.<sup>141</sup> This report makes three exceptions to names in *Mammals of Illinois*. *Canis lupus* is called the timber wolf rather than simply a wolf, to better distinguish it from the prairie wolf (coyote). *Felis lynx* is called the Canada lynx rather than simply a lynx to help differentiate it from the bobcat, which was sometimes called the bay lynx in days past. Although "bison" is the technically accepted name, the popular name is "buffalo"; the two names are used interchangeably on these pages.



In the first decades of the 19th century a series of gazetteers and other publications portrayed the Fox River and its valley. The authors had only heard and read about the river, and had never seen it.

The first scientific investigation of the Fox River Area was carried out in 1823 by a U.S. Army exploratory expedition. The scientific corps included Thomas Say, the "father of American entomology." The men rode across the Fox valley in one day and scarcely described it.

There were several Potawatomi villages in the Fox River Area during the late 1820s and early '30s. Wabaunsee had villages at the future sites of Aurora and Oswego. Shatee's village was nearby in the Big Woods. Nickoway's band was at present-day Dundee. There was a village near Fox Lake and one at Lake Geneva, five miles north of the state line. Three settlements were clustered at the west edge of the Fox valley: Shabbona's Grove, Paw Paw Grove, and Meaeus' village at the upstream limit of forest along Indian Creek.

The valley of the lower Fox in La Salle County received three early groups of immigrants. A Methodist mission was established in 1826 along Mission Creek to minister to the Potawatomi. A colony of farmers and millers came from Ohio and founded Dayton in 1829. Five years later Norwegians began to settle nearby, seeking a new home with religious freedom.

During this same period other families from the eastern United States came to be neighbors of the Potawatomi. Favored locations included the Big Woods that extended from Aurora to Batavia, the Little Woods at St. Charles, and Big Grove and neighboring groves in Kendall County (most notably Aux Sable, Hollenback's, and Holderman's Groves). Other immigrants chose to live at Paw Paw Grove in Lee County and at more distant locales up the river and its tributaries.

The first detailed portrayal of any part of the Fox valley was written by Juliette Kinzie, who made two trips across the valley in 1831.

In May of 1832 Black Hawk led a large group of his people up the Rock River valley. Bands of Sauk and their allies attacked white residents of the Fox River Area on Indian Creek in La Salle County and south of the river in Kendall County. Potawatomi under the influence of Chief Shabbona allied with the whites. Federal troops set out from Chicago in pursuit of Black Hawk, establishing the Army Trail across the Fox River valley. The Black Hawk War made hundreds of soldiers aware of the beauty and fertility of the region, and many decided to move there.

By the Treaty of Chicago in 1833, the Potawatomi relinquished their claim to northern Illinois, triggering a flood of white immigrants in 1834. All the choice timber land and bordering prairie in the Fox River Area was claimed even before the last of the Potawatomi were removed in 1836. These newcomers were "squatters," who could stake a claim but could not yet own the land. The area had not yet been surveyed and offered for sale by the Federal government.

The Fox River valley was transformed to farms faster than any other region of comparable size in Illinois. Four factors fostered this explosive conversion from wildland to farmland. (1) The landscape was mostly well drained. (2) There was a favorable balance of woodland and prairie acreages. (3) Chicago was a nearby commercial center and market for crops, served with a good transportation system. (4) Plenty of water-powered mills were available to grind grain and saw lumber. The Fox River Area was developed so quickly that most early descriptions of its ecology are found in chronicles of its conversion to farms and towns. Beginning in 1841 much of this information was preserved in letters to the editor of *Prairie Farmer* magazine.

Throughout the 1830s and '40s steamboats and stage coaches brought countless immigrants and visitors. Roads radiated from Chicago to serve points all along the river. Several of the nation's most accomplished writers came and wrote about the area: Margaret Fuller, Eliza Steele, and William Cullen Bryant, to name three. British authors plied their trade, including Patrick Shirreff, J.S. Cunningham, and Arthur Cunynghame.\*

Some of the state's earliest and best researched historical volumes were written about Fox River counties. The first county history published in Illinois was Lake County's *Historical and Statistical Sketches* in 1852. *A History of the County of Du Page* followed five years later.

Hardly anything was recorded about the region's ecology during the Civil War years (1861–65). Even after the rebellion ended, little was written about the war era unless it pertained to the war effort.†

Between 1868 and 1873 three volumes of the *Geological Survey of Illinois* treated counties in the Fox River Area. Although these reports focus on geology, they are a fund of information about vegetation and soil. The 1870s saw an increasing number of scientific publications as well as popular writings about recreational opportunities in the valley.

With the approach of the fourth quarter of the 19th century, a new kind of writing industry sprang up as "Old Settlers" recorded their increasingly rare reminiscences. The United States Centennial prompted production of historical volumes about several Fox River counties. This effort continued up to about 1920 with the publication of second and third generations of county histories. The American Bicentennial stimulated preparation of several volumes of local history, but these books afford little additional information about the early ecology of the Fox River Area.

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\* For an introduction to luminaries who visited and wrote about the region, see "Illinois, Host to Well-known Nineteenth Century Authors" <sup>146</sup> and *The Literature of the Middle Western Frontier*. <sup>259</sup>

† A Kendall County historian explained in 1877, "During these years ordinary items of interest appear scarce, because dwarfed into insignificance by the absorbing interest and larger magnitude of our civil war. This, like the rising of the sun, puts so completely out of sight all lesser orbs, that they drift by without drawing our attention." <sup>137</sup>

The summary on pages 7 to 31 condenses the historical narratives into a set of statements about 53 topics.

### ***Acknowledgments***

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Brian Anderson originally suggested that I look into early accounts of the ecology of Illinois. Research began in 1990 in the library of Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley, where I was introduced to the treasure of early Illinois literature through the *Lakeside Classics*.

## SUMMARY

### *A Land of Variety, Abundance, and Beauty*

**The Fox River Area was a mosaic of grassland, woodland, marshland, and open water.**

The distribution of ecological communities was controlled by the landscape: as a British visitor saw it, "either forest or prairie, in keeping with the surrounding surface." Woodlands were mostly limited to hilly ground and streamsides. Level ground was predominantly prairie. Gently rolling land was a mixture of grassland and woodland, with marshes and open waters in the intervening basins.

An 1870 description of McHenry and Lake Counties depicts the relationship between landforms and land cover. "The surface configuration . . . is somewhat varied, embracing not only the upland rolling prairie and woodland, . . . but also extensive wet prairies or sloughs . . ." Intermixed with the undulating prairie and woods are lowlands with "small level prairies and lakes or ponds." The largest lakes are along the Fox river, and the others "vary in character from quiet land-locked ponds to shallow, grassy marshes, differing but little from the ordinary wet prairie or slough."

### **The Fox River and its tributaries were handsome streams.**

A U.S. Army exploring party crossed the middle of the Fox River valley in June of 1823 and portrayed the river as "a fine stream about one hundred and thirty yards wide, the scenery of which is varied by several islands scattered through its channel." The expedition noted, "The river has a fine gravelly bottom, and was very easily forded." According to an author who visited this part of the valley in 1834, "Fox river is a clear stream of water, about twenty rods wide, having a hard limestone bottom, from two to three feet deep, a brisk current, and generally fordable." The character of the stream changes farther upstream; an 1837 gazetteer describes the river in Lake and McHenry Counties as "a deep sluggish stream, connected with a string of lakes." In 1875 a fisherman depicted the reach below the Chain of Lakes: "For twenty miles below the lake portion the river is from twenty to thirty rods wide, gravel bottom, water from two to ten feet and sluggish, and no rocks."

The Fox River and the waters that fed it were clear: "clear, limpid," "clear and beautiful," "clear and pure," "clear and rippling," "clear and sparkling," "clear as crystal," "flowing crystal," "*chrystal* waters," "clear as a New England brook," and "clear as 'The bright waters of that upper sphere.'" Early descriptions of tributaries are often flattering: Little Rock Creek is "a fine stream of pure water," Indian Creek furnishes "a good supply of pure, running water," and Somonauk Creek is "a handsome stream."

### **The valley was bejeweled with the Chain of Lakes and outlying waters.**

Immediately south of the state line, the Fox River expands into a series of six lakes. The Chain of Lakes extends for more than ten miles. The largest three are Pistakee Lake, Fox Lake, and Grass Lake. Dozens of other lakes and ponds are distributed across the Fox River valley, especially in Lake, McHenry, and Cook Counties. Those in Lake County are enumerated on pages 144 to 146.

Early descriptions of these lakes are complimentary. Crystal Lake in McHenry County was "a beautiful sheet of water" to a woman who visited in 1831; it was "a beautiful sheet of water" to the publisher of an 1837 gazetteer; it was "a fine sheet of water" to a visiting fisherman in 1841; and it was "pure and clear as its name would imply" to a legislative investigating committee in 1911. Some lakes had sandy and gravelly shores, and many were "margined with a growth of wild rice and various aquatic grasses and weeds."

### **Creeks arose in headwater sloughs.**

The "Geology of Kendall County" (1870) states, "Sloughs, or flat damp meadows, frequently occupy the hollows between the high rolling prairies, but are not often of any considerable extent. It is in these sloughs that most of the streams which head in this county take their rise." An 1868 book about De Kalb County elaborates: "The head waters of all the creeks in the County are there formed in sloughs or swamps, which always connect one with another, until the united volume of their waters form brooklets, which . . . ultimately become our larger creeks." Kane County: "The two branches of Big Rock Creek head . . . in wide low bottom lands, that, before settlement, grew rank high grass, and were too wet to be attractive."

Sloughs were commonly underlain by deep deposits of organic matter (muck and peat). Horses and wagons were often mired in them. A farmer who hauled grain to Chicago recalled, "Crossing the sloughs was an item of excitement, and if one got stuck, we joined teams and pulled him out." The labor and adventure of getting bogged down are related on pages 62, 109, and 331.

### **Woodlands ranged from dense forest to open savanna.**

Two settings might support well stocked, productive forests: some streamside locales (*e.g.* "handsomely wooded in the neighborhood of the river"), and certain isolated prairie stands ("groves of good timber"). Such areas were portrayed as "richly wooded," "dense forest," and "heavy timberland." A writer who traveled the breadth of the Fox River valley in 1843 remarked that the trees "generally were not large or lofty, but only of fair proportions"; but when she arrived at Ross' Grove amid the Grand Prairie at the west edge of the valley, "Here they were large enough to form with their clear stems pillars for grand cathedral aisles."

Rolling topography that spread from streams was generally less heavily wooded, displaying an open and discontinuous canopy of trees. These sites were portrayed with phrases such

as "light woods," "scattered clusters of trees," "tall, scattering oaks," and "a thinly wooded country."

The density and distribution of understory trees and shrubs varied as much as the overstory trees. Observers often made comments such as "very little underbrush" and "an open grove, clear of underbrush and covered with a green sward." But some places fit the following description: "The groves were full of underbrush and berries and dense with shade . . ." Paw Paw Grove differed from many: "Unlike other groves, it was free from underbrush. The sugar maple was very abundant." Perhaps maples shaded out the understory—or maybe browsing by Indian ponies had eliminated the shrub layer.

Today grassy natural areas with scattered trees are called savannas, but this term was scarcely used during the 19th century. When it was used, "savanna" was a synonym for "prairie"—rather than a name for open woodland as it is defined today. Wooded areas that lack a closed forest structure were called "oak openings" or "barrens" in the 1800s. An early word-picture of Elgin illustrates a classic oak opening: "For a half mile or more in width on the east side, over the gentler hills and valley slopes, were scattered the low topped, wide-spreading burr oak trees, with no undergrowth and carpeted beneath like a grassy lawn." Brushy areas with few large trees were often called barrens, but the two terms—*oak openings* and *barrens*—were sometimes used interchangeably: either term might refer to brushy areas, or to grassy areas with widely scattered trees, or to both. A discussion beginning on page 149 explores the terminology of oak openings and barrens.

### **Lowland prairie was poorly drained and had tall grass; rolling upland prairie was well drained and had shorter grass.**

There were "two kinds of Prarie, that denominated the rolling by some are considered the best, the level prarie is not generally dry as the other." The upland prairies were "high, dry and gently undulating," "dry, undulating and rich," and "dry and undulating and easy of cultivation." There were also "small portions only of this land that was swampy or too wet for cultivation," "some rather extensive level, wet prairies," and "extensive wet prairies or sloughs, in certain localities."

Prairie grass was stereotypically said to be "as tall as a man's head on horseback," but grass did not always grow so high: "The whole prairie land was covered . . . with a dense growth of grass and flowering plants, from one to two feet in height . . ." On "dry, rolling prairie," the grass was "seldom more than eight to twelve inches high." "The prairies were covered with a rank growth of nutritious grass from one foot to eight or nine in the swales, or sloughs." "The grass on the flat land attains a height of six, or even sometimes nine feet. . . ." ". . . in the lowlands a rider on horseback could tie the tall rank slough-grass together above his head."

### **"Whence came the prairie?"**

There were two principal theories about the origin of prairies. One idea held that prairies originated after land emerged from the sea, and trees were prevented from occupying the

land by fine-textured soil and by acids from decayed aquatic vegetation. An opposing theory asserted that prairies were created when fires destroyed the tree cover. The debate can be examined on pages 80, 105, 162, 173, 202, 222, 272, 278, and 345.

**Myriad springs poured forth along the Fox River and its tributaries, but flowing water was limited in level upland areas.**

Early county atlases show hundreds of springs lining the Fox River and its tributaries: "... everywhere are springs of flowing water that were dotted over the land apparently to invite the coming of the pioneers." There were "copious springs of clear, cold water," "clear, unfailing springs," and "effervescing fountains, unfailing in their supply."

Although plenty of groundwater discharged in valleys, this was not the condition in undissected headwater areas. In 1870 a geologist reported about De Kalb, Kane, and Du Page Counties, "Springs are not generally numerous, excepting in the immediate vicinity of the water courses." The same scientist said of Kendall County, "The water supply . . . is chiefly derived from surface drainage, and to a very limited extent only, from springs, therefore the smaller ones are nearly or quite dry during seasons of drouth." After touring the Fox valley in the autumn of 1834, an Easterner concluded that "there are not a sufficient number of springs and small streams of water" in the big prairies. Water in prairie sloughs often became unpotable or dried up during the summer and fall. Referring to the famous springs amid the prairie at Paw Paw Grove, an early historian remarked, "These springs were treasures in those early days when water fit to drink was rarely seen by travelers in the west."

Notwithstanding such reports, an 1888 volume about Kane County stresses that seepage areas were once ubiquitous in the upland prairie: "Hardly could you find even the tallest hills in the prairie but upon the hillsides were what the settlers called seeps . . . at one time; no flowing water from them, but only in the driest season would they be passable on horseback."

**The land was strewn with "lost rocks."**

An 1868 description of De Kalb County says, "Thinly scattered over its entire surface . . . are found rounded granite boulders, varying in size from that of a huge cannon ball to that which would weigh a ton or more." These boulders were brought from the north by glaciers. They consist of hard, igneous or metamorphic rock, but the local bedrock is soft sedimentary rock—so they were called "lost rocks" or "hard heads."

**It was a flowering landscape.**

1833: "The prairies are covered with tall grass and beautiful flowers, and the whole together is beyond description." 1837: "... the whole country, both woodland and prairie, is bedecked with grass and flowers of all colors, which bloom from earliest spring to late autumn." 1837: "The view of the prairie, as it stretches off before you, often

appears like a perfect flower garden." 1839: "Everywhere the ground was covered with luxuriant grass and with beautiful flowers that still were in full blossom." 1840: "I was in the midst of a prairie! A world of grass and flowers stretched around me . . . . Acres of wild flowers of every hue glowed around me . . . . What a new and wondrous world of beauty! What a magnificent sight! Those glorious ranks of flowers! Oh that you could have 'one glance at their array!'"

### **Wild fruits and nuts abounded. Hazel was most abundant.**

"The woods are largely oaks, three varieties of walnut, and small hazel bushes. They all bear large quantities of nuts that are good for human beings and of great benefit to swine." "Strawberries, blackberries, plums, grapes, with many others, bountifully supplying . . . those delicacies . . . ." "... the wild grape vine . . . with the abundant raspberry, blackberry and gooseberry bushes, and crabapple, thornapple and plum trees . . . supplied the pioneers with fruit." "Hazel, blackberry, raspberry, gooseberry and black currant bushes grew in great profusion; and wild grape vines . . . ." "The undergrowth is pretty constantly of hazel, with wild plum, crab-apple, and other small trees." Hazel brush "edged or bordered all the timber." "In the way of shrubbery the hazel bush occupies the greatest area." "But dearest bush of all is the familiar hazel, intertwined as it is with boyhood's memories."

### **The area teemed with fish and game.**

The river was "full of fish." Lakes were "abounding in fish." Creeks had "plenty of fish," and they gave fish access to "shoal waters in which to deposit their spawn." In 1834 a St. Charles man maintained a fish trap in the river; to impress a visitor, "He took his boat, went out to the pen, and dipped out with a small net half a boat load of fish." In 1837 or '38 near St. Charles, a group with a seine was able to catch, dress, and salt ten barrels of fish in a day.

After spending an August night beside the Chain of Lakes in 1833, one traveler wrote, "I was awaked very early by the squawking of the ducks and other fowl, and could not sleep any more. It is the greatest place for game here that I ever saw. The ducks and wild geese and loons, sand cranes, and other fowls are continually passing this place. . . . And these great marshes and the little streams and lakes must contain a great quantity of that cash article, *Fur*."

Shallow prairie wetlands were havens for water birds. A person who grew to manhood in the Fox valley of De Kalb County during the 1850s recalled a "long range or chain of sloughs, some deep and some shallow . . . . Here in the spring congregated geese, ducks, cranes, curlews, snipe, plovers, rails, herons, etc., in great numbers and varieties."

Testimony from De Kalb County: "Deer, prairie wolves, wild cats, and an occasional bear, with wild turkeys, geese, ducks, and prairie chickens, were the principal species." In Kendall County, "Deer, wild hogs, rabbits, squirrels, wild turkeys, ducks, prairie



chickens and quails kept the settlers in meat." In McHenry County, "Deer, wolves, foxes and other animals . . . roamed over these prairies and through the openings, as many and free as the Indian . . . much more was killed than was needed for the necessities of the settler." Game animals of Kane County are reviewed on pages 321 to 325.

**"Flies, mosquitoes, gnats, millers and varieties of flying bugs were far more abundant than now."**

Blood-feeding deer flies—known as green-headed flies or prairie flies—were so plentiful that they "could actually kill stock on the prairie if they could not get to the timber." Mosquitoes were so pestiferous that an adventurer wore gloves and wrapped his head with a handkerchief while he tried to sleep near Fox Lake in August of 1833. A teamster recalled how they slept on the trail "if the mosquitoes would let us." A woman who came through Ottawa in July of 1840 marveled at the prairie "animated with myriads of glittering . . . butterflies" during the day and "alive with hundreds of fire flies" in the evening. A Kane County writer recalled how "incredible numbers of insects—some very beautiful and others exceedingly repulsive—swarmed on every side during the whole warm season." Although honey bees are not native, they were well established in the wild before white immigration reached the Fox River valley.

### **The land inspired awe.**

"... I had never beheld anything so splendid before. I felt a peculiar sensation when viewing so much magnificence. . . . I was astonished with the richness and splendour of the scene" (Colbee Benton at the mouth of the Fox River, 1833). "Can all the magnificence that art has spread over eastern cities—can the loftiest monuments, or the ruins of the old world compare with this?" (Catherine Stewart near Aurora, 1836). "Surely no sensible man could wish for a better place" (a Norwegian immigrant in La Salle County, 1838). "The least reflecting man is sensible to the grandeur of the scenery upon the Alleghanies—but here much more so, for the scene is truly sublime" (J. Gould near Paw Paw Grove, 1839).

A trip across the prairie evoked thoughts of an ocean voyage: "... a boundless expanse of snow-covered surface lay like an ocean before us" (Charles Fenno Hoffman, 1834). "... indeed as far as the sight can extend, nothing but one boundless field of waving grass with here and there a little grove, which appear like little specks of miniature islets upon this vast and verdant ocean" (J. Gould, 1839). Open woodlands were likened to parks and estates: "... it was almost impossible to dispel the illusion that we were not driving through the domain of some rich proprietor, and we almost expected to draw up before the door of some lordly mansion" (Eliza Steele, 1840).

The prairie was beautiful and rich. It was "beautiful prairie," "rich prairie," "beautiful rich prairie," "rich and beautiful prairie," "beautiful and rich prairie," "beautiful and very rich prairie," and "very rich and beautiful . . . prairie." "To say it is rich and beautiful, is not sufficient." The land was "immensely rich," "as rich as land can be," and "as rich as rich can be." Soil was "of unsurpassed fertility" and "seemingly exhaustless fertility."

### **It was beyond description.**

A Vermonter toured the Fox River valley in 1833 and found it “beyond the power of a painter to imitate—or beyond the power of the most distinguished writer to describe.” A New Yorker rode across the valley in 1837 and reported, “. . . we traveled over a country which beggars all description—nothing but the naked eye can have any conceptions of its beauty, imagination cannot paint it, untill the eye has seen it or the like.” Upon first seeing a prairie in 1840, a woman penned, “How shall I convey to you an idea of a prairie. I despair, for never yet hath pen brought the scene before my mind.”

Reflecting back more than half a century to the early 1840s, a Kendall County man wrote, “To describe the solitude of the country, as I remember it in my early years, is impossible.” In 1877 a historian declined to relate past hunting exploits: “. . . the successes in those pastimes then, if truthfully recounted now, would be regarded as an old man’s hunting story, to be believed or not, at pleasure.” In 1878 a hunter would only say that he once shot deer near St. Charles “in numbers too great to present to the skeptical eye of the modern reader.”

### ***A Pyric Landscape***

**Prairie fires were “besoms of destruction”—“grand, terrible and sublime.”**

“A gifted, strong pen is needed to give posterity a true picture of a prairie fire, yet it should be written, because it was a thing indigenous to the great prairies and the early days that happily have passed away.” Accounts of wildfires—and battles to extinguish them—can be consulted on pages 54, 227, 289, 326, and 340.

**Prairies and woods were set afire for a variety of reasons.**

One early immigrant watched Potawatomi villagers prepare to plant corn at the edge of a grove by girdling trees and then “burning up the dead timber.” Another newcomer wrote, “The Indians have always burned the forests for amusement, and this has hindered the growth of woods.” Hunters set fire to the landscape for several purposes—most notably to drive animals to a point where they could be killed, and to improve the habitat—but such uses of fire received scant mention in early discussions of the Fox River region.

Farmers burned off prairie around their property under safe conditions to be sure they would not later be endangered by an uncontrolled wildfire. They managed their prairie pastures and hay meadows with fire. The old grass was burned off in the fall to make it easier to mow (“It is impossible to mow where dead grass remains”) and to increase growth in the spring (“at least one-third greater where the old grass has been burned off in the fall”). If the prairie was burned in July (a “late burn”), the grass would immediately grow back, and “the cattle would feed it close in preference to the older grass.” This close-cropped grass was immune to wildfires, and “this process repeated would . . . in a few years, run out the prairie grass, and in time it would become stocked with blue grass which will never burn to any extent.”

There are no known reports of a wildfire ignited by lightning during the early years of the Fox River valley. Very few lightning-caused prairie fires have been documented anywhere in Illinois.

### **Fires were *annual* and most often *autumnal*.**

Early quotations about the Fox River Area contain 22 statements that wildfires recurred each year. The prairie might catch fire "from the time the grass would burn, which was soon after the first frost, usually about the first of October, till the surrounding prairie was all burnt over, or if not all burnt, till the green grass in the spring had grown sufficiently to prevent the rapid progress of the fire." Narratives mention autumn as the fire season 23 times. Winter is cited two times; spring is cited six times; and summer, four times.

### **Did the entire prairie burn each year?**

A man who saw the fires said that "there was little chance for anything to escape in the line of its advance until it reached a lake or a river; everything in its way was doomed to destruction . . . . On each side of the line traveled by the fire it would burn away slowly until the whole range of the country in the vicinity would be burned over." A fire could burn far and wide: "The smooth and level surface would facilitate the progress of the annual fires . . . . The great extent of the region over which these conditions existed would aid the spread of the fire when started, and some part of so extended a region would be likely to take fire . . . ." Except on page 54, nobody described patches of prairie that escaped burning. Fires were widespread: one person counted as many as 50 fires reflected from low clouds in the night sky. "The whole horizon would be lighted up around its entire circuit." Another person said, ". . . we could in some places trace the advancing line of flame for many miles."

However often the prairie burned, fire usually was frequent enough to prevent establishment of woody plants: "There was very little underbrush or second-growth timber in the groves, as there is to-day. The prairie fires kept it down." Eyewitnesses saw fires "run through and kill the young shoots every season," and they reported "the young sprouts were annually killed." "These terrible conflagrations swept everything before them, including young shoots that had secured a season's growth, and as this happened annually the saplings never attained any development . . . ."

### **Woodland was receding in the face of wildfires, but trees persisted where they were protected from fire.**

"At the date of the white settlements the timber had retired to the banks of the streams, to the thinnest soil and to the low bottoms, and in most cases was still retiring." "In almost every year, in some part of the country, whole forests are consumed by fire." "It was the opinion of the early settlers, that at that time, the prairie was encroaching upon the timber; in fact, the bluff timber was all old, and a majority of the trees injured by the fire, and

there was no young growth . . . .” Trees surviving on bluffs were fire-resistant oaks and hickories—“and if these were receding before the common enemy, it could not be expected that the more tender varieties could exist at all.”

Wildfires diminished or halted when met with open water, rugged up-and-down topography, or poor soil where grass does not grow well. “The timber grows on the alluvial bottoms where partially protected from the prairie fires, or on the thin soil of the bluffs, while the rich and deep prairie soil and the alluvial, where exposed to the fires, grow grass and no timber.” “Indeed, all our groves seem to be located where water is so disposed as to protect them, to a greater or less extent, from the prairie fire . . . .”

Fires maintained prairie on the west side of streams, but the east bank was often wooded. A traveler observed this pattern of vegetation along the Fox River in 1834: “On the east side, it is generally lined with timber to the depth of a mile or more; but the west side is scarcely skirted with it. . . . we found it universally to be the fact, that the east side of all the streams had much the largest portion of timber.” Corroborating narratives appear on pages 49 and 89. A local naturalist explained the phenomenon in 1869: “. . . the prevailing winds upon the prairies, especially in the autumn are from the west, and these give direction to the prairie fires. Consequently, the lands on the westerly sides of the streams are the most exposed to the fires, and, as might be expected, we find much the most timber on the easterly sides of the streams.”

### *Recollections about Weather Extremes*

#### **There were unseasonably cold growing seasons.**

A frost on June 12, 1834, ruined three-quarters of the wheat crop. An early frost in September 1835 “cut off all the corn crop,” which had been planted late. There was a little frost in August 1836 “but it done no injury.” In 1845 there was frost every week at least as late as June 5th; corn and garden vegetables were killed. In 1859 “there was a frost in every month and a killing frost for corn on low ground on the 4th of July.”

#### **There were extraordinarily rainy growing seasons.**

In 1837 “From the first breaking up of winter, the rain poured down daily, with very few days exception, until late in the autumn.” The rains of 1844 were notorious throughout the Midwest; in DeKalb County, “A great many cattle and horses feeding upon the prairies became mired inextricably . . . . Most of the crops were seriously damaged . . . .” Almost all the bridges and dams in the region are said to have washed away in 1844. Terrific thunderstorms swept the valley on August 18–20, 1850; buckets overflowed overnight, and a barrel is said to have filled with water during the three days. “The roar of Big Indian creek could be heard for miles.” The growing season of 1851 was “the wettest, nastiest, and most discouraging season of all in the record”: wheat was blighted, corn did not fully ripen, and oats were poisonous with rust. Crops were similarly affected during 1858, “one of the worst of our wet seasons.” 1865: “. . . at harvest time the floods poured down,

destroying a large portion of the ripened grain." The weather in 1869 was extremely wet; it was remarkably wet in 1876 and 1877-84. The twelve months of 1882 saw storms on 134 days. The year 1892 had "the wettest, rawest and dirtiest of all our nasty springs." Rains continued until nearly July, causing a "mud embargo" that "arrested rural traffic in the west."

### **There were hot and dry times.**

The year 1838 was exceedingly dry. During the following winter, streams ran so low that "the supply of water for milling purposes soon became exhausted." In 1845 no rain fell at Yorkville from May to December. In 1859 crops "were seriously injured by a prolonged drought which was so severe that large numbers of cattle were reported to have perished for want of water." 1870 was called "the driest year on our record." Water levels dropped in wells for the next five years until rains replenished groundwater in 1876. Peat in a wetland near Aurora became so dry during the drought of 1887 that it accidentally ignited and burned until heavy rains extinguished the fire. Hot spells?: "Infernally hot days have been too numerous to mention."

### **There were severe winters.**

The legendary Winter of the Deep Snow was in 1830-31. The snow was said to lay five feet deep on the La Salle County prairie. The Fox River valley had few literate persons then, but Juliette Kinzie preserved a record of a storm at the end of this winter (page 46). A Kendall County historian simply stated that the winter "set in early," and "the Indian ponies were unable to find their usual feed, and some of them died."

There were 42 or 43 snowstorms during the Hard Winter of 1842-43. Snow first fell on November 8 and stayed on the ground until April 14; the river was ice-bound until April 9th. A storm in early December of 1856 was called "the most furious snow-storm ever before known in the country." The temperature dropped 30 degrees below zero several times during a two-week period; trains halted for three weeks; sleighing was good for two months. "The most unbearably cold day" was New Years Day 1864; the mercury fell to 32 degrees below zero during a three-day blizzard—"more terrible in its fury than the 'oldest inhabitant' had ever known before."

Snowfall during the winter of 1880-81 was estimated to have surpassed the total accumulation of the previous 20 years. A series of snowstorms in the first four months of 1881 stopped rail traffic in DeKalb County on three occasions, for as long as five days at a time. The storm of March 3-4 was considered "the greatest storm since the country was settled." Snow piled up three feet deep in the woods, and drifts were as high as 15 feet.

### **Those winds!**

Prairies lacked trees to break the wind. A man who moved to the mouth of the Fox River in 1825 wrote, "... prairie extended back for several miles, & the cold northwesterns

shook our cabins fearfully." A Norwegian who came to the Fox valley in the autumn of 1839 wrote home on December 31st, "Sometimes the cold here is at least as severe as that to which we are accustomed. In fact, one feels the cold even more here on the flat prairies, where there is no protection against the sharp, penetrating north wind."

The Fox valley has had its share of windstorms. In 1831 a woman survived a storm on the bank of the river and reported that "at least fifty trees, the giants of the forest, lay prostrate within view of the tent." The multi-state Great Tornado of 1860 passed Shabbona's Grove; where this storm's track narrowed to about 330 feet, "everything was pulverized; the prairie was scalped, large boulders were torn from the sod and carried off bodily." In June of 1890 a tornado cleared a path 330 to 660 feet wide through Paw Paw Grove.

### *An Era of Contest, Conquest, and Change*

#### **Bison were the stuff of legends.**

No one wrote about seeing bison in the Fox River valley, but the French documented them along the Illinois River in the vicinity of the Fox during the late 1600s. Although the species had been eliminated from the region before the tide of white immigrants reached the Fox River in 1830, four myths developed about the bison, or buffalo.

A farmer who came to live near Shabbona's Grove in 1849 wrote, "That buffaloes in large numbers had roamed these prairies not so very long before was evidenced by their many bones, and skulls with the horns attached, that were to be found near watering places, leading to which were still to be seen their deep paths in the sod . . . ." An 1877 volume about Kendall County says of bison, ". . . forty years ago, in the eastern part of the county, their bones could be picked up by the wagon load." On the basis of such evidence, local historians have supposed that bison once were "as thick as trees in the forest" and roamed the region in "immense herds" and "vast droves." To the contrary, eyewitness accounts of bison in Illinois estimate the size of herds in the hundreds or few thousands of animals at most.

According to a story attributed to Chief Shabbona, bison were completely killed off by a severe winter about 1810. A history of Kendall County gives 1763 as the date for this buffalo-killing winter. Other accounts from throughout Illinois assign a variety of other dates, commonly about 1790 or "about fifty years before the white settlers came." There is no persuasive evidence of such a die-off, and bison were still numerous in the state during the 1790s. A few bison were occasionally seen in northern Illinois (but not in the Fox River valley) as late as the 1830s.

The last record of a free-ranging bison in Illinois is the mention of one killed in 1837 at Troy Grove, which is five miles west of the Fox River Area. This animal might have been part of a herd that possibly held out in the adjacent Green River lowland, the last big wild area in the state. Or perhaps the animal strayed from Iowa. Bison were heavily hunted in Illinois, and some must have sought refuge west of the Mississippi River. Such movement is the basis for a third myth, which says that bison migrated across the Mississippi rather

than being extirpated from Illinois by hunters. The 1877 *History of La Salle County* puts it this way: "Like the Indian, they have gone toward the setting sun . . . ."

A fourth fable pronounces that bison made the first cross-country trails, which were later used by Indians and then by whites. An excerpt from the 1888 *Commemorative Record of Kane County* is typical: "The roads of the country were originally buffalo trails, as they once would go in great herds in their regular migrations over the country. . . . A noted route . . . crossed the river at Geneva. This afterward became the great highway between Chicago and Galena, and finally the great railroad route. This no doubt was a buffalo and Indian highway before America was discovered . . . ." This scenario is based on the false premise that people discovered and adopted buffalo roads—but in fact bison were late-comers to Illinois: they did not appear in significant numbers until perhaps 1600 A.D. or even later. People had inhabited the region for thousands of years before bison expanded from the Great Plains and migrated east of the Mississippi River.

### **The border between woodland and prairie provided a choice place to live.**

The Potawatomi dwelled in and at the edge of streamside woodlands and isolated prairie groves. The populace that replaced the Potawatomi chose to live in the same situations. Groves provided wood, shade, shelter from wind, protection from prairie fires, and refuge from prairie flies. Wooded areas were more likely than prairies to have a permanent source of water. The adjacent prairie furnished pastures and fields free of trees.

Most of the timbered land in the Fox River valley was claimed by immigrants by the time the last Potawatomi were removed in 1836. A man who prospected for land in 1837 was a year or two too late for the choicest sites; he found "the settlements in all cases in or about the groves," which were "thickly settled around." Kaneville Township in Kane County was mostly prairie, so it was among the last townships to be taken. When people learned that land was still unclaimed at Lone Grove in the middle of this township, "They settled about this grove like swarming bees; the first settling in the grove and the outside circle being constantly extended by new arrivals that were forced to take what was left." Eventually the groves were subdivided, and prairie farmers could buy woodlots to supply their need for fence rails, firewood, and lumber.

Prairie farthest from woods remained unfenced and unfarmed for years: "Thus it was that the timbered land was taken up before the prairie, and for years the latter was deemed unfit for anything but pasturage, while many were of the opinion that they would never be cultivated." But later, "What was thought by the first pioneers to be refuse or worthless land proved in the end to be the best."

### **Sugar maple groves were favored by both the Potawatomi and white immigrants.**

The Hobson family chose a fine new homesite along the Fox River in Kendall County in the autumn of 1830, but they decided to leave in the spring when they discovered that "more than a hundred Indians had just encamped hard by their house for the purpose of

making maple sugar in an adjacent grove." When Asa McDole came to live at Sugar Grove in Kane County in 1834, he saw that the Potawatomi had made sugar there the previous spring, as evidenced by the "remains of sugar camps, scars upon the trees, and sap troughs strewn upon the ground." Chief Half Day's band lived along the Des Plaines River and made sugar at a place in the Du Page valley that became known as Downer's Grove—"but when the settlers got in and had claimed all the grove, the poor Indians were squeezed out and found no sugar camps nearer than what was known as the 'Big Woods,' on the Fox River, . . . and this was one of the grievances that the old Indians complained of against the white settlers."

### **Unfenced prairies served as vast pastures and hay meadows.**

"The wild grass of the prairies, in its primitive state, made excellent pasture and hay." "The endless prairies afford the best of pasturage and mowing grounds for any amount, whatever, of stock." "As much hay as anyone could desire may be mowed with little trouble." "One can make as much hay as he wants and where he wishes without paying for it." "A man may grow stock to any extent without enclosing, or owning an acre of land . . . ." "On the large prairies which offer food for millions of livestock there is opportunity to feed as many animals as one is able to gather sufficient winter food for." "The first settlers of the country naturally made their claims in close proximity to the groves and streams; and could hardly believe that the distant prairies would ever serve any other purpose than that of a vast range for flocks and herds."

### **Swine ranged free in the woods.**

Farmers allowed swine to fend for themselves. ". . . as there was nothing growing at that time on the broad prairies upon which they could subsist, they naturally took to the timber belts where wild plums and fruits were plentiful, and walnuts, butternuts, two varieties of hickory nuts and the many kinds of acorns were produced in large quantities. . . . all the settlers had to do when the family got out of meat was for the man to take a rifle, go out cautiously into the wood, and help himself." "Those wild hogs were often the most dangerous beasts that roamed the woods. Long nosed, long legged, gaunt and fleet, and savage as wolves; they could be caught alive only by separating them by dogs." A Kendall County boy's terrifying encounter with free-ranging hogs south of the Fox River is recounted on page 348.

### **Malaria was pandemic.**

Victims of this Old World disease were often bedridden and sometimes died. Malaria (*mala aria*, or "bad air") was blamed on *miasma*, a poisonous property that charged the atmosphere: "The decaying sod of the newly broken prairie . . . filled the air with malaria. From the streams, whose sluggishness was a main characteristic of this level country, there also arose a constant and palpable effluvium that was a fruitful source of disease."



Malaria was called "fever and ague," "intermittent fever," and "bilious fever." It was anticipated in late summer: "... when the bloom of the resin weed and other yellow flowers appeared it was time to look for the ague." A visitor to Paw Paw Grove in the summer of 1846 wrote, "... now there was scarce a family in the neighborhood in which one or more was not ill with an intermittent or a bilious fever. ... The sickness was ascribed by the settlers to the extremely dry and hot weather following a rainy June."

Malaria is not actually caused by "noxious exhalations" from wetlands and newly opened farm ground. It is spread by mosquitoes that breed in wetlands, so a severe outbreak would be expected after a rainy season. But the Fox River valley and surrounding regions were also swept by fevers during prolonged droughts. Such epidemics may have been a water-borne affliction such as typhoid (which was sometimes called bilious fever, the same as malaria). Malaria waned as the region was converted to farmland, eliminating mosquito breeding grounds: "When the land around a residence had become thoroughly cultivated, the inmates ceased to have the ague, the tilled soil readily absorbed the rainfall, and no doubt the deleterious gases of the atmosphere; but whatever the cause, the annual sickness so annoying for many years gradually disappeared as the country became improved." Erosion and entrenchment of streams helped: "Malarious diseases yielded to the lowering of the beds of the river and water courses, constantly going on . . . ."

### **Prairie was quickly plowed under.**

"The quiet farmer with his plow has commenced a war of extermination against the prairie flowers and grasses." It was hard work to break virgin prairie sod, but farmers were equal to the task. By the time the wave of immigrant farmers reached the Fox River valley, few still held the notion that prairie must be infertile (—or else it would grow trees!). Instead of clearing fields from woods, most farmers promptly set out to cultivate prairie. A missionary group in La Salle County broke 80 acres of prairie in the spring of 1826. Twenty-four Ohioans settled nearby late in 1829, and they had "240 acres fenced, and nearly all broken" by the following Fourth of July. Several families claimed land south of the river in Kendall County in the spring of 1831; some "immediately began to make clearings to plant corn, for they had rather plant among the stumps than risk the prairie sod," but one man plowed and fenced 55 acres of prairie that summer. The first white farmer at Paw Paw Grove came in the fall of 1834, in time to plow 20 acres of prairie and seed it to winter wheat.

Prairie-breaking plows were adjusted to cut sod from two to five inches thick, in strips 16 to 24 inches (sometimes 30 inches) wide. Three or four, five or six, or even eight pairs oxen pulled the plow. Miles and miles of the Fox River Area were turned over in this manner before John Deere introduced his efficient self-scouring moldboard plow in 1837.

### **The ease of converting prairie to cropland led to rapid transformation of the Fox valley.**

Amos Parker visited the neighborhood of St. Charles in the autumn of 1834, and he found about 20 families in the space of three miles. One family had arrived two years previous-

ly, and the rest had been there less than a year: "The houses were built near the timber, and a beautiful rich prairie opened before them." Catherine Stewart toured the valley in 1836 and '37, then returned in 1842 to a land "which, five years ago, disclosed little more than an unbroken waste, . . . now almost entirely filled up with smiling settlements." A man sought out vacant land in southwestern Lake County in 1836; eight years later he wrote, "The country has become thickly populated, nearly as much so as the Eastern States, from which most of the settlers have immigrated. . . . The prairies are in a high state of cultivation and covered with fields of grain . . . ." William Cullen Bryant rode across the Fox valley in 1841, then returned in 1846: ". . . I was struck with the difference which five years had made in the aspect of the country. Frame or brick houses in many places had taken the places of log-cabins; the road for long distances now passed between fences, the broad prairie, inclosed, was turned into immense fields of maize, oats, and wheat, and was spotted here and there with young orchards, or little groves . . . ." In 1847 a newspaperman reported that the general vicinity of Geneva had supported about 20 families nine years earlier, but now in the same area there were six villages, each with an average of 1,600 residents.

Victor Township in De Kalb County lacked woodlands, so its acreage was among the last to be bought from the Federal government. But by 1847 and '48 the first tracts were sold, and the whole township was taken within the next five years. By 1868 a De Kalb County resident declared, ". . . the entire County is occupied, and scarcely a vacant spot of the wild prairie can be found throughout its entire extent."

### **Mineral resources supported development of the valley.**

In the late 1600s French colonists and missionaries made note of coal at the mouth of the Fox River, but they did not make much use of it. In 1837 a man commented about a "deficiency of timber" along the lower river, but he noted that the drawback was mitigated by "inexhaustible bodies of coal . . . a few miles distant." This coal did indeed substitute for wood as fuel, as indicated by a remark about the vista from a Kane County hilltop in 1878: "Southward, the view is closed in by the grove of noble old oaks, a portion of the original forest which has been left standing, thanks to the discovery of coal and its general use for fuel."

A big salt spring issues from the floor of the Illinois River valley a few miles below the Fox. The Illinois tribe and the French extracted salt from this spring. The salt must have provided an additional benefit by attracting large numbers of bison, deer, and elk to the area.

The local demand for building stone was met by limestone and dolomite that crops out all along the middle valley of the Fox River. The lower Fox is lined by "inexhaustible quantities" of sandstone. Glacial boulders were cleared from fields and used in foundations and wells. Wetlands served as sources of peat, tufa, and marl, especially in the north part of the Fox River Area. Peat was used for fuel; tufa was burned for lime in kilns; marl was spread on fields to sweeten the soil.

**As soon as wildfires were suppressed, a vigorous growth of trees and shrubs sprang up in the woodlands, barrens, and some prairies.**

A flame igniting somewhere on a big unbroken prairie might spread for miles and burn the whole sheet of combustible vegetation. Plowed ground and closely cropped pastures acted as firebreaks. As the prairie became fragmented by farms, less of it burned because a fire could not spread far. A La Salle County resident explained in 1877, "... if divided into small and isolated tracts like the present fields, fires would be seldom known."

Woody plants sprang up as soon as annual conflagrations ceased. In 1844 two Chicago men rode down the Fox River valley and then to Springfield; along the way they observed, "So surely does a young growth spring up after settlement, that we could generally pretty nearly tell how long a particular section had been settled, by the size of this young growth." The new trees and shrubs grew from "grubs," which were living root masses that had survived and grown for years even though they were repeatedly burned to the ground by wildfires. A geologist wrote of La Salle County in 1868, "Old settlers quite uniformly speak of the timber encroaching on the prairies, which they attribute to the fires spreading less frequently from the prairie into the timber, destroying the young growth, since the country has become well settled." Similar testimony appears in nine other quotations about the Fox River Area.

**Shallow wetlands dried up as agriculture progressed.**

The drying effect began as soon as immigrants began to farm, before ditches and drainage tiles were installed: "... there were small portions only of this land that was swampy or too wet for cultivation, and soon after ... the breaking of the original strong prairie sod appeared little drains that carried away the waters rapidly." A De Kalb County man reminisced in 1868, "The country was much more wet, the streams and sloughs the great obstructions to prairie travel, were more full of water than now. ... The country, ever since its first settlement, has been growing more and more dry. Lands that ten, or even five years ago, could not bear a team at any season of the year, now are constantly passable ... even in places where there is no artificial drainage or cultivation of soil in the vicinity to account for it."

Ditches and subsurface drainage tile systems further improved drainage. Sloughs made good cropland: "... judicious drainage has reclaimed the land covered by them, in most instances, and heavy crops of corn, etc., are raised where once was only a miry bog."

**Streamflow became less stable.**

Lakes and associated wetlands in the Chain of Lakes region helped moderate the flow of the Fox River: "These numerous lakelets, ponds, marshes, and bogs furnish, in their aggregate, a considerable storage for flood waters, and the volume of the stream is consequently comparatively uniform and its changes of level are relatively slow." But this changed: "As the timber was cut off and the land given over generally to cultivation the

bared earth surface no longer retained, as of old, the water that fell upon it, so that periodic floods became the rule. Periods of high water were followed during the dry months by protracted low water . . . .” In 1888 a Kane County historian observed, “. . . waters run off a little faster every year and, consequently, the streams tend every few years to ‘break the record’ in the matter of high water marks made always so authoritatively by ‘the oldest inhabitant.’”

A Kendall County resident observed in 1877, “All our streams are lower to-day than when the country was first settled.” In 1877 reduced streamflow was implicated as a reason for abandoning all three water-powered mills in the Fox River valley of Lake County—as well as all of the other nine water mills in the county. By 1902 in Lake County, “The creeks that once carried water to the mill-wheel have shrunk to tiny brooks.” The low-flow volume of the Fox River was estimated to have diminished to half its former flow by 1915. An early Kane County historian reported that Lily Lake “is now practically dry,” and he remarked, “The effect of the drying up of the water reservoirs and shrinking of the stream is one of the problems future time must solve, we hope without serious detriment to posterity.”

### **The Fox River shortly became the most dammed stream in Illinois.**

“One of the first thoughts of the early settler was to start a saw or grist mill, the former to cut timber for buildings for family and cattle, and the latter in order to feed both himself and his stock.” “. . . in a new country, the greatest benefit is conferred, not by the one who erects a school house or a church, but by the man who builds a mill. They precede all other improvements, and are the beacon-lights in the van of civilization.” The first dams in the Fox valley were made of brush and earth or of logs and stones, rather than cement or metal.

The Fox River’s rocky channel and steep gradient made it ideal for constructing mill dams. The river was dammed at the following places: Ottawa, Dayton, Sheridan, Millington (Milford), Millbrook, Millhurst, Yorkville, Oswego, Montgomery, Aurora, two sites between Aurora and North Aurora, North Aurora, South Batavia, Batavia, Geneva, a site between Geneva and St. Charles (perhaps), St. Charles, South Elgin, Elgin, Dundee, Carpentersville, Algonquin, a site three miles below McHenry, and McHenry. Not all these dams were present at the same time. A 1914–15 inventory listed 14 or 15 extant dams on the river, and concluded, “There were doubtless many other dams, especially in the early days, record of which has been lost.”

Some river towns had more than one dam, and many dams powered more than one mill. By 1877 there was “more improved water power on the Fox, from Wisconsin to its mouth, than on any other stream in the State.” The Fox River probably produced more hydro-power than all other streams in Illinois put together, excluding the Rock River. In addition to sawing wood and grinding grain, these mills ran factories. The Fox River valley became more heavily industrialized than any other area of comparable size in Illinois. The Fox valley of Kane County had the first paper mill and the first butter factory in the state.

Mill dams on tributaries served local needs. There were water mills on Indian Creek (two dams) in La Salle County, Somonauk Creek (three dams) in La Salle County, Little Rock Creek in Kendall County, Big Rock Creek (three dams: at its mouth, at Plano, and upstream in Kane County), Blackberry Creek at Yorkville, Mill Creek near Batavia, Ferson's Creek below Lily Lake in Kane County, Norton's Creek near St. Charles, Poplar Creek and Tyler Creek near Elgin, Spring Brook at Dundee, Spring Creek near Algonquin, Crystal Lake Outlet (one or more dams) near Algonquin, Cary Creek at Cary (one or two dams), Flint Creek in Cuba Township of Lake County, Stickney's Run (two dams) in Nunda Township of McHenry County, Boone Creek at McHenry, Squaw Creek (which drains into Fox Lake in Lake County), Nippersink Creek (five dams: at Greenwood, one mile below Greenwood, below Wonder Lake, at Solon Mills, and at Spring Grove), the North Branch of Nippersink Creek at Richmond, and Sequoit Creek at Antioch. Some of these mills were supplied by satellite dams on branches upstream from the main dam. There must have been other mills on creeks throughout the Fox River valley ("all present evidence of their existence having entirely disappeared").

Water mills had immediate and profound impacts on stream ecology. Mill dams were built on the steepest, most powerful reaches of streams, so they converted rocky riffles and rapids into deep, quiet impoundments. A river that was once "clear as a New England brook meandering from its home in the mountains" became a "chain of stagnant mill ponds."

Only one dam on the Fox River had a lock for boat traffic. All the dams interfered with the passage of fish. A sawmill dam on Indian Creek kept spawning fish from migrating upstream to a Potawatomi village, triggering a dispute that resulted in the biggest massacre in Illinois during the Black Hawk War of 1832.

### **The Fox River experienced destructive floods throughout its recorded history in the 19th century.**

Relatively minor rises in the river repeatedly damaged or destroyed light wooden bridges and weakly built dams during the 1830s and '40s. The earliest reported flood damages were in 1836 when the Batavia dam was carried away, and in 1837 when Aurora's bridge floated downstream. In 1840 "Fox River flooded all the lowlands along its course." In 1844 "the grist mills were almost universally swept away." The most notorious and damaging floods were in March 1849, February 1857, and April 1881. Other major rises were recorded for 1856, 1867, 1868, 1872, and 1887. Almost all of the big floods occurred in late winter or spring, and most of them came with the breakup of ice: "... when the ice broke ... and came sweeping down with the spring freshet, ... the first bridges and dams were swept away like straws before the mad floods."

The prairie sod was blamed for flooding: "... in those early days, when the whole surface of the land was covered with the tough prairie sod, like an almost impenetrable thatch, the heavy rains and, in spring, melting snows, poured volumes of water into all its tributaries, that frequently overflowed their banks and so filled the river that it became a

torrent impassable to man or beast." People were also blamed: "... man drains swamps and sloughs, cuts down the forest and prepares the way for a rainfall to rush to a creek or river as fast as it falls, and, as a consequence, he has disastrous floods." A 1915 hydrological report acknowledges the effects of human activities, but states that dams on the Fox serve to store floodwaters and reduce flood damages.

### **Lakes were put to a variety of uses.**

In 1877 a Waukegan man declared that the Chain of Lakes area is "attracting much attention of late as a place of resort for hunting and fishing." A fisherman from Huntley pronounced Fox Lake to be "one of the finest resorts for the lover of the rod and gun to be found in the State," and he added, "Two fine club houses are already built, and there will be more as soon as the place and its advantages are more widely known." In 1880 a Chicago magazine published "Attractions at Fox Lake," which asserts, "Not only to the hunter and angler do these neighboring lakes afford the most alluring charms, but also to the tourist and invalid . . . ." Visitors were accommodated in a "mammoth hotel" on "some four acres of beautifully wooded land."

Development of the Chain of Lakes and the surrounding region benefited thousands of weekend excursionists and "a large temporary population during the hot months." By 1873 at Crystal Lake, there was "a village of 2,000 inhabitants on the banks of the lake, and a row of tall icehouses, from which the Chicago people cool their summer drink by the aid of a branch railroad to that fair city." The Crystal Lake Ice Company began business in 1855, when it put up 7,000 to 9,000 tons of ice. In the winter of 1875-76 the company stored or shipped a total of 26,400 tons.

Old-time sportsmen were disappointed. In 1873 a man who had fished Crystal Lake three decades earlier supposed that it "would probably be as promising a fishing place as the reservoir in Central Park." A waterfowler lamented, "Again, the progressive ambition of shooters to own club houses, cottages, etc., on good shooting and fishing grounds, led them up the Fox Lake Region. . . . The opening of the Wisconsin Central was the entrance of the wedge and after Lake Villa was built, followed by summer cottages on Fox, Marie, Bluff, and Channel lakes, the death knell of Grass Lake, one of the finest feeding, roosting and play grounds in the whole region, was sounded."

Lakes were immune to drainage projects if they lay in deep basins or were an expansion of the river. But if they were not permanent havens for recreation, they were in danger of reclamation. According to an 1888 volume about Kane County, two efforts to make lakes into farmland met with partial success: "Nelson's Lake . . . and Lilly Lake . . . once contained a considerable amount of water, but the system of drainage adopted in late years has robbed them of their dignity as lakes."

### **Fishing was good.**

One July day in 1841 two men at Crystal Lake hooked about 200 pounds of fish, including two northern pike (each about five pounds), 50 largemouth bass (averaging three pounds),

and "a half bushel of rock bass and perch." During three days in April 1842, two men fished the Fox River near Ottawa and landed nearly 400 smallmouth bass, each weighing about a pound.

In 1875 a Batavia resident listed the biggest fish in the Chain of Lakes region: largemouth bass (6 pounds, "best catch that I know of, 135 pounds in two hours"), smallmouth bass (6 pounds), crappie (two pounds), yellow perch (one pound), northern pike (16 pounds), walleye (15 pounds), redhorse (11 pounds), rock bass (1 pound), bullheads (2 pounds), American eel (7½ pounds), and muskellunge (34 pounds).

By 1915 muskellunge had "practically disappeared from the waters of the lake district," and "most of the game fish" were gone. Pollution was blamed. The river and its tributaries were closed to commercial fishing, and the State built a fish hatchery on Nippersink Creek.

Even before the native fishery crashed, there were concerted efforts to boost fishing in the Fox River by stocking non-native trout and salmon. Water issuing from springs in Cedar Swamp at Elgin was diverted to ponds at a fish hatchery in Trout Park. A cooperative Federal-State program introduced carp, which some fishermen termed "a mistake" because of its ecological impacts.

### **Springs were exploited.**

Spring-side locations were especially favored for homes. Any spring branch that flowed year-round and remained unfrozen in winter was highly sought for watering livestock. Springs were the centerpieces of picnic grounds. Mineral springs became health spas, their water bottled and sold. Spring water supported a burgeoning dairy industry by cooling milk and cheese. A cascading spring branch at Dundee powered a mill with an overshot water wheel.

Springs were waypoints for cross-country travel. Wabaunsee's Trail followed the west bank of the Fox River "and took in all the prominent springs in its course." Farther west a man recalled that he often saw "an acre of wagons" encamped beside one of the big springs along the Great Sauk Trail at Paw Paw Grove.

### **Native prairie plants could not withstand grazing by domestic livestock.**

"Early mowing and close feeding rapidly exterminated the wild grass of the prairie, which, like the buffalo and the Indian, seemed destined to fade out before the steady advance of civilization." Cattle favored bluejoint grass so heavily that "the stock fed constantly on it, it was rapidly exterminated, so that in a few years that portion of the ground where it grew became almost bare of vegetation." Non-native Kentucky bluegrass replaced native species. Farmers learned that "pasturing the prairies with domestic animals would soon change the grasses entirely, and that the bluegrass would thus supersede the reedy, native grasses." William Cullen Bryant rode across the Fox valley in 1841 when it was largely

virgin prairie; he returned five years later and saw big changes: "... where the prairie remained open, it was now depastured by large herds of cattle, its herbage shortened, and its flowers less numerous." A La Salle County botanist noted in 1877, "The fringed gentian, for example, is becoming every year less common in our pastures."

**Some favored plants declined in abundance**—for example, cedar, butternut, and wild rice.

Cedar wood has long been favored for buildings and furnishings. Chief Wabaunsee's lodge at Aurora was framed with red cedar. Areas protected from fire by river bluffs and lake shores provided habitat for cedars. Cedar Lake at Lake Villa was named for cedars on its banks; Lake Zurich was first named Cedar Lake for the same reason. Cedar Swamp at Elgin was a springy bluff with both eastern red cedars and northern white cedars. An 1888 volume states, "Along Fox River, in a few localities, were scattering red cedar trees which, with one or two exceptions, have entirely disappeared." There once was a small gorge at Cedar Bluff in St. Charles: "In the early days this glen was overhung with a scanty growth of red cedar. Both glen and trees have long since disappeared before the quarryman's pick and bar."

The butternut or white walnut is now scarce in the Fox River valley, but it was mentioned often during the 1800s. Quotations in this report refer to butternuts 15 times and black walnuts 21 times. Most of the 11 additional references to "walnuts" probably were intended for black walnuts. If a roughly 1:2 ratio of butternuts to black walnuts in early literature is any reflection of their relative abundance in the past, butternuts were once far more frequent than at present. In recent decades the butternut has been decimated throughout its range by a fungal disease.

Wild rice, an important food plant, once dominated marshes and lake shores in the Fox River valley. An 1870 survey of Lake and McHenry Counties found, "The larger lakes, in many instances, are themselves widely margined with a growth of wild rice . . . ." An 1875 description of the Chain of Lakes says, "Wild rice from four to twelve feet high grows in about three-fifths of their waters." An 1876 account of Grass Lake says, "A large portion of the lake is covered with a dense growth of wild rice." The habitat of wild rice declined from drainage projects, impoundments, foraging by carp, and water pollution. Throughout history botanists have located and mapped wild rice in a total of eight of the 11 counties in the Fox valley, but it is now "by no means as common as the map suggests."

**Native animals were serious agricultural pests.**

Early farms were islands in a sea of native habitat. Hosts of wild animals could feed on farms and then retreat to protective cover. The annals of the Fox valley contain a litany of depredations—for instance: deer on fruit trees, wheat, and corn; raccoons on chickens and corn; robins and cedar waxwings ("cherrybirds") on cherries; red-headed woodpeckers on apples; kingbirds on honey bees. Ground squirrels gleaned new-sown grain. A flock



of passenger pigeons "could take up and carry away all the wheat scattered on two acres of ground in a few minutes." Bobwhites and prairie-chickens frequented fields of ripening grain. "Swarming blackbirds" were "the terror of farmers in early times." Cottontails and voles stripped bark from fruit trees. The poultry yard was haunted by skunks, mink, bobcats, weasels, owls, and hawks. Coyotes preyed on lambs, pigs, poultry, green corn, melons, berries, and "almost everything that comes in their way."

### **Prairie-chickens increased in abundance, then dwindled.**

A person who moved to the prairie near Shabbona's Grove in 1849 said that greater prairie-chickens were "numberless," and they "would frequently light on the house, on the straw roof of the prairie stable and on the cow-yard fence." At first prairie-chickens benefited from farms because they fed on grain crops but had plenty of natural cover for nesting and resting. These birds became so numerous that they formed flocks of two or three thousand in the autumn, and "when the flock rose on the wing the noise resembled distant thunder." Prairie-chickens began to decline as they lost more and more ground to farming—while being "shot and taken in traps in any amount wanted." As early as 1855 a scientist from Geneva wrote of the Pinnated Grouse or Prairie Hen, "Though still numerous in the more thinly inhabited districts, they are getting to be comparatively scarce in the neighborhood of the villages; and are upon the whole, I think, becoming annually less numerous."

In 1904 the State Game and Fish Conservation Commission completed a rough assessment of prairie-chicken numbers. Estimates from Fox River counties ranged from "a few only" in Lake County and "quite scarce" in La Salle County to "plentiful and increasing" in Du Page County. Ten years later the Commission admitted to a statewide "decrease in the prairie chicken supply."

### **Several songbirds benefited as prairies were converted to farms.**

Dr. William Le Baron of Geneva remarked in 1855, "... a comparative scarcity of trees necessitates a corresponding paucity of the feathered population." Elmer Baldwin of La Salle County elaborated: "The prairie region could not boast of as full a list of the feathered tribes as a timbered country. In fact, the more common singing birds were at first almost entirely wanting . . . . even along the edge of the timber, where the first settlements were made, it needed groves, orchards, and gardens, and especially the fruits they bore, to make an acceptable home for the birds of song." Among species that increased in close proximity with the human population are the American robin, gray catbird, brown thrasher, cedar waxwing, and cliff swallow (which nested on buildings).

The common crow was not common in the region, but it increased with the coming of farms. The 1904 *History of Kane County* attests, "Crows were scarce in the early days, and . . . they have largely increased in numbers, notwithstanding the mistaken and cruel warfare incessantly waged against them . . ." People persecuted crows, and both people and crows killed smaller songbirds. Charles Marsh, who witnessed the increase of song-

birds in the region, wrote in 1910, "Of the small birds there were few upon the wild prairie or about our early prairie homes. They came later as trees and orchards were planted and grew; and they too have greatly decreased during late years, as crows have increased and guns in the hands of boys have become more common."

### **Hunters carried out "circle hunts."**

To organize such a hunt, a flagpole was erected on a prominence in the prairie, and hunters made a circle around the pole. The circle might be five or more miles in diameter. On signal the hunters drove wildlife toward the center of the circle. As they neared the pole, game was killed by dogs and with clubs and sometimes guns.

Circle hunts were carried out from the mid-1830s to the early '50s: they could not be conducted until enough hunters were available to form a huge circle; but within a matter of years the prairie was too broken up by fields, fences, and ditches to allow a clean sweep. Here are statistics for three Kendall County hunts: in 1835, 18 wolves and 24 deer were killed; in January 1844, seven or eight wolves and no deer were killed; in the spring of 1844, 2,000 hunters killed 26 wolves and "a great many deer." One of the participants wrote, "These hunts were so frequent that the number of wolves became scarce and the most of the deer were frightened quite out of the country." In 1852 in De Kalb County, "the last call was made for a wolf hunt"; no deer were seen, and three wolves were encircled but they escaped. Circle hunts are recounted on pages 55, 124, 126, 138, 207, 231, 271, 276, and 340.

### **Coyotes were unceasingly persecuted.**

Coyotes were called prairie wolves. They were said to consume "everything eatable that chanced to be left out of doors." It was impossible to raise sheep without penning them securely at night. The prairie wolf "existed by thousands" — "a bold, impudent, and mischievous animal." Its fecundity and audacity made it the target of poisoning, trapping, and hunting campaigns. In the 1840s McHenry County placed a \$15 bounty on wolf scalps; in Lake County in 1854, an adult wolf brought an eight-dollar bounty, and pups were worth a dollar apiece. A man on the Fox River built a trap over a dead cow and caught a dozen wolves in a week. Prairie wolves were rounded up and killed in circle hunts, and they were the object of headlong chases across the prairie: "The men have a good deal of sport in running them down, and killing them.—They take a stick, mount a fleet horse, soon come up with them, and knock them on the head." For a blow-by-blow narrative of such a chase, see page 127.

The coyote population declined and then rebounded. The *History of Kendall County* (1877) states, "Prairie wolves were at first very abundant, then became scarce, and are now becoming more numerous again." The *History of La Salle County* (1877) echoes, "For a number of years they were not seen or heard, having retreated to the large unsettled prairies, . . . and now disturbed in their favorite haunts, they have scattered over the State, not very numerous, but enough to prove a decided nuisance."

### **Deer populations responded to hunting pressures.**

White-tailed deer increased in number during the late 1830s: "Since the departure of the Indians, game had rapidly increased in this district of country. Deer became very numerous." In early La Salle County, "They could daily be seen in droves of four or five to twenty-five, and even 35 to 40 have been seen together." In Kane County deer "were often seen in herds of ten or a dozen" and sometimes even "fifty to a hundred in a herd." About 1834 near St. Charles, "fifty deer were frequently seen in a single herd." A McHenry County hunter saw at least 50 deer in one day about 1846.

Incessant hunting, aided by severe winters, brought a steep decline in deer numbers: "Undoubtedly there had been very many deer in this country prior to the winter of 1842 when the deep snow, crusted, made them easy victims to their butchers—men and wolves. The comparatively few that survived, and their increase, were slaughtered under similar conditions in the winter of 1848." Deer were "occasional" south of the Fox River in Kendall County as late as 1846. In Kane County there were enough deer to support commercial hunting as late as 1850, but "by 1860 it was a rare event to hunt deer with success." A man who came to the Fox valley of De Kalb County in 1849 wrote a half-century later, "In fact I have never seen a wild deer in DeKalb county, though I hunted for them a good deal in those early days." The last deer was thought to have been killed in La Salle County in 1866. Deer were still occasionally seen in Kendall County in 1877. In the Fox valley of Lee County, deer had "long since disappeared" by 1881.

### **Long vistas were blocked out.**

Originally "the views extended for miles, as there were no fences, houses or shade trees to break the vision." In 1843 a man at home south of the river at Aux Sable Grove could see a church steeple eight miles east at Plainfield, a church steeple 12 miles southwest at Lisbon, and Big Grove 10 miles to the west-southwest. In 1852 a hunter standing on a rise in the prairie north of Hinckley could see Shabbona's Grove 13 miles southwest, Lost Grove five miles north, and Squaw Grove four or five miles south; "eastward the view was not interrupted by grove or settlement." Fifty-eight years later this man wrote, "Few of the old settlers are left who can remember the virgin prairies of Illinois as they were sixty or seventy years ago; and those living on them now, who saw them not in the early days, can scarcely realize how they looked. Fences and buildings and plantings of trees interrupt in every direction the clean sweep of the eye; and in summer time the view is bounded by timber, apparently, the orchards and planted groves on the farms blending in the distance and to the eye forming a continuous belt along the horizon."

### **Wooded areas were depleted.**

Woodlands in the Fox River Area received heavy pressure from logging and clearing. In 1878 a Kane County historian declared that "scarcely a tree above mediocre size can be found in an entire grove." And in 1888, "Most of the timber now existing in Kane County is a second growth, the original heavy bodies having been principally cleared away."

The destiny of most woodlands in the Fox valley is illustrated by the fate of the famous Big Woods, a belt of forest between Aurora and Batavia that covered about 37 square miles. As described in the 1878 *Past and Present of Kane County*, this woods contained "many splendid oaks, maples and black walnuts, whose massive boles would square over two feet, which rose straight as arrows, with a height of thirty or forty feet to the first spreading branches." And later "... what, but twenty years ago, was one solid body of splendid oak, hickory and maple, is now finely cultivated farms, with scarcely a stump to be seen to tell the story of what was once there." A 160-acre tract of "the best timber in the Big Woods" remained intact until about 1874.

Editors of the 1888 *Commemorative Record* of Kane County noted that the Big Woods "was mostly cleared away within a few years subsequent to the first settlements in the locality," and they opined, "The wisdom of cutting it so clean was rather questionable, however." A La Salle County man harbored no doubt about the value of forest conservation: "There can be no question but that the immense demand over all the prairie region for lumber, and the readiness with which that want is supplied, must, within the life of another generation, exhaust the supply, and the warnings of thoughtful and sagacious men, to guard against the danger, ought to be heeded." Yet in 1877 when a Kendall County resident reviewed four decades of changes, he concluded, "... the groves are honey-combed by clearings, and the tall beacon trees have been made into posts"—and he summed up, "All is changed—and it is a change for the better."

### **The Fox River was polluted.**

The river carried domestic waste and industrial effluent from each town downstream to the next town. Riverside slaughterhouses, paper mills, and other factories flushed waste directly into the stream. Livestock that drank from the river "got sore mouths from acid wastes discharged by factories." A 1908 monograph says of the Fox River, "... the tributaries often bring large amounts of sediment, and various manufactories along the river discharge a large amount of refuse into the stream, and it has, of late years, become so foul that nearly all fish except carp and other filth-enduring species have been drowned out." A 1914–15 survey of the river by the Illinois Rivers and Lakes Commission concludes, "Now it is in low summer flow a dirty, evil smelling waterway near the cities."

## HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS

### 1667: "Of the Mission of the Ousakiouek and Outagamiouek"

The earliest descriptions of the Fox River Area are inexact. The first writing about the region came from the hand of Claude Allouez, a Jesuit missionary on Lake Superior. When Allouez wrote his report, the Fox River valley of Illinois probably had not yet been seen by Europeans—but Allouez's mission had been visited by a tribe known as the Outagamie, Fox, Renards, or Mesquakie. These people dwelled primarily along the Fox River that flows to Green Bay in Wisconsin, but their territory ranged south to include the upper part of the Fox River that flows south to the Illinois River. \* In the Jesuit *Relation* of 1666–67, Father Allouez reported what he had learned about the Outagamie's homeland:

The country of the Outagami lies Southward toward the Lake of the Ilimouek. † They are a populous tribe, of about a thousand men bearing arms, and given to hunting and warfare. They have fields of Indian corn, and live in a country offering excellent facilities for the hunting of the Wildcat, Stag, wild Ox, and Beaver. ‡ 299

### 1687: "Memoir of Pierre Liette"

Pierre de Liette came to live in Illinois in 1687. Liette's memoir about his stay begins, "The Illinois country is undeniably the finest that is known anywhere between the mouth of the St. Lawrence River and that of the Mississippi, which are a thousand leagues apart." Liette's account of journeying to Illinois leads the reader from Lake Michigan and across the Chicago portage, then down the Des Plaines River. We pick up his narrative about 10 miles below "the fork," where the Des Plaines joins the Kankakee River to form the Illinois River:

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\* There are two Fox Rivers in southeastern Wisconsin. One runs north to Green Bay, and one flows south to Ottawa, Illinois. This second stream, the "Fox River of Illinois," originates northwest of Milwaukee in Tamarac Swamp. This wetland is about 40 miles south of Lake Winnebago, a natural expansion of the other Fox River.

† Lake of the Ilimouek (Lake of the Illinois) = Lake Michigan.

‡ Claude Allouez wrote *pour la chasse du Chat sauvage, du Cerf, du Boeuf sauvage, & du Castor*. 299 The early French applied the name *chat sauvage* (or *chat sauvage*, here translated as "wildcat") to raccoons, bobcats, and Canada lynx. *Le cerf* ("stag") was sometimes intended in a narrow sense for elk, but the name was also applied to deer. *Le boeuf sauvage* (*sauvage*), or "wild ox," is the bison. *Le castor* of French Canadians is the beaver.

Three leagues from the fork is the river Mazon, \* . . . where flocks of parakeets <sup>†</sup> of fifty to sixty are found. They make a very strange noise. They are a little bigger than turtledoves. <sup>‡</sup> <sup>234</sup>

Proceeding down the Illinois River, Pierre de Liette came to the Fox River, which he called the Pestequouy:

Seven leagues from here is a rapid <sup>¶</sup> where, in low water, you have to portage for an eighth of a league. Three leagues farther are some places that are very flat because of several islands that are located here, and a river flowing from the north, which the Illinois call Pestequouy. Near its outlet there is a rich quarry of coal. <sup>§</sup> This river comes from the northeast. It has nothing but prairies on either side, except for a narrow strip of wood consisting of oaks and walnuts, \*\* and running the whole length of its banks.

From here it is two leagues to the old fort. <sup>††</sup> <sup>234</sup>

## 1698: "The Voyage of St. Cosme"

In the autumn of 1698 Jean François Buisson de St. Cosme went with four other priests to establish missions in the lower Mississippi valley. After arriving at the mouth of the Arkansas River, St. Cosme wrote to the Bishop of Quebec to tell of their journey from

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\* The Mazon River enters the south side of the Illinois River opposite Morris. Nettle Creek flows into the Illinois River on the north bank in Morris. The name Mazon is based on an Algonquian name for the nettle plant. <sup>311</sup> When the early French mentioned the "the Mazon," they might have been referring to Nettle Creek rather than the Mazon River. As a practical matter for travelers needing a place to rest, "the Mazon" referred to the future site of Morris at the mouth of Nettle Creek. The opposite bank of the Illinois River at the mouth of the Mazon River is too low and wet to be chosen as a campsite.

<sup>†</sup> Liette wrote *des péruches*. <sup>220</sup> These are Carolina parakeets, now extinct.

<sup>‡</sup> Liette wrote *des Tourtelles*, <sup>220</sup> a reference to the turtle dove of Europe.

<sup>¶</sup> The Grand Rapids of the Illinois extended upstream from Marseilles for about 10 miles.

<sup>§</sup> The most conspicuous outcrop of coal near the mouth of the Fox River was about four miles down the Illinois River at Buffalo Rock. Another big coal exposure was about eight miles upstream at Marseilles. Smaller outcrops of coal occurred at several points closer to the Fox River, including the Fox River bottomland near the mouth of the river. These coal exposures have largely been obliterated by stripmining.

\*\* When Liette wrote *une petite Lisiere de bois de chesne et noyer*, <sup>220</sup> he probably was thinking of hickories as well as oaks and walnuts. The early French referred to both walnuts and hickories as *les noyers*. When they wanted to distinguish native walnuts from hickories, they could refer to *le noyer noir* ("black walnut"). The hickory is *le noyer dur* ("hard walnut"). <sup>197</sup>

<sup>††</sup> The old fort was Fort St. Louis, established by La Salle atop Starved Rock in 1682.

Michilimakinac. \* The first leg of the trip took St. Cosme's group by canoe down the west shore of Lake Michigan:

On the eleventh of October we started early in the morning from the fort at Milouakik, † and at an early hour we reached Kipikaoui, ‡ about eight leagues ¶ farther. . . . Some savages § had led us to hope that we could ascend this river and after a portage of about two leagues \*\* might descend by another river called Pesiou †† which falls into the River of the Illinois ‡‡ about 25 or 30 leagues from Chikagou, and that we should thereby avoid all the portages that had to be made by the Chikagou route. ¶¶ We passed by this river which is about ten leagues in length to the portage and flows through agreeable prairies, but as there was no water in it we judged that there would not be any in the Peschoui §§ either, and that instead of shortening our journey we should have been obliged to go over

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\* Michilimakinac was on the Straits of Mackinac at the north end of Lake Michigan.

† Milouakik = Milwaukee.

‡ Kipikaoui is the entrance of the Root River on Lake Michigan, the site of present-day Racine, Wisconsin.

¶ A French land league is about two and one-half miles.

§ Fox Valley resident John F. Steward wrote in 1903, "We are told that the natives of the New World were savages," but he demurred:

Let us not be deceived by the terms applied to these natives. The beasts the explorers found along the St. Lawrence river were wild, and the French called them *sauvage*. The people they found living a life of wild freedom they also called *sauvage*, although many were so mild in manners as to put the French to shame. We have given the French word *sauvage*, that merely means wild, a most savage interpretation. <sup>287</sup>

\*\* The portage between the Root River and the Fox River was via Big Muskego Lake in the southeast corner of Waukesha County, Wisconsin.

Louise Phelps Kellogg made the translation of St. Cosme's journal that is quoted here. A different translation, by John Gilmary Shea, states that the Frenchmen left Milwaukee on the 10th of October rather than the 11th. Shea's edition gives the length of the portage as approximately nine leagues rather than two. <sup>267</sup>

†† Pesiou = Fox River. Shea's translation renders the name as Pistrui rather than Pesiou. <sup>267</sup>  
A version of St. Cosme's journal published by Milo Milton Quaife gives the name as Pipctiwi. <sup>233</sup>

‡‡ River of the Illinois = Illinois River.

¶¶ There was a single portage from one stream to the next along the "Chicago route" between Lake Michigan and the Illinois River valley. This portage led from the South Branch of the Chicago River to a small tributary of the Des Plaines River. But beyond this portage, travelers had to carry their canoes for many miles at several shallow, rocky reaches of the Des Plaines River and upper Illinois River.

§§ Peschoui = Fox River. Quaife rendered the name as Peschwi. <sup>233</sup> Shea spelled it Bestikwi, and he remarked, "The names in this memoir have suffered greatly in transcription . . . ." <sup>267</sup>

forty leagues of portage roads; this compelled us to take the route by way of Chikagou which is distant about twenty leagues.<sup>170</sup>

The *voyageurs* abandoned their intended route down the Fox River and returned to Kipi-kaoui. They continued southward along the west shore of Lake Michigan. St. Cosme and his companions left the lake at Chicago and portaged to the Des Plaines River. One month after leaving Milwaukee, they arrived at the juncture of the Des Plaines and the Kankakee:

On the eleventh, . . . we came to the river Teatiki, \* which is the true river of the Illinois, that which we descended being only a distant branch. † We put all our baggage in the canoe, which two men paddled, . . . the remainder . . . walking all the time through fine prairies. We came to the village of the Peangichias ‡ . . . . There was no one in the village, for all had gone hunting. That day we slept near Massane, § a small river which falls into the River of the Illinois. On that day we began to see oxen, § and on the morrow two of our men killed four; but as these animals are in poor condition at this season we contented ourselves with taking the tongues only. . . . We afterward saw some nearly every day during our journey as far as the Acansças. \*\*

After experiencing considerable difficulty during three days in carrying and hauling our baggage in the canoe, owing to the river being rapid, low, and full of rocks, we arrived on the 15th of November at the place called the Old Fort. †† . . . We slept a league above it, ‡‡ where we found two cabins of savages . . . .<sup>170</sup>

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\* River Teatiki = Kankakee River.

† St. Cosme was pointing out that the Des Plaines River is a relatively minor stream ("only a distant branch") in comparison to the Kankakee River ("the true river of the Illinois"). Today we say that the Des Plaines and Kankakee merge to form the Illinois River, but the early French often considered the Kankakee River to be the upper part of the Illinois River—rather than a separate stream with its own name.

‡ Peangichias = Piankeshaw.

§ The Massane is either the Mazon River or Nettle Creek, both of which enter the Illinois River at Morris, about 10 miles below the Kankakee River (see a footnote on page 33). John Gilmary Shea rendered the name of the stream as "Massacre" rather than Massane. He mistakenly took this to be the Iroquois River, and he supposed it was named Massacre to commemorate the killing of Iroquois along the stream.<sup>267</sup>

§ Ox = bison.

\*\* Acansças = Arkansas River, which joins the Mississippi River in southeastern Arkansas.

†† The fort was atop Starved Rock.

‡‡ If St. Cosme's encampment was a league above Starved Rock, it was at or near Buffalo Rock, which is midway between the mouth of the Fox River and Starved Rock. According to Shea's version of St. Cosme's journal, they slept a league *below* the Old Fort.<sup>267</sup>



In 1721 Father Charlevoix found that the Illinois River "receives many other Rivers" between the Kankakee River and Starved Rock, including the Fox River: *The largest is called Pisticoui, and comes from the fine Country of the Mascoutins. . . . In this Route we see only vast Meadows, with little Clusters of Trees here and there, which seem to have been planted by the Hand; the Grass grows so high in them, that one might lose one's self amongst it . . . .*<sup>68</sup>

### 1721: *Letters to the Dutchess of Lesdiguières*

In a letter datelined October 5, 1721, at Pimiteouy, \* Father Pierre François Xavier de Charlevoix recalled his recent journey down the Illinois valley and past the Fox River:

The 27th of *September* we arrived *la Fourche (at the Fork;)* this is the Name the *Canadians* give the Place where the *Theakiki* and the River of the *Illinois* join. † The last, after a Course of sixty Leagues, is still so shallow, that I saw a Buffalo cross it, and the Water did not come above the Middle of his Legs. . . . Being enriched all at once by this Junction, it yields to none that we have in *France*; and I dare assure you, Madam, that it is not possible to see a better nor a finer Country than that it waters; at least up to this Place, from whence I write. But it is fifteen Leagues below the *Fork* before it acquires a Depth answerable to its Breadth, although in this Interval it receives many other Rivers.

The largest is called *Pisticoui*, ‡ and comes from the fine Country of the *Mascoutins*. It has a Fall at its Mouth, which they call *la Charboniere (the Coal Fall)* because they find many Coals in its Environs. In this Route ¶ we see only vast Meadows, with little Clusters of Trees here and there, which seem to have been planted by the Hand; the Grass grows so high in them, that one might lose one's self amongst it; but every where we meet with Paths that are as beaten as they can be in the most populous Countries; yet nothing passes through them but

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\* Pimiteouy = Peoria. Most likely Charlevoix did not write this letter on October 5, 1721, at Peoria: he cited specific dates and locations as a literary device to organize his book in the form of a series of letters to his sponsor, the Duchess of Lesdiguières. Louise Phelps Kellogg concluded that the letters probably were written in 1728.<sup>69</sup>

† By "the River of the *Illinois*," Charlevoix was referring to the Des Plaines River plus its downstream continuation, which is now called the Illinois River. In Charlevoix's view, the *Theakiki* (Kankakee) is a branch of the River of the *Illinois*. In today's geography, the Kankakee River joins the Des Plaines River to form the Illinois River.

‡ *Pisticoui* = Fox River.

¶ When writing his history of the Mesquakie tribe, J.F. Steward supposed that this passage by Charlevoix refers to the Fox River valley.<sup>287</sup> But the context of Charlevoix's narrative shows that he was portraying the course of the Illinois River past the mouth of the Fox when he described what he saw "in this Route."

Buffaloes, \* and from Time to Time some Herds of Deer, and some Roe-Bucks. † 68

### 1732: "Foxes Attacked in Their Fort at Marameg"

In November of 1732 the French commandant at Detroit reported that a long-time foe, the Mesquakie, ‡ had been besieged by three of France's allies—the Huron, Ottawa, and Potawatomi:

After our warriors had marched 22 days, they came upon the Renards on the shore of Lake Marameeek in a stockade fort with an earthen rampart inside to the height of a man, with a watch-tower or block-house above it. This fort is situated between the lake and an Impassable swamp so that it can be approached only

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\* Bison may have concentrated along the Illinois River in the vicinity of the Fox River for two reasons: (1) a series of rapids allowed the animals to cross the Illinois without swimming or wading deep water, and (2) an extensive area of salty groundwater discharge is located on the south side of the Illinois River a few miles downstream from the mouth of the Fox River. This area must have served as a mineral lick for bison. Natural scientist John Huett described this site in 1897: "The Salt Marsh is a swale, now drained, situated about 5½ miles southwest of Ottawa at the foot of the Illinois bluffs. A salt spring exists here and an artesian well bored some thirty years ago, about forty rods southwest of Mr. Delbridge's residence, furnishes a considerable volume of salt water. The water is not salt enough to be of value as a source of salt. The vegetation of the vicinity presents some brackish water features." 147

Charlevoix's statement about "Paths that are as beaten as they can be in the most populous Countries" is reminiscent of an earlier account by Louis Hennepin. Father Hennepin had described bison trails after a trip down the Illinois River in 1679-80:

These wild cattle or bulls change country according to the season and the diversity of climate. . . . The paths by which they have passed are beaten like our great roads in Europe, and no grass grows there. They cross rivers and streams. 134

A comparison of writings by these two men indicates that Charlevoix sometimes copied from Hennepin, but there is no reason to doubt that Father Charlevoix saw buffalo trails along the Illinois River in the vicinity of the Fox River. Pierre de Liette described buffalo trails in this neighborhood after he moved there in 1687:

There are avenues extending farther than the eye can reach, which seem made expressly by nature to provoke our admiration, and offering, though about as wide as the Cours de la Reine, not a single bit of brushwood. This may be due to the endless number of buffalos that pass there. The reason why these places are so much frequented by these animals is because there is a kind of marsh here and there in the middle of these alleys which serves them for watering places. 220

† Early French nomenclature of bison, elk, and deer is often confusing. Charlevoix's Deer and Roe-Bucks are white-tailed deer.

‡ The Mesquakie are also known as the Fox (*les Renards* in French).

*At the head of the . . . river is a small body of water that now forms a summer resort much sought by the weary—Pistakee lake, until recently pronounced Pes-ta-koo-ee.* <sup>287</sup>

by means of a tongue of land. This is the description given by all the huron, Outaoüac and Poutoüatomi \* Chiefs. <sup>305</sup>

The editor of this manuscript remarked about Lake Marameeek, "The location of this lake is a vexed question." <sup>305</sup> The lake's name probably relates to "Meramech," a locale beside the Fox River on the royal French hydrographer's map of 1684. <sup>301</sup> The Chain of Lakes along the Fox River in Lake and McHenry Counties is a likely candidate for the site of the Mesquakie fort. Here a series of six lakes (Pistakee, Nippersink, Fox, Grass, Marie, and Channel) are separated from one another by narrow peninsulas and broad marshes.

### **1763: "Minutes of Mr. Hamburg's Journal who travilled this Contry in the year 1763"**

A Mr. Hamburg descended the Illinois River in 1763. Here is how he described the upper reaches of the stream, in the general vicinity of the Fox River:

The Chief Hunting ground of the Battowaymes † is along this River ‡ . . . Down to a Place Called Le Rocher ¶—The greatest plenty they have here is racoons, Otters, Some Bever, Elks and Dear, and Buffilows in ABundance. . . . All a Long Down this River the Country is Exceeding Pleasant And Levil and for the most Part Consisting of Large Plains Which Extend themselves as the french Informed me for several Hundreds of Miles, the Plains are Well stocked With Buffelows And Deer Especially Along the River as they Run through it. The Country all Along Down Produces Plenty of mulberry Trees and the Nut Called Bacane §—There is Several Rivers falls into it where off I know no name. One of them Runs Through the Saacks \*\* Country towards the Green Bay. <sup>200</sup>

This last-mentioned stream, originating in the direction of Green Bay, Wisconsin, is the "Fox River of Illinois."

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\* Outaoüac = Ottawa; Poutoüatomi = Potawatomi.

† Battowaymes = Potawatomi.

‡ When he described the Potawatomi's hunting ground "along this River," Mr. Hamburg was referring to both the Kankakee River and its downstream continuation, the Illinois River. During the 1700s and early 1800s, the Kankakee and the Illinois were often considered to be one and the same river—sometimes called the Kankakee, sometimes called the Illinois.

¶ Le Rocher ("the Rock") = Starved Rock.

§ Bacane = pecan (*Carya illinoensis*).

\*\* Saacks = Sauk.

## 1773: "Mr. Patrick Kennedy's Journal of an Expedition ... to the Head Waters of the Illinois River"

On July 23, 1773, Patrick Kennedy set out from Kaskaskia with an exploring party. The men were in search of a copper deposit that was reputed to be along some tributary of the Illinois River. Seventeen days by boat brought them to rapids near the mouth of the Vermillion River. Mr. Kennedy noted for August 9,

The wind continuing fair, about 10 o'clock we passed the *Vermillion River* . . . .  
. . . At the distance of a mile further, we arrived at the little rocks, which are 60 miles from the *Forks* \* . . . . The water being very low, We could get no further with our boat, and therefore we proceeded by land to the *Forks*. We set out about two o'clock on the western side of the River, † but the grass and weeds were so high, that we could make but little way. ‡ 151

On the next day Kennedy's group left the bottomland to travel the upland prairie:

August 10, We crossed the high land, and at ten o'clock we came to the *Fox River* (or a branch of it) after walking twenty-four miles. It falls into the *Illinois River*, thirty miles beyond the place where we left our boat. §—The *Fox River* is 25 yards wide, and has about five feet water; its course is from the westward § by many windings through large meadows. At three miles distance, after crossing this river, we fell in with the *Illinois River* again, and kept along its bank; here we found a path. About six o'clock we arrived, after walking about 12 miles, at an old encampment, fifteen miles from the *Fork*. \*\* The land is stoney, and the meadows not so good as some which we formerly passed . . . . 151

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\* The Des Plaines and Kankakee join to form the Illinois River at the *Forks*.

† Patrick Kennedy was on the north side of the Illinois River. The right bank (facing downstream) is the west side of the river for most of its length, but above Hennepin the right bank is the north side.

‡ Kennedy had earlier written, "The grass which grows in the interval or meadow ground, between the *Illinois River* and the *Rocks*, is finer than any we have seen, and is thicker and higher and more clear from weeds, than in any of the meadows about *Kaskaskias* or *Fort Chartres*." 151 Kennedy was referring to the river bluffs when he wrote of the *Rocks*. Kaskaskia and Fort Chartres were on the extensive prairies of the American Bottom, along the Mississippi River in far southern Illinois.

§ Kennedy overestimated the distances. The Fox River flows into the Illinois about 12 miles above the point where the men left their boat.

§ As Pierre de Liette noted on page 33, the general course of the Fox River is from the northeast rather than the west.

\*\* This camp was at or near present-day Morris.

Kennedy and his companions ascended nearly the entire length of the Illinois River in a futile search for a copper mine. Before they reached the *Fork*, they met French traders who knew nothing of a copper deposit. They hired one of the Frenchmen to take them in a canoe down-river to their boat:

August 11, We set off about three o'clock, and at night got within nine miles of our boat. We computed it to be 45 miles from the island we last departed from, to the place where we left our boat. <sup>151</sup>

Although Kennedy's estimates of distances are not accurate, his narrative shows that they bivouacked at or near the mouth of the Fox River on the night of August 11:

August 12, We embarked early, and proceeded three miles down the *Illinois* River. — On the north-western side of this river is a coal *mine*, \* that extends for half a mile along the middle of the bank of the river, which is high. † — On the eastern side, about half a mile from it, and about the same distance below the coal mine, are two salt ponds, ‡ 100 yards in circumference, and several feet in depth; the water is stagnant, and of a yellowish colour; but the *French*, and natives make good salt from it. We tasted the water, and thought it saltier than that which the French make salt from, at the *Saline* near *St. Genevieve*. ¶ <sup>151</sup>

### 1790: "Lieutenant John Armstrong's Map of the Illinois River"

In June of 1790 U.S. Army Lieutenant John Armstrong submitted a map of the Illinois River to his commanding officer. The map locates a Coal Mine and Salt Springs along the Illinois River near its junction with the Foxes River.

The map was drawn by someone other than Lieutenant Armstrong. This unnamed map-maker had descended the river in September of 1789 or perhaps earlier. A narrative by the cartographer portrays the Illinois valley near the entrance of the Fox River:

As for the Coal mine; the thickness of the earth above it is about four feet, the thickness of the Coal Seven, and the thickness of the Rock under it, to the then surface of the water, Seven feet &. The length of the mine, which is open and presents itself to the river, is about forty perches. § The country about it is

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\* Early writers referred to mineral deposits as mines even if they had not yet been mined.

† This coal cropped out at Buffalo Rock, which is about four miles downstream from the mouth of the Fox River. The coal has been stripmined.

‡ Kennedy had his directions turned 90 degrees: the salt ponds are on the south side of the river. The site that Kennedy visited in the company of a French trader in 1773 is the brackish marsh identified by the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory 204 years later.

¶ The French operated a major saltworks near St. Genevieve, Missouri.

§ This distance is about one-eighth mile.

Cartographers were inclined to follow each other's delineations of old as well as new errors, and as late as 1718 our beautiful Fox River is given the name "Riviere du Rocher," (River of the large rounded Rock), its foot bathed thereby . . . . <sup>289</sup>

without wood, being a dry Meadow. There is a strong current till past the Fox river, where the current begins to abate in some measure . . . . <sup>293</sup>

### 1817: *The Western Gazetteer; or Emigrant's Directory*

Samuel R. Brown's gazetteer lists the Fox River as the sixth major tributary on the right bank of the Illinois River, proceeding upstream from the Mississippi:

6. Fox River comes in nearly equi-distant between the *Illinois lake* \* and the junction of the Plein and Theakaki <sup>†</sup> rivers, is 130 yards wide—heads near the sources of Rocky river (of the Mississippi,) <sup>‡</sup> . . . and is navigable 130 miles. <sup>¶ 56</sup>

The *Western Gazetteer* mentions coal outcrops and salt springs along the Illinois River near the mouth of the Fox: "A little below the coal mines are two salt ponds one hundred yards in circumference, and several feet in depth; the water is stagnant, and of a yellowish colour. The French inhabitants and Indians make good salt from them." <sup>§ 56</sup>

### 1823: *A Gazetteer of the States of Illinois and Missouri*

Lewis C. Beck's *Gazetteer of the States of Illinois and Missouri* is the earliest comprehensive reference about the geography of Illinois. In his "Topographical View of the Towns, Villages, Rivers, Creeks, &c. &c. in the State of Illinois," Dr. Beck wrote,

*Fox river*, a navigable stream in the northern part of the state. It . . . empties into the Illinois on the right side, a short distance above the great bend. <sup>\*\*</sup>

. . . Fox river is a clear and beautiful stream, with a gentle current, uninterrupted by rapids. <sup>††</sup> Near the point of its embouchure is an extensive and valuable bed of mineral coal. <sup>32</sup>

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\* *Illinois lake* = Peoria Lake.

<sup>†</sup> Plein = Des Plaines River; Theakaki = Kankakee River.

<sup>‡</sup> Rocky river of the Mississippi = Rock River.

<sup>¶</sup> The Fox River was navigable only with canoes or other small boats.

<sup>§</sup> This description was copied from Patrick Kennedy's journal (page 40), which had been published 39 years earlier.

<sup>\*\*</sup> The great bend is at Hennepin, where the Illinois River turns from west to south.

<sup>††</sup> Dr. Beck was misinformed about the river's current and rapids.

### 1823: *Narrative of an Expedition to the Source of St. Peter's River*

William Keating was the Geologist and Historiographer for Major Stephen Long's expedition that crossed the Fox River valley in 1823. The explorers set out from Chicago on June 11, camping that night beside the *Otokakenog* (Du Page River). On the following day . . .

A ride of about eighteen miles brought us to the banks of the Fox river, which is a fine stream about one hundred and thirty yards wide, the scenery of which is varied by several islands scattered through its channel. The country, which consisted of prairie land, became handsomely wooded in the neighborhood of the river; a couple of Indian lodges seen in the distance, gave an appearance of inhabitation to the spot. These we found to belong to the Menomone, or wild rice eaters . . . .

. . . The Fox river of the Illinois is called by the Indians Pishtako. It is the same which is mentioned by Charlevoix under the name of Pisticoui, \* and which flows, as he says, through the country of the Mascoutins. At present it is claimed, at least in this part, by the Potawatomis and Kickapoos, who are incorporated together; the Menomones are allowed to remain there, on account of their being connected by intermarriages. The river has a fine gravelly bottom, and was very easily forded. On the west side we reached a beautiful but small prairie, situated on a high bank, which approaches within two hundred and fifty yards of the edge of the water; and upon this prairie we discovered a number of mounds, which appeared to have been arranged with a certain degree of regularity. Of these mounds we counted twenty-seven . . . .<sup>167</sup>

The place where the expedition forded the Fox River is not known. They crossed the Des Plaines directly west of downtown Chicago; if they stayed on approximately the same course, they came to the Fox at or near present-day Geneva.<sup>†</sup> The men continued west until stopping for the night on high ground between the Fox River and the Kishwaukee:

Proceeding two miles further, through a thinly wooded country, we crossed a brook four yards wide; and six miles further of fine rolling prairie, interspersed with light woods, brought us to our encampment of the 12th of June. As we

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\* Charlevoix's mention of the Pisticoui is on page 36.

<sup>†</sup> The expedition found a large group of mounds on the west side of the Fox River. This indicates that they may have forded the river at present-day Elgin. If they veered south they might have crossed at present-day Aurora, where there was an "Indian burying ground" west of the river<sup>35</sup> as well as effigy mounds east of the river. Another possibility is present-day St. Charles, where a trail crossed the river on its way from Chicago to the Rock River valley.

stopped upon the encamping ground, a night-hawk flew away and abandoned two eggs \* . . . .<sup>167</sup>

On June 13th, "At about twenty-eight miles in a general westerly course from Pishtako, we came to a beautiful winding stream, called the Kishwauke, Cottonwood."<sup>167</sup>

### 1825-26: *Henry Allyn, Autobiography*

In October of 1825 Henry and Sarah Allyn moved to a newly established Methodist mission at the mouth of the Fox River.<sup>†</sup> In his autobiography Mr. Allyn recalled the work of missionaries who had preceded him and his wife by a few months:

During the summer they had built a number of cabins at the mouth of the Fox & one on the opposite side of the Illinois, opposite the other cabins, & they had cut a large quantity of prairie hay, as the Hawleys had a large stock of cattle.<sup>9</sup>

The Allyn's set up housekeeping at the future site of Ottawa:

The weather turned severely cold, & nothing could be done out in the weather. The cabins on the north side of the Illinois, were standing on an eminence or bluff that projected to & join'd the Fox river, & a narrow strip of bottom between them, & the Illinois, & prairie extended back for several miles, & the cold northwesterns shook our cabins fearfully . . . .<sup>9</sup>

Part of the missionary group decided to relocate up the Fox River valley:

On the set time they started, & proceeded 16 miles up the river, & fixed on a spring branch about one mile & a half above its mouth at the Fox river.<sup>‡</sup> The branch was fed by numerous springs, & a beautiful grove of timber extended along its margin to its mouth, & joining the grove a body of rich prairie. I was left to work at the mill<sup>¶</sup> . . . . The other men commenced on the buildings at the missionary station.

. . . Brother Pierce Hawley's cattle was not yet brought up from his improvement in the rich woods,<sup>§</sup> which he had left, & himself, & two others were sent

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\* The expedition's ornithologist was Thomas Say. The phoebe genus, *Sayornis*, was named in his honor by Prince Charles Lucien Bonaparte, nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte.

† When Jesse Walker founded this mission in 1824, the Potawatomi chief Shabbona brought him "a quarter of venison, and a wild turkey."<sup>192</sup>

‡ The new mission was along Mission Creek in Mission Township, about three miles south of Sheridan.

¶ The mill was on the south side of the Illinois River, opposite the mouth of the Fox. It was "propell'd by horse, or ox power."<sup>9</sup>

§ Hawley's "rich woods" farm was in the vicinity of Peoria.



to bring them. Before they arrived a fire broke out on the prairie, which caught in the stacks of hay, & consumed them. \* Thus a great part of the summer's work was destroyed. The only alternative for keeping the cattle alive, was to cut Basswood, or Linn trees for browsing. † It proved to be a very cold winter, & much suffering was experienced, by both man & beast. 9

At the close of winter it was time to "commence on our agricultural department" at the mission station:

We staked off, & commenced, breaking prairie, early in March, & continued, until the 80 acres were finished, which brought the latter part of breaking too late to plant with our seed corn; although the greater part was planted in good season, & for the latter, we procured seed from the Indians of a peculiar kind, which will mature planted any time in June. 9

The Allens then moved back to the mouth of the Fox River "to keep the mill in repair, and to grind for the few families settled there."

The house we occupied was on the south side of the Illinois, just opposite the mouth of Fox, & stood on the bank of the river, & a narrow strip of bottom land extended several miles along the river, & a high & abrupt bluff bounded it. The house was built near to a large unfailing spring. It had been a place much frequented by the Indians, where they had formerly held their war dances, powwows, &c.

... About this time, Mr. T. Couill, a settler, a little below the mouth of the Fox was building a mill on a small stream ‡ . . . .

... I was well pleased with the country, so was my wife.

The beautiful river, the rolling landscape, the limpid streams of heaving water & numerous springs of clear, & ever during water, ¶ & numerous islands of beautiful groves of timber that checkered the rich prairie rendered it the most

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\* This fire was at the Fox River mission, not at Hawley's farm near Peoria.

† Branchlets of the American basswood (linden or linn, *Tilia americana*) served as emergency winter food for livestock. During the unprecedentedly severe winter of 1830-31, a Livingston County family found that "all hope for stock to live was cut off, unless they could find sufficient bass or linwood to cut down for their cattle to browse upon." 28

‡ Thomas Covell (Covil, Covill) dammed Covell Creek, the first stream to enter the south side of the Illinois River downstream from the Fox River.

¶ "Ever during water": enduring or perennial water, as opposed to streams that intermittently cease their flow.

enchancing spot of earth we had ever seen, & I think so yet; even the beautiful Willamette Valley falls beneath it for beauty. \*<sup>9</sup>

### 1830s?: "Some Things I Remember of Chief Shabbona"

Laura Allen Bowers first learned of Shabbona when her father asked the Potawatomi chief to sell him enough trees to build a log house. Bowers recalled, "... the old chief thought it beneath his dignity to sell trees to a Shemokaman,<sup>†</sup> and would not let him have a single tree." But "Shabbona was generous with the white people and he would bring a quarter of a venison to his neighbors frequently, and once in a great while a wild goose and a duck."<sup>51</sup>

Two more vignettes from Laura Bowers' reminiscences about Shabbona's village:

They generally had a tame skunk running around for a pet, and they would play with them as we play with kittens.

... The Indians made maple sugar in the spring of the year, and old Pokenoquay<sup>‡</sup> superintended the making of it.<sup>¶</sup><sup>51</sup>

### 1830: "Narrative by Jesse and David Green"

In the company of 22 other Ohioans, the Green brothers immigrated to the Fox River valley of La Salle County. They settled a few miles above the mouth of the river in the waning weeks of 1829, and "went to work improving in the spring."

... by July 4th we had 240 acres fenced, and nearly all broken, and had built a saw mill, dam and race, and had a run of boulder mill stones in one corner of the saw mill grinding wheat, the first ground on Fox river. The stones were made from boulders or hard heads, found here . . . .<sup>14</sup>

### 1830: "Notes on Illinois: Surface of the Country"

The Fox River joins the Illinois River midway along the Rapids of the Illinois, which extended upstream from Starved Rock to a point about 10 miles beyond Marseilles.<sup>§</sup> The November 1830 issue of the *Illinois Monthly Magazine* discusses the region:

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\* Henry Allyn moved to the Columbia River-Willamette River region of Oregon in 1853.

† *Shemokaman* is a Potawatomi word for "white man."

‡ Pokenoquay was married to Shabbona.

¶ According to Henry Boies, sap was collected in wooden troughs and turtle carapaces. While the sap was being boiled down, rabbits and woodchucks were sometimes added to the pot.<sup>50</sup>

§ The rapids have been inundated by two navigation dams.

The country in the neighborhood of the rapids of the Illinois river, has lately attracted attention, in consequence of its occupying a prominent point in the line of the projected canal, between that river and lake Michigan. The land here is said to be remarkably fine. The prairies are high and rolling, and the timber on the streams remarkably fine. Fountains of pure water issuing out of the rock, are numerous; and all the streams flow over rocky or gravelly beds. The Illinois, Big Vermilion, and Fox rivers, afford abundant water power for mills and other machinery. In this respect, the advantages of this country are unrivalled. Coal is found in immense beds, and of the best quality.<sup>120</sup>

### 1831: *Wau-Bun, the "Early Day" in the North-West*

In company with her husband John and three other men, Juliette Kinzie traveled from Portage, Wisconsin, to Chicago in mid-March of 1831. This was near the end of one of the severest winters on record, and they encountered more harsh weather on their journey. They became seriously lost but eventually reached the Fox River valley in southern De Kalb County on March 15. Mrs. Kinzie relived the ordeal in her book *Wau-Bun*:

At length we halted for the night. . . . here we were—nobody knew where—in the midst of woods and prairies—certainly far from any human habitation, with barely enough food for a slender evening's meal.

. . . The morrow came.

. . . We still had the trail to guide us, and we continued to follow it until about nine o'clock, when, in emerging from a wood, we came upon a broad and rapid river. A collection of Indian wigwams stood upon the opposite bank, and, as the trail led directly to the water, it was fair to infer that the stream was fordable. We had no opportunity of testing it, however, for the banks were so lined with ice, which was piled up tier upon tier by the breaking up of the previous week, that we tried in vain to find a path by which we could descend the bank to the water.

The men shouted again and again . . . . No answer was returned, save by the echoes. . . . I looked at my husband . . . . "We will follow this cross-trail down the bank of the river," said he. "There must be Indians wintering near, in some of these points of wood."

. . . We kept along the bank, which was considerably elevated above the water, and bordered at a little distance with a thick wood.

. . . At this instant a little Indian dog ran out from under the bushes by the roadside . . . . We rode directly into the thicket, and, descending a little hollow, found two squaws . . . .

. . . Mr. Kinzie addressed them in the Pottowattamie language, —

"What are you doing here?"

"Digging Indian potatoes"—(a species of artichoke.) \*

... Mr. Kinzie questioned the women as to our whereabouts. They knew no name for the river but "Saumanong." This was not definite, it being the generic term for any large stream. † But he gathered that the village we had passed higher up, on the opposite side of the stream, was Wau-ban-see's, ‡ and then he knew that we were on the Fox River . . . . <sup>175</sup>

The women ferried Kinzie's party across the river with a canoe.

We followed the old squaw to her lodge, which was at no great distance in the woods.

... she ladled a quantity of Indian potatoes from the kettle over the fire, and set them before me.

... the master of the lodge, who had been out to shoot ducks, . . . was just returned.

... Soon my husband joined us.

... From the Indian he learned that we were in what was called the "Big Woods," or "Piché's Grove," § from a Frenchman of that name living not far from the spot—that the river we had crossed was the Fox River—that he could guide us to *Piché's*, from which the road was perfectly plain, or even into Chicago if we preferred, but that we had better remain encamped for that day, as there was a storm coming on, and in the mean time he would go and shoot some ducks for our dinner and supper.

... The tent being all in order, my husband came for me, and we took leave of our friends in the wigwam . . . .

The storm was raging throughout. The trees were bending and cracking around us, and the air was completely filled with the wild-fowl screaming and *quacking* as they made their way southward before the blast. Our tent was among the

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\* Some possibilities: Jerusalem artichoke (*Helianthus tuberosus*), groundnut (*Apios americana*), or wild sweet potato (*Ipomoea pandurata*).

† *Saumanong* appears to be a cognate of *Somonauk*, which is an English rendering of an Algonquian word for the pawpaw tree.

‡ Wabaunsee had a village along the Fox River at present-day Oswego, and one at Aurora.

§ Although the Kinzies were in the vicinity of Oswego and Aurora, their exact location is not certain. The Big Woods extended along the Fox River upstream from Aurora, which is several miles north of Oswego. In the prairie three miles south of Oswego was an isolated stand of trees called Species Grove, named for the Frenchman Piché.

trees not far from the river. My husband took me to the bank to look for a moment at what we had escaped. The wind was sweeping down from the north in a perfect hurricane. The water was filled with masses of snow and ice, dancing along upon the torrent, over which were hurrying thousands of wild-fowl, making the woods resound to their deafening clamor.

Had we been one hour later, we could not possibly have crossed the stream, and there would have been nothing for us but to have remained and starved in the wilderness.

. . . The men had cut down an immense tree, and built a fire against it . . . .  
. . . I was glad when the arrival of our huntsmen, with a quantity of ducks, gave me an opportunity of diverting my thoughts from my own sufferings . . . .

We borrowed a kettle from our Indian friends. It was not remarkably clean; but we heated a little water in it, and *prairie-hay'd* it out, before consigning our birds to it, and with a bowl of Indian potatoes, a present from our kind neighbors, we soon had an excellent soup.

. . . The storm raged with tenfold violence during the night. We were continually startled by the crashing of the falling trees around us, and who could tell but that next would be upon us? . . . When we arose in the morning, we were made fully alive to the perils which we had been surrounded. At least fifty trees, the giants of the forest, lay prostrate within view of the tent.

When we had taken our scanty breakfast, and were mounted and ready for departure, it was with difficulty we could thread our way, so completely was it obstructed by the fallen trunks.

Our Indian guide had joined us at an early hour, and after conducting us carefully out of the wood, and pointing out to us numerous bee-trees, \* for which he said that grove was famous, he set off at a long trot, and about nine o'clock brought us to *Piché's*, a log cabin on a rising ground, looking off over a broad prairie to the east.

. . . A long reach of prairie extended from *Piché's* to the Du Page, between the two forks of which . . . we should find the dwelling of a Mr. Hawley . . . .

The weather was intensely cold; the wind, sweeping over the wide prairie with nothing to break its force, chilled our very hearts. . . . Not a house or wigwam, not even a clump of trees as a shelter, offered itself for many a weary mile. At length we reached the west fork of the Du Page. It was frozen, but not sufficiently so to bear the horses. Our only resource was to cut a way for them

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\* A footnote in *Wau-Bun* says, "The honey-bee is not known in the perfectly wild countries of North America. It is ever the pioneer of civilization, and the Indians call it '*the white man's bird*.'" 175

through the ice. It was a work of time, for the ice had frozen to several inches in thickness during the last bitter night.

. . . We were all across at last, and spurred on our horses, until we reached Hawley's . . . near the east fork of the river. \* <sup>175</sup>

After a few weeks at Fort Dearborn in Chicago, the Kinzies returned with several others to Fort Winnebago at Portage, Wisconsin. The first day's journey brought them to Dunklee's Grove, † in the Salt Creek valley of Du Page County. They made a late start on the following day because their horses had strayed, but eventually . . .

We pursued our way through a lovely country of alternate glade and forest, until we reached the Fox River. ‡ The current ran clear and rippling along, and, as we descended the steep bank to the water, the question, so natural to a traveller in an unknown region, presented itself, "Is it fordable?" <sup>175</sup>

Riders on horseback crossed easily: "The bottom was hard and firm until we came near the shore; then it yielded a little. With one step, however, we were each on dry ground." But "the difficulty was, could we get the carriage through?" They chose to ford the carriage at a spot of white gravel, but "the white gravel proved to be a bed of treacherous white clay, which, gleaming through the water, had caused so unfortunate a deception." <sup>175</sup>

The carriage mired; horses floundered and panicked. Eventually everyone gained the west bank, but harnesses were cut and the carriage was damaged:

. . . the pole was twisted to fragments, and there was not so much as a stick on our side of the river with which to replace it.

. . . The first thing was to cut a new pole for the wagon, and for this, the master and his men must recross the river and choose an *iron-tree* <sup>†</sup> out of the forest. <sup>175</sup>

The men found "a suitable young tree" east of the river, but there was little or no wood nearby on the west bank. Some of the horses "were resting themselves after their fatigues under a shady tree" on the east bank; but on the west side, one woman lay "among the long grass of the little prairie which extended along the bank." While the harnesses were being repaired, the party sat "on the grass, under the shade of the only two umbrellas we could muster." <sup>175</sup>

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\* The Hawleys lived close to the junction of the West Branch and the East Branch of the Du Page River, south of Naperville. If the Kinzie party started from the Big Woods at Aurora, they angled slightly south of east to reach the Hawleys. A different trail led east from the south end of Species Grove toward Chicago, crossing the Du Page River at Walker's Grove (Plainfield), several miles south of Mr. and Mrs. Hawley's home.

† Dunklee's Grove was on the east bank of Salt Creek in Addison Township.

‡ The travelers probably crossed the river at or near present-day Algonquin.

<sup>†</sup> Iron-tree = ironwood (*Ostrya virginiana* or *Carpinus caroliniana*).

Suddenly "*Un serpent sonnette!* A rattlesnake!" All sprang to their feet, and "the men assailed the spot it had left with whips, missiles, and whatever would help along the commotion."

So great had been the delay occasioned by all these untoward circumstances, that our afternoon's ride was but a short one, bringing us no farther than the shores of a beautiful sheet of water, now known as Crystal Lake. \* Its clear surface was covered with loons and *Poules d'Eau*, † a species of rail, with which, at certain seasons, the region abounds.

. . . The third day of our journey rose brilliantly clear, like the two preceding ones, and we shaped our course more to the north than we had hitherto done, in the direction of *Big-foot* Lake, now known by the somewhat hackneyed appellation, Lake of Geneva. ‡

. . . The air was balmy, the foliage of the forests fresh and fragrant, the little brooks clear and sparkling—everything in nature spoke the praises of the beneficent Creator.

It is in scenes like this, far removed from the bustle, the strife, and the sin of civilized life, that we most fully realize the presence of the great Author of the Universe. Here can the mind most fully adore his majesty and goodness, for here only is the command obeyed, "Let all the earth keep silence before Him!"

It cannot escape observation that the deepest and most solemn devotion is in the hearts of those who, shut out from the worship of God in temples made with hands, are led to commune with him amid the boundless magnificence that his own power has framed.

. . . As we stopped for our noontide refreshment, and dismounting threw ourselves on the fresh herbage just at the verge of a thicket, we were startled by a tender bleating near us, and presently, breaking its way through the low branches, there came upon us a sweet little dappled fawn, evidently in search of its mother.

. . . We had travelled well this day, and were beginning to feel somewhat fatigued, when, just before sunset, we came upon a ridge overlooking one of the loveliest little dells imaginable. It was an oak opening, and browsing

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\* Crystal Lake is in southeastern McHenry County, about five miles northwest of Algonquin.

† Both coots and grebes were known as *les poules d'eau* ("water hens"). Mrs. Kinzie related the Indian "Story of the Little Rail, or *Poule d'Eau*." The waterbird heroine was frozen by a demon in a posture of perpetual fright: "her back pressed down in the centre, and her head and neck unnaturally stretched forward into the air." This stance is characteristic of grebes rather than coots.

‡ Lake Geneva is four miles north of the state line and 13 miles west of the Fox River.

under the shade of the tall trees which were scattered around were the cattle and horses of the soldiers, who had got thus far on their journey. \* Two or three white tents were pitched in the bottom of the valley, beside a clear stream.<sup>175</sup>

#### Day Four:

We now found ourselves in a much more diversified country than any we had hitherto travelled. Gently swelling hills, lovely valleys, and bright sparkling streams were the features of the landscape. But there was little animate life. Now and then a shout from the leader of the party . . . would call our attention to a herd of deer "loping," as the Westerners say, through the forest; or an additional spur would be given to the horses on the appearance of some small dark object, far distant on the trail before us. But the game invariably contrived to disappear before we could reach it, and it was out of the question to leave the beaten track for a regular hunt.

Soon after mid-day, we descended a long, sloping knoll, and by a sudden turn came full in view of the beautiful sheet of water denominated Gross-pied by the French, *Maunk-suck* by the natives, and by ourselves Big-foot, from the chief whose village overlooked its waters. † Bold, swelling hills jutted forward into the clear blue expanse, or retreated slightly to afford a green, level nook, as a resting-place for a dwelling of man. On the nearer shore stretched a bright, gravelly beach across which coursed here and there a pure, sparkling rivulet to join the larger sheet of water.

On a rising ground at the foot of one of the bold bluffs in the middle distance, a collection of neat wigwams formed, with their surrounding gardens, no unpleasant feature in the picture.<sup>175</sup>

The Kinzies continued some distance past Lake Geneva, choosing to camp at "a beautiful sequestered spot by the side of a clear, sparkling stream." A few lodges were nearby, and "the Indians . . . brought us, as a present, some fine brook trout." ‡<sup>175</sup>

The next morning, Juliette Kinzie mused, "One of the most charming features of this mode of travelling is the joyous, vocal life of the forest at early dawn, when all the feathered tribe come forth to pay their cheerful salutations to the opening day":

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\* The Kinzie party had caught up with soldiers who left Chicago a day or two before them, herding cattle to Green Bay by way of the trail to Portage, Wisconsin.

† Lake Geneva was called Bigfoot Lake.

‡ The brook trout is not thought to be native to streams in this area. Bass were commonly called trout during the 1800s.



The rapid, chattering flourish of the bob-o'-link, the soft whistle of the thrush, the tender coo of the wood-dove, the deep, warbling bass of the grouse, \* the drumming of the partridge, † the melodious trill of the lark, the gay carol of the robin, the friendly, familiar call of the duck and the teal, resound from tree and knoll and lowland . . . .

Birds and flowers and the soft balmy airs of morning! <sup>175</sup>

### **1831-36: *Autobiography of Henry W. Blodgett***

In the spring of 1831 Israel Blodgett explored the Fox and DuPage River valleys, seeking a place to start a new farm. He claimed a site near the fork of the DuPage River, about five miles east of the Fox valley. Seventy-five years later his son Henry related,

During the summer of 1834 about eighty acres of prairie sod on our farm was turned over and sown to winter wheat, and about the first of the next June it was as promising a crop as I ever saw, but on the night of the thirteenth of June a frost came, which struck the wheat field just as the most of it was in blossom, utterly killing the germs, so that only about one-quarter of the field was worth harvesting.

. . . The country about, especially upon the Fox River, filled up very rapidly during the seasons of 1833 and 1834 . . . .

. . . St. Charles, on the Fox River, had become almost a thriving village; a grist mill had been built, and a carding machine started. <sup>46</sup>

Early in 1836 the Blodgett family moved farther up the DuPage valley to Downer's Grove, joining newcomers who displaced the Potawatomi westward to the Fox River:

The portion of Downer's Grove in which our wood lot was located was pretty well stocked with hard maple trees, and for years the Half Day band, ‡ as they were called, of Pottowotamies, had been in the habit of coming there each spring to make sugar, but when the settlers got in and had claimed all the grove, the poor Indians were squeezed out and found no sugar camps nearer than what was known as the "Big Woods," on the Fox River, between Aurora and Batavia, and this was one of the grievances that the old Indians complained of against the white settlers. <sup>46</sup>

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\* Grouse = greater prairie-chicken.

† Partridge = ruffed grouse.

‡ Chief Half Day's village was at the junction of Indian Creek and Des Plaines River in southern Lake County.

## 1831–50: “Recollections of Fifty Years”

The full scope of George Hollenback’s “Recollections” spans from 1831 to 1893—from the year he became the first white person born in Kendall County, to the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

In the summer of 1831 the Hollenback family built a cabin near the edge of the timber along a small tributary of the Fox River. Their home was about two miles south of present-day Silver Springs State Park. The household obtained its water from a large pond, but “during the warm weather the water of the nearby pond became so impure as almost to preclude its use for drinking and culinary purposes.” After a year and a half the Hollenbacks moved a half mile upstream, “where there was abundance of spring water for all purposes.” \* <sup>144</sup>

The Hollenback farm contended with visitations from passenger pigeons:

I remember when quite a small boy of having to go into the fields early in the morning to drive off the wild pigeons from the new sown wheat. The wild pigeons were so numerous, and the flocks flying in the morning so large, that they could take up and carry away all the wheat scattered on two acres of ground in a few minutes—all gone now—never to return—what beautiful, graceful birds. <sup>144</sup>

Another visitor was less frequent but proved longer lasting:

In the year 1837, the seventeen year locusts, † so-called, were much in evidence, and have appeared regularly on time ever since, to my knowledge. <sup>144</sup>

Wild honey bees were a perennial interest:

Among the earliest settlers was Robert Ford . . . . Ford was a very enterprising man of no education, his book learning extending no further than the writing of the letters R.F., which he used in marking the bee trees ‡ found by him and marking his claim lines. <sup>144</sup>

When Federal lands were offered for sale into private ownership, Section 16 of each township was reserved to support public schools. In Kendall County these “school sections” were sold in August of 1838, before the rest of the public land was put on the market. The sale of two school sections in Hollenback’s neighborhood excited much interest because they were partly wooded:

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\* Illinois Route 71 crosses Hollenback Creek at this point.

† Seventeen year locust = seventeen-year cicada (*Magicicada septendecim*), whose broods emerge from the ground every 17 years.

‡ According to the custom of the day, anyone finding a bee hive in a tree could mark the tree and claim the honey and beeswax, no matter who owned the land.

The country was getting well settled up, and to get timber land was the ruling passion. There was some timber land on section 16, Tp. 36., R. 6. E. \* and a few miles south on section 16, Tp. 35., R. 6. E., † had many acres of most excellent timber. <sup>144</sup>

Prairie fires were a threat for a number of years, until grassland was largely plowed and further reduced by pasturage:

The most exciting and alarming events were the prairie fires after the first frost had killed the growth of the grass. After starting one of these fires, whether arising by accident or otherwise, if atmospheric conditions were right, would run with the rapidity of a race horse and would travel many miles in a very short time, and there was little chance for anything to escape in the line of its advance until it reached a lake or a river; everything in its way was doomed to destruction—houses, barns, stockyards and fences. On each side of the line traveled by the fire it would burn away slowly until the whole range of the country in the vicinity would be burned over. On some nights in the autumn when there was no moon, and the heavens were overcast by light clouds, many prairie fires would be reflected upon such clouds. When a boy, I counted as many as fifty fires at one time so reflected, the effect of which was very pleasing if they were not too near by to cause anxiety. Early settlers protected themselves by ploughing wide and numerous furrows around their fields and their stockyards. Only one of these fires caused loss of property on my father's plantation, and that was occasioned by causes that could hardly be guarded against. Through the center of the farm meandered a small stream; in the fall when the usual fires passed over the country, the little stream was beyond its usual flow, leaving a strip a few feet wide, and some places as much as a rod in width, in which the dead grass had escaped. In the spring of 1847, one day the wind blew fresh from the south and brought a fire that had been caused by some neighbors a mile or two away down to the banks of the little stream, and in a few minutes all the prairie lying out or enclosed had been over-run by the fire, burning up rails and three of four stacks of oats belonging to a tenant. By good luck there happened to be in the woods beyond the rails and other fence materials to build a good many rods of new fence, a mile or more, and the men who started the fire generously came with two or three teams and helped to rebuild the fence; they were poor men and any consideration for damage caused by the fire was out of the question. <sup>144</sup>

George Hollenback remarked about the expansiveness and quietude of the prairie—and the great distance over which noise could travel:

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\* Section 16, Township 36 North, Range 6 East includes Millington and a segment of Hollenback Creek.

† Section 16, Township 35 North, Range 6 East included a large part of Big Grove.

To describe the solitude of the country, as I remember it in my early years, is impossible. I can only state that, after starting from my father's house and riding in a southeast direction, there was no house, barn or fence to impede the progress of any one who wished to travel seemingly to the horizon. I remember well the summers of 1839-40. It was nothing new then to hear blasting on the canal route at Lockport . . . , there being no buildings or trees to prevent the transmission of the sound. \* A few years ago, in the construction of the drainage canal, much more powerful explosives were used, and my residence in Aurora was much nearer than it was in the early days; yet I do not remember of hearing a single explosion during the time occupied in excavating that waterway. † 144

#### Recollections of a grand circle hunt:

About 1842-43, and for a few years prior thereto, the prairie wolves became very destructive in the killing of young domestic animals, particularly the sheep, so the people in various localities organized a number of "wolf hunts." The inhabitants, within a circle of perhaps seventy-two miles, would be organized for the purpose of having a wolf hunt, having for a center a flag staff placed as near as could be ascertained within a circumference of twenty-four miles. A preliminary meeting would be called at which a captain would be selected, with lieutenants and assistants. I remember when one of these hunts was organized. The center pole was erected near the residence of Daniel Platt, then and now called Plattville. ‡ . . . It was ordered that persons living on the outside of the ring should start as soon as it was light enough to see, and pursue their way leisurely toward the center by any method they should wish to employ, so that they could arrive in sight of the flag or center pole as early as 11 A.M. . . . many wolves and deer were observed making their way along the inside of the circle, and, when within a half mile of the flag pole, many deer and wolves were apparently in great distress. The firing at the frightened animals had now become incessant, and somewhat dangerous to the hunters. Finally the deer could not stand the excitement and a number of them broke through the line and escaped, some of them being killed as well as many of the wolves, but the time has so long passed that I have forgotten the number of each. These hunts were so frequent that the number of wolves became scarce and the most of the deer were frightened quite out of the country. . . . Occasionally, as late as 1846, deer made their appearance in the neighborhood, and were frequently shot by hunters in that locality, and as late as 1851-52, in the woods, bluffs, along the Illinois river, and south of it in Grundy County, and in the northern part of what is now Kankakee County, they were still to be found. I accompanied

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\* Hollenback could hear explosives used to excavate the Illinois and Michigan Canal at Lockport, 25 miles due east of his home.

† The Chicago Drainage Canal approaches within 15 miles of Aurora.

‡ Plattville was amid an immense prairie, seven miles south and two miles east of Yorkville.

hunters twice in the autumn of 1848, and once or twice later, the party having very good luck each time. <sup>144</sup>

#### The great rainstorms of 1850:

On the afternoon and night of the 18th of August, and the night of the 19th, occurred two of the severest electrical storms and precipitations ever experienced in this part of Illinois. The first storm came up in the middle of Sunday afternoon and continued without interruption until sunrise the next morning. There was scarcely a minute's intermission in the electrical discharges, and the thunder and rainfall were marvelous. Of course there was no rain gauge by which the rain could be measured, but a water pail, standing away from the house or other building, would be found full of water. Monday night the storm began about nine o'clock and continued until after daylight Tuesday morning. Grain and hay in the stacks were beaten down and badly damaged, as well as in the shock. . . . Much of the hay in the lower land was flooded and was carried away and was lost, the grain had ripened early. There was no more rain again until late in the fall. <sup>144</sup>

#### 1832: "A Story of the Indian Outbreak of 1832"

Sarah Hollenback was 10 years old in the spring of 1832, when Black Hawk's men raided the sparse new farming community on the south side of the Fox River in Kendall County. She was interviewed about the event 61 years later.

The Hollenback home was along Hollenback Creek southeast of present-day Millbrook. When the Hollenbacks were warned about advancing Indians on May 16, "Father was out, not far away, burning log heaps, preparing to set out an orchard." The family loaded a wagon, joined neighbors, and fled up the valley toward Walker's Grove (Plainfield). Their trail approximated the alignment of present-day Illinois Route 71 southeast of Yorkville: "... about two and a half miles from home the wagon got mired down in a slough, which made it necessary to remain right there until morning." <sup>142</sup>

Sarah's father George was chased by Indians but he took refuge at the northwest edge of Big Grove, \* "among trees thickly standing," where he slept beneath "one low and bushy tree." Later he was caught out on the open prairie during the day, but he escaped the notice of 25 or 30 Indians who "stopped pretty near" where he was lying: "... his dark clothing was his salvation, for the present at any rate. The prairie grass had lately been burned off leaving the ground very black." <sup>142</sup>

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\* Big Grove, the salient feature of Big Grove Township, was southeast of Newark.

## 1832: Diary of James C. Steele

James Steele was a soldier from Indiana during the Black Hawk War. His group of mounted rangers crossed the Fox River valley from east to west in August of 1832. They forded the river above Sheridan in La Salle County. Mr. Steele recorded his passage across the Fox valley in a daybook. On the morning of August 13 the troops set out from Walker's Grove (Plainfield):

On the 13th. we took up the line of march and a short distance from the road was a town Winebages Indians \* almost starved to death. We marched to the Farm Grove † and in-camp ‡ where we saw some of the savages had broke into their house and destroyed their property.

On the 14th. we went on and crossed Fox River and went on to the Pawpaw Grove ‡ and in-camp for 2 days, there was a considerable Indian town vacated.<sup>322</sup>

## 1832: "John S. Tilfords day Book"

John Tilford was with the same company of Indiana Mounted Rangers as James Steele (quoted in the previous section). Heading west on August 13th from the future site of Plainfield on the Du Page River . . .

come 10 miles to spring in the parie ¶ 16 miles to Hohenback Grove  
. . . camp here prity plase

. . . 14th. . . . come 6 miles to fox river crost here at Someniook vilage §  
several wig woms here . . . 2 miles to a creek \*\* crost went up holow stald  
evry few rods come to a fine spring went up the hollow a peas further one  
wagon broak down . . . here we was in a savage country . . . traveld til mid  
knight or after come to A grove . . . here this plas is cald Pawpaw vilage ††  
there is great many wigwams here curiosities &C.<sup>322</sup>

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\* This Potawatomi (not Winnebago) town was on the Du Page River at Plainfield.

† Farm Grove was better known as Hollenback's Grove. It was south of present-day Silver Springs State Park.

‡ Paw Paw Grove was astride the DeKalb-Lee County line at the head of Indian Creek, a major tributary of the Fox.

¶ The roadside stop known as "The Springs" was in the Aux Sable valley at Plattville.

§ Somonauk village probably was on an island in the Fox River, upstream from the mouth of Somonauk Creek.

\*\* The creek is Somonauk Creek.

†† The village was at Paw Paw Grove.

## 1832: *Memories of Shabbona*

Chief Shabbona \* had homes at a number of favored places in the upper Illinois River valley. His principal dwelling-place was in the Fox valley at Shabbona's Grove. This woods was at the head of Indian Creek, far out in the prairie of southwestern De Kalb County. Several miles down the creek was another Potawatomi village, headed by Meaeus. Nehemiah Matson's biography of Shabbona describes a conflict between Meaeus' villagers and white farmers who had moved to the Indian Creek valley about 12 miles north of Ottawa as early as 1830:

On Big Indian creek, † near the head of the timber, ‡ was a small Indian village, consisting of about twenty lodges and seventy or eighty inhabitants. The chief of this village, named Meau-eus, was . . . very envious toward the settlers . . . . . A number of settlers had made claims and built cabins on Indian creek, below the village, which was a great annoyance to Meau-eus, as he believed the sound of their axes would drive away the deer.

In the spring of 1832 a dam was built across Indian creek, § about six miles below the village, by William Davis, which prevented the fish from ascending the stream. The old chief became very angry at this, considering it a trespass on his rights, and threatened to tear it down.

. . . Each day the Indians of the village were in the habit of coming down below the dam to fish, and on one occasion they threatened to injure Davis' family if it was not removed so that the fish could come up to the village as formerly. § 192

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\* Chief Shabbona's name has been spelled many ways. In addition to his book-length *Memories of Shabbona*, Nehemiah Matson wrote a brief biographical notice of this illustrious personage. <sup>193</sup> Shabbona Lake State Park includes a remnant of Shabbona's Grove.

† Indian Creek is sometimes called Big Indian Creek to distinguish it from one of its tributaries, Little Indian Creek.

‡ The head of the timber was the farthest upstream point along Indian Creek where trees extended into the prairie, in the vicinity of Earlville.

§ The dam was built to power a sawmill.

§ Stevens' *Black Hawk War* provides details:

A numerous band of Pottowatomies, under their chief, Meau-eus, lived in their village on this creek, six miles above the dam, subsisting largely on the fish caught in that little stream. Meau-eus, having been always a fine hater of the whites, grew excessively angry at this obstruction, and in an attempt to destroy it resistance followed, in which the Indians claimed one of the band was unmercifully flogged by Davis, a man of powerful physique. For final adjustment, the controversy was carried before Shabbona, who, in conjunction with Wau-ban-se, concluded an arrangement whereby the Indians were persuaded for the future to fish below the dam, which involved but little additional labor and which they did for a time with apparent good will, but beneath the surface a hatred lodged . . . . <sup>284</sup>

When Black Hawk and his followers moved into the region in May of 1832, Shabbona urged the whites at Indian Creek leave immediately. William Davis and 14 others who stayed were killed, and two girls were taken prisoner. Nehemiah Matson reported that "thick timber" along Indian Creek and "thick underbrush" near the Davis cabin made it possible for assailants to surprise the Davises and their neighbors. \*

### **1833: *A Tour through North America***

At the end of summer in 1833, Patrick Shirreff, a Scot farmer, walked from Chicago nearly to Peoria. In a book published two years later, Mr. Shirreff recalled "the landscape seen from the heights above Ottawa on the river Illinois":

Here extensive prairies are seen stretching on every hand, with beautiful undulating surfaces, and adorned with masses of forest of every shape and size. The junction of the Fox River with the Illinois is in the foreground, and their banks are either forest or prairie, in keeping with the surrounding surface. Both rivers are of moderate size, and the flowing of their limpid waters imparts life to the landscape, which combines all the soft beauties of prairie scenery, and excites associations connected with human happiness.<sup>270</sup>

### **1833: *A Visitor to Chicago in Indian Days***

In August of 1833 Colbee Benton, an adventurer from Vermont, arrived in Chicago. He wrote a day-by-day journal of his journey:

*Monday Aug 19.* . . . Previous to my arriving here I had heard that the Indian Agent at this place was going to send out runners to inform the Indians belonging to the Pottawattami tribe that their annual pension or payment would be paid to them the tenth day of September. † I immediately made up my mind to go

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\* White residents of the Fox valley were warned by Shabbona and his relatives more than once at the onset of the Black Hawk War. Nehemiah Matson set the scene for the first alarm:

The 15th of May was a clear, bright day; the sun shining in all its brilliancy, without a cloud in the sky. The prairies were now green with early spring grass, intermixed with blue-bells, violets, and other May flowers of various hues. The forest trees were in full leaf, and the balmy air was fragrant with blossoms of wild plums and crab apples. All nature appeared clothed in her beautiful garment, while the surroundings were calculated to fill the pioneer's heart with bright prospects of the future.<sup>192</sup>

We are indebted to Nehemiah Matson for recording a wealth of historical information that would not have otherwise been preserved—but the above florid prose is fancy, not eyewitness reporting. Matson's portrayal of the natural landscape is an example of the manner in which many historians have fabricated scenes from Nature as a backdrop for human drama.

† Tribes were given annual payments under the terms of treaties with the United States of America. In September of 1833 representatives of the Potawatomi, Ottawa, and Ojibwe nations



with one of the runners, provided I should not be obliged to wait too long.  
... I called upon the Agent . . . . He said I should find it rather a hard journey, but if I wished to go, and was determined to go, he would recommend a young man by the name of Louis Wilmot, \* a half Indian . . . .

... I have concluded to wait till Wednesday and take my Indian tramp and have informed the Agent that I should prefer visiting the Indians in the state of Illinois, to which he answered that the young man would be ready on Wednesday. He laughed at me, saying that I should find harder times than I expected, and his pretty wife laughed, no doubt thinking it was a wild goose chase. But I had a great curiosity to see the Indians at home and far away from the whites, and I was unwilling to let so good an opportunity pass without improving it. And I longed to tread on ground that had never been inhabited by civilized mortals. I wanted to be travelling in the wilderness of the west among the savages where I could be an eye witness to their mode of living.

... *Wednesday Aug 21.* ... I called upon the Agent and was introduced to my new companion, Louis Wilmot. ... And after draining a couple of bottles of beer, we left Chicago . . . .<sup>38</sup>

Benton and Ouilmette rode north along the Lake Michigan shore, staying the night at Wilmette. The next day they headed toward the Fox River, crossing the Des Plaines at or near present-day Ryerson Conservation Area in Lake County. They stopped at the village of Met-tay-wah, † near the junction of Indian Creek and the Des Plaines. After a dinner of pork, beans, and corn, Benton "took the gun and went out just before dark and tried to find some pigeons, ‡ but was not successful." The next morning they rode away from the Des Plaines River and continued toward the Fox:

*Friday Aug 23.* We rose about daybreak, . . . and commenced our journey . . . .

... We passed through a little grove onto a prairie and travelled north about two miles; then northwesterly about seven miles to a beautiful spring on the prairie, where we rested and refreshed ourselves . . . . About one mile from this we came to a little brook on which was some very heavy timber, and near it was a little lake. ¶ After travelling about eight miles farther, across small prairies and

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met with Federal agents in Chicago, and they agreed to cede about a half million acres in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan to the United States.

\* Louis Ouilmette was the son of Archange and Antoine Ouilmette, whose reservation was the beginning of the city of Wilmette.

† The nearby village of Mettawa perpetuates the name of this Potawatomi chief.

‡ Pigeon = passenger pigeon.

¶ Benton and Ouilmette were on the divide between the Fox and Des Plaines Rivers. Most likely the lake they encountered is Gray's Lake (at present-day Grayslake). The little brook with

through oak openings \* and the land not so good, we rested again at a beautiful little lake. The Indians had had an encampment here but they had moved to some other place and we were almost at loss what course to pursue. We took the saddles from our horses and turned them out to feed . . . . I employed myself about changing my stockings, which had become wet when riding through the high prairie grass in the morning dew. It was like wading through water, for my pantaloons and feet were completely soaked and I could not contrive any way to prevent it. I had another opportunity to get wet here. The horses being rather dry and the flies plaguing them induced them to wade into the lake and I could not get them out by any persuasion. Therefore I was obliged to go in after them.

I took the gun and walked round a little point of the lake in quest of game, and when I returned the horses had disappeared. . . . after hunting some time we found them about half of a mile from the lake, and we determined not to turn them out again without hobbling them as it is rather dangerous for they might wander away but a short distance and we should never be able to find them again. And then to be in a wilderness so far from home would make us feel and look rather sorry if we had lost our horses.

I saw a number of loons in the lake but could not get a shot at them. There is a small island in the lake which the Indians said was covered with small pines, † but I was not able to distinguish them, it was so far from the shore. The lake was surrounded by oak openings, had a stony bottom and the water looked very clear indeed.

From this lake we travelled about one mile to another and a larger one. ‡ Here was the remains of an Indian encampment recently deserted, and we were as much at a loss which course to pursue as before, and finally more so, on

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heavy timber may be the uppermost reach of a branch of Mill Creek, a tributary of the Des Plaines. James Getz, who edited this part of Benton's journal, concluded that the brook is Squaw Creek, which flows to the Fox River. But Ouilmette and Benton probably followed the Mukwonago Trail, an established cross-country path that led from Indian Creek to Jones Point, bypassing Squaw Creek and avoiding a big wetland in its headwaters. This trail went across or very close to the location of the present-day community of Prairie Crossing, where Colbee Benton Drive is named in the adventurer's honor.

\* Oak openings are defined in a footnote on page 150.

† Benton's description identifies this body of water as Cedar Lake (at present-day Lake Villa). Cedar Lake is less than three miles east of the Fox River. The island in Cedar Lake is Cedar Island. A 1921 botanical survey notes "large numbers of red cedar trees on the more exposed shores" of the lake, but the report does not mention pines.<sup>315</sup> Although Colbee Benton was familiar with tamaracks (*Larix laricina*), he did not mention them at Cedar Lake. Tamaracks reportedly became established in the bog at Cedar Lake some time about 1906 to 1909.<sup>315</sup>

‡ Their path struck the east shore of either Petite Lake or Columbia Bay on Fox Lake.

account of the number of trails which forked off to the right and left, but fortunately took the direct one. This lake was connected by a little stream, \* through a marsh, with another lake, and it was also connected with some other large marshes and small ponds or lakes which are great places for game. We saw a large flock of wild geese, but we could not get a shot at them. Also saw some ducks and loons, and when we crossed the little stream between the lakes we saw some monstrous pickerel and other large fish. These lakes are surrounded by groves of oak and it is very pleasant about them. The land is not so good as the large prairies.

After crossing the little stream, which was somewhat difficult, we had a low marsh of mire and water to go through for about thirty rods. Louis went forward and very soon his horse was flouncing around and down he went, and Louis was mid-leg deep in the mire. I followed and soon found myself in a worse predicament. The horse flounced, his forefeet sunk in the mud, the saddle partly turned and off I went, with one foot hanging in the stirrup without the power to extricate myself immediately, and my back, and finally my body nearly covered with mud. I then thought "*attitude was everything*." I succeeded in getting up and getting my pony onto a little more solid foundation, and not liking the idea of wading through such a deep mire, I got onto my pony again; but I had not proceeded one rod before I was off again. I almost gave up ever getting across, it grew so much worse. Louis kept moving; sometimes his horse would sink into the mud and it was with the greatest exertion that he could extricate himself. After waiting until I saw Louis safe over, I took my pony by the bridle and led the way, and was soon safe and sound on the other side; and such dirty, muddy-looking fellows were never seen before, I presume. I could not have been hired to have gone back for fifty dollars, and I rejoiced to find ourselves safe, but my rejoicing was of short duration, for we found this dry spot but an island surrounded by tremendous marshes. While shooting some pigeons, which were very plenty on this little island, we accidentally perceived an Indian wigwam across the marsh from near the place we had just left, but we determined not to go back at any rate. We found that the Indians had had an encampment on this ground and it looked as if they had but just left it. We followed the trail to the opposite side where we had a view of some wigwams on the mainland, but there was an impenetrable barrier which we could not surmount without assistance from other sources besides our own.

On our right and left were two extensive marshes or lakes grown up with high grass, and through the centre was a river which I learned from the Indians to be the head of Fox River, which runs into the Illinois. In front was a little neck of water about sixty rods across, which connected the two marshes. On the further side was high grass and a muddy bottom and the water ten feet deep most of the

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\* This is the channel between Petite Lake and Fox Lake.

way and some places more. After shooting a large sand crane \* Louis climbed a large tree and yelled "Indian" and was answered very soon, but it was nearly an hour before an Indian appeared with his canoe. He got almost to us before we saw him; the grass was so high, the way so crooked, and he came so still.

. . . We paddled out into the stream, and we were obliged then to turn to the left and follow down some distance before we could strike for the shore on account of the high grass . . . .

. . . We met two Indians on the shore horseback, who led the way to the village which is situated in the timber land near and in sight of the great marsh. † Here we took up our quarters for the night. Hobbled our horses and turned them into the woods.

. . . We had killed six pigeons and a prairie hen ‡ in the course of the day which were finely cooked . . . , and I can say that I never tasted anything of the kind so sweet, so tender, and so nice and so beautifully cooked.

. . . we laid ourselves down under a large tree a little distance from the wigwam. The mosquitoes troubled me so much that I was obliged to wear gloves, and tie a handkerchief over my head and face to keep them off, but that did not wholly protect me from their voracious appetite. And what was quite as troublesome and aggravating, it did not affect in the least their *eternal singing*.

It was a beautiful evening. The moon was shining bright, and very soon all was "*solemn stillness*" save the hooting of the owl and the occasional whistling of the raccoon.

. . . *Saturday Aug 24.* I was awaked very early by the squawking of the ducks and other fowl, and could not sleep any more. It is the greatest place for game here that I ever saw. The ducks and wild geese and loons, sand cranes, and other fowls are continually passing this place. It seems to be their only thoroughfare. And these great marshes and the little streams and lakes must contain a great quantity of that cash article, *Fur*. It must be quite a home for the hunter—such a home as I should like, were it not so remote from friends and the comforts of civilized life. But I begin to think it rather hard work to be an Indian. To be a hunter is the same, and I think I shall give up the idea of being a hunter.

As soon as daylight I went in pursuit of the horses and found them about one quarter of a mile from the village. They had lived well, having found plenty of

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\* Sand crane = sandhill crane.

† The village was on the west side of the Fox River, next to either Grass Lake or Nippersink Lake.

‡ Prairie hen = greater prairie-chicken.

the wild bean, \* which the horses in this country are very fond of, and which will fat them very quick indeed. We rigged our horses and left . . . .

Soon after leaving the village we came onto a beautiful and very rich prairie, covered with grass and flowers, and surrounded by oak openings. † Passed across the prairie which was about five miles and then travelled about seven or eight miles through oak openings of not quite so good land to two lakes, ‡ each about two miles square, divided only by a strip of land about four rods wide, and connected by a little stream. The trail we were following passed across this strip of land between the lakes and it seemed to me like passing through the Red Sea on dry land. On each side was a dam or embankment formed by nature or art, which prevented the water from rushing in upon us, and I thought it quite a curiosity. It is covered with oak, maple, butternut, and basswood; saw a great many of the little frost grapes. We made a stop for dinner . . . . Saw some Indians in a canoe crossing the lake. . . . Found the bones of a large buck . . . . Saw a great quantity of small shells washed ashore, which lay in little windrows like sand.

In about half a mile we passed a little bay in the lake, where we saw a large flock of ducks, but they were so shy that we could not shoot any of them. Soon came out on a rich and beautiful prairie which was about three miles across. After travelling a short distance in the oak openings, which were very good land, we came to the most splendid lake, and the largest that I have seen since I left Chicago. ¶ It has a smooth, stony bottom, clear, pure water, and it is surrounded by high banks covered with the heavy prairie grass and the great variety of flowers which are everywhere to be found in this country. And the tall, scattering oaks with their rich, beautiful, and comfortable shades, added the finish to this charming and lovely spot. I became so deeply in love with it, and so much interested with its romantic and delightful appearance, that I felt quite unwilling to leave; and I did not, until I had selected a location for my wigwam, which was a gentle elevation in the beautiful grove and overlooked the calm and pure waters of the lake. It seemed the sweetest, the most calm, the most peaceful and retired spot that I ever saw.

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\* The wild bean might be *Apios americana* (groundnut) or any of a number of related leguminous vines.

† Benton and Ouilmette headed northwest on the highland between the Fox River and a tributary, Nippersink Creek. A few years later this prairie was taken over by English immigrants and was named English Prairie (see page 99).

‡ The two lakes are Elizabeth Lake and Marie Lake. Elizabeth Lake straddles the state line; Marie Lake is entirely in Wisconsin.

¶ After traveling west a few miles, Ouilmette and Benton had come to Lake Geneva. They were still in the Fox River watershed, about four to six miles north of the McHenry County line.

Having admired this Elyseum for some time without feeling any more contented with my situation, I concluded to break the enchantment which chained me to the spot, and proceed on my journey. I succeeded, and soon after leaving the lake passed two very extensive marshes on our right, and in the center of each was a cluster of tamaracks which looked like the spruce swamps in N. England. They were much more delightful and beautiful on account of their rarity and situation, and I could but think what a view for a painter of landscapes, the marsh extending as far as the eye could see, covered with the thick high grass, and the little cluster of tall and bright green tamaracks in the centre, and the marsh surrounded by groves of oak extending on here and there. Altogether the view was most splendid and far beyond the powers of a painter to describe.

We passed some other small marshes and two small lakes in the course of three or four miles, and then travelled over heavy swells of land covered with the oak timber. \* Crossed a little stream of water and found the swells much more abrupt. It looked as if there had been an earthquake which had thrown the earth up into high knolls, one of which I ascended, and from the top of it I beheld the most splendid view of land that can be imagined. In front was a low prairie or valley which extended beyond the power of the eye, and on each side the elevated land was covered with the green grass and the scattered oaks with here and there a little prairie to make out a grand variety.

The spot seemed to me as if it had *once* been a vast and extensive lake, and had been destroyed by some natural cause which left only considerable of a stream that passed through the centre of the valley; which stream I afterwards learned from the Indians to be a branch of the Rock River.<sup>38</sup>

Louis Ouilmette and Colbee Benton had crossed to the west side of the Fox River valley, west of present-day Elkhorn, Wisconsin. They were looking west across the basin that gathers the headwaters of Turtle Creek, which flows to the Rock River:

We crossed part of the prairie and forded the stream, and after rising a little hill . . . two little Indian boys . . . guided us to the Indian village which was but a short distance. It is the largest village I have seen. Situated on three little hills which centre into one hollow, where their corn fields are. The land is immensely rich and their corn looks well.

We stopped at the principal part of the village, from which I had a view of the other two parts, situated on two hills about one fourth of a mile distant.<sup>†</sup> I have forgotten the number of wigwams, but all taken together it is the largest village

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\* Their route took them northward around the east end of Lake Geneva. They then headed generally north and west.

<sup>†</sup> James Getz: "The topographical features locate this village in Section 21, Richmond Township, Walworth County."<sup>38</sup>

I have seen except the one on the St. Joseph River in Michigan. It seemed quite like a New England village.

... We rode up to the village .... Very soon the Indians gathered around so thick that we could hardly see out. ... presently an Indian brought us some fresh beef ....<sup>38</sup>

The two men headed back to the Fox River valley:

After resting a short time we proceeded, although it was nearly sunset. Here we changed our direction and travelled nearly south. Soon came onto a beautiful and rich prairie. It was rather small, in the form of a square, and surrounded by the handsomest oaks that I have yet seen. Also passed through some splendid groves, the trees very tall and slim and without a limb for a great many feet.

Arrived at a little prairie containing about twenty acres and camped on the border of it, near a little stream of water that ran through it. \* Hobbled our horses and turned them out; then made a fire with the limbs from a tree which had been shivered by lightning and prepared for the night. ... Roasted a prairie hen which we had just killed, for the dog ....

... I concluded to lie down and therefore prepared myself against the encroachments of the troublesome mosquitoes.

... But at a distance we could distinctly hear the lonely howling of the wolves. Sometimes they would seem to be very near, and the owls accompanied them with their hoarse hooting, and so it continued until daylight. By the way, the mosquitoes joined the music of this interesting night with their eternal singing, and I was obliged to keep time for them. I never before have passed a night so interestingly, and so pleasantly ....

*Sunday Aug 25.* Soon after daylight we left our very peaceable and comfortable encampment and proceeded on our journey. Travelled southerly. Passed across small prairies and through beautiful groves of oak timber for about ten miles. We then came in sight of some lakes on our left. † Very soon we descended from the high and rolling prairies down to a level with the lakes. Passed through timber land, timber consisting of maple, basswood, whitewood, ‡ and butternut. Land very rich. Crossed two beautiful little streams of pure water

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\* The camp was along Turtle Creek or a branch of it.

† Evidently Benton was referring to Delavan Lake and the marshy lake basin north of Delavan Lake.

‡ In the 1800s the names "whitewood" and "basswood" were both given to the same species of tree (*Tilia americana*, American basswood), but Benton seems to have been referring to two different kinds of tree. Another "whitewood," the tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), does not occur in the region.

which run into the lakes, and near the mouth of one of them we saw a cornfield, and with considerable difficulty in crossing a low, wet piece of prairie we reached the cornfield. Here we found two wigwams . . . . . We stopped here . . . , and then passed about two miles from this, through heavy timberland and through some very bad mudholes to Bigfoot's Village. Here we made a stop of about two hours . . . .

. . . The village is situated at the south end of a lake or lakes, which are about six miles long and divided only by a little neck of land. \* The lakes are very handsome and the situation, which is a gradual descent to the lake, is beautiful, and the land about is very rich. . . . After eating some boiled corn . . . we left and passed a short distance under a little bluff, and then rose onto a large and grand prairie. In a southerly direction there was not a tree to be seen, but on each side the oak openings seemed to be its boundaries, although here and there was a little neck of a prairie which would connect monstrous prairies, and there did not seem to be any end to the prairies. They extended in all directions, and many of them were nearly surrounded by the most splendid oak groves.

We travelled about ten miles on this large prairie.<sup>38</sup>

As Ouilmette and Benton rode south from Lake Geneva across this prairie, they left the Fox River drainage and entered the valley of the Kishwaukee. Two days later on August 27, they were at Ontac's village near present-day Sycamore in DeKalb County. They continued south and west to the Fox valley:

We left Ontac's village without a trail and travelled about twenty-five miles across a very rich and beautiful rolling prairie. On a large swell in the prairie I had a view of the prairie on fire, set by the Indians, but it did not make much blaze, more of a smoke. And I also had a view of Pawpaw Grove and Holl . . . † Sho-ma-naw-quā. ‡ The DuPage River the timber on it. ¶ . . . §—Shoumly's \*\* Grove, where we soon arrived and found the old man at home. . . . He is a

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\* Benton was back at Lake Geneva, but this time he was at the west end instead of the east.

† The manuscript is torn, removing part of a word that begins with "Holl."

‡ Sho-ma-naw-quā = Somonauk Creek, which courses through the grand prairie south of Sycamore to enter the Fox River at Sheridan. As one early resident noted, the name of Somonauk "in old times could be spelt in any way that first came to hand."<sup>169</sup> "Somonauk" can be traced back to Algonquian names for the pawpaw, spelled variously as *assimine*, *açimine*, *racemina*, etc. The name in the South evolved into *jasmine*.<sup>197</sup> The Algonquian names show forth in the scientific name of the pawpaw, *Asimina triloba*.

¶ Benton's mention of the DuPage River is unaccountable. He could not have seen as far as the forest along the DuPage.

§ A small part of the manuscript is torn away at this point.

\*\* Benton spelled Shabbona's name "Shoumly" and "Shoumla."



great friend to the whites . . . . . He has a reservation of land from government of two sections of fine rich land. It is a grove of timber situated on a little elevation in the prairie. In front is a large & extensive prairie with a stream of water passing through the centre of it.

. . . I had got almost tired travelling among the Indians, and I had made up my mind to leave Louis as soon as I thought I could reach a white settlement in safety. I enquired the distance to a white settlement. Old Shoumly said that an Indian could travel it in so long a time, which would probably make it about twenty five miles. It was then about two o'clock afternoon, and I was quite undetermined whether to undertake a journey of twenty five miles without a track or trail to the mouth of the Fox River or keep round with Louis. . . . I concluded to bid them all goodbye and start off alone. The old chief marked out the direction which was a smoke that rose above the trees on Indian Creek, named the objects which I should find if I was right, and . . . I bid them all goodbye and departed alone and without a trail.

The distance across the prairie to . . . \* is about twelve miles. I followed the direction of the smoke and of two small groves; near the first passed the road from Chicago to Galena. † Very soon after passing the groves the smoke disappeared and I was left without a direction and wholly unable to form one, for I could not see back. I however selected a tree across the prairie and trusted to fortune for the correctness of the course. I found it very difficult to follow my object. Sometimes I was going a different direction before I was aware of it, but it was not strange because in passing through a little hollow I could not see anything about me but prairie, and above me the deep blue sky. However, I succeeded in reaching the timber land on the creek about sunset. ‡

I proceeded directly to the bank of the creek and there found an old Indian trail. Not knowing whether I had struck the creek too high or too low I . . . determined to pursue the safe course, and follow the trail down the creek. About two miles from the place where I took the trail I passed an old log house, deserted last summer in the time of the Indian war; also passed an old Indian camp and came to the house where was the scene of the horrible massacre of fifteen persons last summer by the Sac and the Fox Indians. ¶

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\* The manuscript is torn; the missing text might be "Indian Creek."

† This was the Great Sauk Trail, later to become Chicago Road. Colbee Benton crossed it rather than following it to Chicago because he wanted to reach the white populace at the mouth of the Fox River.

‡ Indian Creek would lead Benton south to the Fox River.

¶ Benton had found the abandoned settlement of the Davis family and their neighbors. They had been attacked the previous year.

... After a hasty survey of this place I proceeded to cross the creek, which I easily effected, but found it very difficult and somewhat dangerous gaining the prairie on the opposite side, on account of the many deep holes worn in the low ground by the water, which were hid from me by the high and thick weeds. I could not walk very well, and I hardly dared to ride, but by walking and riding I succeeded in getting onto the dry prairie, and was fortunate to find myself at the cornfield which was pointed out to me by old Shoumla. Daylight had disappeared, and I was quite undetermined whether to venture on to the prairie and pursue my course to the mouth of the Fox River, a distance of twelve miles, or to camp down where I was . . . . But I was not in a quandary a long time before my good fortune directed me to a trail which passed down the creek. I was not long in making my choice which course, for I knew that the trail would lead on to the mouth of Indian Creek and from there to the mouth of the Fox, altho' a roundabout way; but I did not know where the broad prairie would lead me. I had followed the trail but about three miles before I came to a log house and I am sure I was very happy to find it, and very happy to see a white man again and one that I could talk with.

... *Wednesday Aug. 28.* . . . After breakfast I went with the young men to a saw mill which they had just put into operation on Indian stream. Wandered about the mill two or three hours, and found it surrounded by a good lot of hard timber, some white wood, ash, and bass wood, but upon the whole I thought the mill and privilege rather *small fish*. The whole fall is only about three feet and a half, and the saw moves as if it was just breathing its last. However, they think they are doing well, and they probably *are*, for when they get their lumber to the mouth of the Fox River, a distance of twelve miles, it will bring them twelve dollars and fifty cents per thousand. \*

... I left about eleven o'clock and passed down the creek a short distance, then struck across to the falls on the Fox, about four miles from where it empties into the Illinois. Prairie all the way and very rich—a great quantity of plums which are very good indeed. Saw two ugly looking rattlesnakes; one had five rattles, the other three, which made one eight, the other five years of age, as they do not have any rattles until they are three years old.

There is a small grist mill at the falls on the Fox River, and one saw mill. There is also another grain mill building which will be completed next season. There is plenty of water for any purpose. . . . The bottom of it at the falls is solid, smooth lime stone. † The channel having been cut or worn by the water (leaving the bank about six feet above the water) which is quite a curiosity. There are many holes worn into the bank which make it appear like swallow

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\* That is, per thousand board feet.

† The rock is St. Peter sandstone.

holes in a sand bank, only they are larger, many of them large enough to admit a man. There are high bluffs each side of the river at the falls, but a little below you have to rise but a few feet to get onto the prairie. I followed a little down the river until I reached the low prairie, and then struck across to the mouth of the Fox.

When I arrived in sight of the Illinois and the mouth of the Fox River, I thought that I had never beheld anything so splendid before. I felt a peculiar sensation when viewing so much magnificence. It seemed to me the whole world centered to this very spot & I was astonished with the richness and splendour of the scene. I stopped my horse upon a little eminence on the prairie to admire this beautiful, rich, and extensive view. Immediately in front and about one mile distant, was the laid-out town of Ottawa, with a few scattering log houses situated on each side of the Illinois and the Fox. On the south side of the Illinois is a high bluff about fifty feet which extends as far up and down the river as the eye could see. The land this side is a low level prairie about fifteen feet above the water in the river, which extends back more than a mile; then the land gradually rises about twenty feet onto a large, dry prairie which runs to Indian Creek north. This rise is covered with a beautiful grove of oaks and hickory, and has a most lovely appearance. The prairies are covered with tall grass and beautiful flowers, and the whole together is beyond description. The prairies from the north seemed to have been growing larger and more beautiful, and had been rolling on, clothed with their rich and beautiful garbs to this very spot, here to display all their magnificence and splendour at one view; a view rich with the beauty and the loveliness of nature, such a view as would be beyond the power of a painter to imitate—or beyond the power of the most distinguished writer to describe.

The beautiful Illinois with its high and imposing bluffs on the south side, can be seen for a great distance, above and below, and on the north side can be seen the Fox River winding its way along through the prairies to its junction with the Illinois. There is a large bed of coal in the forks of the Fox and Illinois. The town of Ottawa is situated, or laid out, on both sides of the Fox & Illinois. . . . Forded the river at this place.<sup>38</sup>

Colbee Benton then proceeded downstream along the south side of the Illinois River.

### **1834: A recollection by Charles Sutphen**

Charles Sutphen moved from Boston to the Fox River valley in April of 1834. Thirty-four years later he wrote about his arrival at the future site of Earlville, along Indian Creek in northern La Salle County. He and two companions came by way of Chicago, spending the night of April 26 at Naper's settlement on the Du Page River:

After traveling some fourteen miles farther west we came to the Fox River, where we found a cabin . . . where now is the town of Oswego.

. . . we crossed Fox River . . . and found Indians living at both groves, of the Pottawatomi tribe. \* Shabbona gave us some corn for our horses. The Indians raised the . . . corn by girdling the timber in the edge of the groves. They were then preparing to plant by burning up the dead timber.<sup>235</sup>

### 1834: A recollection by E.S. Kelsey

Levi Kelsey and Joel Griggs were the first white persons to live at Paw Paw Grove. They arrived in January of 1834. Decades later Mrs. Kelsey wrote about her husband's first days at the grove:

Often heard him tell about . . . having Indians for neighbors, and of . . . cutting a bee-tree. The Indians induced Griggs to cut several trees for them, but not finding the right one he became tired of it; then they tried my husband, who refused to cut any. They then set . . . to chopping, . . . after several failures, succeeded in finding plenty of honey.<sup>112</sup>

### 1834: *A Winter in the West*

Charles Fenno Hoffman authored *A Winter in the West* under the pen-name "A New-Yorker." As part of an extensive tour of Illinois, Mr. Hoffman traveled by sleigh from Walker's Grove (now Plainfield) to Ottawa. There he sat down to record the latest leg of his excursion:

Ottawa, Illinois, January 16.

The sleigh soon . . . came to the door . . . ; and . . . we crossed a broad brook, known as the Au Sable River † . . . . The grove in which we had passed the night soon vanished from sight, and a boundless expanse of snow-covered surface lay like an ocean before us. . . . after riding for about twelve miles, an island of timber hove in sight . . . .

. . . we crossed the Au Page, ‡ a narrow stream, with smooth banks, utterly divested of shrubbery; and after, in the next eight miles, encountering two or three tremendous snow-banks, where our horses were frequently immersed to

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\* Mr. Sutphen's account does not name the two groves inhabited by the Potawatomi. Perhaps he was referring to Shabbona's Grove and Paw Paw Grove, which were farther up the Indian Creek valley from the grove where Sutphen chose to live.

† Our New-Yorker mistakenly referred to the Du Page River as the Au Sable.

‡ Hoffman mistakenly gave "Au Page" as the name for Aux Sable Creek.

their cruppers, and whence nothing but the leaders, from their firm footing beyond, dragging the wheel-horses through the heavy drift, could have extricated us, we reached a beautiful grove of elms and oaks, and stopped to change our worn-out team. \*

. . . A dinner of grouse <sup>†</sup> at this place came very opportunely after our keen ride of twenty-four miles over the prairie without once stopping . . . .

It was just sunset when, after riding about thirteen miles over a dreary-looking prairie, we came suddenly to one of those *steppes* into which these singular plains sometimes break so beautifully; and, looking down over two broad platforms, which successively projected their flat surfaces and angular edges below us, beheld the Illinois River winding through the lowest meadow, and receiving its tributary, the Fox River, opposite the little village of Ottawa. It seemed to repose upon a rich alluvial flat, with the rocky bluffs of the Illinois rising in a regular line to the height of seventy or eighty feet immediately in the rear . . . . The warm light of the setting sun resting upon their mossy edges, and touching with freshness an evergreen <sup>‡</sup> that sprouted here and there among the cliffs, while the rising mists of evening imparted a bluish tint to the distant windings of the smooth valley below, gave an Italian softness to the landscape, but little in unison with the icy rigours that enchained the streams to which in summer it must owe its greatest beauty. A mile or two farther brought us over the frozen river to the comfortable frame-house from which this letter is dated. <sup>2</sup>

### 1834: "Reminiscences of Early Illinois"

Lyman Raymond was two years old when his parents brought him to Big Grove Township in Kendall County. They alighted from a passenger boat at Chicago in the autumn of 1834. From there . . .

. . . the little party journeyed about sixty miles into a vast wilderness of prairie and grove, . . . and the objective point . . . was Holderman's Grove, one of a line of small forests, running a little distance east of Fox River from Aurora, with some open prairie between them. The first one was Long Grove, <sup>¶</sup> then

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\* The Holderman's Grove stage house stood beside Chicago Road on the south side of the Fox River valley in the southwest corner of Kendall County.

<sup>†</sup> Prairie-chickens must have made up this grouse dinner. During the day's ride across the prairie, Hoffman had noted that "the grouse would rise continually from under our very horses' feet." <sup>2</sup>

<sup>‡</sup> On the morning of his departure from Ottawa, Hoffman made note of "stunted cedars, whose green branches impended from the rocks above." <sup>2</sup>

<sup>¶</sup> Long Grove was immediately south of the Fox River at Yorkville.

came Big Grove, \* with an opening on the southwest of about half a mile. Abakeeche Grove † followed, and the fourth was Kellogg's Grove, ‡ Holderman's Grove ¶ being the last, and is located about eighteen miles northeast of Ottawa.

After a day or two spent in Chicago, passage in a prairie schooner was secured to haul the families and goods which they had brought from Massachusetts, to the destination they desired. Five yoke of oxen were used to draw the wagon, and the trip took five days. The route ran through the wet prairies, and across three or four good-sized streams. Several log cabins stood forth on the trip, like signal posts pointing out the way. The prairies were covered with a rank growth of nutritious grass from one foot to eight or nine in the swales, or sloughs.

. . . When my father and his associates arrived at their new home, it was too late in the season to build cabins. . . my father made arrangements with John W. Mason . . . to live in his double cabin . . . This cabin was located in Big Grove. It was less than a mile from an encampment of some 800 Indians, who, although defeated during 1832, refused to leave their camp by the springs in Big Grove.

. . . Money being so scarce, the fur bearing animals were hunted for their skins which were used in barter . . . Deer, wild hogs, rabbits, squirrels, wild turkeys, ducks, prairie chickens and quails kept the settlers in meat.

A little later, the settlers began raising corn near the timber, but their first efforts proved almost futile because raccoons destroyed it when in the ear. The boys were sometimes successful in hunting them, going out on dark nights and taking a dog to tree them. . . Did not space forbid, it would be interesting to name the birds, wild animals, reptiles, varieties of timber, wild fruits and wild flowers the early settlers found here. The brilliancy and fragrance of the flowers have not been surpassed, except by those found in the tropics. . . The native grass was very rank, growing sometimes to the height of eight to nine feet, and when it was dry it was a constant menace to the settlers for in it started very many terrible prairie fires which swept over the land at the pace of a race horse, often burning a strip 100 or more feet wide. The flames shut out the air for fifteen to thirty feet, and the roar was something one who heard it never forgot. <sup>237</sup>

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\* Big Grove was six miles southwest of Long Grove.

† This grove, variously named Apakesha, Aptakisis, etc., was less than half a mile south of Big Grove.

‡ Kellogg's Grove was two miles southwest of Big Grove.

¶ Holderman's Grove was less than a quarter mile southwest of Kellogg's Grove, in the southwest corner of Kendall County.

## 1834: Samuel McCarty's description of Wabaunsee's village

Samuel McCarty is known as the founder of Aurora, but a village already existed when he arrived there in November of 1834. Mr. McCarty recalled, "It was not a wild, desolate, unpopulated region . . .

. . . for we had plenty of neighbors in the red men, who had occupied and enjoyed these beautiful prairies and rivers for many and many a year before this, and the village of the head war chief of the Pottawattomie nation was but little over a mile north of us. On the west side of the river, on the bluff opposite Mr. Tanner's stone farm house, and a little north, was the Indian burying ground, a part of which is now occupied by the Catholics for the same purpose. The village and vicinity contained from three hundred to five hundred Indians, and we had many visits from them. Quite a commercial trade sprang up between us, especially swapping bread and tobacco for fish, of which we soon found that they had much the largest supply, although we could give but one *slice* for a large fish weighing from three to five pounds, and then at times they would have several in their canoes to take back.

. . . The old chief, Waubonsie, \* was a large and powerful man . . . . The most of their village was composed of movable or temporary wigwams, as the tribe was a wandering and unsettled people. They spent their summers here on Fox River, but would emigrate to the south to spend the winter on the Illinois and Kankakee, returning in the spring. The old chief's wigwam, being the capitol of the tribe, was built very substantially, apparently to stand for centuries, the posts and frames being of red cedar. . . . The building, I think, was about twenty feet wide by thirty feet long . . . . . The outside of this capitol was covered with the bark of the linn or basswood tree, taken from the standing trees, fitted to the sides and roof of the building very nice and tight. It was fastened by cutting three-cornered holes through the bark, and tying to the cross rafters with the inside bark of young basswood trees.<sup>35</sup>

Seats or beds along either side of a main hallway were built of girders and smaller poles, on which was placed "wide bark taken from the basswood tree":

These were covered with the skins of the animals they had slain, such as wolves, lynx, wildcats, and deer. Thus were formed their beds, with Government blankets or buffalo skins for covering.<sup>35</sup>

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\* Samuel McCarty spelled the Potawatomi chief's name Waubonsie. Ellen Whitney, a scholar of the Black Hawk War, selected Waubensee as the preferred spelling. The stream that joins the Fox River at Oswego has yet a different spelling: Wabaunsee Creek.

## 1834: "The Warrens of Warrenville"

The family of Harriet Warren numbered among the first white residents along the West Branch of the Du Page River, in the vicinity of Naperville. About the end of March in 1834, Miss Warren rode a lumber wagon from home to the future site of Geneva. Fifty-four years later she recalled this "first visit to the Fox River region":

There were no laid out roads. We followed the Indian trail to the river, where Aurora now stands. I think our wagon must have been the first ever going through the big woods timber, at that time a dense forest, 9 miles long and 3 miles wide, skirting the east bank of the river from near where Aurora now is to Batavia. The men were obliged to remove logs frequently on the way that our wagon might keep on this trail. Of course the Indians traveled on ponies and in single file, which left a deep black path, and this we followed until we reached the bank of the river, which we sisters greatly feared to cross, but Mr. Bird insisted we could go even with our high lumber wagon where an Indian pony could. As we came to the east bank which was bordered with tall trees on either side and looked dark and deep we were greatly alarmed . . . . . our hearts were in our throats until we were safely across. The first object to meet your view was the large wigwam of the Indian Chief "Wabaunse" surrounded by smaller ones. . . . There were no Indians anywhere to be seen . . . . . Mr. Bird said they were probably all in the woods making sugar . . . . . We came up as far as where Geneva now stands on the west bank of the river and were charmed with the lovely landscape all the way. . . . We re-crossed the river a little north of where Batavia is now, . . . and . . . as we sisters stood up on the high spring seat, . . . the water was so deep as to come over the seat where we stood and dampen the soles of our boots.<sup>86</sup>

## 1834: *Trip to the West and Texas*

A seven-month tour during 1834-35 took Amos Parker from New York to Texas and back. One splendid autumn day found Parker in the company of three fellow travelers, approaching the Fox River valley from the east:

We took the Galena road \* . . . and arrived at night at Naper's settlement, † on the Du Page river . . . .

We now left the Galena road and took a course more northerly to the *big* and *little woods*, ‡ on Fox river. In travelling twelve miles we came to the settle-

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\* Amos Parker's route approximated the current alignment of U.S. Route 34 from Chicago to Lyons and across southern Du Page County.

† Naper's settlement = Naperville.

‡ The Big Woods extended along the east bank of the Fox River between Aurora and Batavia. The Little Woods was on the east side of the river at St. Charles.



ment at the lower end of "little woods." In the space of three miles, we found about twenty families, all in comfortable log houses . . . . And among the whole number only one family had been there two years; the remainder had none of them been there quite a year. The houses were built near the timber, and a beautiful rich prairie opened before them.

The man who had been here two years, had a hundred acres under fence . . . . He had built a wear \* across the river to catch fish, which I walked down to see. He took his boat, went out to the pen, and dipped out with a small net half a boat load of fish.

This is a land of plenty sure enough; . . . a man . . . can obtain all the necessities of life in abundance.

Fox river is a clear stream of water, about twenty rods wide, having a hard limestone bottom, from two to three feet deep, a brisk current, and generally fordable. On its banks, and on some other streams, we occasionally found ledges of limestone . . . .

We here forded the river, and travelled all day on its western bank. We found less timber on this side of the river. On the east side, it is generally lined with timber to the depth of a mile or more; but the west side is scarcely skirted with it. It is somewhat singular and unaccountable, but we found it universally to be the fact, that the east side of all the streams had much the largest portion of timber.<sup>†</sup>

We passed a number of log houses, all of which had been built the present season, and came at last to the upper house on the river.

. . . We went a few miles above this, forded the river, passed through the woods into the open prairie, and started down the east side. We travelled on, until it became dark. We were in an open prairie . . . . . the wolves began to howl around at a distance. . . . I confess I began to have some misgivings in my own mind, whether this new world ought, in fact, to be called a paradise.

. . . The next day, we passed a few miles down the river, crossed it, and travelled twenty or thirty miles west, towards Rock river. Our whole course lay through open prairie. We could see timber on either hand. This day we found a

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\* A *weir* is a fish trap.

<sup>†</sup> Woodland was often absent from the southern and western sides of streams in prairie regions. If trees were present on the south or west side, they often formed a narrow fringe along the channel. This vegetation pattern is explained by the fact that the prevailing winds are from the south and west during the autumn, when fires were most frequent. Fires were driven by winds to the north and east until they encountered a firebreak such as a stream. A large enough watercourse would stop fires and protect trees on the east and north bank.

number of gravel hills, the tops of which were coarse, naked gravel, and looked white at a distance. They were from ten to twenty feet high. We walked up to the top of the highest one, and had an extended view of the surrounding country. From this elevation, we could see the timber on the border of Rock river.

We obliques more to the south, came to a grove of timber and a house. Here we stayed that night. The next day we took a southeasterly direction, passed one house, and came to Fox river, where the Galena road crosses it. \* We forded the river, and travelling over an open rolling prairie twenty miles in a southeasterly direction, came to Walker's grove, † on the Du Page river . . . .<sup>216</sup>

At this point Amos Parker's book digresses to a series of generalizations about the region, including—

. . . there is no such place as a perfect elysium on earth . . . . In the first place there are many prairie wolves all over the country, so that it is almost impossible to keep sheep. In travelling over the country, I have started half a dozen in a day; they did not appear to be very wild . . . . . The men have a good deal of sport in running them down, and killing them.—They take a stick, mount a fleet horse, soon come up with them, and knock them on the head.

A man on Fox river told me he made a wolf pen over a cow that got accidentally killed, and caught twelve wolves in one week! As the country becomes settled they will disappear.<sup>216</sup>

Now back to Parker's journey:

But I have dwelt long enough on the upper country. I took the stage and travelled twenty-five miles over an open prairie, passing only one house, and arrived at night at Holderman's grove. ‡ This is a pleasant grove of excellent timber . . . .

The next morning, we rode fifteen miles to Ottawa . . . . Here the Illinois and Fox rivers join, and appear to be nearly of equal size, both about twenty rods wide. ¶<sup>216</sup>

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\* This particular Galena Road crossed the Fox River at Aurora.

† Plainfield occupies the remnants of Walker's Grove.

‡ The stagecoach route extended westward from Plainfield. The road skirted the south side of the Fox River valley as far as Holderman's Grove, near the west line of Kendall County.

¶ Amos Parker repeated this surprising observation: "At Ottawa . . . comes in Fox river. This is by far the largest tributary of the Illinois, and at their junction is nearly equal to it in size."<sup>216</sup> Parker gave the width of both rivers as about 20 rods (330 feet). John Davis inspected the Illinois and Michigan Canal corridor in 1843 and reported very different dimensions. He wrote that the Fox River is about 500 feet wide at its mouth; he stated that the Illinois River is half a mile wide above the mouth of the Fox River, widening to a mile immediately downstream from the Fox.<sup>179</sup>

Later in his book, Mr. Parker revisited his impressions of the Fox River region:

The region of Rock and Fox rivers is a beautiful and healthy portion of the State. The land is rich; the prairies are high, dry and gently undulating and surrounded by excellent timber. The only faults are, the prairies are too large for the quantity of timber, and there are not a sufficient number of springs and small streams of water. But it is a very pleasant and desirable portion of the country, and I believe more emigrants are now directing their course thither, than to any other portion of the State. It has one advantage over all the western section of country, it is more healthy. I believe it is as healthy as any portion of the United States.

... In all descriptions of the State, mention is hardly made of Fox river; but it is the next in size to the Illinois and Rock rivers, and is one of the most beautiful streams in the whole State. It rises in the territory west of lake Michigan, runs with a lively current, in a very straight channel, from its source to its mouth. It heads in a lake, and this accounts for the fact, that it is not, like other streams, subject to freshets. It is generally fordable—the water is not more than about three feet deep, and the bottom is sand and pebbles. It is a clear stream, abounding in fish, and withal, passes through the most healthy part of the State.<sup>216</sup>

### 1834 and later: “Thomas Parr’s Statement”

Thomas Parr farmed along the Fox River in Dayton Township, north of Ottawa:

I came to Illinois in 1834, arriving about the 20th day of April. Then Illinois was a wild country. I went to Chicago to the land sales in 1835 . . . .

... We got our land and came home. Pretty wild times—chasing prairie wolves, scaring droves of deer, flocks of sand-hill cranes, geese and ducks. There were a good many Indians in the country then . . . . . I settled on the right bank of Fox river, eight or nine miles from Ottawa, where I have lived ever since. We had the whole country to pasture, and to cut hay in . . . .

... The settlers had a good many slow notions: three or four yoke of oxen to turn the prairie; and going to mill or market we would hitch our oxen to the big wagon, and be gone two or three days, or a week, as the case required . . . .

... We used to go to Chicago to do our marketing, and sell our wheat. . . . By the time I reached Indian creek, \* two or three more teams would join, and as we proceeded others would fall in, till when we reached Chicago a hundred teams would be in the train.

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\* Indian Creek joins the Fox River at Wedron, a few miles above Thomas Parr’s homesite.

... We would camp, ... and, if the mosquitoes would let us, go to sleep ....

... Our teams found plenty of excellent pasture on the prairie wherever we stopped. Crossing the sloughs was an item of excitement, and if one got stuck, we joined teams and pulled him out.<sup>14</sup>

### 1834-35: "Description of Northwestern Indiana"

In 1834 Solon Robinson moved to the northwest corner of Indiana, part of the same belt of rolling morainal country that forms the Fox River valley. Six weeks after arriving at his new home, he wrote to the newspaper at his old home in far southeastern Indiana. Robinson told the editor of the *Madison Republican and Banner*, "I cannot give you an adequate idea of this country. To say it is rich and beautiful, is not sufficient."<sup>168</sup> In the following February he wrote a second letter to the newspaper. Although it was published under the headline "Description of Northwestern Indiana," the account ranges into northeastern Illinois:

Forty miles west of Chicago is the "Fox river country," which is high dry Prairie, with rapid streams running over solid beds of limestone, on the banks of which are groves of good timber, though a very small supply for the great extent of open Prairie.<sup>168</sup>

### 1834-36: Letters from J C Hanks

James Hanks left the Adirondack Mountains to make a new life in Illinois. He walked from Chicago and staked a claim about three miles northeast of Elgin. In October of 1834 he addressed a letter to his "Beloved and kind parents" in upstate New York:

I found the boys Tuesday noon within six miles of the highest settlers on Fox river. This handsome river is about fifty rods wide, a shallow stream with gravel bottom. We spent two and a half days up the river looking for locations and in justice to the country I must say that in goodness it surpasses anything that I have yet seen; so much so that I am perfectly satisfied with the choice I there made.

My claim and Elisha's are joining, six miles above any settlers and about three miles from the river on the east side on a stream of water about the size of Spauldings spring run with a gravel bottom, three feet bank, and dry. \* The land begins to rise from the banks. For beauty, convenience and goodness take the three together, and I think my choice surpasses any lands I ever saw. The soil when plowed up and wet is so black that it would be difficult to distinguish by the color between a pile of charcoal and of earth the distance of thirty rods. The prairie is on the creek, and timber back, which is an uncommon thing in

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\* Hanks' claim was either in the headwaters of Spring Creek or along a branch of Poplar Creek.

this country. The prairie land rises from the creek about three feet in a hundred, the timber more . . . .<sup>165</sup>

Hanks began the above letter at Galena on October 17. He told his parents how he had walked there from the Fox River. Evidently Hanks followed the Galena Road that ran west from St. Charles. He took a shortcut and missed the last house on the road, so he had to sleep by himself on the prairie west of the river:

The prairies were afire all around me; I had to pass through one chain. \* . . . At 8 o'clock I came to a creek on the edge of the prairie . . . . I slept half of the night. The fires that were burning on all sides of me at night had disappeared in the morning. . . . My first prairie was about ten miles across, and half the way I could not see a tree in any direction. The smoke prevented my seeing more than three miles, when I espied a woods ahead. . . . I gathered some acorns and passed on to a brook; there sat down to breakfast on cold water and bitternuts.<sup>165</sup>

Early in 1835 Mr. Hanks was working as a rail-splitter and boarding on the Des Plaines River. He wrote to "Happy Home" in New York to muse about the cause of prairies:

My opinion concerning the origin of these prairies is different from any person I have ever yet talked with on the subject. It is the minds of all that they are formed by fire killing the timber but I believe that 1000 years ago there was not  $\frac{1}{4}$  as much timber here as there is now.

We read in the bible that in old times they would drive their flocks to different parts of the country for pasture no person can doubt but what that country was blest with prairies I believe that from the hands of the Creator a large portion of the world was left without timber but no part of the Eastern country that I have seen has a rich soil enough to produce a growth of grass that by burning would kill the young trees and keep them from getting the start but here the fires on the rich soil kill the young trees. All the timber in this country is on the poorest land or swampy where fires cannot run as a general thing the further from the timber the better the prairie. Where there is timber here there is not half as much dead timber as there is in Steuben.<sup>†</sup> . . . .<sup>165</sup>

On September 6, 1836, James Hanks told Dear Afflicted Home, "Winter wheat never until last winter failed in this country and the oldest settlers say that it would have stood then had it been sowed the last of August." Ten days later he wrote again: "The 4 acres that was to have been ploughed by my house . . . could not be ploughed till the grass was burnt this fall." He added, "The oldest settlers complain of its being a very cold season I think it has been as cold a season with the exception of frost as you often have in Steuben. There was little frost here in August but it done no injury."<sup>165</sup>

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\* One chain is 66 feet.

† Steuben was Hanks' former hometown in New York.

### 1834-37: "Johannes Nordboe and Norwegian Immigration"

Johannes Nordboe was one of many Norwegians who followed the lead of Cleng Peerson and emigrated to the Fox valley. A fellow emigrant said that Peerson was "almost dead of hunger and exhaustion as a result of his long wanderings through the wilderness" when he came upon the Fox River in 1833. But then Peerson "threw himself upon the grass and thanked God who had permitted him to see this wonderland of nature." And "Strengthened in soul, he forgot his hunger and sufferings. He thought of Moses when he looked out over the Promised Land from the heights of Nebo, the land that had been promised to his people."<sup>45</sup>

Nordboe helped found a colony along the Fox River in 1834. The first settlement was 12 miles northeast of Ottawa at Middle Point, which has become the hamlet of Norway. At the end of April 1837, Nordboe wrote to a friend back in Norway,

The land in the state of Illinois consists largely of prairie, with little of woods except along the rivers and creeks. The summers are extremely beautiful. Then the whole country, both woodland and prairie, is bedecked with grass and flowers of all colors, which bloom from earliest spring to late autumn. When some fall, others come up again. Some varieties of big, yellow ones in the autumn have stalks three and one-half yards high. \* The summer may be compared to an earthly paradise, but the winter, on the contrary, may be likened to "Brieflaaen."<sup>†</sup>

The fields here are prepared in the following manner: the sod, two and one-half inches thick, is turned over by a large plow that cuts strips sixteen, eighteen, twenty, and in some cases twenty-four inches wide. The plow is drawn by five and sometimes six pair of oxen, but most frequently by five. The land that is broken in the spring is ready by August to be harrowed and sowed with wheat for the next summer, but usually it is allowed to lie until the following spring. It is then plowed with one or two pair of oxen, and corn or wheat is planted, oats, or whatever one desires. The field is then in fine condition without the need of any fertilizer.

... Deer are plentiful here. They are mostly hunted by Indians, for others do not have time for such things.

... There are many prairie wolves here, but they are small and are not dangerous. However, the sheep must be protected from them now. There are also a

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\* Such a tall fall-blooming species probably is the saw-toothed sunflower (*Helianthus grosseserratus*) or perhaps prairie dock (*Silphium terebinthinaceum*). The equally tall compass plant (*S. laciniatum*) usually stops blooming earlier in the season.

<sup>†</sup> The preparer of a different edition of Nordboe's letter substituted "a mountain climate" for "Brieflaaen."<sup>45</sup>

great many prairie chickens . . . . . They do damage to the corn, wheat, and so forth, and so also do the migratory pigeons, the thrushes, the squirrels, and others. The wolves damage the sweet pumpkins. There are also bears here, but they do no harm. There are not many skunks, but there are some raccoons and polecats. \* There are many varieties of squirrels, as well as weasels. Some kill chickens. The wildcats are as large as half-grown dogs, are of a brown striped color, are shy, and keep to the mountains and caves and thick underbrush. † There are many kinds of fish in the streams, but there is little time to catch them. Fishing and hunting are Indian occupations, but most of the Indians have now departed from here. There are mud turtles in almost all the rivers and creeks, and also snakes of many kinds. The rattlesnake is not as dangerous as reported. It is no more poisonous than the one in Norway. It is about the same length but somewhat thicker, brownish-yellow in color with black spots. ‡ . . . Since the coming of so many settlers, the rattlesnake has largely disappeared. Some other kinds of snakes are almost worse, especially the so-called copperhead. Last summer we lost a large calf. Had it been at home we could have saved, it, but it was in the woods. The woods are composed largely of oak trees, three varieties of walnut, § and small hazel bushes. They all bear large quantities of nuts that are good for human beings, and swine benefit greatly by them. They may be sold in town for a dollar a bushel. There are plenty of gooseberries and they are good. Some cedar trees grow on the dry slopes of sandy hills near rivers. The wild apples are sour, and also the cherries, but some of the plums are sweet and good. There is much sandy rock here but it is too soft for grindstones except in emergency. §

. . . When the tops are broken off certain kinds of tall grass, a clear juice is exuded which smells and tastes like turpentine. \*\* Later it dries and becomes a pleasant-smelling gummy substance somewhat resembling mastic or incense. Almost all the grasses seem to contain some of this substance. Consequently the prairie grass burns more readily than other grass. It is burned every autumn and

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\* The European polecat is related to American weasels. The skunk has also been called a polecat.

† In much of Nordboe's letter, he was obviously describing his local environs, but his mention of mountains and caves hardly pertains to the valley of the Fox. Perhaps Nordboe's words have not translated well from the Norwegian language, and he was referring to sandstone bluffs and crevices in his neighborhood along the lowermost reaches of the Fox River.

‡ This description matches the timber rattlesnake.

§ Europeans often considered the hickory to be a kind of walnut.

§ The lowermost Fox River is lined by St. Peter sandstone, which is composed of weakly cemented sand grains.

\*\* This "grass" must be one or more of the rosinweeds: *Silphium laciniatum* (compass plant), *S. terebinthinaceum* (prairie dock), and *S. integrifolium* (rosinweed).

*The upper portion of our river, above Pestakee (Pistakee) Lake, as late as 1838, still retained the Algonquin name, River of the Buffalo.*<sup>290</sup>

spring because it is troublesome and in order to improve the hay and pasturage. It is impossible to mow where dead grass remains. It is also as sharp as scouring grass \* and quickly wears out shoes and stockings. It is difficult to walk through the grass where there is no path. The Indians have always burned the forests for amusement, and this has hindered the growth of woods.<sup>159</sup>

### 1834-38: "Sketch of Waukesha"

The first volume of the *Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin* preserves the following reminiscences of Alexander F. Pratt. The town of Waukesha was established near the source of the Fox River, where the stream cuts through a gorge several miles west of Milwaukee.

Waukesha was originally called "Prairie Village." . . . The Messrs. Cutler built the first "log cabin" in this town in the year 1834. . . . At that time large tribes of Indians were located in this county. Their headquarters were at this place; yet their *wig wams* were scattered up and down the Fox River, (or *Pish-ta-ka*, as they called it,) from Mukwonago to Pewaukee Lake; † and for the first two or three years they were a great annoyance to the white settlers. There being no fences, the settlers' cattle would often get among the Indians' corn fields, and caused much trouble.

. . . Mr. Sergeant located on the west side of the river, near the water-power. . . . This, for some length of time, was a bone of contention, all being anxious to "claim" the water-power.

. . . In the spring of 1837, we came here to look at a claim . . . . we came to the river, which at that time was nearly two feet deep . . . .

. . . In the spring of 1838, several new settlers immigrated.

. . . The road from here to Milwaukee was any where we chose to travel, as travellers generally preferred new routes each time, knowing that a change must necessarily be an improvement. It had never been cut out through the timber, and each traveller was compelled to carry an axe to cut the trees, whenever he ran against them. Previous to the summer of 1838, there were but few settlers between here and Milwaukee.<sup>227</sup>

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\* Scouring grass = scouring rush or horsetail (*Equisetum*).

† Mukwonago is along the Fox River about 10 miles below Waukesha. Pewaukee Lake is a few miles northwest of Waukesha on a branch of the Fox.



## 1835: "James T. Gifford and the Founding of Elgin, Illinois"

James Gifford and his brother Hezekiah came to the region in the spring of 1835. James was seeking a place to build a water mill, and Hezekiah wanted to farm. They first investigated Milwaukee but were disappointed — "water power here being claimed and it not being an inviting place for farming." They decided to try their prospects on the Fox River. James wanted to locate along the river "on the direct line between Chicago and Galena, under an impression that at some future day an important thoroughfare must exist between those two places."<sup>3</sup>

James Gifford found his spot and founded Elgin where U.S. Route 20 would later cross the Fox River between Chicago and Galena. Fifteen years after settling down at Elgin, Gifford delivered a speech to celebrate the completion of the railroad between Elgin and Chicago. During this address he recounted the journey west from Milwaukee and down the Fox:

... we concluded to strike west on to the waters of the Fox and traverse it down to the white settlements which we supposed extended as far north as the State line at least.

... After procuring some bread and pork of the Indian trader and getting the best directions we could from the Indians in relation to the trails to lead us to Fox river, we started . . . . After much difficulty from the diverging or branching off of trails, their running out, and the hunting up of new ones, we reached the Fox river in the vicinity of Rochester, we having for some distance followed down the Muskego.\* After following down the Fox a few miles on the east side, perceiving the ground to be better for traveling on the west side, we felt desirous of crossing, which we were aided in by two Indians,† the first we had seen since leaving Milwaukee river. Each was in a canoe with a rifle and spear in each for taking fish and muskrats.

... After bidding goodbye to our Indian ferrymen, . . . after wandering two days and scarcely seeing a living thing except birds . . . , we waded through the outlet of Geneva Lake and encamped near the present site of Burlington.‡<sup>3</sup>

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\* Muskego Creek (now the Wind Lake Drainage Canal) joins the Fox River at Rochester, Wisconsin, 16 miles north of the state line.

† Although Hezekiah and James Gifford had to cross tributary streams on the west side of the Fox River, they fortunately avoided the vast marshes on the east bank. As the editor of the 1904 *History of Kane County* observed, "Had they not crossed the river with the Indian, and had they endeavored to make their way down its east bank, they would almost invariably have miserably perished in the interminable swamps above and around Fox and Grass Lakes. Who can fathom the providential impulse, that induced them to cross to the west bank of the stream?"<sup>29</sup>

‡ The waters of Lake Geneva discharge into the Fox River at Burlington, eight miles north of the state line.

James Gifford described the rest of his trip in a letter to his wife in New York. He wrote the letter seven days after he had completed his quest:

Proceeding a few miles down the west side we came to a very beautiful stream coming in from the west which we concluded to be Pitstaca from the map. \* This we forded and found about its mouth one of the most attractive spots we had seen in Wisconsin. Here had been an Indian village, many mounds and places where they had buried corn. † Near this spot by a pretty little brook we encamped for the night . . . . . We rested, . . . a prairie wolf . . . came near and barked at our fire. . . . The next day after leaving the Indian mounds a few miles, we began to get among marshes and lakes, some of them extending miles into the country east and west of the river, which made our route very circuitous. Many marshes we crossed, wading through them for miles, where doubtless human feet never had trod. Some streams we had to ford in the marshes, there being no materials for building a raft, in one instance stripping off all our clothes and carrying them over our shoulders. . . . The river the latter part of this day itself expanded into lakes, in several places of some miles in extent, interspersed with islands covered with timber. ‡ . . . Near sunset we seemed to have passed the lakes and marshes principally, the river being confined within handsome dry banks. We rose upon an elevated, extensive prairie. Seeing a grove ahead apparently about two miles we laid our course for it, in order to encamp in it. We found, owing to the deception of distance on the prairie, we had underrated it, as we had to travel considerably in the evening and at least five miles to reach it. . . . I was confident from the geography of the country and the distance we had passed, that we must have crossed the Wisconsin line, and if in Illinois, I knew we must reach settlements the next day. . . . The following morning was clear and pleasant. . . . As we took the last of our scanty allowance, sitting on the bank of a little brook, I observed a tear standing in brother H's eye. "Oh," said I, "Hezekiah, I can travel yet a fortnight and live on oak buds and frogs." We traveled fast, as we had done all the time since leaving our horses, § at least I think, forty miles per day. About noon we discovered something white a distance before us, near the bank of the river, which appeared to be in motion. . . . we tripped over the smooth prairie, until at length we discovered it to be a man, swinging a maul, splitting rails. . . . We stayed until the next day and were treated with true Virginia hospitality. §

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\* The Pitstaca may be one of three or four creeks that flow into the Fox River in the vicinity of New Munster, Wisconsin.

† The villagers had buried corn in underground caches.

‡ This is the Chain of Lakes region of northern McHenry and Lake Counties.

§ They had left their horses at Milwaukee.

§ The Giffords' host, an emigrant from Virginia, was making the northernmost white outpost on the Fox River, near the site of present-day Algonquin.

... We came down to this place \* fourteen miles south ... Friday, April 3rd.  
... I made examination on each side of the river between Little Woods and  
Tyler's Creek, † being pleased with the many springs a brooks in the vicinity  
and the beautiful banks of the river.

Hezekiah and myself have located on the river, have a tolerable supply of  
timber, some good springs of water and plenty of good prairie. We have also  
some fine land of the kind called Burr Oak Openings, the soil of which I think  
much of. We have selected land lying in considerable swells, such as would be  
called in this country broken, as I like to see something like hills. I have on my  
claim the best place for water power which I have found on the river from its  
source to some distance below this. I have made a claim adjoining mine for  
brother Augustine, which I shall endeavor to keep, and he may get a good  
prairie adjoining, a mile square if he chooses. ... Settlers are rapidly coming  
in . . . . . I am on the whole as well pleased with the country as I anticipated.  
There is generally a want of timber and for from 12 to 15 miles west of this  
place, ‡ the country is too level and too much of it wet. From that to the Fox,  
the land appears to be good, the surface rolling, and well watered. And for a  
prairie country supplied with timber to support considerable population. The  
Fox is the finest stream I ever saw, it has uniformly in this State a limestone  
bottom, its current uniform and gentle, its waters pure, and is abundantly sup-  
plied with fine fish. We have selected for sites to build upon, an elevation of  
from thirty to forty feet above the river and from thirty to forty rods from it,  
a grove lying between. <sup>3</sup>

### 1835: *Life on the Lakes*

Chandler Gilman made a 16-hour stagecoach ride from Chicago to Ottawa on October 2,  
1835. He told about the trip in *Life on the Lakes*:

Our ride from the Desplaines river . . . to Ottawa, <sup>1</sup> was rather uninteresting.  
The prairie became drier after we crossed the river, and the proportion of  
woodland rather greater, though still, I think, less than will be required by the  
future settlers. We passed during the day eight or ten farms. The wheat was  
already housed, of course we could not judge of the crop; but the Indian corn  
was standing, and nearly every hill blasted by the frost. The season opened this

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\* This place is Elgin.

† The Little Woods was at St. Charles. Tyler Creek is on the north side of Elgin.

‡ Gifford was in Chicago when he wrote this letter on April 11.

<sup>1</sup> Gilman is likely to have crossed the Des Plaines River at Riverside. Beyond this point he  
probably took the route through Plainfield, which would have taken him along the south side of  
the lower Fox River valley.

year very late, and an early frost in September cut off all the corn crop. Some of the farmers had small droves of cattle, generally of the best breeds and in capital order. A few hogs were ranging through the prairie grass; they were miserable animals . . . .<sup>106</sup>

### **1835 and later: Recollections of Mrs. Luman Preston**

Mr. and Mrs. Luman Preston moved from Vermont to Jacksonville in 1834. More than four decades later, Mrs. Preston recalled her subsequent move to the lower Fox valley:

The next year a company came up in a lumber wagon, . . . and prospected through to Chicago. They thought the region around Georgetown \* the finest they saw; indeed, quite the heart of the country; so we all decided to move up there. For the first few years we saw hard times. We were often in danger of being burnt out by prairie fires, and had to plow furrows and burn spaces around us for our protection.<sup>137</sup>

### **1836: *A Journal of a Trip to Illinois in 1836***

John Thurston traveled far across the state in the spring of 1836: Shawneetown—Cairo—Alton—Tremont—Peoria—Jacksonville—Springfield—Hennepin—Ottawa—Joliet—Chicago—Kankakee. After seeing all this, here is what Mr. Thurston wrote about Ottawa and its environs:

*Ottawa* is beautifully situated in a rich open country at the junction of the Fox and Illinois rivers. . . . We travelled from this place in every point of compass and I fully believe that there is not a richer soil in the whole state with the exception of some of the bottom lands which are said to be rather unhealthy, as all low lands are thought to be that are near the water. The soil on the prairies is from two to three feet deep, and the grass which grows and is burnt annually, is at the rate of ten tons to the acre—and often more.<sup>307</sup>

### **1836: *Notes of a Journey through Canada, the United States of America, and the West Indies***

On the afternoon of October 18, 1836, British author James Logan sat in a stagecoach on his way to Ottawa. Logan recalled the drive from Joliet:

Large flocks of prairie hens . . . occurred here and there, and we saw quails, ducks, and geese in abundance.

About three in the afternoon, we crossed Fox River, near its junction with the Illinois, and soon after arrived at a small town called Ottawa, beautifully

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\* Georgetown = Newark.

situated on the latter, upon an eminence, surrounded by extensive prairies, and having a fine prospect . . . . . I have little doubt, that when the scenery of Ottawa is properly known and appreciated, it will be visited by crowds.<sup>184</sup>

Continuing along his way beside the Illinois River below Ottawa, Mr. Logan noted,

The grass on the flat land attains a height of six, or even sometimes nine feet, and in the waggon we were in a manner completely overtopped by it over a space of nearly three miles.<sup>184</sup>

### 1836-37: "A Merchant of Early Chicago"

After Eri Hulbert relocated to Chicago in 1836, he wrote a series of letters to his wife Mary back in Otsego County, New York. On November 10 he put pen to paper to marvel about his new surroundings:

I was struck with wonder and amazement that such Land should have remained so long unpeopled and that Farmers in Otsego Co should remain upon their cold hard farms when there was such vast quantities of this land unoccupied, and as rich as land can be and not stone to be seen, (I need say no more) . . . .<sup>333</sup>

Less than three months later Hulbert traveled with four men to the Fox River valley. Their destination was Lake Geneva. Mr. Hulbert then wrote to give Mrs. Hulbert "a short scetch of my late tour into the country some 80 or 90 miles":

Left Chicago on the 2nd Feby for Geneva Lake W Teritory \* . . . was absent 7 days during which time we traveled over a country which begars all description —nothing but the naked eye can have any conceptions of its beauty, imagination cannot paint it, untill the eye has seen it or the like. The country is mostly prarie with now and then a grove interspersed over it, but in some places you are out of sight of timber, the Praries being so large, the settlements in all cases in or about the groves and the praries the handsomest farming lands you ever saw. There are two kinds of Prarie, that denominated the rolling by some are considered the best, the level prarie is not generally dry as the other and about the valley they generally have the best water . . . . Their Houses are invariably built of logs . . . , their being no saw mills in the country. . . . At the head of Lake Geneva W.T. we each of us made us a claim of 800 acres apiece, part Prairie and part Timber and good springs of water on them . . . .<sup>333</sup>

On May 21st Mr. Hulbert wrote to Mary, "I am in hopes . . . that you are about to start for the Western World":

Cannot conceive why it is that so many of our good folks will grub away on their old worn out hill farms when there is such a vast extent of unsettled

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\* W Teritory = Wisconsin Territory.

country West as rich as rich can be and that to be obtained at 10s \* per acre and nothing to do to it but plow & fence before raising a crop.<sup>333</sup>

### 1836-42: *New Homes in the West*

Catherine Stewart made several trips from the East Coast to the "Far West" of Illinois during the 1830s and '40s. As Stewart reported in *New Homes in the West*, she carried out her first examination of the Fox valley in 1836:

"How beautiful!" I exclaimed, as the setting sun was bathing the rich foliage of trees, that threw their lengthened shadows over the borders of Fox river. "Can all the magnificence that art has spread over eastern cities—can the loftiest monuments, or the ruins of the old world compare with this?"<sup>†</sup> This tribute of admiration was unconsciously paid to the rural environs of the little village of Aurora; which with its small houses and large mills, soon met the view. Though its dawns are feeble, the fertile country around gives it claims to future prosperity.

Following the southern course of the river, the attention is called to the different aspect of the country on the opposite shores. On the one hand, trees overloaded with vines, form a canopy of shade over the undulating borders; further back, dark groves of oak, with occasional openings of flower-blushing prairies, skirted with forests in the distance, seeming almost blended with the blue sky; altogether spread out a landscape of enchanting beauty.

Fording the river about fifteen miles below Aurora, a ride along the western shore, over uninterrupted savannas,<sup>‡</sup> so level, as to make a carriage seem almost self-propelled, afforded infinitely more enjoyment than a rail-road flight; as with perfect security, it dealt out on either hand, such a prospect as one avariciously wishes to retain rather than to be snatched away with the speed of twenty miles an hour.

... Taking a view through the future vista of half a century, it seems highly probable that the whole course of Fox river will be bordered with one continued village, with highly cultivated fields, orchards and vineyards, extending back

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\* Ten shillings, the equivalent of \$1.25, was the minimum price for an acre at Federal land sales.

<sup>†</sup> Stewart considered the "affluence of arcadian scenery" in the wilderness to be "more attractive than when the period arrives that will proudly say, art has been here." On another page of *New Homes in the West*, she raptured, "Does any one sigh for a romantic seclusion, embowered under lofty trees, let him come to Illinois, and erect a snug cottage or pillared palace, where his grounds are more beautifully ornamented than the most fastidious and refined taste could dictate."<sup>292</sup>

<sup>‡</sup> During the 1800s the term *savanna* was applied to prairies.<sup>319</sup>

over a large extent of country. \* . . . The time cannot be far distant, when the deep solitudes of the trackless wastes spread far away, will be enlivened with the hum of busy enterprise, and covered over with a hardy industrious population; when science and the arts will move hand in hand over this great western empire; and incense will arise from a thousand sacred altars.<sup>292</sup>

To begin the next chapter of her book, Stewart wrote, "In an excursion the following year . . . a portion of our route lay along the borders of Fox river . . . ."

The country around Ottawa, eighty miles south of Chicago, presents a landscape of startling magnificence. Verdant slopes are covered with clumps of trees of the richest luxuriance; others detached, so as to throw their shade fully around them; stretching away over vales, watered by Illinois and Fox rivers, flowing along like rivals, at no great distance from each other; the latter affording glimpses of its swift, limpid water through the overhanging foliage, leaves no room for hesitation as to its superior claim to admiration.

. . . From Ottawa to Peru, a distance of sixteen miles, the country presents singular features. The road passes over a rich bottom land, nearly a quarter of a mile in width; bounded on either hand with high woodlands.<sup>292</sup>

During Catherine Stewart's last visit—in 1842—she discovered,

The country around Fox and Rock rivers, and westward, on to Galena, which, five years ago, disclosed little more than an unbroken waste, is now almost entirely filled up with smiling settlements; the land yielding seventy, in some instances, a hundred bushels of corn, an acre; equally productive of other grain, and every kind of vegetation suited to a northern climate.

. . . Somonok grove<sup>†</sup> on this route, . . . is but another term for a little village, skirted by a lengthened range of trees . . . .

. . . Nature ever provident, and ever ready to minister to the tastes of man, furnishes on every hand, stores of delicious wild fruits. Strawberries, blackberries, plums, grapes, with many others, bountifully supplying the absence of those delicacies the farmer, in subduing a new soil, finds little leisure to cultivate.<sup>292</sup>

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\* Near the end of her book, Stewart made a grander prediction: "From Prairie Du Chien to New Orleans, a distance of more than 2000 miles, an almost continued village may, in time, stretch along the Mississippi river . . ." <sup>292</sup>

<sup>†</sup> Somonauk Grove extended along Somonauk Creek, which flows through southeastern De Kalb County to enter the Fox River in the northeast corner of La Salle County. Stewart must have crossed Somonauk Creek on the old Chicago Road, five miles north of Sandwich.

## 1836-44: "Fort Hill"

Fort Hill is a 10-acre, 30-foot-high knob at the east edge of the Fox River valley in central Lake County. \* Water flowing down the west slope of Fort Hill eventually enters a bay of Fox Lake on the Fox River; runoff from the east side of Fort Hill ends up in the Des Plaines River. A columnist for a Chicago newspaper applied the name Fort Hill to a wide area, extending across most or all of Fremont Township and into the adjacent townships:

This is the name of a beautiful and fertile tract of country situated in the western part of Lake County, Ill., containing about sixty-four square miles. † Its superior advantages as a farming country have been, until a few years back, but little known abroad.

In the Spring of 1836, while seeking a location in the western country upon which to spend the remainder of my days, I was by chance led upon the tract in question. I immediately saw the numerous advantages which it possessed over the surrounding country, having about an equal quantity of prairie and timber, and both of the best quality, being also well watered by streams and small lakes, so that nearly every farm could be accommodated by living water ‡ . . . .

. . . Let us now take a view of the country at the present date—but mark the change! The progress of eight years has wrought a change which I had not expected to see short of the space of twenty. The country has become thickly populated, nearly as much so as the Eastern States, from which most of the settlers have immigrated. Public roads have been established in every direction and well improved. The prairies are in a high state of cultivation and covered with fields of grain; and, in short, Fort Hill is now acknowledged to be the richest and most flourishing part of the country.

. . . There are many who, seven years ago, shunned this part of the country and settled fifty miles to the west, who are now returning and paying from three to five dollars per acre for wild land, for the purpose of settling nearer to a market.<sup>117</sup>

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\* Fort Hill was so named "in consequence of its commanding position over the surrounding country."<sup>117</sup> The specific location of Fort Hill is the southwest quarter of the northwest quarter of Section 10, Township 44 North, Range 10 East (Fremont Township). The hill is about three miles south of Gray's Lake. Peterson Road cuts through the base of Fort Hill.

† Perhaps the writer was thinking of the Fort Hill election precinct, which was in place before Lake County accepted the township form of government. Fort Hill Precinct was an eight-mile by seven-mile rectangle with the county line as its west border and Fort Hill near its center.

‡ *Living water* is fresh, flowing water.



## 1837: *A Gazetteer of Illinois*

John Mason Peck completed a prodigious personal effort by publishing his *Gazetteer of Illinois*. The Reverend Mr. Peck intended to ensure that "no creek, prairie, or settlement, known by name amongst the people, would escape notice." Part First of the second edition Peck's *Gazetteer*\* is a "General View of the State of Illinois." One topic is water power:

Probably in no part of the great west does there exist the capability of such an immense water power, as is to be found naturally, and which will be created artificially along the rapids of the Illinois and Fox rivers, and the Illinois and Michigan canal. Incorporated companies with ample means are now constructing hydraulic works at Ottawa, Marseilles, and other points along the rapids of the Illinois. Fox river rapids have a descent of sixteen feet at Green's mills, four miles above Ottawa, with abundant supplies of water at its lowest stage; and the river itself, from thence to McHenry county, is a rapid stream with rocky banks, admirably suited for hydraulic purposes.<sup>222</sup>

Investors planned to harness water power in conjunction with the Illinois and Michigan Canal, which was under construction:

From Lockport the canal proceeds down the valley of Des Plaines, to Juliet<sup>†</sup> where it crosses by a dam, its line runs past Marseilles, and crosses Fox river by an aqueduct betwixt the main bluff and Ottawa. A navigable feeder, will connect it with the rapids of Fox river, four miles above Ottawa, and extend through the town to the Illinois river, where a natural basin, of deep water, is at the mouth of Fox river.<sup>222</sup>

Part Second of the *Gazetteer of Illinois* describes each county. When J.M. Peck prepared his book, the boundaries of Kane County included almost all of present-day Kane County as well as DeKalb County and the northern tier of townships in Kendall County. Peck's description of Kane County says in part,

It is watered by Fox river in its southeastern parts, and Indian creek, Somonauk, Rock and Blackberry, Wabonsie, Morgan and Mill creeks that enter Fox river . . . . These are all excellent mill streams, and already saw and flouring mills are built or in progress.

The timber is in groves, of which Au Sable, Big-woods, Little-woods and various others are thickly settled around. There is white, black, red, yellow<sup>‡</sup> and bur oaks, sugar maple, linden or basswood, black and white walnut,

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\* The first edition of Peck's *Gazetteer* is less complete.<sup>221</sup> It was published in 1834, when the Fox River valley was much less well known to the English-speaking populace.

† "Juliet" is not a misspelling; it is the original name of the city of Joliet.

‡ Yellow oak = ? yellow chestnut oak (*Quercus prinoides* var. *acuminata*).

hickory, ash of various species, white poplar, \* ironwood, elm, some cherry, and occasional clumps of cedar along the cliffs that overhang Fox river, and other streams.<sup>222</sup>

Peck reported that De Kalb County would soon be created from western Kane. He noted of the county-to-be,

The timber resembles that of the adjacent counties, and is in groves, and scattered portions of oak openings. The surface generally is undulating, and the soil rich.<sup>222</sup>

In 1837 La Salle County embraced the south part of the Fox River valley, including the central and southern townships of present-day Kendall County:

Besides the Illinois river, which passes through it, Fox river, Big and Little Vermilion, Crow creek, Au Sable, Indian creek, Mason, Tomahawk, and several smaller streams water this county. In general, the streams in this part of the state run over a rocky or gravelly bed, and have but a few alluvial bottoms near them.<sup>222</sup>

McHenry County included Lake County:

It is watered by the north branch of the Chicago, Des Plaines, Fox river and branches, together with Cache Mère, Crystal and other small lakes. Some of these lakes have limpid water, gravelly beds, with ridges of gravel and sand around them.

East side of Fox river, the soil approaches to a clay, while on the western side it is a rich, sandy loam. Timber abounds along the lake shore, and near the streams, with many beautiful groves and oak openings in the interior. . . . Limestone is plenty.<sup>222</sup>

Cook County was larger in 1837 than today. A new county named Michigan was to be carved from western Cook County. Its extent would have corresponded closely to present-day Du Page County plus northwestern Cook County:

Fox river and its branches will water its western and northwestern portions . . . .

The southern portion of this county is a superior region with some large groves of timber and rich, undulating prairie. Along Fox river are cedar cliffs, and in the northeastern and middle portions are extensive prairies.<sup>222</sup>

Part Third of the *Gazetteer* contains "a particular description of each town, settlement, stream, prairie, bottom, bluff, &c." Mr. Peck touched on the ecology of several places

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\* White poplar = eastern cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*).

in the Fox valley. The first is Aux Sable Grove, which extended along the high divide between Aux Sable Creek and the Fox River:

*Au Sable Grove* is . . . at the heads of the Au Sable creek. \* Here is a fine body of timber surrounded with an extensive and rich prairie. <sup>222</sup>

Big Grove was three miles southeast of the Fox River in southwestern Kendall County:

*Big Grove* . . . is about three miles in diameter. † The land in the timber is wet, but the surrounding prairie is dry, undulating and rich. <sup>222</sup>

The Big Woods extended from Aurora to Batavia:

*Big Woods*, a large tract of timbered land, lying on the east side of Fox river . . . . It is about 10 miles in length and from 4 to 5 miles in width. ‡ The timber consists chiefly of white, black, yellow, and bur oaks, sugar maple, linden, black and white walnut or butternut, § hickory, ash of various species, poplar, ironwood, elm, cherry, etc. The soil is generally a dark sandy loam; sometimes approaches to clay, generally a little undulating, but in some places quite level and a little wet. The Big Woods are thickly settled on all sides, as is the prairie country adjoining.

. . . *Little Woods* is a tract of timber on Fox river, in Kane county above the "Big Woods." § The land of excellent quality, but swampy in places. <sup>222</sup>

Blackberry Creek is one of the biggest tributaries of the Fox River, joining it at Yorkville:

*Blackberry Creek*, in Kane county, . . . enters Fox river near the south line of the county. \*\* Groves of timber, barrens, and rich undulating prairie along its course. <sup>222</sup>

Crystal Lake is in southeastern McHenry County. Peck characterized it as "a beautiful sheet of water . . . , with gravelly banks and a delightful prospect." <sup>222</sup>

The Fox River is "one of the principal branches of the Illinois":

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\* The name was usually spelled *Au Sable* in the 1800s, but it has since been standardized as *Aux Sable*.

† Big Grove was about two miles in diameter.

‡ The Big Woods was about 7½ miles long and up to 4½ miles wide.

§ The butternut (*Juglans cinerea*) was far more abundant in the 1800s than at present. The species appears to have declined greatly even before a lethal butternut canker disease (caused by the fungus *Sirococcus clavigignenti-juglandacearum*) was newly identified in the 1960s. <sup>213</sup>

§ The Little Woods was at St. Charles.

\*\* Kane County extended six miles farther south in 1837 than at present.

It rises in the Wisconsin territory, passes through a series of small lakes about the boundary line, and enters the Illinois river at Ottawa.

Its general course is south. At the boundary line its width is forty-five yards.

Several bodies of fine timber line its banks, especially about the mouth of *Indian Creek* and the *Big Woods*. At the rapids, five miles above its mouth, are most extensive water privileges.

Here the river is from eighty to one hundred yards wide, with the bed and banks of coarse grained sand stone. The rapids are sixteen feet descent, and both sides of the river will admit of mills and machinery for three-fourths of a mile, with inexhaustible supplies of water.

The deficiency of timber near this spot is the only drawback upon it; but inexhaustible bodies of coal are to be found but a few miles distant.

It furnishes a vast amount of water power, and can be easily made navigable by dams and slack water. From the town of Elgin near the south part of McHenry county, it is a deep sluggish stream, connected with a string of lakes, and is navigable within fifteen miles of Milwaukee. Hence, with small expense, a navigable communication may be opened from Lake Michigan by Milwaukee and Fox river.

... *Indian Creek*, a branch of Fox river from the northwest. \*

... Large bodies of fine timber lie on this stream; the surface of the country is undulating, and the soil good.

... Settlements are now rapidly forming on Indian creek and Fox river, and much excellent country remains to be possessed in that quarter.

... *McHenry*, a town site ... on the west side of Fox river. Surrounded with excellent prairie, and timber in groves and bur oak openings or barrens. †

... Ottawa ... was laid off by the canal commissioners, in 1830, at the junction of Fox river with the Illinois ....

... It is expected a lateral canal from the Illinois and Michigan canal will pass through the town to the Illinois river. This, by means of a feeder to the rapids of Fox river will open a navigation into Kane county. Fox river is susceptible of improvement by slackwater at small expense, into the Wisconsin territory, and from thence by a short canal of fifteen miles may become connected with

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\* Indian Creek flows into the Fox River about six miles north of Ottawa.

† Oak openings and barrens are discussed on page 149.

Milwaukee. Hence Ottawa may be regarded as one of the most important sites for commercial business in the state.

. . . *Wabonsie*, a tributary of Fox river in Kane county. \* It rises in a large spring, runs southwest, and enters Fox river, 8 miles below the Big Woods. It is a fine mill stream.<sup>222</sup>

### 1837: "Aurora in 1837"

In 1869 "an old citizen" of Aurora recalled the scene 32 years previous:

A gristmill and sawmill had just been completed on the east side of the river, and was in operation. . . . The grades of Main Street and Broadway were four or five feet below the present grade, and there were more or less stumps of trees in both of these streets, the trees having been taken by the McCartys for the mill dam and other purposes.<sup>35</sup>

### 1837: *Gleanings by the Way*

The Reverend Dr. John A. Clark of Philadelphia took a stagecoach from Galena to Chicago in mid-June of 1837. He elected to take the "lower route" through Dixon rather than going through Freeport, so he saw Paw Paw Grove and traversed the heart of the Fox River Area:

. . . our path lay through a magnificent, level prairie country. The wide sea of grass around us was now and then broken by a grove, springing up with luxuriance and beauty amid the treeless tract of country that stretched around on every side. These groves are points of great interest, and are spoken of by the sparsely scattered inhabitants of northern Illinois, as we speak of cities and towns. The most beautiful of those which we passed were Buffalo, Inlet, and Paw Paw groves<sup>†</sup> . . . .

As no one can conceive the sensation awakened by being out of sight of land at sea, till he actually stands on the deck of a vessel, that is ploughing her way through the trackless world of waters that stretch interminably around him, and strains his eye in vain to catch a view of one single fading outline of the far off shore—so no one can conceive the emotion that rises up on the bosom of the traveller as he stands on the broad prairie, and sees the horizon settling down upon one wide sea of waving grass, and can behold around him neither stone,

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\* The mouth of Waubensee Creek is at Oswego.

† Buffalo Grove was at Polo, in the Rock River watershed of southwestern Ogle County. Inlet Grove was in central Lee County at the Inlet, where the waters of Inlet Swamp gathered into a distinct channel to form the Green River. Paw Paw Grove spanned the divide between the Green River and the Fox River on the Lee-De Kalb County line.

nor stump, nor bush, nor tree, nor hill, nor house. These vast prairies, though bearing a luxuriant growth of grass, would impress one with a sense of desolateness, were they not beautified with flowers, and animated with the songs and the sight of the feathered tribes. The view of the prairie, as it stretches off before you, often appears like a perfect flower garden. Though we were too late to see these productions in their rich vernal beauty, yet often they stood strewn around us on every side as far as the eye could reach, spreading out their rich and brilliant petals of every colour and hue. An intelligent lady told me that in a single walk over the corner of a prairie, she gathered for a bouquet forty different kinds of flowers; and another informed me that she had been able to gather one hundred and twenty different kinds. Though the music wafted along over these luxuriant expanses of earth be usually not so melodious nor varied as that to which the woodlands echo, there is something very animating in the wheeling of the plover, the chirping of the robin, and the fluttering of the wings of a flock of prairie hens, started up at every half mile of your journey. And then occasionally we saw noble herds of cattle feeding over these vast plains. Such large, and fat, and noble-looking oxen and cows, I never before beheld, as I saw grazing amid the luxuriant prairie of Illinois. There is no fence to stay them in their course:—they range where they choose amid the ten thousands of acres that stretch unenclosed around them.<sup>78</sup>

### 1837: “Wyoming Township”

Mrs. E.S. Braffet wrote about Wyoming Township for *Recollections of the Pioneers of Lee County*. Wyoming Township embraces nearly all of the Fox River drainage in Lee County. Paw Paw Grove was the centerpiece of the township:

The first settlers in this township located around the grove, of course. Paw Paw Grove takes its name from the Paw Paw trees that grow there. \*

... Jacob D. Rogers came in 1837 . . . . His claim . . . included the west part of the site of Pawpaw. † He was the first to settle out on the prairie west of the grove.

... James Gable . . . used to tell about helping to build the log house, and he said after they had hauled one load of logs and piled them upon the ground and went and got another load, they had hard work to find the place where they had deposited the first load, the grass was so thick and tall it hid them from their sight, and there was no road to guide them.<sup>54</sup>

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\* In an 1855 letter to the *Republican Sentinel* newspaper, “Wooljah” (one of De Kalb County’s “Old Settlers”) desultorily ventured a different view: “In relation to the names of groves— . . . ‘Paw-Paw’ from Paw-Paw in Michigan or some other place . . . .”<sup>169</sup>

† The village of Paw Paw was founded on the prairie northwest of Paw Paw Grove.

## 1837-38: Letters from B Hanks

B. and Elizabeth Hanks relocated to the Fox River valley near Elgin in 1837. On the 22nd of September Mr. Hanks wrote to his children in New York,

we have had a verry warm and wet summer the Crops both winter and spring has come in good Corn is a fine crop and Completely out of the way of the frost

. . . we have 2 grist mills and our saw mill in operation within 4 miles of us one of them a flouring mill with 2 \* of stones . . . No trouble about Pasture the prairie affords first rate pasture <sup>165</sup>

A letter from Mr. Hanks datelined Elgin, June 14th, 1838, contains the following:

we have had very dry weather hear for 2 or 3 weeks until 4 days ago I do not know as it has injured the crops much some pieces of corn planted on dry ground did not come up well my spring crops are doing well now. I was out to Chicago Twice the week before last with a wagon the roads were excellent Started from home at 8 o'clock A.M. arrived at Chicago at 4 P.M. <sup>165</sup>

## 1838?: *Echoes from the Backwoods*

British Captain R.G.A. Levinge went on a hunting excursion, probably in late 1838:

At Chicago we hired a waggon and a pair of horses, and started for the prairies . . . .

. . . we continued our course over the prairies, steering, as it were, now for a clump of trees, now for some rise on the horizon—across the rolling prairies without road or track—through the most luxuriant grassy herbage as deep as the wheels of the waggon, stopping occasionally by the way to shoot grouse, ducks, or quail. Our eventual object was to reach the Fox River, along the line of which we heard that the prairie-hens abounded, in consequence of the cultivation along its banks; and by night we arrived, and put up at one among a few huts on the banks of the river. . . . The country was much dried up, but we found game in great quantities round the house, so that we had as much shooting as we could manage both of grouse and quail.

But, before reaching Fox River, I discovered that I was in for the ague . . . . I swallowed quantities of quinine . . . . We next moved our quarters, some eight miles down the river, and put up at a log-hut. Here an old woman gave me a decoction of a plant which she called *thorough-wort*, and which, I think, is a

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\* A gap in the manuscript may have had the word *run*: "2 run of stones" would mean two sets of millstones.

species of eupatorium. \* . . . In one week we had nearly finished all our ammunition, and began to think of returning.<sup>183</sup>

### 1838: A letter from Gjert G. Hovland

Gjert Hovland was a member of the Norwegian colony along the Fox River about 12 miles northeast of Ottawa. One of his letters was published by a newspaper back in the Fatherland. Mr. Hovland emphasized that "anyone who wants to make good here has to work," but "here everything is better rewarded":

The land around here that has enough woodland has been bought up and is inhabited. We have an unbelievable amount of vast grass plains (savannas) that extend for many miles with the most marvelous grazing for the animals imaginable. As much hay as anyone could desire may be mowed with little trouble. Surely no sensible man could wish for a better place. . . . We who are accustomed to work since childhood feel that this is Canaan when we consider the fertile soil that without manuring brings forth such rich crops of everything. Norway cannot be compared to America any more than a desert can be compared to a garden in full bloom.<sup>45</sup>

### 1838: A recollection by E.S. Ingalls

Forty-two years after coming to the Fox valley, Judge Ingalls wrote the following in a letter to the Old Settlers' Association of Lake County:

I came to the present Lake County with my father . . . in the spring of 1838. We . . . struck the Fox River at St. Charles, and traveled up its west side to English Prairie, † in McHenry County. There we made a halt and built a small log cabin in the burr oak opening to the west of English Prairie, about one mile north of Spring Grove on Nippersink Creek.

The country was then new, with here and there a settler from ten to twenty miles apart. The Indians had been removed from the country the summer previous. The only settlers in English Prairie at that time whom I can remember were the Rays and a few of their English relatives, Major Stearns and his brother, John Sanborn and Cole. . . . The English desired to hold the whole Prairie and the lands adjoining it for settlers of their own people, whom they expected to come and fill them up. They used force to keep away the American settlers, and many efforts were made to expel those who were already there.

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\* The thoroughwort (*Eupatorium perfoliatum*) was used to treat malaria.

† English Prairie spread across about three square miles in the northeast corner of McHenry County, immediately west of Chain O'Lakes State Park.



*"Riviere des Renards," river of the slaughter of the Fox tribe. How appropriate the name the French last gave it! Well may it be so known until some greater event warrants a change.* <sup>288</sup>

... Our party thought it not worth while, coming into a new country, where there was not one person to ten square miles, to quarrel over a location of land; and ... we determined to cross the Fox River and settle on the east side. <sup>127</sup>

### **1839: A letter from Johannes Johansen and Søren Bache**

Johannes Johansen and Søren Bache emigrated from Norway to America in the autumn of 1839. After examining lands along the Rock River in Wisconsin, they ended up at the Norwegian colony along the Fox River in La Salle County. On the last day of the year they wrote to tell "relatives, friends, and acquaintances" of their experiences:

Arriving at this place, we found it a rather discouraging destination for our journey because of the great amount of sickness here—ague and diarrhea . . . . Here there was not a single house where someone wasn't lying sick. In most houses there were several; and many had died this summer and last . . . .

... During the last two summers sickness has been more prevalent than usual. The reason for this is supposed to be the fact that these years had unusually great drought and heat. This caused the rivers to shrink and the swamps to dry up. This evaporation is considered harmful to the health.

... Sometimes the cold here is at least as severe as that to which we are accustomed. In fact, one feels the cold even more here on the flat prairies, where there is no protection against the sharp, penetrating north wind.

... From Chicago to this place we had our first opportunity to see something of the country, which was chiefly prairie, with small wooded sections of oak here and there at intervals of several Norwegian miles. Everywhere the ground was covered with luxuriant grass and with beautiful flowers that still were in full blossom. That the soil here is extremely fertile we could see from the large amount of wheat, corn, and oats that already had been harvested and stood in stacks on the cultivated fields.

The extent of cultivation is most insignificant compared with what is wilderness. It is probable, moreover, that the largest part will always remain wilderness because of lack of woods for building material and fuel for settlers. As far as the quality of the soil is concerned, ... without cultivation it will yield the most luxuriant growth of all sorts . . . .

... On the large prairies which offer food for millions of livestock there is opportunity to feed as many animals as one is able to gather sufficient winter food for. In the fall these prairies are burnt over, causing more damage than good. <sup>44</sup>

## 1839: "Wanderings in the West in 1839"

Mr. J. Gould carried out a wide-ranging inspection tour of Illinois in the summer of 1839: from Paris to Decatur to Peoria to Peru to Rockford to Elgin and Chicago. Mr. Gould's route took him across the Fox River valley twice, first along the road north of Peru. One night he found himself at Troy Grove, immediately south of the Fox valley:

The next morning we left Troy grove \* and entered upon the wide prairie, where wood and water are seldom found:—eight miles brought us to Four mile grove, † where we found an excellent spring; thence to Pawpaw grove ‡ is six miles. The prairie here is quite high and rolling, even hilly—and the subsoil is gravel; the groves on the contrary are low and flat, occupying the lowest places where there is water, and are heavily timbered.

Between Pawpaw and Four-mile groves we enjoyed the most extensive view that I ever saw upon land: § towards the N.W., S.E. and N.E. in the direction of Chicago, there is nothing to intercept the sight for a distance of perhaps from 40 to 60 miles; indeed as far as the sight can extend, nothing but one boundless field of waving grass with here and there a little grove, which appear like little specks of miniature islets upon this vast and verdant ocean. It is a "grand prairie" indeed. In this vast solitude, man with all his power sinks into utter insignificance:—the beholder is astonished—his thoughts expand with his perception—but they will recur to *himself*, and then he feels his nothingness. The least reflecting man is sensible to the grandeur of the scenery upon the Alleghanies—but here much more so, for the scene is truly sublime.

Four miles from Pawpaw we came to Allen's grove where we stopped for the night, the next house upon our route being sixteen miles. <sup>132</sup>

Mr. Gould spent a few weeks inspecting land around Belvidere and in southern Wisconsin. He then departed from Belvidere for Chicago. He took Galena Road, entering the Fox River valley in the northwest corner of Kane County:

My friend accompanied me to Chicago, whither we rode in a wagon. The country eastward as far as Pleasant grove § is very fine and fast filling up: from thence to Fox river there are few inhabitants, and the country is not so pleasant being chiefly dry rolling barrens.

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\* The village of Troy Grove is about 10 miles north of La Salle.

† Four Mile Grove was at the north line of La Salle County along Four Mile Grove Creek, a small branch at the head of Indian Creek.

‡ Paw Paw Grove was on the high moraine that separates the Fox valley from the Rock valley.

§ The road between Four Mile Grove and Paw Paw Grove climbs a morainic ridge and rises more than 200 feet above the adjacent plains.

§ Pleasant Grove, in the headwaters of the Kishwaukee River, is now Marengo.

Elgin on Fox river appears to be a growing town, and is rather pleasantly situated. The river is broad but too shallow to admit of navigation.<sup>132</sup>

### 1840s?: Recollections of William I. Phillips

William Phillips recalled growing up in Wayne Township, on the east side of the Fox River in the northwest corner of Du Page County: "When I was about five years old I looked out early one morning and saw five deer that had made their night's rest in the orchard. . . . In those days we had other animals like wolves and pigeons, the latter in such multitudes that they almost blotted out the sun."<sup>107</sup> Phillips also reminisced about an encounter with a skunk.

### 1840: *A Summer Journey in the West*

Eliza Steele's stagecoach stopped at Ottawa to let passengers dine on the evening of July 7, 1840. Mrs. Steele had been riding the coach since leaving Chicago at 9 o'clock on the previous evening. Her route had taken her down the Des Plaines River valley, where she awoke amid the Grand Prairie:

. . . when I was awakened at dawn this morning, by my companion, that I might not lose the scene, I started with surprise and delight. I was in the midst of a prairie! A world of grass and flowers stretched around me, rising and falling in gentle undulations, as if an enchanter had struck the ocean swell, and it was at rest forever. Acres of wild flowers of every hue glowed around me, and the sun arising from the earth where it touched the horizon, was 'kissing with golden face the meadows green.' What a new and wonderous world of beauty! What a magnificent sight! Those glorious ranks of flowers! Oh that you could have 'one glance at their array!' How shall I convey to you an idea of a prairie. I despair, for never yet hath pen brought the scene before my mind. Imagine yourself in the centre of an immense circle of velvet herbage, the sky for its boundary upon every side; the whole clothed with a radiant efflorescence of every brilliant hue. We rode thus through a perfect wilderness of sweets, sending forth perfume, and animated with myriads of glittering birds and butterflies:—

"A populous solitude of bees and birds,  
And fairy formed, and many colored things."

It was, in fact, a vast garden, over whose perfumed paths, covered with soil as hard as gravel, our carriage rolled through the whole of that summer day. You will scarcely credit the profusion of flowers upon these prairies. We passed whole acres of blossoms all bearing one hue, as purple, perhaps, or masses of yellow or rose; and then again a carpet of every color intermixed, or narrow

bands, as if a rainbow had fallen upon the verdant slopes. \* When the sun flooded this Mosaic floor with light, and the summer breeze stirred among their leaves, the iridescent glow was beautiful and wonderous beyond any thing I

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\* Eliza Steele's observation about the patchy distribution of plant species and great masses of flowers is supported by statements of three botanists who knew the early Illinois prairie. Professor Eugene Hilgard remarked of the southern Illinois prairie, "It may be said that most of the species growing on the prairies had a tendency to grow in more or less compact patches, so as frequently to remind one of a varicolored quilt":

In open spaces and the general open prairie the tall *Andropogons* cover large areas almost alone, but usually interspersed with tall-growing flowers, especially Composites of many kinds. . . . Where the grasses were lower there were glaring patches of *Rudbeckia hirta*, *Echinacea purpurea*, *Coreopsis aristata*, and others. Large purple patches were also formed sometimes in the tall *Andropogon*, sometimes solidly, by *Vernonia Praealta*, and . . . numerous species of *Solidago*, among which *S. Canadensis*, *speciosa*, *rigida* and *altissima*, sometimes formed almost solid masses several acres in extent, especially the first named.<sup>138</sup>

The genus *Andropogon* has been applied to big bluestem, little bluestem, and Indian grass. Composites are members of the aster family. *Rudbeckia hirta* = black-eyed Susan; *Echinacea purpurea* = purple coneflower; *Coreopsis aristata* = ? *Bidens aristosa* (swamp marigold); *Vernonia praealta* = ? *V. gigantea* (tall ironweed); *Solidago canadensis* = Canada goldenrod; *S. speciosa* = showy goldenrod; *S. rigida* = prairie goldenrod; *S. altissima* = *S. canadensis* (Canada goldenrod).

After botanizing the central Illinois prairie, Dr. Charles W. Short wrote,

Its leading feature is rather the unbounded profusion with which a few species occur in certain localities, than the mixed variety of many different species occurring any where. Thus from some elevated position in a large prairie the eye takes in at one glance thousands of acres, literally empurpled with the flowering spikes of several species of *Liatris* . . . . In other situations, where a depressed or flattened surface and clayey soil favor the continuance of moisture, a few species of yellow-flowered *Coreopsis* occur in such profuse abundance as to tinge the entire surface with a golden burnish. . . . This peculiarity of an aggregation of individuals of one or more species, to something like an exclusive monopoly of certain localities, obtains even in regard to those plants which are the rarest and least frequently met with; for whenever one specimen was found there generally occurred many more in the same immediate neighborhood.<sup>271</sup>

The genus *Liatris* includes several showy species known as gayfeather and blazing star. The *Coreopsis* noted by Dr. Short is a wetland *Bidens* (bur marigold) rather than one of the upland members of the genus *Coreopsis*.

Professor Albert Herre, who spent his boyhood summers at a farm on the prairie of Tazewell County, reminisced in the *American Botanist*,

One of the most marvelous sights of my whole life, unsurpassed in my travels in nearly all parts of the world, was that of the prairie in spring. Unfading are my memories of that waving rippling sea of lavender when the "wild sweet William," a species of *Phlox* two to three feet in height, was in full flower. It stretched away in the distance farther than the eye could reach, while I sat entranced in the rear end of the wagon bed as we jogged slowly on to Delavan.<sup>136</sup>

had ever conceived. I think this must have been the place where Armida \*  
planted her garden, for she surely could not have chosen a fairer spot. Here are

‘Gorgeous flowrets in the sun light shining,  
Blossoms flaunting in the eye of day;  
Tremulous leaves, with soft and silver lining  
Buds that open only to decay.’

The gentle undulating surface of these prairies, prevent sameness, and add variety to its lights and shades. Occasionally, when a swell is rather higher than the rest, it gives you an extended view over the country, and you may mark a dark green waving line of trees near the distant horizon, which are shading some gentle stream from the sun’s absorbing rays, and thus, ‘Betraying the secret of their silent course.’ Oak openings also occur, green groves, arranged with the regularity of art, making shady, alleys, for the heated traveller. What a tender benevolent Father have we, to form for us so bright a world! How filled with glory and beauty must that mind have been, who conceived so much loveliness! <sup>283</sup>

Continuing down the valley toward Ottawa . . .

Flowers again in untold numbers, were covering the prairies, and here are many of our garden flowers growing wild, as blue bells, flox, bouncing bet, sweet william, roses, cocoris, heliotrope, <sup>†</sup> astre, &c., beside wild flowers as fringed gentean, solidago, <sup>‡</sup> orchis, yellow golden rod, scarlet lilly, wild indigo, superb pink moccasin flower, and scarlet lobelia. <sup>¶</sup> There were many I had never seen—among them was a species of teasel, having a tall stem, purple head, surrounded by a fringe of long pink leaves <sup>§</sup>—I called it the Indian fairy, for as its dark head bobbed about, and its pink mantle flowed around it, it looked like a tiny Indian. In fact, flowers

‘rich as morning sunrise hue,  
And gorgeous as the gemmed midnight,’

were smiling and blooming in every direction.

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\* Armida is a mythic enchantress.

<sup>†</sup> The name “heliotrope” was formerly applied to sunflowers and sunflower-like plants in general. Steele was not referring to the genus *Heliotropium*, which is in the borage family.

<sup>‡</sup> Solidago = goldenrod.

<sup>¶</sup> Eliza Steele’s accounting of the flora appears to be more rapturous than accurate.

<sup>§</sup> This plant is the common teasel (*Dipsacus sylvestris*). It is native to Eurasia but might well have spread into the wild by the time of Steele’s visit.

... The oasis, or 'oak openings,' upon the prairies are very beautiful. We passed through one this morning. It presented the appearance of a lawn, or park around some gentleman's seat. The trees are generally oak, arranged in pretty clumps or clusters upon the smooth grass—or in long avenues, as if planted thus by man. From their limbs hang pretty vines, as the pea vine \* —*Lonicera flava*, honey-suckle †—and white convolvulus. ‡ While our carriage wound among these clumps, or through the avenues, it was almost impossible to dispel the illusion that we were not driving through the domain of some rich proprietor, and we almost expected to draw up before the door of some lordly mansion. Our afternoon drive from the Au Sable to Ottawa was through a treeless prairie, looking very much like a vast lake or ocean. So much is this appearance acknowledged by the country people that they call the stage coach, a prairie schooner. When the sun shines brightly over the landscape, its yellow light gives the prairie an azure hue, so that one can scarcely see where the earth ends, and the sky begins. The undulations are a very singular feature in the landscape. This is best seen at early morning or sunset light—the summit of every little swell is illumined, while the hollow between lies in shadow, thus making the ground a curious chequer work. We saw many prairie hens, or species of grouse this afternoon, but no wolves or deer, much to my regret. The road is so much travelled that they avoid it and retire to more sequestered places. Birds innumerable, were sporting in the sun's light among the flowers, and butterflies clad like Milton's angels, in 'purple beams, and azure wings, that up they fly so drest.'

And now you ask, to what is the prairie land owing; fire or water? Many are the theories upon this subject. The Indian name for prairie, is *scutay*, (fire;) and they are in the custom of burning off the grass every fall. Some will tell you, to this must be traced the dearth of trees. As the mould is so deep—in some places twenty feet, and there are in it, except in one or two places, no trace of trees or the huge stumps they leave, this does not seem probable, at least the trees must have been burnt from ages. Others will tell you it is the sediment of an ocean which is spread over the land—or in some places large lakes. ... Why not join the two theories? The land has no doubt been covered with water; this is proved by the 'lost rocks,' § by the hard packed soil like the bottom of a lake; by its

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\* This pea vine might be any of a number of legumes (*Apios*, *Lathyrus*, etc.).

† *Lonicera flava*, honey-suckle = ? grape honeysuckle (*Lonicera prolifera*).

‡ White convolvulus = ? wild sweet potato (*Ipomoea pandurata*) or ? American bindweed (*Calystegia sepium*).

§ One theory held that boulders had been strewn across the landscape by the Great Flood. As a Methodist circuit rider observed in 1835, "But upon the plains no stone are visible, except here and there a primitive rock, called in this country 'lost rock:' There are on an average about one to a 100 or 180 acres, & are supposed to have been thrown here by the action of the water in the deluge." <sup>57</sup>

inky blackness, when wet, as we see in marshes, and, by the marsh grasses, and water plants which are seen growing upon it. This land, when dry was occupied by the Indians, who kindled a fire at the edges of a circle, among the rushes, which drove the animals in the centre where they were caught. The roots of the prairie grass is not destroyed by fire, and it therefore could not so completely eradicate the roots of those enormous trees which grow upon the western land. There is nothing in a prairie land to prevent the growth of trees, as wherever the fire is checked they immediately spring up. The rivers also protect their trees from fire.

Prairie land occupies two thirds of the State of Illinois; the dearth of water, and wood, and stone, will prevent them from being settled very thickly, except in the vicinity of the river; so that these beautiful plains will long remain undisturbed to gratify the traveller's eye. . . . Why should we stop at second causes in considering the origin of prairies; why speak of Indian fires, or rushing floods? The Almighty mind who hath conceived this admirable globe, and who, with such infinite taste, hath formed and beautified it, decking it with flowers and every other delight, has spread out this fair western world with lakes immense, and stately forests, wondrous cataracts, smiling prairies, and broad rolling rivers, to decorate the abode of His loved, although erring sons. He, in his wisdom, foresaw the time would come, when the exhausted soil, and crumbling institutions, and crowded homes of the old world, would require a new field for its overgrown population, and held this world perdu beneath the ocean caves until the fitting moment. When the hour had come, it arose fresh and blossoming from the sea, adorned with a goodly variety of mountain, lake, fair plain, and noble river, to compensate the lonely wanderer for the home he has been forced to leave. Now is not that a pretty theory? <sup>283</sup>

— Back to her journey . . .

A *ground swell*, rather higher than the rest, placed us upon an elevation, from whence we looked down upon the enchanting vale of Ottowa. A verdant plain lay below us, over which two bright rivers were winding, the Fox and the Des Plaines, \* which meeting, formed a broad and noble stream . . . . . In the

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Governor John Reynolds' explanation of the name: ". . . all over the northern part of the State, are found, what are termed, 'lost rocks.' . . . They are the primitive granite rock, and have no affinity or similarity to the rocks in the same region of country. This is the reason why they are called the lost rocks." <sup>238</sup>

After an excursion across northern Illinois, William Cullen Bryant wrote, ". . . we saw many boulders of rock lying on the surface of the soil of the prairies. The western people, naturally puzzled to tell how they came there, give them the expressive name of 'lost rocks.'" <sup>58</sup>

\* The river downstream from the junction of the Kankakee and the Des Plaines is called the Illinois River. Eliza Steele was under the mistaken impression that the stream between the mouth of the Kankakee and the mouth of the Fox is called the Des Plaines River: "The Des Plaines is called

centre of this fair valley, just where the 'bright waters meet,' is the little town of Ottawa. . . . A gentle descent of about a mile, brought us to the banks of the Fox, beneath the shadow of the shrubbery which fringed its shores we drove some time, following its windings and gazing at the bright sheen of its waters glittering through the foliage. We forded it twice while crossing the valley, and so pure and transparent was the stream, that the pebbles which lay upon the sandstone floor, could be seen as distinctly as in the hand. . . . The Fox river is here about 100 yards wide, but is low at this season. . . . Many parts of its shore are richly wooded. The rapids upon the stream afford a great amount of water power, serviceable for machinery. <sup>283</sup>

Mrs. Steele supped in Ottawa and continued on her way:

I shall not soon forget that lovely purple evening, which threw such a charm over the scenery as we drove from Ottawa to Peru, a distance of fifteen miles. Our road lay beside the bright Illinois, upon prairie or bottom land, which lines each side of the river throughout its whole length, making a valley from one to five miles broad, skirted with high limestone and sandstone bluffs. The ground was gay with flowers, and as the twilight threw its purple haze over the opposite shore, it became alive with hundreds of brilliant fire flies, larger and more luminous than any I had ever seen. <sup>283</sup>

### 1840: *The Eastern and Western States of America*

British author James Silk Buckingham toured Illinois in 1840. One day in late June he was on his way from Peru to Ottawa. His route paralleled the north bank of the Illinois River. The last three or four miles lay between Buffalo Rock and the mouth of the Fox River:

. . . we passed underneath a lofty promontory, . . . its towering perpendicular cliff overhanging our path. This is called The Buffalo Rock, from the fact of its having been the cliff, over which the Indians used, in their hunting excursions, to pursue whole herds of buffaloes, to their certain destruction. \*

. . . Our journey beyond this was almost entirely over a level prairie covered with grass and flowers, and having a rich bed of soil of several feet in depth. Occasionally, however, the bed of limestone rock, † on which nearly the whole of these prairies repose, would approach the surface, and for many yards would be entirely denuded of soil. These patches are, indeed, but few and small, and

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a branch of the Illinois, which joins with the Kankakee, and afterwards the Fox, and the united streams take the name of the Illinois." <sup>283</sup>

\* The use of Buffalo Rock to kill bison is further discussed in a footnote on page 322.

† Most of Mr. Buckingham's route between Buffalo Rock and the Fox River lay on a terrace eroded in St. Peter sandstone, but perhaps a half mile of the road crossed limestone. <sup>327</sup>



are quite insignificant compared to the vast area of fertile land, on which they are mere specks. One great advantage of this substratum of rock is, that stone is everywhere close at hand for the construction of the greatest, as well as the smallest works of architecture. All the stone required for the embankments of the canal, \* as well as the basins and locks, which are formed of the most substantial masonry, is procured from within a few yards of the spot on which it is used, all along the line; and all the towns that may ever cover this road, may also have every building in them constructed of excellent stone, close at hand.<sup>60</sup>

After a two-hour layover in Ottawa, Buckingham continued toward Joliet. His coach crossed the Fox River and headed up the east side of the stream. The route began along the high divide that separates the Fox River valley from Aux Sable Creek and other small streams that drain directly to the Illinois River:

Our way . . . was over an extensive prairie, the largest, indeed, that we had yet seen in the country, and, as we had three hours of daylight to travel on it, we had an opportunity of enjoying the novelty to the full. It was certainly very striking; and created sensations in my own mind of pleasure and awe; the former from the beauty of the verdant lawn, stretching over an immeasurable space, and adorned with the most brilliant and variegated flowers; the latter, from the entire isolation and solitude in which every object seen, and every living creature moving upon its surface, seemed to live. As far as the eye could reach, in every direction, there was neither tree, nor shrub, nor house, nor shed visible; so that we were rolling on as it were on the bosom of a new Atlantic, but that the sea was of rich green grass and flowers, instead of the briny and bottomless deep; and a pleasurable excitement was produced by the feeling that there was more of danger here than in wooded and peopled tracts, as, if attacked by man or beast, there was no shelter, and no safety in pursuit. Even if an accident should happen, such as the disabling of the horses, the breaking down of the coach, or the missing the track and going in the wrong direction, which might readily happen in the slightest fog, or the clearest night, there was no assistance or advice, no aid or information to be had in any quarter, but we should be left to our own resources entirely. I had often travelled in the Deserts of Arabia and Mesopotamia . . . and . . . I never felt before so strongly the sense of loneliness as here . . . .<sup>60</sup>

Mr. Buckingham quoted at length from one of James Hall's brilliant portrayals of the Illinois prairie, † then continued . . .

We could bear full testimony to the accuracy of this description, having in the course of our drive across this prairie seen the greatest variety of flowers in the

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\* The Illinois and Michigan Canal was under construction when Buckingham visited the Illinois valley.

† James Hall's word-pictures of the prairie can be read in the November 1830 issue of the *Illinois Monthly Magazine*<sup>120</sup> and in his 1838 *Notes on the Western States*.<sup>121</sup>

same spot that had ever met our eyes, not even excepting the beautiful ride from Cape Town to Constantia, at the Cape of Good Hope . . . .

As night approached, the aspect of the prairie became more remarkable, — the stars burning, . . . and the wide expanse of grassy lawn offering no object to break the even line of the horizon in any direction—the scene was truly sublime, and the stillness and solitude deeply impressive.

At midnight, however, our troubles began. . . . over the generally level plain of the prairies there are occasional undulations, like great waves upon a broad scale in the Atlantic or Pacific oceans. In the depressions between these swells, there are often found small rills of water, which so soften the soil as to form sloughs of considerable depth. Of these we had crossed several in the course of the night, but after a heavy plunge we had surmounted them all, till at midnight, we sunk into one so deeply, as almost to bury the wheels entirely, and to defy the utmost power of the horses to move them an inch. Our first step was to empty the coach of all its passengers, and then repeat the effort, but it was still immovable. After this, all the baggage was taken off . . . . We were literally “in a bad fix” . . . . Our trunks and carpet-bags were all lying in the slough, and absorbing water pretty freely; the labour of carrying them to drier land was such as could not easily be performed, as their weight occasioned the person bearing them to sink so deep in the mire, as to make it difficult to lift the feet up again. So there was nothing to be done with our present force, and it therefore became necessary to send for aid.<sup>60</sup>

They extricated the coach from the slough at dawn: “In about an hour’s drive, we reached a small cluster of houses, dignified with the name of Lisbon . . . .” The stage house was in southwestern Kendall County, about three miles southeast of the Fox River valley. Beyond this point Buckingham’s route continued east across the headwaters of Aux Sable Creek, diverging farther and farther from the Fox River:

We left Lisbon at half past six, A.M., and were soon out again on a boundless prairie, being at one time so completely in “the open sea,” that no single tree, or any other object, save the verdant grass and beautiful flowers, could anywhere be seen. Birds were here more abundant than we had noticed before. Large flocks of black birds, about the size of the English starling, were most numerous. Besides these were a larger-sized bird, with beautiful patches of crimson, contrasting with its jetty black, on the pinions and near the tail, so that when on the wing, it looked brilliant; \* but of prairie hens, a large kind of grouse that abounds here in the autumn, we saw none. The soil was everywhere fertile, and the undulations which broke the level of the surface, gentle and graceful. I had always thought the great plain of Esdraelon, in Palestine, one

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\* Buckingham tried to describe a red-winged blackbird.

of the most extensive and fertile to be anywhere seen, but it is surpassed in both these qualities by the prairies of Illinois. <sup>60</sup>

### 1841: A letter from Nicholas Frett

The family of Nicholas Frett emigrated from Germany to a new farm in the Fox River valley of McHenry County. Herr Frett bought 160 acres at \$2.50 per acre three miles from McHenry. In a letter to a friend in the Rhineland, he wrote, "The land lies in a good situation and also a beautiful neighborhood."

Also we have very fine meadow land upon which the grass is so high it reaches above my head. This will perhaps seem unbelievable to you, but it is true. I would not have believed it myself had I not seen it. The forest is composed of many trees and hazel brushes like none such are found in Germany and they grow in great masses. Also in the woods the wild lemons (plums) grow in abundance. When we bought the land we hardly knew what to say as we glimpsed the splendid fruit and high grass.

. . . Here it is not like in Germany that one must support the cattle with his labor; here cattle support themselves. They run out day and night, cows, hogs, oxen, horses, etc. Cows come home evening and morning by themselves. Feed is absolutely free. One can make as much hay as he wants and where he wishes without paying for it. . . . Every day we thank the dear Lord that He has brought us so to speak out of slavery into paradise.

. . . One cannot describe how good it is in America and the many remarkable things to be found here. If one should write about them they would sound too unbelievable. <sup>209</sup>

### 1841: "Address of Jas. T. Gifford, Esq."

When Union Agricultural Society met in Geneva, the founder of Elgin delivered a speech about agricultural progress. Among his remarks:

*Cultivated Grasses.*—The cultivation of grasses is a branch which should receive the attention of every farmer. Although the native prairie grasses of our section are of immense value, and will be for years, having given facilities for its rapid settlement and increase of stock which could not have been dispensed with; yet the extent of range required for stock is such, that as the lands are enclosed and country filled up, resort to cultivated grasses will be indispensable. Another important objection to the native grasses as an entire dependance, is, that they do not start as early nor hold out as late in the season as timothy, blue grass or red top.

*Improved Stock*— . . . The county of Kane in June last contained over 16,000 of the swine species . . . . <sup>104</sup>

## 1841: "Fowl-Meadow Grass"

J.S. Wright edited Volume 1 of the *Union Agriculturalist and Western Prairie Farmer*. In his "Notes from our Memorandum Book," Mr. Wright mentioned what he had learned about a native forage grass in the Des Plaines and Fox valleys:

Mr. Wynkoop showed us a few miles North of Libertyville, \* a piece of indigenous fowl-meadow grass †—says it grows very luxuriantly, and that he knows of other pieces like it. Mr. D.J. Townsend, near Bristol, ‡ Kendal co., told us, some time since, that we might safely recommend fowl-meadow for cultivation in all low and marshy places—that he had proven it; and if it be indigenous, no better evidence is wanted of its value to a Western farmer. <sup>331</sup>

## 1841: "Fencing" . . . "Hedging—Ditching"

Alfred Churchill farmed in the Fox River valley of west-central Kane County. He wrote to the *Union Agriculturalist and Western Prairie Farmer* magazine in Chicago "to give a few hints to my brother farmers upon the subject of fencing." Churchill had examined various alternatives for enclosing livestock on the prairie, and he concluded that the best approach is to dig a ditch, build an embankment beside the ditch, and plant a hedge atop the mound:

Ditch and embankment with a hedge on the embankment seems to be our only alternative. The ditch will defend the embankment and hedge from the horns and jaws of vicious or hungry cattle, and the snouts of prairie rooters; † the roots of the hedge will preserve the embankment from crumbling and falling, and the whole will improve by age and proper care.

*Material for Hedge.*—I have made some inquiry, and tried a few experiments to ascertain the best native shrubs and timber trees for hedges. Thorn, crab, and plum, may be obtained in abundance and will answer a good purpose for a hedge . . . .

Cotton-wood and the willow, natives; and Lombardy poplar, foreign, grow freely from cuttings . . . . If any one should wish to form a fence without being troubled with the shade, and expense of trimming a hedge, the yellow

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\* Libertyville is on the Des Plaines River in Lake County.

† Fowl-meadow grass = fowl manna grass (*Glyceria striata*).

‡ The north side of the Fox River at Yorkville was known as Bristol.

¶ Ill-bred, free-ranging swine were called prairie rooters, prairie breakers, landpikes, land sharks, alligators, and worse. Churchill admonished that farmers who mistreat their pigs and allow them to roam free will have to devote "a week spent to hunt hogs on the range." <sup>74</sup>

dwarf willow, \* found on dry prairies and barrens may be used with great advantage . . . .<sup>70</sup>

A farmer from Sangamon County wrote to Churchill for advice about which species to use for hedges, and Churchill's response saw print in the magazine:

I came into the country in 1834; in 1835 I put up a piece of embankment on wet and dry ground; while building, I put in willow slips on the wet ground, and crab, thorn, and plumb with roots, on the dry ground. Finding the next spring that I had not commenced in the proper place, I suffered the hogs to level it. I found that the willow had sent out long roots which formed so much of a support to the bank that in places it was difficult for the hogs to destroy it; and that the crab, thorn and plumb were easily removed. Since that time I have been continually in search of a material that should answer as well for dry ground as willow did for wet. In 1840 my attention was drawn to the dwarf willow from discovering that the slips would grow if slightly covered with earth; this I discovered while trying to eradicate them from a new garden that I was forming.<sup>330</sup>

#### 1841: "Prairie Soils, Ploughing, &c."

Alfred Churchill wrote again to the *Union Agriculturalist and Western Prairie Farmer*:

I infer that our prairie soil is, in part, composed of lime and iron among the mineral bases . . . from the fact that the deposits about nearly all of the numerous springs that are scattered over the prairies, are of that material generally combined. . . . Evaporation of the water, probably, is the cause of the mineral being left at the place where the water first breaks from the earth, more than at any other place; I, therefore, conclude that the deposit at these springs is a sure indication of their existence, though possibly not on the surface.

I also infer that rich vegetable mould is not as abundant on our prairies as many imagine, from the fact that but a small proportion of the vegetation of the prairies is left to decompose; as it is generally burned before decomposition takes place.<sup>† 72</sup>

#### 1841: "Weeds, &c."

Yet another letter from Alfred Churchill to the *Union Agriculturalist and Western Prairie Farmer*:

There are several kinds of weeds on the prairies that have something of the appearance of Lucern, † which cattle, horses, sheep, and even hogs, are

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\* This is the prairie willow (*Salix humilis*).

† Churchill did not recognize that most organic matter in prairie soil is from the decay of roots.

‡ Lucern = alfalfa (*Medicago sativa*). Churchill must have been referring to native bush clovers (*Lespedeza*), tick trefoils (*Desmodium*), or similar legumes.

extremely fond of, both when green and dry. I cut a few bunches twice, of one kind, that were about fifteen inches high, and might have cut them the third time before the frosts, as they grew after the second cutting about twelve inches—these bunches stood among other prairie grass. Is the grass commonly called “blue joint” \* the gamma grass? Can some one that is acquainted with the gamma grass tell us something about it. † Wild bean, commonly called pea-vine, ‡ is an excellent food for all kinds of stock; can it be cultivated, and how? 73

## 1842: “Fox River Country”

On New Years Day Wm. B. West of Blackberry Township in Kane County wrote to the *Union Agriculturalist and Western Prairie Farmer* to describe farming settlements on the west side of the Fox valley, extending from the river’s mouth northward through La Salle, Kendall, and Kane Counties:

Mr. Editor.— . . . A description of agricultural sections . . . will probably not be inappropriate to your columns. . . . commencing at the Indian Creek † west of Fox River . . . and North of Ottaway. The scenery in this section is truly fine, picturesque and beautiful: the farmers . . . have made great progress in cultivating the soil, improving stock, &c. . . . The two Indian creeks § differ from sections North, from their being of a remarkably broken, hilly and rocky surface.

The next settlement on our northern route is Somonauk Creek. \*\* The land in this settlement is dry, kind, rich and fruitful and eminently adapted to farming purposes. . . . The soil in this place and vicinity appears to be excellent for winter wheat in particular.

The next settlements North are the Rock Creeks †† . . . . Seven or eight years ago this part could boast of scarcely a white inhabitant. The Indian hunter was

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\* Both bluejoint grass (*Calamagrostis canadensis*) and big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*) were called blue joint.

† Gamma grass (*Tripsacum dactyloides*) is a tall grass of moist southern prairies. Because of its name, gamma grass is sometimes confounded with grama grasses (*Bouteloua*), which are indigenous to the short-grass prairie of the Great Plains.

‡ A number of viny leguminous species might have been called wild beans or pea-vines.

† Indian Creek joins the Fox River at Wedron.

§ The two Indian Creeks are Indian Creek (Big Indian Creek) and its biggest tributary, Little Indian Creek.

\*\* Somonauk Creek joins the Fox River at Sheridan.

†† The waters of Little Rock Creek and Big Rock Creek mix shortly before flowing into the river south of Plano.

the only human being met with. They now show settlements as fine, prosperous and as extensive as any in Northern Illinois. Wheat, corn, and pork, the fatness of the Earth abound here to overflowing.

The next settlements in our course are on the Blackberry Creek. \* Sugar Grove † is not the least important one. The township appears to be quite filled up . . . .

. . . Northwest of this is Lonely Grove; ‡ not so thickly settled. North of Sugar Grove is Blackberry Grove ¶ also an old and extensive settlement. . . . There are supposed to be more good and large farms under good cultivation in this place than any other in this part of the State.

. . . The next settlement north is Avon on the old Phelps State Road. It is well settled. —The timber is barrens and not of so good a quality as those just described which is first rate. The next settlement North is the New Hampshire settlement, containing a strip of barrens extending from the Ohio Grove § nearly to Fox River . . . . Next north is Chicken Grove, \*\* containing a strip of timber running east and west probably ten or twelve miles, well and thickly settled. Next north is Pigeon Grove †† . . . .<sup>317</sup>

## 1842: "Rabbits Girdling Fruit Trees"

Edward W. Brewster of Elgin wrote to the editor of the *Union Agriculturalist and Western Prairie Farmer* on December 10th of 1841 to make a suggestion. His letter appeared in the January issue of the magazine:

J.S. Wright, Esq., Sir, Passing through a young orchard a few weeks since, I observed a number of the trees had been girdled by the rabbits. Anxious to preserve my young trees, I made a wash of lime and strong soap suds, about the consistency of cream, which, with a common paint brush, was applied to the

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\* Blackberry Creek enters the Fox River at Yorkville.

† Sugar Grove was along Blackberry Creek, northeast of the present village of Sugar Grove.

‡ Lonely Grove (later known as Lone Grove) was in west-central Kaneville Township.

¶ The original Blackberry Grove settlement was along Blackberry Creek in southwestern Blackberry Township.

§ Ohio Grove was in the Kishwaukee River valley of western Virgil Township and eastern Cortland Township.

\*\* Chicken Grove was in the southwest corner of Plato Township. William West defined the Chicken Grove settlement broadly to include timbered lands extending to the east in Plato Township and to the west in Burlington Township.

†† The Pigeon Woods settlement extended across the Hampshire Township—Rutland Township line.

trunks; the result of which has been, thus far, effectually to check depredation. It may be necessary occasionally to renew the wash.

If the publication of the above fact will save one apple tree it will be worth more than the cost of a year's subscription to your paper.<sup>55</sup>

## 1842: "The Illinois and the Prairies"

James K. Paulding, newly retired from his duties as Secretary of the Navy, toured Illinois in 1842. Seven years later he reported his trip to the readership of *Graham's American Monthly*. We pick up Mr. Paulding's story as he arrives at Ottawa:

I found the situation so peculiarly agreeable, and the hotel so comfortable, that I determined to remain awhile, and amuse myself with making little excursions about the neighborhood, than which nothing can be more beautiful. The town stands at the junction of the Fox River with the Illinois. They are both clear, limpid streams, and though coming from far distant lands, meet and mingle together as quietly as if they had been friends from their birth. The scenery is as gentle as the rivers, and as mild and mellow as one of Claude's pictures,\* that actually makes a real connoisseur yawn and stretch to look at it. In one direction the eye passes over a long narrow prairie, all one rich expanse of grass and flowers, through which the Illinois sometimes hurries rapidly over a ledge of rocks, at others meanders lazily along. On either side of the river, the prairie is bounded by those remarkable terraces which form one of the more beautiful features of this region. They rise abruptly from the green level sward, to the height, I should imagine, of one hundred and fifty feet, in some places presenting a smooth grassy bank, whose ascent is dotted and their summits crowned with trees; in others, walls of perpendicular rocks disposed in regular strata, of varied tints, diversified with all sorts of verdure peeping from out the crevices. These terraces seem created on purpose for houses, from the porches or windows of which the proprietors of the rich fields and meadows beneath, might overlook their beautiful possessions, and thank a bounteous Providence for having cast their lot, not in Araby, but Illinois the blest.

Looking toward the north, from my window at the hotel, the great rolling prairie, extending from Ottawa to Chicago, presented itself in a succession of gentle risings and waving lines, all green, yet of such various shades, that there was nothing like sameness or dull insipidity. The Fox River approaches in this direction, and may be seen stealing its way with many windings of coy reluctance, toward the union with the Illinois where it is to lose its name and identity forever. Indeed, in all directions the views are almost unequalled for softness and delicacy, and I hope I may be pardoned for this vain attempt to

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\* Claude Lorrain was a 17-century French landscape painter.



communicate to my readers a portion of the pleasure I derived from their contemplation.

. . . Ottawa is a fine place for sportsmen, most especially those disciples of Job and St. Anthony who deal with the fishes. The traditionary fishing in the Illinois and Fox Rivers is capital, and there is scarcely a man to be met with, who has not at least once in his life been eminently successful.

. . . The fishing is . . . good, both in the Fox River and the Illinois. There is a large species called trout, \* rather from its habits than appearance, which frequents the rapids, and is a noble subject for the angler; while the vulgar fisherman, who affects the still water, may now and then luxuriate in a cat-fish weighing ten or fifteen pounds, and ugly enough to frighten a member of a militia court-martial. There is also the gar-fish, of great size, whose pleasure it is to let you toss him up into the air, without ever catching him, and then see him plump down into the water with the bait, perhaps hook and all, in his jaws. On the whole, however, the sport is extremely agreeable, and the little excursions to the various points renowned for angling, present such a succession of charming scenes, that no one can complain he toiled all day long and caught no fish, who has preserved the happy faculty of enjoying the smiling earth and balmy air.

Add to this, the prairies abound in a species of grouse, affording equal sport to the fowler and epicure. I am no shot, but my excellent host . . . was both a capital shot and a first rate angler. . . . He would every morning . . . sally out on the prairie, whence he never returned without a supply of game. . . . in short, I know few places where a man fond of rural scenes, rural sports, and quiet enjoyments, might spend his time more pleasantly than at the comfortable quarters of mine host at Ottawa, whose name is Delano, and whose house is on the margin of Fox River.

. . . Leaving Ottawa, I embarked on the sea of prairie . . . . †

. . . The prairies have already been described, as well perhaps as they ever will be, because they are a sort of *lusus naturae*, ‡ and there is nothing with which to compare them. To tell of what ingredients they are composed is easy enough, but to give a just idea of the effects of their combination, requires analogies not

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\* Paulding's "trout" is the smallmouth bass.

† Paulding did not describe his route across the grand prairie, but he eventually arrived at Joliet. The most direct route from Ottawa to Joliet follows the Illinois and Des Plaines Rivers for about 50 miles, but Paulding rode "some seventy or eighty miles on the prairie" to an unidentified Dutch community, then continued on his way until reaching Joliet "toward evening." Perhaps he took an indirect route up the Fox River valley as he formulated his impressions of the prairiescape.

‡ *Lusus naturae*: a "freak of nature."

to be found in the other productions of nature, nor in the imagery of the mind. Although substantial realities, they present nothing but deceptions, and I believe it is beyond the power of language, almost imagination, to exaggerate the strange and beautiful combination of what is, and what is not, sporting together in perfect harmony on these boundless plains. The eye becomes at length wearied with being thus perpetually the dupe of imaginary forms, and imaginary distances, while the mind involuntary revolts at the deceptions practiced on the senses.

. . . If ever miser were pardoned for coveting his neighbors land, it might be such land as the prairies of Illinois, where man labors almost without the sweat of his brow, and the crops are so abundant that all I heard the good people complain of was having more than they knew what to do with. . . . I passed over a vast region where the table of every man groaned under superfluities, and every brood of swine wasted more corn than would supply bread to a family of English manufacturers.<sup>218</sup>

### 1843: *Summer on the Lakes*

In the first days of summer Margaret Fuller departed Chicago for the Fox valley:

The first day brought us through woods rich in the moccasin flower \* and lupine, and plains whose soft expanse was continually touched with expression by the slow moving clouds which

“Sweep over with their shadows, and beneath  
The surface rolls and fluctuates to the eye;  
Dark hollows seem to glide along and chase  
The sunny ridges,”

to the banks of the Fox river, a sweet and graceful stream. We reached Geneva just in time to escape being drenched by a violent thunder shower . . . .

. . . A day or two we remained here, and passed some happy hours in the woods that fringe the stream, where the gentlemen found a rich booty of fish.

Next day, travelling along the river's banks, was an uninterrupted pleasure. We closed our drive in the afternoon at the house of an English gentleman . . . .

. . . A wood surrounds the house, through which paths are cut in every direction.

. . . I wish it were possible to give some idea of this scene as viewed by the earliest freshness of dewy dawn.

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\* The name “moccasin flower” has been applied to any of a number of orchids in the genus *Cypripedium*.

... The young ladies were musicians, and spoke French fluently, having been educated in a convent. Here in the prairie, they had learned to take care of the milk-room, and kill the rattlesnakes that assailed their poultry yard. ... In the wood grew, not only the flowers I had before seen, and wealth of tall, wild roses, but the splendid blue spiderwort, that ornament of our gardens.

... Next day we crossed the river. We ladies crossed on a little footbridge, from which we could look down the stream, and see the wagon pass over at the ford. A black thunder cloud was coming up. ... we were a mile or two on our way before the violent shower obliged us to take refuge in a solitary house upon the prairie.

... Near the door grew a Provence rose, then in blossom. Other families we saw had brought with them and planted the locust. \*

... No heaven need wear a lovelier aspect than earth did this afternoon, after the clearing up of the shower. We traversed the blooming plain, unmarked by any road, only the friendly track of wheels which tracked, not broke the grass. Our stations were not from town to town, but from grove to grove. These groves first floated like blue islands in the distance. As we drew nearer, they seemed fair parks, and the little log houses on the edge, with their curling smokes, harmonized beautifully with them.

One of these groves, Ross's grove, † we reached just at sunset. It was of the noblest trees I saw during this journey, for the trees generally were not large or lofty, but only of fair proportions. Here they were large enough to form with their clear stems pillars for grand cathedral aisles. There was space enough for crimson light to stream through upon the floor of water which the shower had left. As we slowly plashed ‡ through, I thought I was never in a better place for vespers.

That night we rested, or rather tarried at a grove some miles beyond ¶ . . . .

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\* The black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) was a favorite among the first wave of farmers to plant trees on the prairie. J.M. Peck wrote, "It is of rapid growth, and, as a valuable and lasting timber, claims the attention of our farmers. It forms one of the cleanliest and most beautiful shades, and when in blossom, gives a rich prospect, and sends abroad a delicious fragrance." <sup>221</sup> Farmers experimented with the honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*) for hedging livestock out of cropland.

† Ross' Grove was about three miles south of Shabbona's Grove, in the southwest corner of De Kalb County.

‡ Shallow bodies of water were sometimes called plashes, slashes, or splashes during the early 1800s.

¶ This was Paw Paw Grove, about three miles west of Ross' Grove.

. . . In this house we had, if not good beds, yet good tea, good bread, and wild strawberries . . . . "A's fish that comes to the net," should be painted on the sign at Papaw grove. \* <sup>100</sup>

### 1843: "Wintering Stock"

The February issue of the *Prairie Farmer* carries an article by Alfred Churchill of west-central Kane County. Mr. Churchill mentioned that a slough might serve a purpose even if it could not be farmed: "Some farmers water their cattle at a 'slew' . . ." — and he provided some definitions:

SLEW, *n.* Wet land, covered with a thick sward of grass, and occasionally with water.

SLEWED, *v.n.* Stuck in a slew: therefore it should be parsed as an inactive intransitive verb, though it generally conveys the idea of a smart chance of passion.

There, Mr. Webster, put that in your Dictionary. <sup>75</sup>

### 1843-44: "A Diary of the Illinois-Michigan Canal Investigation"

In December of 1843 John Davis began an inspection tour of the Illinois and Michigan Canal, which was under construction. He had come from Massachusetts to investigate the project for a British investment group. Among his goals was to determine how well the Fox River would serve to supply water for the canal. Mr. Davis met an engineer and another inspector at the west end of the canal in Peru on December 2. Their objective for the following day was Ottawa, at the mouth of the Fox:

We started about 10 O Clock for Ottaway, about 17 miles up the line of the canal, at a point where the Fox River unites with the Illinois. . . . The river <sup>†</sup> passes through what is called a bottom from which rises a sharp hill or high bank on each side from the top of which spreads out the table land generally prairie, being in this place apparently a dead level, as far the eye can reach in all directions. We took this bluff road, and followed it to Ottaway, to which we descended again into the bottoms. Along this bottom the canal passes and upon it this town which is a pretty village is built. In our route we passed a number of large farms having extensive enclosures and large fields.

The prairie strikes the mind with the greatest force. At this time it is slightly whitened with snow, and apparently is as level and free from trees and under-

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\* This proverb, usually phrased "All's fish . . .," encourages one to make do with whatever is available.

<sup>†</sup> At this point Davis was referring to the Illinois River rather than the Fox.

wood as the sea. The grass lies as it was cut down by the frost, and the landscape seems to be a common pasture outstretched from horizon to horizon. . . . The soil of the prairie is as black as coal dust, and this vegetable loam is said to be two or three feet deep, and so it appeared where excavations had been made by the road side. The custom is to burn over annually those vast tracts and hence the springing wood is destroyed. \* As the eye wanders over these vast uninhabited and uncultivated regions one cannot divest himself of the impression, that it is a country which has been cultivated, and abandoned for it resembles in all respects, what we call old field pastures. We saw no deer, but great numbers of prairie hens; the deer, however, are said to abound in great numbers, and this would seem to be confirmed by the fact, that an entire carcass weighing from 150 to 200 can be bought for one dollar. . . . Found at Ottaway a good comfortable house kept by Delano, who is a hunter and supplies his table with venison. † 179

Mr. Davis and crew continued their journey after a two-day stay in Ottawa:

Left at ½ past nine for Fox River Valley. . . . from the terminus of the canal at Peru, Ottaway is the first important place on the line towards the lake. ‡ Here is the junction of the river Fox with the Illinois . . . . . The river § is about 500 feet wide, and sends down a large volume of water. The town is located between the main river or Illinois and the canal, which from the Fox forward westerly runs a mile, twice the usual breadth between high and strong banks. . . . To . . . afford an adequate supply of water a dam is thrown across the Fox, about 4 or 5 miles from its mouth, and the river is thus brought or to be brought into the canal as a feeder, § both to supply navigation, and water power. . . . the power must eventually be very valuable, as the country is not well supplied generally with mill privileges.

. . . we ascended the westerly bank of the Fox, four or five miles, to the feeder dam, and then fording the river, after traveling a mile of more, through timber, emerged into the open, undulating prairie. We continued on this leaving the river some distance to the left till we came to a little village, called Newark, about 19 miles from Ottaway, passing scattered farms with their enclosures

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\* Davis wrote in his diary some days later, "Timber it must be remembered is scarce. All that the fires have spared consists of what stands upon the borders of the streams, which are far from numerous, and here and there a scattered grove which appear like islands in the ocean, some containing a few acres, and some many." 179

† Mr. Delano kept a hotel, the Fox River House. He was quite a fisherman as well as hunter (see pages 116 and 189).

‡ This is Lake Michigan.

§ Davis was describing the Fox River.

§ The feeder canal between Dayton and the mouth of the Fox River is described on page 357.

along the whole distance, but the country often, as far as the eye could reach, wore the aspect of one great neglected field, which had been suffered to go to grass and weeds. There was not a bush or tree to be seen, except here & there a small stream wending its way along the open space, skirted with timbers, and occasionally a patch of wood called in the language of the country, a grove. Settlements were, however, begun in almost all directions. . . . After leaving Newark, we seemed very gradually to rise upon the Prairie, and to approach nearer to the river the course of which was marked by the timber until we came upon a summit, which opened a surpassingly beautiful view of the valley. This is considered among the best of lands, and for many miles in extent all around, we saw farms and cultivation, enlivening the scene, while in almost all directions were visible patches of wood called groves, & generally known by the name of the proprietor. About sunset we came to a village of a few huts, called Yorkville, and here we forded the river opposite the mouth of Blackberry creek. Though we were 30 miles from the mouth, the size of the stream seemed in no respect diminished. From this point we passed, as was represented over a beautiful country alternating with prairie and timber for twelve miles to Aurora in Kane County but the night closing in upon us precluded all observations.

Decr. 6. Slept last night at Wilde's tavern . . . .

. . . Aurora is pleasantly situated on both sides of the river . . . . There is a dam giving five or six feet of head and fall upon which stand a number of mills. Among them is a new and very complete flouring mill with four run of stones owned by Mr. Hoyt . . . . I passed along a highway fenced; keeping near the river . . . . We next came to St. Charles . . . . There was a dam which supplied five or six apparently large mills. . . . I could not fail to be impressed with the extraordinary vigor and growth of the country. . . . In one word all appearances indicated a most vigorous and healthy growth of which agriculture was the basis. These elements alone can account for such advances in so short a period, assuming what all seem to agree in, that the soil is very fertile, to wit:

1. The country is ready for the plough instead of being encumbered with timber and subjecting the settler to the heavy expense of removing it.

- 2d. The whole prairie is a good road, and consequently the inhabitants are exempt from the expense of making them and have at once good cartage to almost any point. \* These two exemptions afford unspeakable relief to the

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\* John Davis emphasized the ease of riding across the open prairie. This was indeed the case before much of the prairie had been plowed and fenced—and when the ground was either dry or frozen. The weather was freezing during Davis' visit to the Fox River valley. When he headed out from Aurora to Naperville on December 7, his route was "over a road somewhat mirey and therefore now rough with frost." <sup>179</sup>

settler, and there is a third consideration not less important namely—These vast prairies afford grass and hay to any extent without a particle of labor. A man may grow stock to any extent without enclosing, or owning an acre of land devoted to either purpose. Hence it is, that the labor of the emigrant becomes at once productive, and all he needs to make him at once, with reasonable industry a thrifty man is a market. . . . All accounts concur in representing the Fox river valley, as a delightful and highly productive region. In fact the avidity with which it has been taken up would seem to establish the conclusion. I look also upon this river which is so large, and represented on all hands, as an unfailing stream, as the certain site of extensive manufactures at no remote day. The means of subsistence are cheap beyond example.

. . . From all I have witnessed, I am clearly of opinion, that no class of farmers in moderate circumstances, in any place can better bear taxation, than those in Illinois. The endless prairies afford the best of pasturage and mowing grounds for any amount, whatever, of stock. Any man, therefore, without owning a foot of land, and without a cent of expense for supporting them, except the cutting of the hay, which all admit cannot exceed, but generally falls short of a dollar a ton, can raise as many cattle, sheep, horses &c as he pleases. He has no occasion to fence, or own any except the land he cultivates. From this too he has no trees, stumps, or roots to overcome, but ploughs it as you would an old field, and has from the first heavy crops, and may easily from the first crop more than pay for the land after deducting all expenses.

. . . Indeed there seems to be no better fattening pasturage than the prairies.<sup>179</sup>

John Davis headed east from Aurora on the morning of December 7. Within a few miles he crossed a watershed divide, and in a few more miles he was on the banks of the DuPage River at Naperville. Continuing his way to Lockport, he caught his first sight of a prairie afire:

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A thaw set in on December 10th, and roads worsened. At Lockport on December 17 after two days of rainstorms, Davis wrote, "The mails have become deranged and we have recd. no letters or papers for two days." After rains let up on the 18th, Davis began a three-day, 90-mile excursion: from Lockport to Joliet and Wilmington, then "across the prairie, 38 miles" to the west bend of the Calumet River (near present-day Dolton), and back to Lockport. At the end of this trip, he wrote, "The weather is mild and the traveling exceedingly slow and laborious, the open untraveled prairie being decidedly preferable to the roads"—except where he crossed Forked Creek in Will County: "It is a small brook with a soft bottom, and in attempting to water the horses, they both sunk to their backs in the mud, and we came very near being swamped after a pretty severe struggle, however, the poor animals reached the opposite bank in safety, covered with mud."<sup>179</sup>

Christmas Day at Lockport: "The weather continues mild, but the travelling is horrid, and the mails are quite irregular . . . ." December 30: "The weather is still mild and the mud deep." The weather turned cold during the first week of 1844; then on January 11 . . . "Left Lockport upon sled for Chicago . . . ." January 15, hoping to leave Chicago for points East: "We fear that winter will break up and the roads become impassible."<sup>179</sup> Davis got out of town on the 18th.

Descending the river a few miles we crossed upon a bridge, and rose by a sharp ascent to the prairie—all open and unobstructed except here and there a little cultivation, and a faint glimpse of the blue tops of the trees in the valley of the Des Plaines river. This prairie was on fire at various points, and we could in some places trace the advancing line of flame for many miles. The day was cold with flakes of snow floating in the air.<sup>179</sup>

Davis probably crossed the Du Page River at Hobson's Mill, where Hobson Road now bridges the river on the south side of Naperville. He then climbed the ridge separating the West Branch of the Du Page from the East Branch. \* This height afforded him a panorama of a landscape on fire. Davis continued:

After traveling some 8 or 9 miles across the open plain, slightly undulating, we fell into the valley of the Des Plaines, and passing over a tract covered with boulders, we arrived at Lockport . . . .<sup>179</sup>

After settling in at Lockport, Davis made note of wildfires on three of the next five days. Although Davis was about 15 miles from the Fox River Area, his remarks are presented here because they are among the few accounts that describe the weather as well as fires:

. . . Decr. 8th. . . . The day has proved very boisterous the wind sweeping over the prairies with almost the violence of a hurricane. The cold is also piercing. . . . While I am writing the horizon is brightly illuminated in almost all directions with the streaming flames of the fires upon the prairies. They all appear to be some miles distant, but to one unaccustomed to such scenes, it is a little startling to witness the bright reflection from the sky.

. . . Decr. 9. Saturday. The wind subsided in the night and a clear pleasant winter day followed.

. . . Decr. 10. Sunday. . . . The day was mild with rain in the night.

. . . Decr. 11th. Monday. The morning is clear bright and mild, but indications of wind appear. The prairies were on fire again yesterday on the opposite bank of the river<sup>†</sup> and did some mischief to stacks and fences.<sup>‡</sup>

. . . Decr. 12. Tuesday. . . . The prairies still continue on fire and where the fire has passed over, look as black as coal dust. The fires last night seemed much more remote.<sup>179</sup>

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\* At this point the Fox River valley is five miles to the west, and the Des Plaines valley is four miles to the east.

† These fires were west of the Des Plaines River.

‡ Haystacks and fence rails were vulnerable to wildfires.



Mr. Davis stayed in the region until January 11. He mentioned no more fires even though he spent several days riding across the prairies. During this period the weather vacillated between mild and stormy.

### 1843 and later: "A Pioneer of 1843"

Rollin M. Wheeler came to live at Aux Sable Grove, a magnificent forest a few miles south of Oswego. The grove straddled the divide between the Fox River and the headwaters of Aux Sable Creek. Here is part of Mr. Wheeler's story:

I came to this county in 1843, and settled along the river on the edge of the grove. . . . It was government land around here. In the summertime it was a sight to behold. No flower but was represented in the prairie. There was no obstacle to the view. I could sit here at my house and see the steeples of the churches at Plainfield \* and at Lisbon, † which was twelve miles off. You could see Big Grove ‡ from here. The Indians had a trail from Walker's Grove ¶ which passed forty rods below the house. A beech wood tree § on the banks of a creek near Murley's was the only obstacle to the view. The edge of the grove was pretty thickly settled. . . . When Johnson and I lived in the old Cowdry place we walked out one Sunday, and came up on a drove of deer. They were not frightened by us, and when we came up did not run. However, if we came too close they would slowly move off, looking at us out of their great brown eyes. The next spring some one appointed a great wolf hunt. A flag was erected between Wollenweber's old place and Howell's. They formed a ring and moved forward. There was a great turnout. People came from as far as Ottawa. It was estimated that two thousand people took part in the hunt. When the circle closed up there was an enormous quantity of deer, many of which were let out, but a great many were killed along with the wolves. Twenty-six wolves were killed.

. . . Most of our ploughing was done with wooden ploughs. One man had a wrought iron one, but the wooden ones were better. <sup>27</sup>

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\* Plainfield is eight miles east of Wheeler's vantage point.

† Lisbon is 12 miles to the southwest across the headwaters of Aux Sable Creek.

‡ Big Grove was 10 miles to the west-southwest, viewed along the ridge that forms the south wall of the Fox River valley.

¶ Walker's Grove was at Plainfield.

§ The American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*) is not at all likely to grow far out in a prairie. The species is not known to have occurred anywhere in or near this part of the Fox River valley.

## 1844: "A Trip South"

The editors of the *Prairie Farmer*, John S. Wright and J. Ambrose Wight, shared some observations with their readership about a trip down the Fox River valley and beyond:

A traveler in passing through Kendall and Lasalle counties and those which lie south of these in the same tier, till he arrives in Sangamon \* will have on his left a large prairie, which extends with broken intervals, nearly across the state; and in places we were told one might visit the Wabash without touching timber. This prairie is indented and studded with groves more or less frequent. Confirmatory of a statement made in a former number of this paper, we were gratified in noticing the progress which the young timber had made and is making wherever it has the necessary protection. So surely does a young growth spring up after settlement, that we could generally pretty nearly tell how long a particular section had been settled, by the size of this young growth. As we advanced southward, we found it to increase in size, till in Sangamon and Morgan counties it frequently constituted a forest of half grown trees. Sometimes this younger growth formed a piece of woodland by itself, and sometimes it has sprung up amid the scattering trees, which form what are called "barrens"—the old trees of which now stand like patriarchs watching the thrift of their stalwart progeny. If those among us, who are so careless of their shrubby grounds as to suffer the fires to run through and kill the young shoots every season; while they mourn over our scantiness of timber, could but look at these young forests, they might calculate precisely how long it would take to *balance* timber and prairie on their farms. . . . We are satisfied more and more, that one of the surest ways for a farmer to make money is to keep the fires out of every rod of his grounds on which there are any signs of a shrub starting. On the large prairies timber will not always spring up from keeping out the fires, but there are many places where plowing will occasion the shooting up of a vigorous growth of poplars. † 332

## 1844: *Early Bench and Bar of Illinois*

Eighteen forty-four was a year of unexampled wetness. John Dean Caton, who later became Chief Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court, rode the law circuit then:

When going to open the first term of the fall circuit in 1844, in Kendall county, ‡ I found the roads in a most horrible condition, showing that no road labor had been bestowed upon them. That was the wettest summer that I ever

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\* The route led to the Sangamon River at Springfield.

† These poplars are eastern cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*) or possibly bigtooth aspen (*P. grandidentata*) or quaking aspen (*P. tremuloides*). All three have wind-borne seeds and readily colonize bare ground.

‡ The county courthouse was beside the Fox River in Yorkville.

knew in this country. All the sloughs were full of water, and had been tramped up until they seemed to have no bottom, and I myself, with a light carriage and two horses, got stalled in a slough not two miles from the court house . . . .<sup>66</sup>

### **1844 & '46: Descriptions of a circle hunt and a wolf hunt**

To organize and carry out a "circle hunt," a flagpole was erected on a prominent point in the prairie. At an appointed time hunters arrayed themselves for miles along the perimeter of a huge circle that was centered around the pole. On signal the hunters advanced toward the center of the circle and drove wildlife ahead of them. As hunters and quarry neared the pole, slaughter commenced. One day in January of 1844 residents of the Fox valley conducted a hunt north of Yorkville that began as a circle 12 to 15 miles in diameter. Mr. N.S. Young recorded the event in his diary:

The center for closing in and securing the game was in Sugar Grove Township, in the Rob Roy Slough. \* A tall pole was raised in the center of the slough, from the top of which a flag with the stars and stripes floated in the breeze, and could be seen for a long distance. It was a grand sight, after the lines were closed in, making a circle of half a mile or more in diameter, of men on foot, horseback, some with teams and wagons, with numerous tin horns, pitchforks, drums, flags, and innumerable dogs, all in readiness for the fun. About a dozen wolves were enclosed, seven or eight of which were killed, the rest escaping. The laughing and hooting of the men, with the yelping of the dogs, were indescribable, intermingled now and then with the crack of a rifle. As a wolf would, under chase of the dogs, attempt to pass out through the line, the tin horns, drums and hooting would scare him back toward the center, soon to be caught, overpowered and quickly dispatched by the yelping crew after him. A few deer were started in the morning, but escaped before the line was sufficiently close to hold them. After the fun was over, a general cheer was given all round the ring, and then the men broke ranks and started for their homes, going east, west, north, and south, well satisfied and well paid for the day's performance. The settlements then were near the timber and groves, the center of the prairies being unfenced and open.<sup>35</sup>

Circle hunts were carried out during a brief period of years after a region was occupied by immigrant farmers. It was not possible to conduct a circle hunt until there were enough hunters to form a huge circle. But within several years after farmers began moving into a locality, the prairie became so broken up by fields, fences, and ditches that hunters could no longer make a clean sweep.

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\* Rob Roy Slough was a large wetland at the head of Rob Roy Creek. The former slough is crossed by the Kane-Kendall County line and Illinois Route 47.

Sometimes the hunt took the form of a headlong dash along a single front rather than a closing circle. Two years after the above-described circle hunt, such a chase was carried out in neighboring Du Page County. Fences foiled the fun:

The wolf hunt was a source of amusement . . . for years, and whenever a wolf dared to show his head above the prairie grass, the boys were instantly in pursuit of him. The pursuers usually went on horseback, carrying in the hand a short club, and the captain of the company was the one who had the swiftest horse. The plan of action was to spread out in every direction and scour the prairie until the game was started, when by a peculiar yell, the whole company was called together and the chase commenced. Every horse was now put to his utmost speed . . . . It is utterly impossible to describe the wild excitement that attended the wolf chase. Generally a race of from three to five miles would bring *Mr. Wolf* down . . . .

. . . At one of the last of these hunts a circumstance occurred which may be classed with the serio-comic . . . . On a cold, blustering morning in January, 1846, the *boys* (men) started out for a hunt. Wolves were becoming scarce, and the party wandered off some five or six miles, to the north of what was then known as the Duzenberry claim. The new settlers had commenced fencing their lands, and at several places before coming to this claim the party had been obliged to dismount and remove the obstruction, but here they found a *ditch* fence, \* which terminated at a great distance on the open prairie, and was built upon the supposition that the cattle could not, or would not go around it, consequently there was no fence on the back side.

The snow had drifted very deep on the side of this fence opposite to the party, and although their horses had been trained to jumping, yet, an attempt to leap it would only land both horse and rider floundering in a deep snow bank.

While holding a consultation upon some method of surmounting the barrier, a wolf started from a thicket and crossed the path only a few rods from them. . . . The chase led us far out into the prairie, and before long we found ourselves running inside the fences on the Duzenberry claim, and would soon have to clear one of the ditch fences. There were fifteen horsemen spread out in a line, every man plying the whip and spur, and every horse at the top of his speed. <sup>241</sup>

— Mr. Wolf cleared the fence but all his pursuers were arrested by the snow-filled ditch.—

At this juncture the wolf was discovered about a mile distant, standing upon an elevation and looking back over his shoulder. . . . the company started again, . . . and within five minutes from the time of the new start *Mr. Wolf* had surrendered unconditionally to superior force. <sup>241</sup>

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\* A ditch fence was constructed by digging a trench and mounding the excavated earth along one side. The mound was covered with prairie sod. Such fencing did not effectively contain wayward livestock unless it was topped by a hedge.

## 1845: A letter from S. Long

In June the *Prairie Farmer* published a letter by S. Long, from the Jefferson \* settlement of Kane County. Mr. Long protested the use of straw to cover the floor of bridges because pigs root up the straw "so as to make the bridge almost or wholly impassable." He advocated native shrubs as an alternative: "... in almost every place where a bridge is wanted, near by may be found either the hazel bush, the willow, or other bushes which may be easily cut and used for the same purpose . . . ." <sup>185</sup>

## 1845: "Cost of Sheep Keeping—Stocking Prairie"

Alfred Churchill of Kane County wrote to the *Prairie Farmer* to answer a reader's enquiry about the cost of raising sheep for wool. Churchill's plan includes a full-time shepherd for a flock of one thousand:

The shepherd could not be dispensed with during summer, unless the wolves were destroyed <sup>†</sup> and the pasture fenced and well set with English grass. <sup>‡</sup>

. . . after ten years experience in northern Illinois I have found that sheep live well on grass or on what they find on the prairies in the fall, even till the snow comes, *provided*, ALWAYS, *that they are not confined to the same piece of ground*. Give them a new range every day, or give them English "grass or roots <sup>¶</sup> or both combined."

Prairie may be well set with grass by sowing the seed in the spring, and pasturing close afterwards. It is better to harrow, on sowing the seed. Or sow on wet ground, mow in June, and pasture close through the remainder of the season; mow the next year in June, and pasture as before. The third mowing will be principally English grass, especially if timothy and red top are sowed in equal quantities. Or you may, if the season is wet, burn a piece of prairie on which a good coat of old grass remains in June. Sow on plenty of seed, harrow well with a sharp harrow, feed close through the summer, and the next season the tame grass will be found very well set. If the weeds and wild grass are likely to overrun it, mow it in June, and your stock will keep the wild stuff down and

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\* Jefferson was renamed Oak Park but later faded away.

<sup>†</sup> At the beginning of 1845 Churchill wrote that he had raised a few sheep until the past year, but it was unprofitable—in part because "the wolves worked up too many of the bodies of my sheep." <sup>77</sup> Four years earlier he mentioned that he timed the birth of his lambs to help protect them from predators: "My practice is to have the lambs fall as early in the winter as possible; I can then keep them from wolves and foxes with ease." <sup>71</sup>

<sup>‡</sup> The name "English grass" was given to non-native cool-season species such as Kentucky bluegrass, timothy, and orchard grass.

<sup>¶</sup> Sheep were fed turnips and other root crops.

allow the tame grass to get a good hold. If for pasture, blue-grass should be mixed with other seed.<sup>76</sup>

### 1845: "Notes of Travel in the West"

Solon Robinson, a farmer and writer from northwestern Indiana, set out on New Year's Day 1845 to "proceed through the South Western States." His excursion was "for the purpose of procuring information and promoting the interests of 'The Cultivator,'" an Eastern agricultural magazine. Subscribers to the *Cultivator* were apprized of Robinson's inspection tour in a series of letters titled "Notes of Travel in the West."

Before going to the Southwest, Mr. Robinson went northwest. On the third day he was in Joliet, headed for the Fox River valley:

... I set off in the afternoon of the 3d, to visit one of the largest farms that I know of in this part of the State, situated about 14 miles westerly, most of the way across open prairie.

... After my cool ride, I met with a warm reception in the very comfortable cabin of Major Wm. Noble Davis, (Au-sable-grove, Kendall county, Illinois,) \* whose farm is situated about 2 miles from that beautiful stream, the well known and oft described Fox river . . . . The Major . . . located upon this lovely spot about ten years ago, and by the purchase of an "Indian Reserve," † secured about 500 acres of timber, that is now worth from \$30 to \$50 an acre. To this he has added about 1500 acres of as fine rolling prairie as fancy could wish, about 1100 acres of which is under substantial rail fences, mostly divided into lots of 80 acres each . . . . Indeed, I believe he intends in time to make a sheep farm that will produce an amount of wool that will make some of the down east 100 acre farmers look with wonder, and wonder if such things can be. ‡ He has

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\* Aux Sable Grove was about three miles south of Oswego.

† Aux Sable Grove had two Indian reservations. Theodore Jessup recounted them to the Chicago Literary Society in 1905:

These were the two reservations of Waishkeshaw, and Mohaway. Waishkeshaw was a Pottawatomie Indian woman who was given a thousand acres of forest here in 1829. She sold it in 1835 to Joseph Laframboise, one of the fourteen tax payers in Chicago in 1825. A tract of forest adjoining was given to the widow of the Indian, Wolf, whose name was applied to the angle of land formed by the junction of the north and south branches of the Chicago river. "Ma-hwa-wa" was the Algonquin word for wolf, so it is the Mohaway Reservation.<sup>158</sup>

‡ In a letter to the *Prairie Farmer*, Solon Robinson noted that Major Davis was raising 1,200 sheep.<sup>250</sup>

one little patch of Kentucky blue grass, \* of 160 acres. He has as yet but one barn, but that is a most noble one . . . . He intends in the course of a couple of years more to get the remainder of his prairie under fence and in cultivation or seeded down to grass, and then with a well fenced 1500 acre farm—well what then do you think he intends to do? why, then he intends to *build a house and get married*.

. . . On Saturday afternoon, the Major drove me up to Oswego, 2½ and Aurora, 7 miles, two flourishing villages on Fox river, at both of which the river, as well as at numerous other places, affords the best of water power, and at the latter is one of the best finished flour mills of 4 run of stone in the State.

Here we visited a picket fence making machine. †

. . . Many of your Orange county ‡ readers will be interested to hear that I visited an old resident of that county, by the name of Townsend, who with several of his children, live in the same grove with Major Davis, and own about 3,000 acres of fine land. From Mr. Townsend I first learned that fowl meadow grass, ¶ which is one of the most valuable kinds that I am acquainted with for wet prairie, is indigenous to the country. By conversation with the old gentleman, I also became satisfied of what I had long believed, that what we call “blue grass,” is a different article from what is known at the east by the same name. §

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\* Native prairie grass makes poor forage when it stops growing and goes dormant. Prairie farmers quickly turned to Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*) to provide green pastures during the fall, winter, and early spring—as Solon Robinson described for the *American Agriculturist*:

One of the first objects with the shepherd upon the prairie, should be to get a good stock of domestic grass for fall feed. . . . I believe that blue grass will be found to be the most permanent pasture that can be made for sheep, and that it may be worked in upon the prairie by fencing small lots and yarding sheep, which will soon kill the wild grass, and then, by sowing the blue grass seed, it will take well without plowing. <sup>252</sup>

† Solon Robinson cultivated an intense interest in experiments at fencing the vast prairies. As he rode toward the Fox River from Joliet, he noted,

I had a dozen miles across an open unsettled prairie, which must long remain unsettled, unless cultivated without fence, or else by some as yet undiscovered method of fencing; for the settlements are already as much extended from the groves upon each side as circumstances will admit, and the experiment of sod fence, I look upon as a total failure. <sup>249</sup>

Construction of a sod fence or ditch fence is described in a footnote on page 127.

‡ Orange County is along the Hudson River in southeastern New York.

¶ Fowl meadow grass = fowl manna grass (*Glyceria striata*).

§ A year and a half later Mr. Robinson ruminated, “But, pray tell me, which is the real Kentucky ‘blue grass,’ *Poa pratensis* or *Poa compressa*? [Botanists have decided *Poa pratensis*.] What is called blue grass in New York is a different grass from that which is so called in Kentucky.” <sup>251</sup> Eastern farmers generally knew *P. compressa* (Canada bluegrass) as their “blue grass.”

Bradbury's 1846 geography of the upper Mississippi valley mentions a branch of the Illinois River called, by the Indians, *Pishtaco*, and by the inhabitants of the country, in modern times, the *Fox River of the Illinois*.<sup>52</sup>

The eastern blue grass he thinks much the best. \* Neither of the kinds are profitable to cultivate for hay, but for fall and winter feed, particularly for sheep, exceedingly valuable.

... On Monday, I passed on my way down Fox river . . . . . I stopped this night with an old farmer from Lycoming county, Pennsylvania<sup>†</sup> . . . . . he has bought 400 acres of land—rich land—200 of prairie, and 200 that is neither timber or prairie, plow land or meadow, but covered with a growth of small oaks, fit only for fire wood, while his rails must be hauled from 3 to 6 miles, and cost \$2,50 or \$3 a hundred.

The whole tract cost \$3 an acre, 50 acres under improvement with poor buildings, destitute of water, and several attempts to get good well water, have failed at 70 feet deep. . . . I mention this circumstance, to show that emigrants do not always better their situation, when they leave substantial comfort in the east to pursue a vision of acquiring numberless acres of wild land in the west, however rich the soil of those acres may be.

Ten miles north of Ottawa, is "Indian creek" . . . . Here is a body of good timber, which is the nearest timber to that town. The space between this settlement and Ottawa, being unoccupied prairie. Four miles above Ottawa, there is about 20 feet fall over a rocky bed of the Fox river, partially occupied by a sawmill and flouring mill of five run of stones, and a woolen manufactory of 4 satinet, and three broad looms, &c. As such manufacturing establishments are as yet so rare, although so much needed, I like to note all that come in my way.

... Ottawa is situated on the Illinois at the mouth of Fox river, and head of steam navigation in high water . . . . . There is a Court House at

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*P. pratensis* (Kentucky bluegrass) was more likely to be known as June grass or spear grass in the eastern states.

\* Farmers came to different conclusions about the value of Kentucky bluegrass for hay and pasturage. One authority judged, "It . . . may be questioned whether it deserves to be reckoned among the superior pasture grasses."<sup>96</sup> Another farmer reported, ". . . it is not only the most beautiful of grasses, but the most valuable of crops. . . . it makes fine winter pasture for all kinds of grazing animals. . . . It makes also the best of hay."<sup>96</sup> Although Kentucky bluegrass thrives on black prairie soil, Canada bluegrass tends to be favored on less productive sites: "It is an exceedingly valuable pasture grass on dry, rocky knolls . . . . This should not be confounded with Kentucky blue grass . . . ." <sup>96</sup>

<sup>†</sup> Robinson crossed the Fox River on ice and proceeded downstream. He must have over-nighted near the mouth of Blackberry Creek, Big Rock Creek, or Somonauk Creek.



Ottawa . . . . As an evidence of very uncommon taste in this treeless country,  
I notice the yard set with shade trees. \* 249

### 1845: "Tour down the Fox Valley—Sheep—Orchards"

Solon Robinson's journey had taken him as far as Springfield by January 14, when he paused to write to the *Prairie Farmer*:

Messrs. Editors: I am on a "tour of observation" through the "Prairie State"—  
can I interest your readers with a few remarks on the things that I have observed?

Part of my tour was down the valley of the Fox River, from Aurora to its mouth  
at Ottawa. This is one of the best mill streams in the State. At Aurora there is  
an extensive and well finished flouring mill . . . . There is also considerable  
other machinery driven by water power from the same dam—among which is a  
picket-fence manufactory . . . .

. . . The land of the Fox River valley is of extreme fertility, and particularly  
on the west side, a fine, dry, rolling surface, in some places gravelly: but on  
this side there is but little timber, which makes it inconvenient—for there are  
no bridges, and sometimes no fording. On the east side I do not like the land  
generally so well, but the greater convenience of timber makes up for that.

Ten miles above Ottawa there is a good body of timber, on Indian Creek . . . .

. . . At present no exertion is made to raise any thing for sale but wheat . . . . 250

### 1846: *Letters of a Traveller*

William Cullen Bryant rode a stagecoach from Chicago to Peru in the summer of 1846.  
*Letters of a Traveller; or, Notes of Things Seen in Europe and America* tells of his journey.  
The first day of travel took Bryant not far west of Joliet. On the next day he continued  
down the Illinois valley through Ottawa, arriving in Peru about midnight. He had been this  
way before:

In my journey the next day, I was struck with the difference which five years  
had made in the aspect of the country. Frame or brick houses in many places  
had taken the places of log-cabins; the road for long distances now passed  
between fences, the broad prairie, inclosed, was turned into immense fields  
of maize, oats, and wheat, and was spotted here and there with young orchards,

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\* Two years after Solon Robinson's visit, J.H. Buckingham admired these trees: "Ottawa . . .  
has a large court-house, pleasantly situated in a square surrounded with thriving acacia, or locust  
trees . . . ." The black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) was formerly known as an acacia.  
Buckingham summarized the merits of this species: "The acacia is easily cultivated, and grows  
very rapidly wherever it is planted . . . ." 228

or little groves, and clumps of bright-green locust-trees, and where the prairie remained open, it was now depastured by large herds of cattle, its herbage shortened, and its flowers less numerous. The wheat harvest this year is said to have failed in northern Illinois. The rust has attacked the fields which promised the fairest, and they are left unreaped, to feed the quails and the prairie-hens.<sup>58</sup>

Bryant continued from Peru to Princeton by wagon. The stagecoach ride had proven so miserable that he "procured a private conveyance" for his trip back to Chicago. He took a more northerly route through the Fox River valley, stopping overnight at Paw Paw Grove and at Aurora. After returning to Chicago, Bryant wrote,

I mentioned in my last letter that the wheat crop of northern Illinois has partially failed this year. But this is not the greatest calamity which has befallen this part of the country. The season is uncommonly sickly. We passed the first night of our journey at Pawpaw Grove—so named from the number of pawpaw-trees which grow in it, but which here scarcely find the summer long enough to perfect their fruit. The place has not had the reputation of being unhealthy, but now there was scarce a family in the neighborhood in which one or more was not ill with an intermittent or a bilious fever. \* . . . The sickness was ascribed by the settlers to the extremely dry and hot weather following a rainy June. At almost every place where we stopped we heard similar accounts. Pale and hollow-eyed people were lounging about. "Is the place unhealthy," I asked one of them. "I reckon so," he answered; and his looks showed that he had sufficient reason. At Aurora, where we passed the second night, a busy little village, with mills and manufactories, on the Fox River, which here rushes swiftly over a stony bed, they confessed to the fever and ague.

. . . It is a common remark in this country, that the first cultivation of the earth renders any neighborhood more or less unhealthy. "Nature," said a western man to me, some years since, "resents the violence done her, and punishes those who first break the surface of the earth with the plough."<sup>58</sup>

### 1846-53: *Life and Adventures of David H. Fillmore*

David Fillmore was nearly seven years old when his family moved to the neighborhood of Lily Lake in Kane County. The Fillmores boarded their wagon and set out from Chicago on May 1, 1846. As David recalled in his autobiography, they reached the Fox River valley on the second day of travel.

The roads were bad, and consequently we made but twenty miles and camped in the big timber west of St. Charles and the Fox River. † Father picked out a beautiful camping ground in the edge of the timber, where there was an abun-

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\* Malaria was known by many names, including intermittent fever and bilious fever.<sup>242</sup>

† This big timber probably was east of the river.

dance of blue joint grass \* for our stock. . . . The oxen and cow . . . wandered out some thirty rods, and at ten o'clock were stampeded by a large flock of deer, and as we had no bell on them, we did not find them for two days and then we had a great deal of difficulty to get the cow away from the deer, but we finally won out and made the trip in five days . . . .<sup>95</sup>

Once at their new home beside the main road at Lily Lake . . .

The white-faced mulley cow gave our people a great deal of anxiety and annoyance, on account of her running away with the numerous flocks of deer and elk † that ran on the prairies as well as the timbered portions of Illinois, during those early times. The cow almost made the living for the family. I remember of her being absent once for a week before we were able to find her and then it was in company with a herd of ten or a dozen deer and elk, and almost as wild. So we secured a rope and tethered her out on the prairie. This proved a decoy, so the deer would come to her, and father, with his British musket, kept the family in fine venison, so that the cow proved to be a great blessing of supply to the family.<sup>95</sup>

### 1847: "Correspondence of the Courier"

J.H. Buckingham, a newspaper reporter from Boston, rode a stagecoach from Galena to Chicago in the summer of 1847. Upon his arrival in Chicago, he reported to the readers of the *Boston Courier*, "The prettiest town we passed through was Aurora, on the Fox River":

Only nine years ago the country around this village was almost unsettled. At La Fox, as it was then called—now Geneva ‡—were a few families, and within the circuit of perhaps fifteen miles there only lived about twenty families in the whole; now, in that same circuit there are six villages, with an average population of sixteen hundred inhabitants in each! The water-power on the Fox River is great, particularly for the Western country, and every day is adding to the wealth of those who settled in its valley a few short years ago.<sup>228</sup>

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\* Big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*) is the species most often called "blue joint" in the 1800s. The lowland prairie grass *Calamagrostis canadensis* (currently called bluejoint grass) received scant mention during the 19th century.

† Elk are thought to have been extirpated from the region many years before David Fillmore's reported experiences with elk (approximately 1846–53). Perhaps Fillmore confused antlered white-tailed deer with elk.

‡ The post office at Geneva was called La Fox from 1836 to 1850. Later a railroad crossing (Kane Station, about five miles west of Geneva) was renamed La Fox.

Oswego ("Flowing out") is an Iroquois name for a place at the mouth of a river in New York, according to "Indian Names in Illinois."<sup>118</sup>

### 1848: A letter to the Genesee *Evangelist*

After visiting the Fox River valley, a traveler submitted the following to a Christian periodical in upstate New York:

... if any preference can be given among so many counties, all of which are so beautiful and so fertile, that preference must be given to Kane. I think, after taking all things into consideration, that I may safely pronounce it the best county in the State. Although the prairie land predominates, it is interspersed with valuable groves, containing timber sufficient for fuel, fencing and building for years to come.

... But its magnificent river, which supplies so much water power and propels so much machinery, adds materially to the wealth and business of the county. This is Fox river, which rises in Wisconsin . . . . After running twenty or thirty miles from its source, and before entering the State of Illinois it becomes sluggish, and for most of the way has too little fall to propel machinery with much power. By the time, however, that it reaches the north part of Kane county, its descent is more rapid and it rolls on in a broad channel and nearly a straight course through the whole length of the county (about thirty miles), affording many valuable mill sites. On ascending or descending the river, the traveler passes, once in every five miles, on an average, a thriving village, divided by the stream, until he reaches the sixth before leaving the county. Each of these villages contains one or more flouring mills.<sup>165</sup>

### 1849–89: *Recollections*

Charles W. Marsh was 15 years old when his family moved from Canada to southern De Kalb County, "near Shabbona Grove, where our long journey ended." \* In his *Recollections* at age 77, Marsh wrote of the second day at his new home—when he beheld a grand vista of one corner of the Fox River valley:

It was ideal Indian summer weather. We were delighted with the prairie, with its breadth, its freshness and its freedom. We went up on "Holbrook's Knoll," a height a short distance southwest of the present village of Waterman, and from that elevated point surveyed the land. Southward an immense tract of treeless, undulating prairie, dotted by scattered cabins near the timber, was spread out before us, the view bounded by Shabbona Grove, Pritchard's Grove and Ross

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\* The Marsh family first rented a cabin on a farm next to theirs, about a mile east of the north end of Shabbona's Grove.

Grove \* to the right, by Indian Creek timber † in front and by Somonauk timber ‡ to the left. Eastward was Squaw Grove § and northward was the boundless prairie, the view in that direction unbroken by house or tree so far as the eye could reach.

Few of the old settlers are left who can remember the virgin prairies of Illinois as they were sixty or seventy years ago; and those living on them now, who saw them not in the early days, can scarcely realize how they looked. Fences and buildings and plantings of trees interrupt in every direction the clean sweep of the eye; and in summer time the view is bounded by timber, apparently, the orchards and planted groves on the farms blending in the distance and to the eye forming a continuous belt along the horizon. The climate of this prairie country has not suffered through destruction of its timber, § for there is far more foliage to-day than there was sixty years ago. <sup>187</sup>

About December 20 of their first year in Illinois, the Marshes set out to visit relatives in Wisconsin. They crossed the southern Kishwaukee valley, stopping overnight at Marengo. They then headed north and east across the Fox valley: “. . . it was mostly an ‘oak-opening’ country till we reached Big Foot prairie at the west end of Lake Geneva, which was then surrounded by forest, with no settlement in sight from the west end.” <sup>187</sup>

After visiting for a few days at Whitewater and Madison, the family returned to the Fox valley, “well satisfied that we could do no better than to locate where we had already made a beginning.”

During this first winter, we, my brother and I, as father never fired a gun, shot many prairie chickens and quails, just as many as we needed or could use; for they were in such numbers that little skill was required in shooting them, which we did mostly on our way to and from the wood-lot. Thus we were supplied with fresh meat. Mother seldom had to use more than the breasts of the chickens, which she sliced and fried or broiled as steaks. Chickens would frequently light on the house, on the straw roof of the prairie stable and on the cow-yard fence. Quails did not venture so far out. They wintered in the hazel brush (which then edged or bordered all the timber), as there was little or no

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\* Shabbona's Grove, Pritchard's Grove, and Ross' Grove were in the headwaters of Indian Creek in the southwest corner of De Kalb County.

† Woodland lined Indian Creek along nearly its entire length in La Salle County, all the way to its junction with the Fox River at Wedron.

‡ The Somonauk timber began three miles southeast of Waterman and extended along Somonauk Creek to Sheridan on the Fox River.

§ Squaw Grove was an isolated tract of woods along Little Rock Creek, which flows to Big Rock Creek south of Plano.

§ A common belief held that removal of forest results in a drier climate.

cover for them beyond. Squirrels and rabbits were plentiful, but we did not care to eat either.

We looked for deer or signs of them but did not find a track in the grove or on the prairie. In fact I have never seen a wild deer in DeKalb county, though I hunted for them a good deal in those early days. I did find and follow the tracks of three in Somonauk timber in the winter of '51, but could not get sight of them; and I found the bed of one in the grass once when I was hunting ducks far out on the prairie. Undoubtedly there had been very many deer in this country prior to the winter of 1842 when the deep snow, crusted, made them easy victims to their butchers—men and wolves. \* The comparatively few that survived, and their increase, were slaughtered under similar conditions in the winter of 1848.

That buffaloes in large numbers had roamed these prairies not so very long before was evidenced by their many bones, and skulls with the horns attached, that were to be found near watering places, leading to which were still to be seen their deep paths in the sod, sixty years ago. I was told that Shabbona, an Indian chief, said that they were numerous prior to the winter of 1809, when they were killed off by the severe cold and deep snow. †

We arrived too late in the fall to find many water fowls in the country. They had gone south for the winter; and it was not until after their return in the spring that we realized what varieties and quantities there were of them.

A short distance northward from the place on which we were living was a long range or chain of sloughs, some deep and some shallow (all drained out since and converted into good farm land) which appeared to have been long the resort of every species of water fowl that visited this country. Here in the spring congregated geese, ducks, cranes, curlews, snipe, plovers, rails, herons, etc., in great numbers and varieties. And early in the mornings of the first soft days of April their cries and calls, mingled with the crowing of prairie cocks and the cackling of their hens, made a medley of noises that cannot be described. It was a "Halleluiahs of the Birds," not very musical but extremely pleasant to the ears of sportsmen.

Excepting the geese, all these birds found such cover on the prairie as they required for their nests and the rearing of their young. In short our virgin prairies swarmed with such game birds; and they decreased gradually as they

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\* This was the winter of 1842–43.

† According to Henry Boies, Chief Shabbona stated that the bison-killing winter was "about the year 1810." <sup>50</sup> Nehemiah Matson said that the lethal winter was about 1790, and he cited Shabbona as his informant. <sup>192</sup> Bison were occasionally sighted and killed in Illinois as late as the 1830s (see a footnote on page 218).

were driven farther back by man's increasing occupancy of the land, until finally there was no place left for them. Of the small birds there were few upon the wild prairie or about our early prairie homes. They came later as trees and orchards were planted and grew; and they too have greatly decreased during late years, as crows have increased and guns in the hands of boys have become more common.

... The spring of 1850 opened early with conditions favorable to operations on the farm.

... On the 18th day of August, 1850, began a series of the most terrific thunder-storms ever known in this section. ... Toward evening ... the lightning, thunder and rain broke forth with extraordinary violence and so continued without any interruption until morning. The lightning kept the one lower room of our house ... almost as light as day. ... we huddled together without attempting to sleep until the storm halted in the morning.

An empty twelve-quart pail in the yard had been filled to overflowing. In a pasture across the road, a few rods from the house, laid three cattle struck dead by the lightning. Several cattle in the thinly settled neighborhood were killed but not any person. Before noon of this second day a similar storm began and continued all the afternoon and into the night, and next day there was another violent storm but not of long duration. The sloughs were filled and the low grounds covered with water. The roar of Big Indian creek could be heard for miles.

Many years after ... a pioneer ... declared that at his place a barrel standing by itself and outside of any possible drip, was filled to the top with the rain that fell during the three days. This seems impossible, but he stated it as a fact of his own knowledge. Fortunately these storms were comparatively local; had they extended over much of the country the damage would have been very great. The climate of this section is ever trying to beat its worst, but it has not yet come anywhere near doing so in this instance.

... In the fall of 1850 we moved into the little house built upon our own place. The winter following was mild and wet with no hard freezing. Eighteen inches of snow, as roughly estimated, fell on the first Sunday in April and six inches the second Sunday. Thereafter until nearly midsummer it rained most of the time. During ten consecutive days in June there was not an hour of sunshine. It was the wettest, nastiest, and most discouraging season of all in the record. Our wheat was blighted, our corn did not fully ripen, and our oats were rusted so as to be poisonous. We wallowed in water and mud at our work. ... But the rain stopped at last and the fall of 1851 was fine, with a delightful Indian summer.

... In 1852 the last call was made for a wolf hunt. Notices were duly sent out to the people of the surrounding country, asking them to attend and advising

them of the day and of the point of meeting, the center toward which all should direct their course and which they were told to reach at or near a certain hour. The point selected was on the prairie some four or five miles north of Squaw Grove. \* The day was fine and people turned out from all directions. They came on horseback, of course, with whoop and hello and the firing of guns toward the common center where we expected to inclose and kill many wolves; but there was "nary" a wolf within the circle. Only three had been seen, as reported, and they had run through the line when it was yet too open. Not a deer was started.

We had a wild time on the wild prairie, and though we did no more we demonstrated that there were very few wolves or other wild animals on our big prairie at that time. From the point of meeting not a house was to be seen westward; only the tops of the trees of Shabbona Grove † were visible; eastward the view was not interrupted by grove or settlement; Squaw Grove ‡ and a house or two at its north end were in sight southward; and far to the north, near Lost Grove, ¶ stood out plainly, on a rise of ground, a small house newly painted white . . . .

. . . The year 1858 was one of the worst of our wet seasons; wheat was blighted, oats were rusted so as to be almost worthless, corn was only a middling crop . . . . The season of 1859 was remarkably cool and dry; there was frost in every month and a killing frost for corn on low ground on the 4th of July. All the corn was injured in this section. Wheat was a fair crop . . . .

About the middle of May, 1860, a terrible tornado crossed the Mississippi river, partly destroying Albany § . . . . It passed through Lee Center, \*\* destroying several houses and killing a few people; it plowed a channel through Twin Grove, †† erased a farm house northwest of Shabbona Grove, killing its three inmates; then bounded upward to strike again at Dundee, ‡‡ where it did considerable damage and passed on to dissipate itself over Lake Michigan.

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\* Hinckley occupies the remains of Squaw Grove.

† Shabbona's Grove was about 13 miles southwest of the center of the circle.

‡ Squaw Grove was three or four miles to the south.

¶ Lost Grove was about five miles to the north and west, about two miles beyond the low divide that separates the Fox valley from the Kishwaukee valley.

§ Albany is on the Mississippi River almost due west of Shabbona's Grove.

\*\* Lee Center is 22 miles directly west of Shabbona's Grove.

†† Twin Grove was eight miles west of Shabbona's Grove, in the headwaters of the Green River.

‡‡ Dundee is on the Fox River about 35 miles northeast of Shabbona's Grove.



Fortunately its track was narrow, only about twenty rods wide where its awful power was most manifest . . . .

We drove westward along its track several miles the next day. Where the track was narrowest and its greatest force exerted, everything was pulverized; the prairie was scalped, large boulders were torn from the sod and carried off bodily. The cast iron drive wheel of a McCormick reaper was found nearly two miles from the place where the machine was demolished. \*

. . . The blighted grain of 1858 and the drouth and frosts of 1859 had provided no means for recovery from the effects of the panic of 1857, <sup>†</sup> and we entered 1860 in deep depression. <sup>187</sup>

Charles Marsh maintained a lifelong interest in the weather. He was most impressed by early 1881:

That winter will long be remembered on account of its tremendous snow storms and their interruption to travel and business. Very little snow fell before the middle of January, after which storm followed storm in quick succession until the highways were so filled and drifted that travel on them was impossible much of the time, and the railways were so blockaded by some of the big storms that trains could not get through for several days. <sup>187</sup>

The first terrific squall came in the evening and night of February 11. Rail traffic through De Kalb was stalled by drifting snow. On February 27th trains were again stopped by an awful storm. Charles Marsh thought that a third storm—on March 3 and 4—probably was “the greatest storm since the country was settled.” Train service through De Kalb from the east was held up for more than three days, and trains were halted from the west for five days. On March 11 a blizzard stopped trains “more or less from Saturday till Sunday.” Mr. Marsh drove a sleigh over snow-covered fences. A storm on March 19–20 halted trains again for three days: “Three feet of solid snow in the timber.” The “6th blockade” came on April 11, but the “trains not seriously bothered.” Marsh concluded his memorandum about these onslaughts,

It was estimated that more snow fell that winter than in all the winters of the previous twenty years. . . . After the last snow storm the weather became unseasonably warm and summer weather followed. We had no spring that year. Corn was planted as early as usual and before the banks of snow along the fences had fully disappeared. <sup>187</sup>

The following year, 1882, “was remarkable for its many storms of rain, sleet and snow”:

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\* The multi-state Great Tornado of 1860 is further described in the 1865 volume of the *Transactions of the Illinois State Agricultural Society*. <sup>264</sup>

<sup>†</sup> This was a financial panic.

According to my record, storms of one kind or another occurred on 134 days. A tremendous storm of thunder and rain occurred on the night of June 29; it has not been beaten since. No one complained of dust in the roads that year. There was an extraordinary cold spell in January, 1883, the thermometer in Sycamore ranging from 32 to 36 below zero on the 24th.<sup>187</sup>

In 1885 Marsh wrote an article about "Our Weather" for a Chicago newspaper:

The history of the weather for the past forty years would indicate that it was disposed to move in cycles or climatic periods, varying in character and duration. Thus 1844, '51 and '58, every seventh year, was excessively wet, and people talked of the septennial rainy year as a regular occurrence; but we went from '58 to '69 for an extremely wet year. The seventh year thereafter, '76, could be numbered with the wet; and with the exception of '77, it has been wet ever since.

... beginning with 1870, the driest year on our record, the ground became gradually dryer, as evidenced by lowering wells, till nearly through '75. In '76 the wells were filled full, and they have so remained since.

... The most disagreeable wet year was 1851; 1860 was the pleasantest and most productive; 1870 was the driest, and 1882 had the greatest number of storms of rain and snow. The heaviest thunder-storm in our record began in the afternoon of August 18, 1850, and lasted, with short intermissions, two nights and a day. The nearest approach to it was the storm on the night of June 29, 1882. The most unbearably cold day was January 1, 1864. Infernally hot days have been too numerous to mention. The winter and spring of 1881 gave us the most extraordinary snow-storms.<sup>187</sup>

A final remark about the local climate:

The spring of 1892 opened unfavorably; the weather was rainy and raw, and it continued rainy and raw all through the spring months and nearly to July. Crops were planted late and in the mud, and cultivation was done in the mud. In short it was the wettest, rawest and dirtiest of all our nasty springs. It was the season of the famous "mud embargo," so called because the mud prevented travel and carriage over the country roads to and from market and for the time arrested rural traffic in the west.<sup>187</sup>

In 1889 Charles Marsh took part in a hunting and fishing expedition to the Gulf Coast of Texas. In four days the hunters killed 388 waterfowl and other game birds—"and probably as many birds went off wounded—more or less—as were killed." But—

... abundant as it appeared to our party, it was less than we had in Illinois in the early days when, besides numberless prairie chickens and quails the year around, our sloughs in the open seasons \* swarmed with geese, ducks, cranes,

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\* That is, when the sloughs were "open" or free of ice.

snipes and plovers of all kinds. They were killed off or their haunts were broken up long ago. Unless more carefully protected all such game will be exterminated before this generation shall have passed.

. . . When this section of the country was new . . . game was so plentiful that, with such poor guns and skill as we had, almost anyone could get a good bag.<sup>187</sup>

### 1850: *A Glimpse at the Great Western Republic*

In the autumn of 1850 Lieutenant-Colonel Arthur Cunynghame took leave from his duties in Canada to have a glimpse at the Great Western Republic. Upon arriving at Chicago, Cunynghame occupied his time hunting prairie-chickens in the outlying region. He then took passage on the Illinois and Michigan Canal:

Towards the afternoon we arrived at Ottawa; this town is situated in a most beautiful portion of the valley . . . . The pasturage looked green and pleasant, the town neat and thriving. We remained but a few moments to land some passengers, but this time was sufficient for me to recognise the unmistakable figures of two of my fellow countrymen, whom I afterwards ascertained were those who were making a brief stay at Ottawa for the purpose of killing prairie grouse, &c.<sup>82</sup>

### 1850: "*Plank Wanted*"

Private corporations were formed in the late 1840s and early '50s to build toll roads with oak pavement. Farmers could haul larger loads of produce to city markets on plank roads twice as fast as on rutted, muddy roads. One plank road connected Naperville on the Du Page River with Oswego on the Fox River. As planks were being laid, a group of local businesses and businessmen published an announcement in the *DuPage County Recorder*:

*Plank Wanted*—We will take any amount of white or burr oak plank from those indebted to us, if delivered at Naperville, or any other place on the line of the Naperville and Oswego plank road, before the first day of April, in payment of their account, or will pay goods for them. The planks to be eight feet long, three inches thick, and not more than thirteen inches wide. 500,000 feet of plank wanted for the stock of the company. \*<sup>205</sup>

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\* In addition to the plank road from Oswego to Naperville, another one was intended to connect Oswego with Plainfield and Joliet, but the section between Oswego and Plainfield was never built. The author of the 1907 history of Will County explained,

In building and planking the roads the promoters used a large amount of valuable timber that should have been preserved for future use, and which would be of immense value to the owners of today if they now possessed it. The twenty-one miles of plank roads in the county consumed nearly all of its best oak timber, and a large quantity of its black walnut. The groves of the county were stripped, and since that day those groves have had but few

### 1851: A letter to the *Kenosha Telegraph*

Correspondence to the editor of this southeastern Wisconsin newspaper begins,

The river which rises a few miles northwest of Milwaukee, and flows so tardily to the state line, and through McHenry county, Illinois, begins, as it approaches the line of Kane county, to move more rapidly onward. Its haste to reach its destination continues through nearly the entire length of the county, affording water power which already propels a large amount of machinery, and may be made to propel much more. The river passes in nearly a straight course from north to south through the eastern part of the county, lined on each side by a narrow strip of woods, beyond which the high, rolling prairie, dotted as it is by well cultivated farms and comfortable dwellings, presents an appearance which beauty's self might envy. Six of the numerous mill-seats on the river are the nuclei of as many villages, distant from each other, on an average, less than five miles.<sup>165</sup>

### 1852: *Historical and Statistical Sketches, of Lake County, State of Illinois*

The Potawatomi were the last of a series of tribes to settle in Lake County. They had been gone for 16 years when Elijah Haines published his history of the county:

That portion of country now known as Lake County, seems even to have been with them a favored spot, and at the present day, in various parts of the County, relics of their wigwams, villages and cornfields are to be found. But at no point, do we find these unmistakable evidences so apparent, as upon the borders of the Pistakee Lakes \* . . . ; and so strong seems to have been their attachment to this particular locality, that for several succeeding seasons, we find them returning thither to enjoy their sports, and bewail their misfortune.<sup>116</sup>

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of the trees of the first or original growth.

After the first year the planks decayed rapidly and had to be replaced, hence there was a constant call for planks to keep the roads in repair. But they have now passed away and for good. They answered their purpose well for the time, and afforded the farmer a means of getting to market, or to town to trade, when it would have been impossible to travel with a load without them.<sup>286</sup>

During the decade between the plank road boom and the Civil War, transportation and economics changed radically in northeastern Illinois. After local timber stocks were largely depleted, railroads and the Lake Michigan shipping industry made it possible to import cheap pine lumber from the North Woods. A road-builder from Sycamore wrote in 1865, "Pine plank afford an admirable surface covering for the road, but oak are abominable, warping and springing from their places, they are rougher than the corduroy roads of wooded countries, and also expensive."<sup>49</sup>

\* The Pistakee Lakes are Pistakee, Fox, and Grass Lakes.

This volume includes a chapter about each township. In keeping with the fashion of the era, Mr. Haines referred to townships as "towns." First is the Town of Antioch: \*

This Town has within its borders, 18 Lakes, as follows: Dunn Lake, Stevens Lake, Grass Lake, Lake Maria, Channel Lake, Lake Catherine, Silver Lake, Loon Lake, Deer Lake, Crapo Lake, Crooked Lake, Deep Lake, Sun Lake, Cedar Lake, Petite Lake, Handkerchief Lake, Bluff Lake, and Hastings Lake. †

There are also 4 other Lakes, which lie partly in other Towns, as follows: Overton Lake, Cross Lake, Fox Lake, and Hurlburt Lake; ‡ most of the Lakes in this Town are equally beautiful with those of the other Towns in the County, and their average size is about the same.

In addition to the foregoing Lakes, this Town is watered by Fox river, Otter creek, ¶ Sequoit creek, § North branch of Mill creek, Hastings creek, \*\* and Petite creek. †† Upon Sequoit creek, there is an excellent saw mill, situated in the Village of Antioch, which was built . . . in 1839. ‡‡

. . . This Town, for the rearing of stock probably possesses advantages over any other Township in the County—being so remarkably well watered, and at the same time possessing an unsurpassed quality of soil. <sup>116</sup>

Town of Avon: ¶¶

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\* When Elijah Haines wrote his history of Lake County, Antioch Township was larger than it is now. The south part of the township included 13 square miles that later became incorporated as the north half of Lake Villa Township.

† Deer Lake, Crooked Lake, and Hastings Lake are in the Des Plaines River watershed. The locations of Stevens Lake, Crapo Lake, and Handkerchief Lake are not known. The others are in the Fox valley.

‡ Cross Lake is in the Des Plaines valley. The locations of Overton Lake and Hurlburt Lake are not known.

¶ The identity of Otter Creek has not been determined.

§ Sequoit Creek was also known as Gage's Creek and Illinois Creek. The latter name probably stems from the fact that it is the first tributary to the Fox River encountered in Illinois as one descends the river from Wisconsin. *Sequoit* is reportedly an Indian word for "winding." <sup>326</sup>

\*\* Mill Creek and Hastings Creek are tributaries of the Des Plaines River.

†† Petite Creek may be the channel that connects Fox Lake with Lake Marie.

‡‡ In 1851 this mill was sawing 3,500 board feet of lumber per day. <sup>127</sup>

¶¶ At the time of publication of these *Sketches*, Avon Township extended north to include 12 square miles of southern Lake Villa Township.

It has within its limits 9 Lakes, as follows: Gray's Lake, \* Cranberry Lake, Taylor's Lake, † Round Lake, Sand Lake, Slough Lake, the 3d and 4th of Gage's Lakes, ‡ and part of the 2d and a small portion of Long Lake.

Gray's Lake takes its name from William Gray, who . . . was one of the early settlers of this Township.

. . . Cranberry Lake is but a small pond upon the north-east quarter of section 28, which is nearly surrounded by a marsh, affording yearly an abundance of cranberries.

While this marsh was in possession of Mr. Samuel Gunwood, it is said that he usually gathered from it, annually about 200 bushels of cranberries.

Taylor's Lake takes its name from an individual of this name, who was the first settler in its vicinity, and we believe, the first in the Township.

. . . Round Lake . . . is so named from its round and regular form. This Lake . . . is one of the most beautiful Lakes in the County.

. . . In addition to the foregoing Lakes, this Township is watered by Squaw or Deer creek, which passes through the south-western portion of the Township, . . . upon which . . . there is one of the best saw-mills in the County . . . .

Probably no other Township in the County, which possesses an equally good quality of land in other respects, with the exception of Antioch, is as well and conveniently watered as this. The Lakes mostly have beautiful gravel shores, and are so interspersed through the Township as to afford an abundance of water for every neighborhood. <sup>116</sup>

#### Town of Cuba:

It is watered by Fox River and Flint Creek, † and several small rivulets, besides one or two small ponds.

. . . This Township is esteemed by the inhabitants to be one of the best wheat Townships in the County; being mostly oak openings and timber land, rendering the soil of such a character as to prevent serious injury of the wheat from the severity of the winters. <sup>116</sup>

#### Town of Ela:

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\* Gray's Lake is on the drainage divide between the Fox River and the Des Plaines.

† Taylor's Lake is now called Highland Lake.

‡ Sand Lake, Slough Lake, and the four Gage's Lakes are in the Des Plaines valley.

† Flint Creek was named for a person, not for rock along its course.

It has but one Lake within its border, which is known as Lake Zurich . . . which . . . covers about 500 acres, and is said to be one of the most beautiful Lakes in the County.

. . . The woodland and prairie of this Town is not so equally divided as in most of the other Towns of the County; there being by far a greater portion of the latter.

. . . The Prairies are dry and undulating and easy of cultivation. <sup>116</sup>

#### Town of Freemont: \*

The eastern portion of this Township is mostly prairie, while the western portion, is mostly woodland and oak openings. There is however a fair share of woodland in proportion to the prairie. . . . On section 17 is another small Lake or Pond, called Grass Lake, <sup>†</sup> from which Squaw Creek takes its rise and runs north-westward into Fox River. <sup>116</sup>

#### Town of Goodale: ‡

It is watered by Fish Lake, Wooster lake, Sullivan's lake, Mud lake, Duck lake, Long lake; part of the Pistakee Lakes, and some 2 or 3 smaller ponds not named; also by Squaw Creek which passes through the northern portion. It contains an area of about 15360 acres of which about one-fourth part is covered with water. It has therefore the smallest population, and least wealth of any of the towns of the County.

. . . The land was originally mostly timbered land, or woodland, with the exception of a small skirt of prairie, extending up into the southeast corner of the Township. It is however well adapted to farming purposes, especially to the raising of stock; and affords many thriving and industrious farmers. <sup>116</sup>

#### Town of Wauconda:

The Township is watered by Bangs' Lake, Slocums Lake, and two or three small ponds not named. . . . The lands were originally mostly woodlands and oak openings. It has, however, a small prairie, formerly known to some extent as Rice's Prairie, lying immediately south of the Village of Forksville, <sup>¶</sup> containing an area of about 600 acres.

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\* The township's name is now spelled Fremont.

† The remnant of Grass Lake or Grassy Lake is known as Ray's Lake.

‡ This township is now called Grant. It was formerly a rectangle, four miles from east to west and six miles from north to south; but now the northeastern-most section is part of Lake Villa Township.

¶ Forksville = Volo.

From the abundant supply of timber in this Township, it has become quite thickly settled.

. . . Limestone are found in abundance in the vicinity, and the burning of lime at this place, has been a source of considerable profit \* . . . .<sup>116</sup>

### 1852: *Summer Rambles in the West*

Elizabeth Ellet rode from Chicago to Galena in July of 1852. † In a book about her journey, Mrs. Ellet related, "The first prairies on which you enter are perfectly level—a treeless, shrubless expanse . . . ." Then passing from the Chicago Lake Plain onto a series of undulating glacial moraines . . .

The shortness of the grass, owing in some measure to the late drought, much disappointed us in the first views of these "gardens of the desert," especially after ascending to a somewhat higher level, when we came into the region of the rolling prairies. Cultivation, too, has sadly marred the effect of these; one can scarcely conceive how much the sight of a distant corn patch, or field of wheat, or even a fence, or inclosure round a dwelling, takes away from the aspect of romantic wildness usually associated with the idea of a prairie of the West.

. . . The burning of the grass, which is done every year, presents a splendid spectacle, though less stupendous than the perilous and poetical conflagrations described by glowing pens. Several blackened patches showed where the dry grass had been recently burned. ‡

At Prairie State Mills, . . . we came upon the Fox River, a low but graceful stream flowing through a pretty valley on the left, in which herds of cattle were grazing.<sup>91</sup>

### 1852: *Western Portraiture, and Emigrants' Guide*

Daniel Curtiss compiled most of this volume by gathering information from other publications. The following remark appears to be his own composition: "The Fox River Country, as it is called, is noted as being one of the best agricultural districts in the state;

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\* In 1851 three lime kilns at Volo were reported to burn more than 3,000 bushels per year.<sup>127</sup> According to the 1877 history of Lake County, limestone was mined in the vicinity of Volo to feed the kilns.<sup>117</sup> There are only a few small exposures of bedrock in western Lake County; perhaps tufa was mined from local wetlands to substitute for limestone bedrock, as was done in Kane County (page 183).

† Ellet's route probably took her through Geneva.

‡ The drought that Ellet mentioned must have allowed the prairie to burn in mid-summer.



and as well advanced in improvement as any. . . . In several of the towns on this river there are good paper mills.”<sup>84</sup>

## 1852-70: “Personal Reminiscences”

The *History of McHenry County* records the remembrances of E.E. Richards, who arrived at Woodstock in 1852 at age 14:

Fishing, like hunting, “is not what it used to be.” Duffield’s Lake, near Woodstock, Fox Lake, Pistagua Lake, Crystal Lake, Fox River, all furnished good fishing. Pickerel, pike, \* black bass, river bass, † rock bass, silver bass ‡ and muskalonge were abundant in those days. I saw a forty-two-pound muskalonge that was caught in Pistakee Bay thirty years ago.

. . . Among my earliest recollections was a fishing party consisting of nine persons . . . . The place was Fox River, near Burton’s Bridge. ¶ We had a seine sixteen rods long. My share was a two-bushel grain sack full. The number of fishes taken was great. It is a crime to draw a seine now, and should have been then or at any time.

Spearing fish in Fox River was an exciting sport. With a torch attached to the bow of the boat, the spearman with his spear poised, awaited the swiftly darting red horse and other fish. . . . Red horse usually weighed from six to twelve pounds.

. . . The stocking the waters of the State with German carp was a mistake. They destroy the breeding places of the game fish and are a nuisance.

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\* Richards’ “pickerel” probably are northern pike, and his “pike” probably are walleye. The intent of these names is often murky. R.E.P. of Bloomington wrote to the editor of a New York sporting magazine in the 1870s for clarification:

Would you please define for me and several other friends . . . the difference between these three fish—the pike, the pickerel, the maskelonge. We have an argument on hand with reference to these fishes, it being contended by one party that they are all one fish in different stages of growth; by another that they are fish of the same species in the same class that a cat belongs to the tiger family. If you will settle this matter for us we shall be much obliged. Further, what is the fish called a wall-eyed pike? are there two kinds of pike—walled-eyed and another kind?<sup>123</sup>

ANSWER: See page 2.

† Both the largemouth bass and smallmouth bass were known as black bass in the 1800s. The “river bass” is the smallmouth.

‡ Silver bass = crappie.

¶ Illinois Route 176 crosses the Fox River at Burton’s Bridge, between Wauconda and Crystal Lake.

... The game found in the years from 1852 to 1870 was abundant as compared with the present time. Jack snipe, \* sandpiper, yellow legs, plover, woodcock, quail, prairie chickens in clouds, rabbits, squirrels, raccoons, woodchucks, gophers, † to say nothing of the tens of thousands of ducks, wild geese, wild pigeons, etc. Hunters lived on the fat of the land. The slaughter of wild pigeons was as bad as seining fish, and consequently these pigeons are extinct. I will relate one instance to show the possibilities in hunting in the early days. ... We hunted over the farms of the Hartlets and others in Greenwood Township for about three hours and bagged eleven prairie chickens . . . . . The spring and fall gave the hunters fine sport in hunting ducks and geese. <sup>240</sup>

### 1854: "Hickories" . . . "Can a Hickory be Transplanted" . . . "Among the Counties"

In its fourteenth year of publication, *Prairie Farmer* magazine presented a series of observations about hickory taproots. Although the story began in the Fox River valley, it continued 180 miles to the southwest. The entire line of inquiry is presented here because it provides a rare insight into the growth and development of trees from "grubs." ‡ This discussion also affords a good opportunity to explore the terminology of *oak openings* and *barrens*. ¶

The topic arose with the July 1854 issue of the *Prairie Farmer*, which includes this notice from the editor, J. Ambrose Wight:

HICKORIES.—Can a hickory be successfully transplanted? People have often enough tried it, and generally said no. Being a few days ago in the garden of Augustus Adams, Esq., of Elgin, we saw a large number of hickories from three to seven feet high, which had been transplanted successfully from the woods, or

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\* Jack snipe = common snipe.

† Gopher = ground squirrel.

‡ A *grub* is a growth form of a tree or shrub, consisting of an old mass of roots that supports a clump of young sprouts. Where wildfires are frequent (recurring annually or nearly so), some fire-tolerant species such as oaks, hickories, and New Jersey tea are maintained as grubs because their roots survive and continue to enlarge from year to year even though the above-ground stems are repeatedly killed back by fire. After each fire, the roots send up another set of sprouts.

¶ *Barrens* and *oak openings* described in the next two footnotes. Brushy areas were more often termed "barrens." Grassy, park-like areas with open-grown trees were more likely to be called "oak openings." The two terms were, however, used interchangeably: either term might refer to brushy areas, or to grassy areas, or to both kinds of vegetation. <sup>319</sup> Some writers considered the two terms to be synonyms: "the 'barrens,' or 'oak openings'" (1838), <sup>160</sup> "these barrens or 'oak openings,' as they are more appropriately styled" (1838), <sup>304</sup> "the oak openings, or 'barrens,'" (1850). <sup>268</sup>

rather the openings, \* and were growing vigorously on their second summer. Mr. Adams stated that he had lost no more of them than of any other tree. His plan is to dig down and down till he gets tired of it, and then cut off the tap root. He never stops till he gets four feet and from that to six, and yet he states that he never got so low as to find the tap root as small as the tree at the surface of the ground.<sup>324</sup>

Two months later the *Prairie Farmer* published a response from a Jacksonville reader under the heading "Can a Hickory be Transplanted."

MESSRS. EDITORS:—I notice this question in your last number is answered in the affirmative, and truly too. For there is no tree on earth large or small, that cannot be successfully transplanted, but there are probably quite a number that would not pay cost of transplantation.

Some ten years since I was told by every one hereabouts that it was impossible to transplant a hickory; and this, of course, set me forthwith to work at it, for I never really loved to do anything except those very things that were clearly impossible.

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\* Eliza Steele, who crossed the Fox River in July of 1840, described oak openings as "green groves, arranged with the regularity of art, making shady, alleys, for the heated traveller."<sup>283</sup> A more detailed portrayal of oak openings by Mrs. Steele is on page 105.

Charles Latrobe, who took the same route as Eliza Steele eight years earlier, wrote of "the 'oak-openings;' so termed from their distinctive feature of the varieties of oak which are seen scattered over them":

The trees are of medium growth, and rise from a grassy turf seldom encumbered with brush-wood, but not unfrequently broken by jungles of rich and gaudy flowering plants, and of dwarf sumac. Among the 'oak-openings' you find some of the most lovely landscapes of the West, and travel for miles and miles through varied park scenery of natural growth, with all the diversity of gently swelling hill and dale—here, trees grouped, or standing single—and there, arranged in long avenues as though by human hands, with slips of open meadow between.<sup>177</sup>

Solon Robinson, one of the region's most prolific agricultural writers, described the same kind of vegetation—but he referred to it as "barrens" in the following excerpts:

- There are large tracts of timber land called "barrens," which are about half way between prairie and timber land—the tree standing apart like an orchard, and the ground covered with grass, the sod of which is much less tough than that on the prairie.<sup>248</sup>
- Large tracts of land in the prairie region are covered with a growth of scattering timber, void of undergrowth, and frequently not unlike an orchard or artificial park, the ground covered with grass; and these tracts are called "*barrens*" . . . .<sup>168</sup>
- . . . very large tracts of land called "barrens," an intermedium between prairie and timber; after growing so isolated as to have the appearance of a scattering orchard and having a strong resemblance to the work of man. You may travel miles before the country is settled, through these "barrens" with a carriage, without any obstruction.<sup>245</sup>

I went into the barrens, \* spade in hand myself, and selected three young hickories and two oaks, about four or six feet high from the ground. I dug their roots up from 4 to 6 feet deep till I came to the last one, and found them all larger, as your correspondent says, where I cut them off than they were at the top of the ground. Of the last hickory, then about 4 feet above the ground, and the smallest of the lot, I determined to have the whole tap root at any rate. So I dug and dug till I got 22 1-2 feet of straight tap root, 2 1-2 inches in diameter in the largest place, and full 1-2 an inch through in the smallest, where it was cut off at the bottom. *So I did not get the whole tap root after all:* for being on a steep side-hill or bluff, the roots of a large oak run in from the bottom of the bluff and so entangled the root of the hickory that I could not go deeper without some other tool than a spade; so I gave it up.—All these trees are now standing in my front yard and growing finely, though the one with the long tap root has always grown about twice as fast as the others.

... These facts will enable your readers to understand the nature of this class of trees, and to estimate the *probable cost of transplanting* them. I should never rely on taking less than 6 feet of tap root even for the very smallest of them more than one year old.

Yours truly,  
J.B. Turner. <sup>308</sup>

Jonathan Baldwin Turner was a professor at Illinois College in Jacksonville. He was one of the foremost promoters of agricultural science in America during the middle 1800s. J. Ambrose Wight paid a visit to Professor Turner and examined the hickory with the amazing taproot:

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\* An associate of J.B. Turner, J.M. Peck of St. Clair County, formulated this description of barrens:

I settled on a tract of "barrens," so called from the timber being shrubby, stunted and scattering; with patches of prairie, intermingled with patches of under brush, of oak and hickory, growing from grub roots. On such tracts of new country, the autumnal fires contend with the annual growth, and partially or wholly kill the young timber, until settlements are made and the prairie grass killed out. <sup>225</sup>

Mr. Peck also explained the process by which grubs in barrens become trees:

When the fires are stopped, these barrens produce timber, at a rate of which no northern emigrant can have any just conception. Dwarfish shrubs and small trees of oak and hickory are scattered over the surface, where for years they have contended with the fires for a precarious existence, while a mass of roots, sufficient for the support of large trees, have accumulated in the earth. As soon as they are protected from the ravages of the annual fires, the more thrifty sprouts shoot forth, and in ten years are large enough for corn cribs and stables.

... The rapidity with which the young growth pushes itself forward, without a single effort on the part of man to accelerate it, and the readiness with which the prairie becomes converted into thickets, and then into a forest of young timber, shows, that, in another generation, timber will not be wanting in any part of Illinois. <sup>223</sup>

The Professor has quite a variety of trees on his place. He has planted into his grounds the Pecan and Hickory; and I saw the very tree of the latter variety whose tap root was dug to the length of 22 1-2 feet. The tree was planted by digging a deep trench, and laying the root within it horizontally, instead of digging downward to find full room for its length. The tree is about ten feet high, and not more than about two inches in diameter.<sup>323</sup>

### 1855: "Observations upon Some of the Birds of Illinois Most Interesting to the Agriculturist"

William Le Baron, a medical doctor and natural scientist from Geneva, submitted an article for the first volume of the *Transactions of the Illinois State Agricultural Society*:

Nothing is clearer than that nature has established a law of compensation, whereby the injury to vegetation, committed by one creature is balanced by some benefit conferred, either by itself or its congeners; or that where this is not the case, she has made the noxious kind the natural prey of some other species, by which the excessive multiplication of the former is kept in check. And I have often thought that there could be no more interesting contribution to our scientific literature, than a history, or even a descriptive catalogue, of those species of animals which are either useful or injurious to the agriculturist. I shall endeavor in this communication, to furnish a few materials for such a work, limiting myself at present to the class of birds.

With regard to birds in general, it may be remarked that they are much less numerous in Illinois than in the eastern states. \* This is to be accounted for chiefly, no doubt, by the comparative scarcity of mature orchards and timbered lands, in a newly settled and prairie country. Now as a considerable proportion of the insect race subsists upon trees, either living or decayed, and as most of the smaller birds prey upon insects, whilst some of the larger birds devour the smaller, it follows that a comparative scarcity of trees necessitates a corresponding paucity of the feathered population.

Birds benefit the agriculturist by destroying countless myriads of noxious insects, whilst they injure him by consuming a part of those products which he would fain reserve for his own exclusive benefit. But it is the universal testimony of those who have investigated the matter, that the evil compared with the good which they accomplish is extremely trivial.

. . . At the head of the Omnivorous order of birds, stands the Crow, (*Corvus Americanus*,) . . . . The Crow, which is so common and troublesome, in the

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\* Dr. Le Baron had moved from New England to Illinois, so he often compared bird populations in the Northeast with those of Illinois.

New England states, is rare at the west. It is only occasionally that we see them, and then only in small companies of less than a dozen. \*

The Blue Jay, (*Garrulus cristatus*), is one of our most common birds. They are said to eat sometimes the larger kinds of caterpillars, but they feed chiefly upon grain and ripe fruits. They attract the attention of the farmer, more particularly in the winter, when in small but greedy companies, they attack the corn crib . . . .

. . . Another group of Omnivorous birds, in which the agriculturist is much interested, are those belonging to the genus *Icterus* . . . .

The most conspicuous of these is the well known Baltimore Oriole, or Golden Robin, (*Icterus Baltimore*.) † This brilliant bird is extensively distributed, though nowhere numerous. He is rare in this part of the country, but will become more common, undoubtedly, when the orchards and shade trees in which he delights, have become more mature. He sometimes eats the smaller garden fruits, and is especially fond of green peas. They are not sufficiently numerous, however, to effect much damage, and they do at least as much good as harm, by devouring a variety of insects, and amongst others, the common apple tree caterpillar, (the larva of the *Clisiocampa Americana*.) ‡ being the only bird, so far as I am aware, that feeds upon this hairy caterpillar.

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\* Many reports from the Fox valley and adjacent regions indicate that the common crow was not common during the early 1800s. For instance ornithologist Thomas Say rode from Chicago westward across the Fox valley and then to Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, in June of 1823; after eight days of traveling and observing birds, Mr. Say heard a single crow as he neared the Mississippi River. <sup>167</sup>

Elmer Baldwin of La Salle County stated in 1877, "The crows have increased with the settlements." <sup>14</sup> Charles Marsh, who came to DeKalb County in 1849, later said the same: ". . . crows have increased." <sup>187</sup> An 1881 book about Lee County says, "The crow has appeared in the more modern years of the county's history. It was formerly unknown in this part of the country." <sup>112</sup> The same observation comes from Kane County (page 325).

Other early observers indicate that crows were not scarce everywhere in northern Illinois. Daniel G. Harvey, whose parents helped found the Argyle settlement on the Boone-Winnebago County line in 1837, wrote of that era, "Then there were hawks and owls in great variety, also crows and sand-hill cranes." <sup>128</sup> Crows concentrated at food sources. For example when William Johnston rode along the south shore of Lake Michigan on his way to Chicago in 1809, he noted, "The shore is frequented by flocks of crows, buzzards, gulls & <sup>c</sup> which soon destroy the fish that is thrown out on the shore." <sup>233</sup> Fourteen years later William Keating visited Chicago, where he made note of "a party of soldiers constantly engaged in shooting at the crows and blackbirds that committed depredations upon the corn planted by them." <sup>167</sup>

† Baltimore Oriole or Golden Robin (*Icterus Baltimore*) = northern oriole.

‡ Common apple tree caterpillar (*Clisiocampa Americana*) = eastern tent caterpillar or apple-tree tent caterpillar (*Malacosoma americanum*).

There is another species of Oriole, closely allied to the Golden Robin, known by the name of the Orchard Oriole, (*Icterus spurius*,) which is seldom seen so far north as our latitude; I saw one of them in my garden, on the eleventh of May, 1853. He was busily engaged in extracting honey from the blossoms of the crown imperial, and flowering currant.

The Rice Bunting, or Bobolink, (*Icterus agripennis*,) . . . is known in Illinois only as an occasional resident. In the early part of the season, they subsist chiefly upon insects, but at the close of summer, the young and old, in accumulating flocks, make their frequent visits to the fields of ripening grain . . .

. . . The Red-winged Blackbird, (*Icterus phoeniceus*,) is one of the most abundant birds in the United States, and is even more numerous at the west than at the east. Strongly gregarious in their habits, they arrive in the spring in considerable flocks, which become vastly increased in the autumn, when they almost blacken the fields of corn and other grain by their numbers. In these flocks we generally may see here as at the east, a number of other and less common, allied species. I have noticed amongst them the Cowpen bird, (*Icterus pecoris*,) \* and the Rusty Grackle, (*Quiscalus ferrugineus*,) †

The Meadow Starling, (*Sturnella Ludoviciana*,) ‡ known here as the Prairie Lark, is another very common species in this part of the country, being more commonly met with on the prairies than any other bird. Their food consists mostly of insects, and they must therefore be regarded as friends to the farmer.

The Cedar Bird, or Cherry Bird, (*Bombycilla Carolinensis*,) § seems to extend his migrations wherever his favorite food, the cherry, is cultivated, and they are accordingly seen at the west in yearly increasing numbers. They are remarkable for . . . their voracious appetite, which renders them a serious annoyance to the horticulturalist. Shooting them seems only to call their friends to the funeral. At least I never could perceive that it sensibly diminished their numbers. The only human and rational course with regard to these and other fruit-loving birds, is to plant enough for them and ourselves too.

I proceed in the next place to notice some of the birds of Illinois, belonging to the order of Insectivora . . .

. . . At the head of the Insectivora are the Shrikes, constituting the Genus *Lanius*, of which there are but two species in the United States; one of these

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\* Cowpen bird (*Icterus pecoris*) = brown-headed cowbird.

† Rusty Grackle (*Quiscalus ferrugineus*) = rusty blackbird.

‡ Meadow Starling (*Sturnella Ludoviciana*) = eastern meadowlark.

§ Cedar Bird or Cherry Bird (*Bombycilla Carolinensis*) = cedar waxwing.

I think I have seen a few times in this state, but at too great a distance to determine the species.

Next comes the Genus *Musicapa*, of which we have at least the three most common species, the King-bird, (*M. tyrannus*,) \* the Phoebe-bird, (*M. fusca*,) † and the small Pewee, (*M. acadica*,) ‡ These are the true fly-catchers.

. . . Intermediate between the flycatchers and the warblers, is the interesting genus *Vireo*, of which we have the three species most common at the east, namely: the Yellow Throated Vireo, (*V. flavifrons*;) the Warbling Vireo, (*V. gilvus*;) and the Red-eyed Vireo, (*V. olivaceus*.) . . . they seek their insect food mostly in the summits of large forests or shade trees . . . .

. . . Of the beautiful and extensive group of warblers, I have met with but few . . . . I can call to mind but four species that I have identified . . . : The Summer Yellow Bird, (*Sylvia aestiva*,) ¶ common in New England, but as yet rare here; the Yellow Rump Warbler, (*S. coronata*,) our most common species; the Blue Yellow Backed Warbler, (*S. Americana*,) § and the Cape May Warbler, (*S. maritima*,) The last is an extremely rare bird, but few being on record, and none having been seen so far north as this. I find in my note book the following notice of this species:

"*Sylvia Maratima*, May 10th, 1853. I have seen a small *Sylvia* to-day hopping upon the ground in my garden, the markings of which I determined, with sufficient accuracy to enable me to refer it, without doubt, to the species above."

. . . The thrushes . . . . Of these we have the three well known species, the Robin, (*Turdus migratorius*;) the Brown Thrush, (*T. rufus*;) \*\* and the Cat Bird, (*T. felivox*,) The Robin is common, but not so abundant as at the east. The Brown Thrush, is a common species throughout the United States, though no where very abundant. The Cat Bird is, as yet, a comparatively rare bird at the west.

. . . The Brown Thrush and Cat Bird sometimes enter our gardens, and regale themselves upon currants and other small fruits, but they usually reside in open woods and thickets.

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\* King-bird (*Musicapa tyrannus*) = eastern kingbird.

† Phoebe-bird (*Musicapa fusca*) = eastern phoebe.

‡ In addition to the eastern wood-pewee, any of the small flycatchers might have been called pewees. The binomial *Muscicapa acadica* has been applied to both the Acadian flycatcher and the least flycatcher.

¶ Summer Yellow Bird (*Sylvia aestiva*) = yellow warbler.

§ Blue Yellow Backed Warbler (*Sylvia Americana*) = northern parula.

\*\* Brown Thrush (*Turdus rufus*) = brown thrasher.



The Robin, on the contrary, evidently has a strong predilection for the society of mankind, and being of a migratory disposition, he has kept pace with the advance of human settlements, over almost every part of the North American continent. . . . In the spring he subsists mostly on insects, and in the autumn upon berries and other fruits. He is very fond of earth worms . . . . I have sometimes seen a number of them together, scratching in the rich garden mould, and exposing dense masses of the . . . larvae of the Bibionidae \* . . . . He shows a more refined taste in his fondness for the smaller garden fruits, and strives with the Cherry Bird to see which can eat the most. But for these depredations, he more than repays us by his confiding manners and his cheerful song.

. . . Of the Swallow tribe, including the Caprimulgi, which live exclusively upon insects, which they capture with much agility, on the wing, we have the Martin, (*Hirundo purpurea*;) † the Barn Swallow, (*H. rustica*;) the White-Bellied Swallow, (*H. bicolor*;) ‡ and at least one other species which I have not determined; and of the nocturnal section, the Night Hawk, (*Caprimulgus Virginianus*;) and the Whip-poorwill, (*C. vociferus*.)

The Woodpeckers constitute another family of emphatically insect-eating birds. . . . I have met with only three species in this part of the country; namely: the Golden-Winged Woodpecker, (*Picus auratus*;) ¶ the Downy Woodpecker, (*P. pubescens*;) and the Red Headed Woodpecker, (*P. erythrocephalus*.) The last is a very common species in our groves and orchards, and sometimes does considerable damage by pecking holes into the ripening apples. He is also accused of making holes into the healthy bark of growing trees . . . .

. . . To the insectivorous birds may be added the four following species . . . : the Blue Bird, (*Sialia Wilsonii*;) the White Breasted Nuthatch, (*Sitta Carolinensis*;) the Blackcap Tit, (*Parus atricapillus*;) § and the House Wren, (*Troglodytes aedon*.) I have also seen transiently a Winter Wren, which is probably the *T. hyemalis*.

. . . The principal families of granivorous birds are the Sparrows, the Doves, and the birds of poultry kind. I can here only enumerate those which are known to inhabit this part of the country.

Of the Sparrows, I have seen eight species, which I include for the sake of brevity, under the original genus *Fringilla*: The White Crowned Sparrow,

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\* Bibionidae = March flies.

† Martin (*Hirundo purpurea*) = purple martin.

‡ White-Bellied Swallow (*Hirundo bicolor*) = tree swallow.

¶ Golden-Winged Woodpecker (*Picus auratus*) = northern flicker.

§ Blackcap Tit (*Parus atricapillus*) = black-capped chickadee.

(*F. leucophrys*;) the Chipping Sparrow, (*F. socialis*;) the Tree Sparrow, (*F. Canadensis*;) our most common winter bird; the Snow Bird, (*F. hyemalis*;) \* the Purple Finch, (*F. purpurea*;) the Indigo Bird, (*F. cyanea*;) † the Gold Finch, (*F. tristis*;) and the Ground Robin, (*F. erythrophthalma*;) ‡ To these we may add a species of an allied genus, the Shore or Field Lark, (*Alauda alpestris*;) ¶ . . . . Here it is one of our most common and permanent residents, being seen at all seasons of the year, when the ground is not covered with snow. In the summer they may often be seen dusting themselves in the roads that lead across the prairies, flitting or running a few yards only, into the grass, to avoid the passing traveler.

Of the Columbidae we have the Ground Dove, (*Columba passerina*;) and the Wild Pigeon (*C. Migratoria*;) § The latter are considerably numerous, but less abundant than in some of the more densely wooded states. Of the Gallinaceous birds, we have the Ruffed Grouse or Partridge, (*Tetrao umbellus*;) in small numbers; the Quail, (*Ortyx Virginiana*;) \*\* in abundance; and perhaps in equal numbers that prime game bird of the west, the Pinnated Grouse or the Prairie Hen, (*Tetrao cupido*.)

The tracking of these fine birds, with a well trained dog, as they sit, couched in flocks, in the long prairie grass, and shooting them as they rise upon the wing, constitute the chief sport of the prairie country.

. . . Though still numerous in the more thinly inhabited districts, they are getting to be comparatively scarce in the neighborhood of the villages; and are upon the whole, I think, becoming annually less numerous.

As soon as the harvest season arrives, the Prairie Hens and Quails, in numerous families, take up their abode in the wheat fields, and in the aggregate capacity, must devour a large quantity of this valuable grain, in the course of the season. But the loss is not sensibly felt in the vast grain fields of the west.

I have thus hastily run over those families of land birds, which are most interesting to the agriculturist, either for the depredations they commit, or for the benefits they confer, and have enumerated such species as occurred to my memory, as inhabiting this part of our state. The catalogue might be considerably increased, undoubtedly, by obtaining the result of the observations of others,

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\* Snow Bird (*Fringilla hyemalis*) = dark-eyed junco.

† Indigo Bird (*Fringilla cyanea*) = indigo bunting.

‡ Ground Robin (*Fringilla erythrophthalma*) = rufous-sided towhee.

¶ Shore or Field Lark (*Alauda alpestris*) = horned lark.

§ Ground Dove (*Columba passerina*) = mourning dove; Wild Pigeon (*C. Migratoria*) = passenger pigeon.

\*\* Quail (*Ortyx Virginiana*) = northern bobwhite.

and by searching for the birds themselves, in their native resorts, especially at the season of their vernal migration. But even this imperfect sketch may be of some interest, by showing what birds are common in this part of the country. <sup>178</sup>

### 1857: *A History of the County of Du Page, Illinois*

Every 19th-century farmer needed plenty of wood for fences, buildings, and fuel. After the choice farms at the edge of woodland had been claimed, farmers had to settle for the treeless prairie. The neighboring groves were often subdivided and sold to provide each prairie farmer with a private woodlot. The 1857 *History of the County of Du Page* mentions this practice in its chapter about Wayne Township, which sits astride the prairie between the Du Page and Fox Rivers: "The town is not well supplied with wood and timber from its own resources. The 'Little Woods,' \* just over the line in Kane County, are chiefly owned by the inhabitants of this town, and afford convenient supplies of both fuel and timber." <sup>241</sup>

### 1863: "Range of Arborescent Vegetation in Illinois"

George Vasey was a physician and professional botanist. He practiced medicine at two places in the Fox River Area during the middle 1800s: Elgin and Ringwood (a crossroads hamlet in northeastern McHenry County). At a meeting of the State Natural History Society in the summer of 1863, Dr. Vasey read a paper about the distribution of trees. Here are his remarks about the Fox valley:

The white cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*,) <sup>†</sup> occurs . . . at the cedar swamp near Elgin, on the Fox river.

. . . The corky white elm (*U. racemosa*,) <sup>‡</sup> a species which occurs most abundantly further north, comes into our borders down the valley of the Fox river as low as Elgin.

. . . Of the Ash family we have five species; the white ash (*Fraxinus Americana*,) the black ash (*F. sambucifolia*,) the red ash (*F. pubescens*,) the green ash (*F. viridis*,) <sup>§</sup> and the blue ash (*F. quadrangulata*). All of which probably range through the principal extent of the State, along the rivers and low ground. I have seen the five species within a distance of two or three miles, in the valley of the Fox river near Elgin. <sup>310</sup>

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\* The Little Woods was at St. Charles.

<sup>†</sup> White cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*) = northern white cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*).

<sup>‡</sup> Corky white elm (*U. racemosa*) = rock elm (*Ulmus thomasi*).

<sup>§</sup> Black ash (*F. sambucifolia*) = *Fraxinus nigra*; red ash (*F. pubescens*) = *F. pennsylvanica*; green ash (*F. viridis*) = *F. pennsylvanica* var. *subintegerrima*.

## 1867: "Notes on Birds Observed . . . in Northern Illinois"

J.A. Allen's study included the Fox River valley of northwestern Cook County. This region is a "knob-and-kettle" landscape with dozens of marshes and small lakes. Mr. Allen listed the black tern as "Common along the Fox River marshes." Regarding Wilson's phalarope, he said, ". . . this species is known to breed in the Fox River . . . marshes, . . . though I did not actually observe it." <sup>8</sup>

## 1868: "Geology of Cook County"

Henry Bannister prepared the Cook County chapter for Volume III of the *Geological Survey of Illinois*. The following excerpts pertain to the Fox River valley:

The surface of the country is generally level or gently undulating, the latter character prevailing in the northern and south-western portions of the county, becoming more broken and even hilly in the extreme north-western and south-western parts. The hollows between the undulations are often marshy, and occasionally contain deposits of peat of greater or less extent.

. . . The soil of the prairies is usually a black or dark brown mould, varying from one to four feet in depth, and is underlaid by a lighter colored sandy or gravelly clay subsoil. In the dry timbered tracts this subsoil comes very nearly to the surface, and generally throughout the county supports a growth of black, white and red oak, butternut, black walnut, bitternut and shell-bark hickory, \* cottonwood, etc., with an undergrowth chiefly of hazel.

. . . In the northwestern part of the county, in townships 41 and 42, range 9 east, <sup>†</sup> lying near the Fox river, a very noticeable feature is a stratum of water-worn boulders and pebbles, chiefly of limestone, but with an occasional hard-head (boulder) of granite, hornblende rock, etc., which crop out on nearly all the hillsides, in some places strongly resembling a natural outcrop of a limestone bed.

. . . In various portions of the county deposits of peat are known to exist, and have, in some cases, been worked to a limited extent. None of the beds yet discovered occupy any large surface of country; they are, in most cases, of only a few acres in extent, and when of greater area are generally of very inconsiderable depth. . . . It is highly probable that, when this article becomes of more economic value, very many more localities of it will be discovered in all parts of the county.

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\* Shell-bark hickory = shagbark hickory (*Carya ovata*)—not *C. laciniosa*, which is commonly called shellbark hickory today.

<sup>†</sup> Township 41 North, Range 9 East = Hanover Township; Township 42 North, Range 9 East = Barrington Township.

Deposits of fresh-water marl are sometimes met with in connection with peat-beds, or in very many similar situations.<sup>18</sup>

### 1868: "Geology of La Salle County"

H.C. Freeman wrote the description of La Salle County for the third volume of the *Geological Survey of Illinois*. Mr. Freeman did not specifically describe the Fox River valley, but a few of his remarks about the vegetation in general pertain to this part of La Salle County:

All the streams are lined with timber on the bluffs and in their valleys . . . .  
. . . Along the streams entering the Illinois river, continuous bodies of timber exist; and in many places the timber is encroaching on the prairie, showing growths of from ten to twenty years. Old settlers quite uniformly speak of the timber encroaching on the prairies, which they attribute to the fires spreading less frequently from the prairie into the timber, destroying the young growth, since the country has become well settled.

The timber is chiefly oak of several varieties, in wet places, while birch and cotton-wood were noticed on the bluffs. \* Crab-apples are abundant in clusters and isolated trees; wild plums, also. . . . The small undergrowth appeared to be mainly hazel.

. . . The wild grape, *Vitis estivalis*,<sup>†</sup> was plentiful in the valleys, and to some extent appeared among the timber on the bluffs.<sup>99</sup>

### 1868: *History of DeKalb County, Illinois*

Henry L. Boies' volume is one of the earliest and best researched of the state's local histories. Mr. Boies began his book, "The surface of our County of DeKalb, has few marked peculiarities—few grand distinctive features."

It is simply a plain parallelogram of rich rolling prairie, eighteen miles broad and thirty-six miles long, dotted with a few groves and watered by a few small streams.

But the features of the landscape, although less bold than those of mountainous regions, are yet impressive and strongly marked. In the broad, billowy prairies, extending as far as the eye can reach, we have the element of vastness as in scarce any other land; we have a luxuriant sward of emerald greenness, clothing

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\* Two phrases appear to have been transposed in this sentence, which probably was intended to read: The timber is chiefly oak of several varieties on the bluffs, while birch and cotton-wood were noticed in wet places.

† Wild grape, *Vitis estivalis* = summer grape (*Vitis aestivalis*).

the whole land, down to the very margin of the waters; we have meandering streams, clear as crystal, now smooth, quiet and glassy, then ruffled by winds or rapids; we have clumps of trees, charming groves, disposed with an effect of beauty that might baffle a landscape gardener; now crowning the grassy height, now clothing the green slope with their pleasing shade. From the gentle heights of the rolling prairies, the country, even before the hand of man had broken its surface, wore the aspect of cultivated meadows and rich pasture grounds, irrigated by frequent rivulets.

. . . The central portion of the County contains the least extent of timbered lands, and the fewest running streams. \*

. . . The first settlers of the country naturally made their claims in close proximity to the groves and streams; and could hardly believe that the distant prairies would ever serve any other purpose than that of a vast range for flocks and herds. They were confident that no farmer could live and labor conveniently, farther than a mile or two from his timbered lots, and they regarded him as a visionary enthusiast who dared to predict that they would live to see it all settled and occupied by man. But the settlements gradually extended farther and farther out upon the prairies, and now the entire County is occupied, and scarcely a vacant spot of the wild prairie can be found throughout its entire extent.

The settlers upon these farms remote from the groves, now claim that the soil is there more productive than in their closer vicinity, and observation seems to justify the claim; but this superiority may be due to their having been more recently settled and subjected to fewer drafts upon their fertility, than those which have been longer cropped.

. . . Although this central portion of the County is comparatively rugged, yet no large streams are found there. The head waters of all the creeks in the County are there formed in sloughs or swamps, which always connect one with another, until the united volume of their waters form brooklets, which flowing north and south ultimately become our larger creeks.

. . . Hardly a ledge of rocks pierces the surface in any part of the County. Some soft, inferior limestone <sup>†</sup> is found in Kingston a few feet below the surface . . . . A similar quarry has been found in Afton, and in the southern part near the banks of the creeks it may be found cropping out occasionally.

But the whole County is, even for this prairie land, singularly and unfortunately destitute of rock suitable for building or for any other valuable purpose. Thinly

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\* This formerly treeless expanse comprises the broad divide between the waters of the Fox River and those of the Kishwaukee.

<sup>†</sup> Some of the "limestone" in the Fox River valley is a closely related rock, technically known as dolomite.

scattered over its entire surface, however, are found rounded granite boulders, varying in size from that of a huge cannon ball to that which would weigh a ton or more. In the vernacular of the country they are called hard heads . . . and are prized by the farmers, who use them for underpinning barns; sometimes also for stoning their wells, and more rarely their house cellars. But few farms are so fortunate as to possess enough for these purposes.<sup>50</sup>

Chapter I finishes with a discussion of the origin of prairie. Mr. Boies presented a theory that was in vogue during the latter half of the 1800s: the prairie landscape was once the bed of an immense lake, and the character of lakebed sediments prevented the growth of trees.\* This ancient lake had formed when a continental glacier melted. Glacial meltwaters also helped explain the presence of boulders on the landscape:

. . . the vast sheets of ice became equally vast currents of water, which floated off huge icebergs loaded with rocks, sand, gravel, clay, and fragments of trees. Floating toward the warmer regions of the south they gradually melted and deposited their debris upon the surface of the earth. Becoming fixed upon some accidental projection, large gravelly knolls and hills were formed from their deposits, and over the entire surface their boulders were scattered.

. . . These prairies were undoubtedly at one time the bed of such a lake.  
. . . The granite ledges, from whence the boulders that strew the prairies were taken, can now be seen about six hundred miles toward the polar ocean.

It seems most probable that the departure of the waters which formerly covered these prairies was due to the gradual elevation of the surface by internal forces; and it is not impossible that this gradual elevation may still be in progress, and account, in part, for the constantly increasing dryness of the surface of the country, which is so evident to every settler who was accustomed to these prairies a quarter of a century ago.<sup>† 50</sup>

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\* Professor Leo Lesquereux was a foremost proponent of this theory. The State of Illinois published his 1866 essay "On the Origin and Formation of the Prairies," which postulates that trees are excluded from prairies by the fine texture of the soil, coupled with certain acids that result from the decay of aquatic plants.<sup>181</sup>

† Early writers throughout Illinois noted that land had become drier. John Reynolds, who came to southwestern Illinois in 1800, wrote in 1857, "The earth has become much drier within fifty years . . . ." <sup>239</sup> Ferdinand Ernst remarked about Madison County in 1819, "But every year the ground, here and there swampy, is becoming firmer and drier . . . ." <sup>93</sup> Nehemiah Matson of Bureau County wrote in 1867, "As the country settles up, it gets dryer, and that which was called a lake, thirty years ago, is now considered good grazing land." <sup>190</sup> In 1876 John Smith noted, "The fact is that there is much of the land of Macon county that is now considered high and dry, or at least sufficiently so for all practical farming purposes, that was so wet that during a greater portion of the year it was absolutely dangerous to ride over it on horseback, for fear of miring." <sup>274</sup> In 1880 Hiram Beckwith mused, "It is certainly curious to observe that as the country becomes settled and improvements are made, the wet portions become dry and tillable." <sup>33</sup>

Mr. Boies discussed the resident Potawatomi:

The Indians cultivated small fields of corn—not upon the open prairies where it would be difficult to break the sod, but upon the bottom lands, near the streams, and on the borders of the groves. Their only implement was a heavy kind of hoe and they hilled the corn to a great height so that the traces of their hills may even yet be seen in some places.

Their chief reliance for food, however, was upon the chase. Deer were plenty in these woods and upon the prairies at this time, and the prairie wolf, the rabbit, the polecat, \* the martin † and the woodchuck were quite numerous. ‡ The buffalo had passed away, but many of their bones were yet to be found. Shabbona, their intelligent and truthful old chief, states that about the year 1810

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Henry Boies supposed that De Kalb County might be losing its wet character because land was becoming more elevated, but other observers saw the drying trend as a byproduct of farming. J.H. Oakwood of Vermilion County wrote, “. . . about 1850 . . . a large portion of the country had been brought into cultivation, and a very large portion of the remainder was grazed off by the thousands of cattle that roamed over the prairie, eating the grass close to the ground, and the tramping of the ground by the stock, together with some ditches made by plowing or otherwise, so drained off the surface water that the country became more healthy than when first settled.”<sup>211</sup> As Henry Engelmann noted in 1865, prairies became better drained without the aid of drainage tiles and ditches:

The character of our prairies is undergoing a gradual but very perceptible change in the progress of their cultivation. Their natural drainage is generally very imperfect, even in the high prairies, and formerly it was still more obstructed by the dense growth of the tall prairie grasses which year after year grew and died on the same spot, and covered the soil with their decaying remains. Besides impeding the rapid surface drainage, and thus causing the soil to absorb more of the falling rain, it attracted the night dews, and shielded the soil from the desiccating and warming rays of the sun. In consequence thereof, our prairies appear to have been formerly, without exception, wet. This has considerably changed, and continues changing under our eyes. The surface drainage is facilitated, especially on the high and rolling prairies, the tall grasses have disappeared nearly everywhere, the soil is exposed to the sun and to the winds, the prairies have consequently become drier, some of them very markedly so; and although at some points the water still rises in the wells to their very rim, the water level has generally become deeper. The prairie lands are thus becoming more and more adapted, also, to the growth of the more deep-rooted of our ordinarily cultivated dry land plants, especially the fruit trees . . . .<sup>92</sup>

\* Skunks were commonly called polecats. Weasels were occasionally called polecats.

† Perhaps Boies was thinking of mink when he wrote of the “martin.” The marten, a northern relative of the mink, may have once occurred in very low numbers in northern Illinois.

‡ Henry Boies wrote that woodchucks were quite common and the Potawatomi ate them, but others reported that this species was absent or rare in the region. In neighboring Kendall County, E.W. Hicks reported, “The woodchuck, or ground hog, emigrated here after the whites came.”<sup>137</sup> The state’s first mammalogist, Robert Kennicott of Cook County, wrote in 1857, “In this part of Illinois it was exceedingly rare ten years ago, but is now becoming quite common.”<sup>172</sup> The 1904 *History of Kane County* states, “Woodchucks and house-rats and mice came with civilization . . . .”<sup>29</sup>



there was a winter of extraordinary severity, more terrible than had ever been known before or since that time; that multitudes of Indians perished with the cold, and that all of the buffalo died and were never afterwards seen in this section of the country. \*

Near the present town line between Clinton and Shabbona is a small pond of water whose springs never fail to yield an abundant supply. Around this spring, could have been seen, twenty years ago, the bones and skulls of hundreds of buffalo. In times of severe drought this was the only watering place on the open prairie for many miles around, and it is supposed that the old and decrepid buffalo, who always avoid the groves, resorted to this spot for water when nearly worn out, and died there. But although the buffalo were gone, the toils of the Indian hunters were yet rewarded with an abundance of game, and it constituted their principal supply of food.<sup>50</sup>

Henry Boies compiled a year-by-year "Annals of DeKalb County." Here are significant events from an ecological viewpoint, beginning with 1835:

It was in the spring of this year when the treaty with the Indians which followed the Black Hawk war had bound them to leave this country . . . , that the first considerable body of white settlers came into the County.<sup>50</sup>

1836:

Comparatively few settlers came in; the timbered lands of the county had nearly all been claimed during the previous year, and those who were not able or willing to pay the prices demanded by claimants were forced to go further west.

. . . Most of the settlers had built upon or near the banks of the streams, and in the shelter of the groves. The decaying sod of the newly broken prairie, which surrounded their dwellings, filled the air with malaria. From the streams, whose sluggishness was a main characteristic of this level country, there also arose a constant and palpable effluvium that was a fruitful source of disease. The ague, that curse of new lands in the fertile west, this year became the prevalent complaint.

. . . The difficulties of travelling were much greater than at present. The country was much more wet, the streams and sloughs the great obstructions to prairie travel, were more full of water than now.<sup>50</sup>

1837:

This year, 1837, was noted as the first in the series of the regular Septennial wet seasons that have recurred every seven years since that time.<sup>†</sup> From the first

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\* A footnote on page 137 discusses the date of this buffalo-killing winter.

† A different view of the seven-year wet cycle is on page 141.

breaking up of winter, the rain poured down daily, with very few days exception, until late in the autumn. The windows of heaven were opened, the rain descended, and the floods came. The country was inundated; the roads would have been impassable if there had been any roads; the crops were poor and sickly, for want of sufficient sunshine. \* Shabbona, the sagacious old Indian, had predicted the wet season. He had asserted that as far back as Indian tradition reached, every seventh year had been similarly visited with a superabundance of rain—with almost constant storms and flood, and swollen streams. Seven years before, the soldiers at Fort Dearborn . . . had made record of a similar year of constant storms and endless floods; and it is certain that on every succeeding seventh year, such seasons have recurred. All of those who have resided in the county during the succeeding four septentriades, will testify that 1844, 1851, 1858 and 1865, were each seasons of extraordinary moisture, and noted as wet summers. . . . most of the old residents admit the regular return of this seventh year of floods and storms, and plan their farming operations with reference to it. It is worthy of remark, however, that the last of these wet seasons, which occurred in 1865, was but a comparatively moderate specimen of the kind. The floods began in July, and would have attracted no very marked attention, but for the general looking for and expectation of it.

A wet season in those early times, was different from what it is at present. It caused far greater inconvenience. Then, the country had no artificial drains, no broken and open soil to drink up the showers; it was all covered by the thick, tough sod of the native prairie, into which the rain penetrated with difficulty. It flowed off into the lowlands or sloughs, and being undrained, remained there, 'till evaporated by the summer's sun, making them almost impassable for teams. The country, ever since its first settlement, has been growing more and more dry. Lands that ten, or even five years ago, could not bear a team at any season of the year, now are constantly passable: and that is remarked, even in places where there is no artificial drainage or cultivation of soil in the vicinity to account for it.<sup>50</sup>

1838:

Since the departure of the Indians, game had rapidly increased in this district of country. Deer became very numerous.<sup>50</sup>

1839:

The year 1839 was memorable as one of great suffering among the new settlers, from sickness. . . . Ague and billious fevers were the prevailing diseases. They resulted from the close proximity to the groves and streams to which the new

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\* The family of Henry Wood moved to their new home in De Kalb County in the spring of 1837, but "the summer of 1837 was a hard one, and but little was raised." The Woods lived for two months on potatoes and samp with milk.<sup>67</sup>

comers all built their houses, and were aided . . . by the bad surface water from the sloughs which they used in the want of wells of proper depth to supply pure water.<sup>50</sup>

1840:

Around all of the groves which dotted the prairies like oases in a desert, or like islands in the blue ocean, little communities of farmers were gathered . . . . They raised bountiful crops of the finest winter wheat and the fresh virgin prairie soil produced of all kinds of grain such crops as have never since been equalled . . . . They drew their wheat to Chicago over roads that were passable only in a time of drought . . . .<sup>50</sup>

1842-43:

The winter of 1841-42, was one of uncommon severity. \* A heavy coating of snow fell on the 8th of November, and it remained on the ground until April 14th, during all which time, with the exception of the usual January thaw, the sleighing was excellent. . . . Forage for the stock became very scarce, and hundreds died of starvation. Hay sold at twenty dollars per ton. The snow became crusted over, and the deer entrapped in it could be slaughtered with axes and clubs. They would "yard" together in large numbers in the woods, where they lived on the bark of trees. If driven out into the crusted snow, they could make no progress, and were easily killed.

. . . The terrible winter ended in the middle of April . . . .<sup>50</sup>

1844:

This was the second since the settlement of the County, of the regular septennial wet seasons. The floods began early in summer, but not early enough to ruin the splendid crops of winter wheat which were everywhere abundant. Some farmers report that they cut and bound their wheat while standing ankle-deep in water, and then carried it out on the high knolls to dry before stacking. . . . A great many cattle and horses feeding upon the prairies became mired inextricably, and the calls were numerous for teams to attach long ropes or chains to them and draw them out. Most of the crops were seriously damaged by the floods and storms. All of the bridges that surrounded the County seat were carried away by the flood, and the same was true of the bridges all over the country. . . . when the water subsided, the soil of the valleys was covered with sand so as to ruin the land for cultivation. The grist mills were almost universally swept away . . . .<sup>50</sup>

1851:

The regular seven years flood and subsequent long wet summer, came again this year. There had been no snow during the previous winter, but a great amount

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\* The legendary Hard Winter was in 1842-43 (see a footnote on page 218).

of rain. On the first Sunday in April, one of the most furious snow-storms ever known in this country, set in and more than fifteen inches fell in the course of the day. On the Sunday following, came another similar storm of equal severity. About a month after and before the soil had become sufficiently dry for farming operations, a heavy rain set in and continued with but occasional intervals, for more than two months. It is related that at one time the sun did not shine through the clouds for ten days. The plowed ground became covered with a green mould. The wheat crop was all scabbed. Little or none was raised that was really fit for flouring, and in some cases it sickened and apparently poisoned those who were compelled by the prevalent destitution, to use it.

The roads became impassable and continued so during most of the season.

... A subscription was started for the construction of a plank road from Sycamore to St. Charles. A large amount of money was raised, the road was graded, the plank laid down and toll-gates established. For about one season the road was a decided convenience, but soon the hard wood plank became warped by the sun; the road was as rough as the old-fashioned corduroy; no one used it when they could avoid it; the neighboring inhabitants finally confiscated the plank and the road was abandoned.<sup>50</sup>

1856:

The winter of 1855-56 was signalized by the most furious snow-storm ever before known in the country. For three weeks no trains ran through upon the railroads, and not a mail was received in the County.<sup>50</sup>

1858:

This year was another in the regular course of those wet seasons which have been noted as coming every seventh year. The spring weather was tolerably fair, and promised well; but before the season for planting corn arrived, floods of rain drowned vegetation, enveloped the country in seas of mud, and rendered it almost impossible to conduct farming operations with any degree of profit.

The wheat crop had become well started and near harvest time was promising an abundant yield when a series of moist hot days blighted it and in a few days' time destroyed its value. There was less than half a crop.<sup>50</sup>

1859:

The crops of this year were seriously injured by a prolonged drought which was so severe that large numbers of cattle were reported to have perished for want of water.<sup>50</sup>

1860:

The severe drouth of the previous year, drawing all the moisture of the sub-soil to the surface from an unusual depth, and with it the fructifying substances held

there in solution, seemed to have covered the whole country with a coating of manure, and stimulated the yield of every crop to unusual productiveness. The average yield of wheat was estimated at thirty bushels to the acre, and all other products of the soil were equally remarkable.<sup>50</sup>

1862:

At the autumn session of the Board of Supervisors the claim of the County against the United States, under the swamp-land grant, \* was offered at auction.

. . . A committee of the Board presented an elaborate report, giving the full history of the swamp-land matter, which was to the following effect:

They report that in 1852 John L. Beveridge had been appointed Drainage Commissioner, with authority to drain and sell the swamp-lands . . . . By April, 1853, Mr. Lamb, the County Surveyor, had selected as swamp-lands 31,153 acres, but none of these lands had been conveyed to the County until 1858, when only 5741 acres were conveyed, the remainder, about 25,000 acres, having meanwhile been sold by the United States to individuals.<sup>50</sup>

1864:

The year 1864 came in with a storm, † more terrible in its fury than the "oldest inhabitant" had ever before known. . . . The country was buried beneath . . . drifts, and the mercury sunk to thirty-two degrees below zero. This severity of cold was intensified by a fierce gale, which blew for three days with extraordinary fury. Many persons were frozen to death, and cattle perished in great numbers. More than one-half of the fowls in this County were frozen; the railroads were blocked up . . . for several days.

. . . A favorite shade-tree in this County had always been the rapidly-growing locust, and thousands of acres of them had been planted for the purposes of timber and as screens from the fierce winds of the prairie. During this year they

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\* The Federal government could not find buyers for millions of acres of public land in Illinois and adjacent states because it was too wet. Under the terms of the Swamp Land Act of 1850, the State of Illinois took title to such tracts within its borders. With the participation of county governments, this land was supposed to be sold into private ownership. According to State law, income from sales was to be used "for the purpose of constructing the necessary levees and drains to reclaim the same, and the balance of said lands, if any there be, after the same are reclaimed as aforesaid shall be distributed in each county, equally, among the townships thereof, for the purpose of education, or the same may be applied to the construction of roads and bridges, or to such other purposes as may be deemed expedient . . . ." <sup>47</sup> Paul Gates' article "The Disposal of the Public Domain in Illinois, 1848-1856" is a good summary of the effort. <sup>103</sup>

† The storm was on New Year's Day.

were entirely destroyed by a species of borer, \* which left hardly one tree alive in the country.<sup>50</sup>

1865:

The crops were very poor. This was the occasion of the return of the regular Septennial wet season. † There was a drouth in the summer, but at harvest time the floods poured down, destroying a large portion of the ripened grain, and covering the country with a coating of slimy mud, so deep that the reapers would not operate upon it (when this was attempted in the intervals of the showers). The wet season continued during the fall.<sup>50</sup>

1866:

On the 8th of August a most desolating hail-storm swept through a belt of the northern and central portions of the County, beating every species of vegetation into the earth, as would the tramp of an army. Farmers had just commenced harvesting their wheat and oats, and with the exception of that which stood in the shock every acre of it was rendered utterly worthless. Thousands of acres of corn were beaten to bare stalks. Hail-stones, measuring six and seven inches in circumference, fell by millions. Children were knocked senseless; pigs, fowls and birds were killed by hundreds.<sup>50</sup>

1867:

The subject of hedges for the prairie farms began to attract a great deal of attention, and over two hundred miles of osage orange hedge were set out during this spring. ‡

Among the meteorological phenomena of the year were unusually heavy falls of snow in January, a prodigious flood in February, extraordinary and long-continued storms in March, and a very destructive hail-storm in July.<sup>50</sup>

Henry Boies' *History of DeKalb County* provides glimpses of the natural environment of each township. First in order is Afton Township:

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\* The black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*) is subject to severe infestations by larvae of a long-horned beetle known as the locust borer (*Megacyllene robiniae*).

† Charles Marsh, an assiduous observer of weather in De Kalb County, did not count 1865 as a wet year. He listed 1869 as the first extremely wet year after 1858. (Boies' record of weather observations closed with the publication of his book in 1868.)

‡ Hedging with Osage orange plants made it possible to subdivide and enclose prairies despite an inadequate supply of wood for rail fences. When Henry Boies wrote of the advent of hedges on the De Kalb County prairie in 1868, he had no idea that wire fencing would replace hedging within a few years. Joseph Glidden of De Kalb invented the first successful and widely used barbed wire fencing in 1873. Within three years his factory was producing a ton of wire per hour. Shipments went out across the Midwest and Great Plains and as far as California.<sup>113</sup>

Afton is yet a stripling in our family of towns. . . . It is one of those towns that, being far removed from natural groves, and rich only in a soil of unsurpassed fertility, were considered by the early settlers undesirable for farming purposes, and consequently remained unsettled.

. . . Afton is one unbroken prairie . . . . It has one handsome stream. The head waters of the Little Rock Creek, a fine stream of pure water, burst from the ground on Section Fourteen, and run southeastwardly through Squaw Grove.<sup>50</sup>

#### Clinton Township:

Clinton is now one of the populous and prosperous towns of our County, but was not settled so early as those towns which were more favored with timbered lands. One small grove of about one hundred acres borders the Little Indian Creek, which has its head in the town; the remainder is handsome rolling prairie.

. . . in 1847 and 1848, when Shabbona's Grove (which is on the west line of this town) was sold by the old chief, and divided into lots by the wily speculator Gates, so that all could procure timber, a dozen more settlers made claims on the prairie . . . .<sup>50</sup>

#### Pierce Township:

Pierce is a prairie town, remote from woodland. The head waters of Big Rock Creek rise in the eastern part of the town, bursting from the side of a natural elevation sixty feet above the lowlands near it. The spring is impregnated with sulphur.<sup>50</sup>

#### Squaw Grove Township:

Squaw Grove was probably the first township settled in De Kalb County. In the summer of 1834 one Hollenbeck . . . made a claim to the fine grove in this town.

. . . He did not remain on his new claim, but . . . William Sebree . . . started at once to possess it.

. . . In September, 1834, he reached the spot, . . . camping down in the midst of the Indians . . . .

It was a very cold winter. When he went on Christmas day to cut the slough grass for his famishing cattle, he had his ears and nose frozen. The family lived principally upon deer and prairie fowl for the first six months. The latter game were not so numerous as they were in after years, when grain fields were more plenty; but wolves abounded, and were very troublesome, snatching up everything eatable that chanced to be left out of doors.<sup>50</sup>

#### Paw Paw Township:

There is no waste land in the township, and its deep, black soil, resting over a subsoil of clay, is extremely productive. The Big Indian Creek \* and its tributaries, which run through the township in various directions, furnish a good supply of pure, running water. Ross Grove, Coon Grove, and a portion of PawPaw Grove, lie in this town, and supply its inhabitants with a considerable portion of their fencing and fuel.

... PawPaw Grove took its name from the abundance of pawpaw apples found there, and which grow there to this day—a fruit small, juicy, and luscious, found nowhere else in this vicinity.

... Game was found quite plentiful at that early date. Deer, prairie wolves, wild cats, and an occasional bear, with wild turkeys, geese, ducks, and prairie chickens, were the principal species.<sup>50</sup>

#### Victor Township:

It was one of the prairie towns, remote from woodland, and consequently was not occupied by settlers until those sections of the country which were better favored by timber had passed out of the hands of the United States, and could not be purchased at "government price." In 1847 and 1848 some of the lands were first entered, and during the next five years it was all taken up.

... Ross Grove and Shabbona Grove furnish some of its people with timber, but most of them own no woodland.<sup>50</sup>

#### Somonauk Township:

Its surface is rather level; it has a good supply of timber, and is well watered by Somonauk Creek, a handsome stream, which turns two mills.<sup>†</sup>

... In 1851 the railroad,—that great life-giving stimulant to the impoverished West,—was built through the township . . . .

... In a few months, every acre of land in the township was taken up by settlers or speculators . . . .<sup>50</sup>

#### Shabbona Township:

Shabbona's Grove, twenty-five years ago, was one of the finest bodies of timber in the State, containing about fifteen hundred acres, well covered with heavy white, burr and black oaks, and black walnut. It is situated on the Big Indian

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\* Big Indian Creek = Indian Creek.

† Somonauk Creek had three mill dams within four miles of its mouth.<sup>235</sup>



Creek, and is named after an old Pottawattamie chief, — Shabbona, — who at that time, with his tribe, lived at the north end of the grove, where his headquarters, a large, long log house, now stand in a good state of preservation. It was surrounded by an immense tract of high, rolling prairie, well watered and drained . . . . . On account of the excellence of the land, its dry and healthy location, and the quality of the timber in the grove, it was very attractive to the early immigrants . . . .

. . . Eighteen years ago, almost every resident of Chicago could tell you where Shabbona's Grove was, and all about it; now, scarcely a citizen knows that there is such a place on the face of the earth.

. . . New-Year's Day of 1836 was celebrated at Shabbona Grove by the erection of the first white man's dwelling at this place. . . . the first white inhabitants, who had lived for a few weeks in the wigwams which the Indians had abandoned for awhile, . . . rolled up the logs, and speedily enclosed a dwelling . . . .

. . . In 1845, the population had been increased by the immigration of the families of Mr. June Baxter, William Marks, Peter Miller, and William White.

. . . The deer in the neighboring groves and prairies furnished them with a considerable supply of venison, and from their skins they made durable garments. Prairie fowls, which were then vastly more numerous than now, together with sand-hill cranes, swans, ducks, and geese, contributed liberally to the supply of their tables. The Indians living near them baked these fowls in the ashes, or boiled them in their kettles . . . .<sup>50</sup>

## **1869: An oration before the Old Settlers Association of McHenry and Lake Counties**

On the 8th day of September in the year 1869, George Gage spoke to the first assemblage of "Old Settlers" at the town of McHenry. Among his remarks . . .

After a residence of thirty-five years in this county, during which time the waves of adversity have beaten heavily against our frail bark of life, . . . it affords us untold satisfaction to meet so many of our old friends here upon this occasion . . . .

. . . I wish to go back with you to-day to our starting point in life here and trace our footprints along the winding way which brings us to our present position. And first I wish to introduce a prairie view, a view of the country as we found it—a prairie

"Whose rolling surface far exceeds our gaze  
Where herds run wild and wander as they graze."

These groves of timber in the distance, which seem to skirt the horizon, mark the line of some water course or lake which serves to protect them against the

annual desolating scourge, the prairie fire. . . . This little bird that flies screeching and screaming around us, known as a "prairie jack," \* with his long pipe-stem bill, sends his sharp, shrill voice far echoing over the prairie. The sand-hill crane in yonder marsh catches the echo, and tunes her throat to the melody her mother taught; her mate takes up the glad refrain, responds in perfect time and harmony, and while they dance and sing . . . .

Such is a faint outline of the picture as mirrored from memory's chart to-day.

. . . Now . . . we look over the country, upon the spot where the painted savage, the prowling wolf and the timid deer have been wont to roam unmolested . . . . The quiet farmer with his plow has commenced a war of extermination against the prairie flowers and grasses. Civilization . . . has established a permanent residence here, carrying destruction to all the lower forms of animated nature, to make room for a higher, more perfect development of the vegetable, animal and intellectual kingdoms.

. . . Notwithstanding the fact that this country presented the most cheering prospects in our beginning here, with its rich alluvial soil spread out in unlimited extent, we were all doomed to bitter disappointment. Bright visions of golden harvest have loomed up before us only to be swept away in a single hour. Prairie fires have swept over the country like a flaming tornado leaving all a blackened mass of ruins in their path, and always finding victims among the farmers. Fences, hay, grain and buildings have fallen before the devouring element. The swarming blackbirds, like the locusts of Egypt, have been the terror of farmers in early times. They would first ruin our harvests and then add insult to injury by chanting their funeral dirge amid the green branches of the forest, while they laughed at our calamity and mocked when our fear came. The malaria arising from the newly turned prairies has caused us to burn with fever and freeze with ague. We struggled year after year against fire, black-birds, vermin and disease, until we began to realize fine harvests, and then we had no markets. <sup>155</sup>

## 1869: "Origin of the Prairies"

On December 30, 1869, the Honorable John D. Caton read a paper before the Ottawa Academy of Natural Sciences titled "Origin of the Prairies." † He began his lecture with a discussion of Leo Lesquereux's pronouncement that prairies owe their existence to the peculiar nature of soil formed under aquatic plants in shallow waters. ‡ Caton rejected this

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\* Prairie jack = upland sandpiper.

† Caton's lecture was published as one of the *Transactions* of the Ottawa Academy of Natural Sciences. <sup>63</sup> His paper can also be consulted in Number 3 of *Fergus' Historical Series*. <sup>64</sup>

‡ Leo Lesquereux's theory is discussed in a footnote on page 222.

theory, pointing out that "scarcely one acre in the thousand of the great prairies of Illinois and Iowa would be recognized" as the special kind of soil that Professor Lesquereux's theory demands. Caton emphasized that a great variety of soils support prairies, and he detailed other reasons why Lesquereux's ideas are not tenable.

Judge Caton asserted that treelessness was caused by fires, and he offered testimony of long-time residents as evidence:

The opinions of the first settlers on the prairies, who are often good observers of many phenomena, are entitled to respect, and, so far as I am aware, they universally attribute the absence of trees from the prairies to the periodical fires which swept over them, overlooking, no doubt, many minor causes.<sup>63</sup>

Caton observed that the prairie's thick sod might keep tree seeds from germinating, and he noted that the roots of prairie plants allow them to survive drought that would kill tree seedlings. Caton also discussed how fire increases the vigor of grasses:

It is a familiar fact to all careful observers that fire is much more destructive to the vitality of arborescent than to herbaceous plants, *caeteris paribus*.<sup>\*</sup> A fire that will destroy the last vestige of life in a tree of considerable size will leave the roots of the grasses surrounding it unharmed, from which will spring a more luxuriant growth the succeeding season. Indeed, it is a most interesting fact, familiar to all the early settlers, who depended upon the prairie grasses for pasturage and for hay, that a much more luxuriant growth is produced on the prairies where the old grass is burned off than where it is allowed to remain and decay upon the ground. I have in person often made careful observations on this subject, and uniformly with the same result. The farmer does not burn off the old grass in the fall solely that it may not obstruct the scythe when mowing the next year's crop, but the most casual observation will show one that the actual growth of grass is ordinarily at least one-third greater where the old grass has been burned off in the fall. . . . the roots of the prairie herbage are not injured by a very considerable degree of heat where even large trees would be liable to be destroyed. What, then, must be the fate of the tree of but a few months' growth? Utter annihilation seems absolutely inevitable. So long as the prairies are subject to the annual conflagrations, to which they are so much exposed in a state of nature, there is a manifest cause why trees get a lodgement on them with so much difficulty.<sup>63</sup>

Wherever trees grew on the prairie, Caton found them on sites that do not burn well:

. . . I cannot resist the remark that wherever we do find timber throughout this broad field of prairie, it is always in or near the humid portions of it, — as along the margins of streams, or upon or near the springey uplands. Many most luxuriant groves are found on the highest portions of the uplands, but always in

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<sup>\*</sup> Chief Justice Caton interjected a bit of Latin legalese meaning "other things being equal."

the neighborhood of water. For a remarkable example, I may refer to that great chain of groves, extending from and including the Au Sable Grove \* on the east and Holderman's Grove † on the west, in Kendall county, occupying the high divide between the waters of the Illinois and the Fox rivers. In and around all the groves flowing springs abound, and some of them are separated by marshes, to the very borders of which the great trees approach, as if the forest were ready to seize upon each yard of ground as soon as it is elevated above the swamps. Indeed, all our groves seem to be located where water is so disposed as to protect them, to a greater or less extent, from the prairie fire, although not so situated as to irrigate them. If the head waters of the streams on the prairies are most frequently without timber, so soon as they have attained sufficient volume to impede the progress of the fires, with very few exceptions, we find forests on their borders, becoming broader and more vigorous as the magnitude of the streams increases. It is manifest that lands located on the borders of streams which the fires cannot pass are only exposed to one-half the fires to which they would be exposed but for such protection. This tends to show, at least, that if but one-half the fires that have occurred had been kindled, the arboraceous growth could have withstood their destructive influence, and the whole surface of what is now prairie would be forest. ‡ Another confirmatory fact, patent to all observers, is, that the prevailing winds upon the prairies, especially in the autumn are from the west, and these give direction to the prairie fires. Consequently, the lands on the westerly sides of the streams are the most exposed to the fires, and, as might be expected, we find much the most timber on the easterly sides of the streams.

Another fact, always a subject of remark among the dwellers on the prairies, I regard as conclusive evidence that the prairie soils are peculiarly adapted to the growth of trees is, that wherever the fires have been kept from the groves by the settlers, they have rapidly encroached upon the prairies, unless closely depastured by the farmer's stock or prevented by cultivation. This fact I regard as established by careful observation of more than thirty-five years, during which I have been an interested witness of the settlement of this country, — from the time when a few log cabins, many miles apart, built in the borders of the groves, alone were met with, till now nearly the whole of the great prairies, in our State at least, are brought under cultivation by the industry of the husbandman. Indeed, this is a fact as well recognised by the settlers as that corn will grow upon the prairies when properly cultivated. Ten years ago I heard the

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\* Aux Sable Grove was on the high divide between the headwaters of Aux Sable Creek and the Fox River, south of Oswego.

† Holderman's Grove was in Big Grove Township south of Newark.

‡ Caton's conclusion is based on the premise that wildfires burn in all directions with equal probability. His supposition is countered by the final two sentences in the paragraph.

observation made, by intelligent and observing men, that within the preceding twenty-five years the area of the timber in the prairie portions of the State had actually doubled by the spontaneous extension of the natural groves. However this may be, certain it is that the encroachments of the timber upon the prairies have been universal and rapid, wherever not impeded by fire or other physical causes, without regard to the constituents of the soil.

The manner and progress of the encroachments are familiar to all. The hazel is the usual pioneer in these encroachments, though sometimes even this is preceded by the wild apple. No one can at this day travel two hours on any of the railroads through our prairies without passing some grove of timber bordered by considerable belts of hazel, among which, not far from the outer edge, young forest trees will appear, and these will be observed larger and larger as they are farther and farther from the edge of the grass, and are found nearer and nearer the original forest, and this where there has been no cultivation. This is the usual though not universal appearance of the surroundings of the groves at the present day. Sometimes, no doubt, large trees will be found as advance sentinels, standing out quite in the prairie, but, how they have been able to maintain their ground there we may not at all times be able to explain. Such instances are rare exceptions. The general rule is, that the hazel is in the advance, and from this we may safely conclude that this shrub can maintain the struggle for life with the prairie grass better than forest trees, while in turn it succumbs to the latter. In the hazel rough \* the seeds of the trees find an accessible soil, where

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\* The "hazel rough" has vanished from the lexicon of naturalists as well as the landscape. The following notes are offered to encourage resurrection of the term and the vegetation.

In his 1885 history of Morgan County, Charles M. Eames testified, "The 'hazel roughs' that crept out on the dry prairie knolls near the timber, and the young timber skirting the prairies, had a hard struggle for life with the autumnal fires, lighted by the Indians for hunting purposes, and, after the passage of such fires in the fall, presented a blackened and stunted appearance . . ." <sup>88</sup>

In an 1845 article, "Observations on the Botany of Illinois," Dr. Charles W. Short wrote, ". . . on the margins of 'sloughs,' and along the courses of the small streams which occasionally meander through them, clumps of bushes and clusters of shrubbery are always to be found. These 'roughs,' as they are called, furnish welcome retreats to grazing cattle, and sometimes to the traveler's horse, from that annoying pest of these regions—the prairie fly." <sup>271</sup>

M.S. Bebb was a physician and botanist like Dr. Short. In 1860 Dr. Bebb wrote to the *Prairie Farmer* about oak groves in northern Illinois: "Beneath we find an abundant growth of shrubs, principally Hazel (*Corylus americana*) and *Cornus paniculata*—the Hazel often extending out into the prairie for a mile or more, forming what is called 'Hazel ruff.'" <sup>31</sup> (*Cornus paniculata* = *C. racemosa*, gray dogwood.)

In an 1851 essay titled "Breaking Prairie," J. Milton May alluded to the reason why shrubby areas are called "roughs": ". . . in locations where adjacent improvements prescribe limits to the annual burning of the prairie and in the neighborhood of the groves; hazel bushes spring up, forming a thicket which are called 'hazel roughs' by those who break prairie." <sup>194</sup>

the young plants are indifferent to or are benefited by the shade. In time they rise above the hazel, and at length grow to sufficient size to constitute a forest, and shade the ground, which destroys the hazel, which was their protecting nurse in infancy. The facts stated, I think, clearly warrant the conclusion drawn.

. . . Arboreous seeds when thrown upon the unbroken prairie do germinate and grow to trees, but with difficulty, no doubt, on account of the sward on which they fall, and the great danger to which they are exposed, especially from fires. Where they have no protection from these their destruction is almost certain, no matter how readily the seed may germinate or how vigorously the young plants may grow.

. . . We have, then, obvious reasons why the scattered clusters of trees referred to, the isolated groves upon the prairies, have not extended their domain so as to embrace the whole field. The prairie fires, the matted, tough sward, the grazing of wild animals in the neighborhood of the groves to which they resorted, the aboriginal encampments usually located around the borders of the groves, would seem to present a sufficient explanation why the groves have not extended, independently of the quality of the soil. That the cultivation of the prairie soils improves their condition for the growth of trees is proved by the more vigorous growth of those where the ground is cultivated than those which spring from seeds accidentally scattered on the prairie along the borders of the groves; but this is true of herbaceous vegetation as well.

. . . But the supposition of igneous agency in producing the effect under consideration is not a mere speculation or conjecture. It is an established fact, proved by such evidence as leaves no room for controversy. So that whatever else may also have contributed to the same result, fire at least has done its share. In almost every year, in some part of the country, whole forests are consumed by fire. In a majority of instances, no doubt, a new growth of trees takes the place of the old, but such is not always the case. Mr. Daniel Ebersol, of this city, \* who is a good observer, and of undoubted veracity, informs me that many years ago, on the Vermilion River, a fire occurred, under his own observation, which utterly destroyed, root and branch, an entire hard-wood forest, and that the entire burnt district was directly taken possession of by the herbaceous plants peculiar to the prairies, and that in a very few years it could not be distinguished from the adjoining prairie, except by its greater luxuriance. The testimony of Mr. J.E. Shaw, † who has resided upon the prairies of Illinois for more than fifty, and upon his farm, within two miles of Ottawa, for more than forty years, is equally to the point. He assures me that he has known many

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\* The city is Ottawa.

† Josiah Shaw moved to La Salle County in 1827.

forest districts entirely burned over and every living thing upon them destroyed. Generally they were replaced with trees similar to the former growth; but that sometimes the prairie herbage takes and maintains possession. He cites an instance on his own farm, where forty years ago, when he took possession, there was a forest of large trees, which was destroyed by a fire, when a part of the burned district was again covered with trees, and a part was taken possession of by the prairie grass, and in a comparatively short time could not be distinguished from the adjoining prairie. He mentions another occurrence of the same kind within his own observation, in Putnam county. All who know Mr. Shaw, as I have for a third of a century, will place implicit confidence in the truth of his statements and the accuracy of his observations. Indeed, the character of the latter is such as scarcely to admit of mistake. But corroborating testimony is abundant. I have conversed with many old settlers in different parts of the prairie regions, who mention similar occurrences. I venture the assertion, that a thousand witnesses may be found still living who can state particular instances of the same kind. In my early wanderings over the wild prairies it several times occurred, when approaching a body of timber, that I met in the prairie grass charred remains of forest trees, perhaps half a mile or more from the edge of the wood, and I have in no instance inquired of one who had similar facilities for observation who did not remember having observed the same thing.

In a former part of this paper I have shown, by evidence which may be seen and comprehended at this day by every observer, how prairies have been and are still being converted into forests. I have now stated, with considerable particularity, evidence satisfactorily showing how forests have been converted into prairies. This seems to me of the very essence of the inquiry, which can alone be solved by evidence of authenticated facts, one ounce of which should be entitled to more weight than a pound of ingenious conjecture.

How vain, then, are the most plausible theories and fine spun speculations, when we have this palpable, tangible proof of the actual process by which the result has been produced, and that by a simple cause adequate to the result. If the thousand witnesses who have observed this process going on before their very eyes had been in the habit of writing and publishing their observations for the last half century, the question would have been long since so conclusively settled, both among the learned and the unlearned, that all men would be surprised that it was ever a subject of dispute. The great danger to truth would have been that too much effect would have been attributed to igneous agency. For myself, while I am prepared to believe that this has been the most potent of all the causes contributing to the result, I am also prepared to admit that there have been many minor auxiliary causes aiding the principal one, which may have escaped the attention of observers.

. . . In grouping together some of the facts in support of what may be denominated the igneous theory, I but state a theory which is as old as the first white

settlements upon the prairies; but because it has been universally accepted by those who have had the greatest opportunities for observing the facts bearing upon the question, although they make no pretensions to scientific attainments, —for that reason I do not feel called upon to reject it, and with it a great volume of facts which seem to conclusively establish it. At least till some one else shall produce other tangible facts, as well supported by proof as these, in support of some other theory, and tending to prove the fallacy of the conclusions deduced from these, I must believe that the popular opinion of the country is in the main correct.

Perhaps I have too little respect for mere theories, and too much reverence for facts. I cannot be content with general observations of facts without descending to their minute details, which in my view become of immense importance as qualifying or explaining more general observation. If, without the careful study of well established facts, mere theories may be draped in the tinsel glitter of learned speculations, they can never satisfy that wholesome craving for exact knowledge, which alone forms a sure basis for definite conclusions. Science has sometimes suffered grievous wrong from some of her votaries, who have felt called upon to explain everything, whether explicable or not by ascertained facts; and, indeed, the more occult the explanation, the more profound would their learning appear. If it so happen that manifest facts are opposed to their theories, why—so much the worse for the facts! <sup>63</sup>

### 1870: *Geological Survey of Illinois*

Assistant State Geologist Henry M. Bannister surveyed most of the counties in the Fox River Area. The results of his investigations appear in the fourth volume of the *Geological Survey of Illinois*. The following quotations from Bannister's "Geology of McHenry and Lake Counties" pertain to the Fox valley:

The principal streams by which this region is watered are, in the order of their importance, as follows: the Fox river, which, entering this district from the north, and passing through several expansions or lakes, traverses it in a general north and south direction; the DesPlaines . . . ; the Kishwaukee . . . ; and the Nippersink, a tributary of the Fox . . . .

. . . The surface configuration of this district is somewhat varied, embracing not only the upland rolling prairie and woodland, the prevailing character of the surface in this part of the State, but also extensive wet prairies or sloughs, in certain localities . . . .

. . . in Lake county, the general appearance of the country is . . . undulating prairie and forest, with here and there over the surface, small level prairies and lakes or ponds. These latter are most numerous in the western and northwestern portions of the county, where they are extremely abundant and vary in extent



from a few acres to several square miles. The largest are those on the upper course of the Fox river, near the McHenry county line, Pistakee Lake and Fox Lake, which are from four to seven miles in length, and a mile or more in breadth. The others seldom exceed one or two square miles in area, and vary in character from quiet land-locked ponds to shallow, grassy marshes, differing but little from the ordinary wet prairie or slough. Indeed, almost every intermediate form between the two may be found in this region. The larger lakes, in many instances, are themselves widely margined with a growth of wild rice and various aquatic grasses and weeds, the matted stems of these, together with the floating confervoid vegetation, \* forming, in some places, a mass of sufficient buoyancy to support the weight of a man. When, however, this mat is once penetrated, a stick or an oar may sometimes be thrust down for a depth of several feet, meeting with scarcely any more resistance than is furnished by its own buoyancy. There are in Lake county, including the smaller ones, some twenty or thirty of these lakes or ponds; their average extent is, perhaps, nearly one square mile.

Passing westward into McHenry county, we find much of the surface of the same character, but also a much greater proportion of prairie, both level and undulating. The wooded country becomes more broken . . . . The general characters of the soil and timber continue about the same; the small lakes, however, so characteristic a feature in the adjoining county, are scarcely met with at all to the westward of the Fox river. The prairies of this county, which, including under this head the low-lying marshy tracts or sloughs, comprise probably two-thirds, or a still greater proportion of its surface, show in themselves rather greater variety of soil and surface than those in the counties farther to the south. We have here the gently undulating or rolling prairie, a continuation of that of the counties lying to the south and west, with its dark brown or blackish upper soil of varying depth, with a sandy or gravelly clay sub-soil, and with narrow strips of marsh or slough between the undulations. This is the general character in the southern tier of townships, and to a considerable extent, though less generally, in other parts of the county. In the central, and in some other portions of the county, the surface of the prairie sometimes becomes less undulating, and even apparently level, though still preserving sufficient rise to afford good drainage. A good example of this variety of prairie surface may be well seen in the Kishwaukee prairie, and at one or two other places in the county. Lastly, we have the before mentioned wet prairies, or sloughs, which combined, occupy a considerable area in this county. Small sloughs, varying in extent from one acre or less to several hundred, are found in all parts of the county, but the largest are in the northern tiers of townships. The soil of these wet prairies is generally more or less peaty, varying in composition from ordi-

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\* *Confervoid* vegetation refers to filamentous algae ("pond scum") or to submersed floating aquatic vegetation in general.

nary black, swamp muck to true peat; its depth varies from one to twelve feet, and is sometimes even more.

. . . Boulders . . . are tolerably abundant on the surface, and are also met with in . . . excavations, many of them of considerable size and weight, and of nearly every material, granite, syenite, greenstone, trap, etc., as well as of the more recent sedimentary rocks, such as limestone and sandstone. In the western part of the county, near the Fox river, we find the ridges, in some places, to be largely composed of rolled limestone boulders. . . . The material, judging from the lithological characters and contained fossils, is chiefly derived from the beds of the Niagara group, to the northward, in the State of Wisconsin.

. . . *Peat*.—This material is found, in a greater or less extent, in all parts of the district, but the most extensive deposits are found in its northern half. The different bogs or sloughs in which these deposits exist, are so numerous and scattered that it is difficult to give more than an approximate estimate of the area they occupy. Perhaps, taken altogether, four or five thousand acres would be a sufficiently low estimate. Only a few of the sloughs have been at all examined as to the quality and depth of the beds.

One of the largest of the sloughs is that which may be seen in sections 7 and 8, township 46, range 7, a little north and northeast of Hebron \* station on the Rockford and Kenosha division of the Northwestern railway. From this point it extends, with some interruptions, several miles in a general southwest direction to the Nippersink, and probably occupies altogether an area equal to two or three square miles. The depth, when I was able to observe it, averaged from six to ten feet; the peat ranging from a light, fibrous substance, of a reddish brown color, to a denser dark colored material, of a considerable specific gravity, when dried.

Most of the other sloughs are of comparatively small size, varying from one to two or three hundred acres in extent. . . . A very large proportion of the area in the district, now occupied by these deposits of peat, is so situated as to be capable of drainage, and nearly all can be made use of to a greater or less extent for the purpose of pasturage, etc.

In regard to the value of the material as an article of fuel, we have the testimony of those who have used it, generally in its favor. †<sup>21</sup>

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\* Hebron is near the state line in north-central McHenry County.

† In 1885 the Inter-State Publishing Company repeated Bannister's information about peat, and added, "In these peat beds the county has an almost inexhaustible fuel supply, stored for future ages."<sup>155</sup> In 1922 the Munsell Publishing Company repeated Bannister's statistics and added, "Peat was used for fuel in Durfee's brick and tile works at Woodstock, where it proved very successful."<sup>277</sup>

From Henry Bannister's "Geology of DeKalb, Kane and DuPage Counties":

The principal water courses in this territory are, first: the Fox river, which traverses the whole length of Kane county, near its eastern border; the Kishwaukee . . . , and the DuPage . . . . These, with their tributaries, and a few minor streams, furnish an abundant supply of water in all parts of this district. Springs are not generally numerous, excepting in the immediate vicinity of the water courses.

The predominating character of the surface of the country, in this district, is that of an upland rolling prairie, with, however, numerous groves, or timber islands, and extensive wooded tracts along the principal streams. The proportion of wooded land to prairie may perhaps be as small as one to three or four, but the checking of the prairie fires which formerly swept over this region, and the greater attention which has of late years been given to arboriculture, have probably made up for the deficit caused by the cutting down of the timber for fuel and other purposes, and it may perhaps be safely said that the amount of surface actually occupied by growing woods, excepting in a few localities in the immediate vicinity of the railroads, is not less at the present time than in the period of the early settlement of this region. The principal kinds of timber are, black, white, red and bur oaks, bitternut and shell-bark hickory, black-walnut, butternut, elm, black \* and white ash, soft maple, † sugar maple, and cottonwood. The red cedar and arbor vitae are also found in a few localities in this district. The varieties of soil are . . . on the prairie a deep, black or dark brown humus, and in the timber a lighter colored, sandy clay soil or loam. In a few localities the sandy or gravelly character of the soil is more predominant, as in township 42, ranges 6 and 7, ‡ in the northern part of Kane county, where some of the ridges or irregular elevations of land, separating small wet prairies or sloughs, are quite sandy. These low prairies are found, of inconsiderable area, in various portions of the district, but are more abundant in this particular region.

. . . Some of the springs along the upper course of the Fox river, in Kane county, issuing from the lower limestone bed of the Niagara group, hold much lime in solution, and deposit calcareous tufa. A considerable deposit of this material occurs on the eastern bank of the river, about three miles north of the

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\* Three trees were called black ash during the 1800s: *Fraxinus nigra* (which is currently called black ash), *F. pennsylvanica* var. *pennsylvanica* (red ash), and *F. pennsylvanica* var. *subintegerrima* (green ash). *F. nigra* is uncommon and grows in seepage areas and wet depressions, so it would not have been listed among "the principal kinds of timber" in the county.

† Soft maple = silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*).

‡ Township 42 North, Range 6 East = Hampshire Township; Township 42 North, Range 7 East = Rutland Township.

city of Elgin, and close to the track of the Fox River Valley railroad. \* This deposit was formerly quarried for the manufacture of lime, and is exposed in the excavations to the depth of about four feet. It appears to be regularly bedded, and varies in structure from a loosely compacted, porous material, resembling petrified moss, and full of traces of vegetable remains, to a compact travertine, almost resembling in density some of the older rocks. The whole extent of this deposit is not to be seen, as it is covered by from one to four feet of soil bearing large forest trees. It is exposed, however, for a distance of several rods in the ditches alongside of the railroad track.

. . . Boulders of granite, quartzite, greenstone, and various other rocks, are abundant in various localities on the surface of the ground, and are frequently met with in excavations for wells, etc., and large deposits of rolled boulders, chiefly of limestone from the underlying Niagara beds . . . occur in the Drift deposits of the adjoining portions of Kane and DuPage counties. These may be well observed in the vicinity of Elgin . . . .

. . . The limestone boulders and hard-heads, † which are so abundant in various places along the Fox river, in Kane county, are also used to a limited extent as a building material, in ornamenting the fronts of houses, etc.

*Peat.*—Deposits of this material, of greater or less extent, are found in various parts of this district, but are most numerous and extensive in the northern portion of Kane county, where there are some rather extensive level, wet prairies. . . . At the village of Carpenterville, on the Fox river, one mile north of Dundee, there is a deposit of peat one hundred acres or more in extent, and averaging at least four or five feet in depth, which has been somewhat used in the neighborhood as fuel, and found to answer well. Still more extensive beds occur farther west, in the towns of Rutland and Hampshire, which are reported to have also been used to a slight extent.

. . . Water is readily obtained by sinking wells to depths varying from ten to fifty feet, and very rarely more. . . . It is only in extraordinarily dry seasons that any inconvenience is felt in the want of a sufficient supply of water for stock.<sup>19</sup>

From H.M. Bannister's "Geology of Kendall County":

It is watered by the Fox river, which traverses the northern and northwestern portions of the county . . . . The water supply of . . . streams, in this county, is chiefly derived from surface drainage, and to a very limited extent only, from springs, therefore the smaller ones are nearly or quite dry during seasons of drouth.

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\* Trout Park Nature Preserve is in this section of river bluff.

† Hard, rounded, igneous and metamorphic boulders were called "hard-heads."

The general character of the surface of the country in this county, is that of an undulating prairie, with the timbered portion either in isolated groves, or skirting the principal streams. Sloughs, or flat damp meadows, frequently occupy the hollows between the high rolling prairies, but are not often of any considerable extent. It is in these sloughs that most of the streams which head in this county take their rise.

. . . On the uplands we find the woods consisting chiefly of black, white, red, and burr oak, shell-bark and bitternut hickory, black walnut, butternut, white \* and slippery elm, white ash, iron wood, white † and sugar maple, and on the low grounds, in addition to the most of these, we find black ash, cottonwood, and occasionally a sycamore. The red cedar is also frequent along the banks of Fox river, though it forms no large portion of the timber. The undergrowth is pretty constantly of hazel, with wild plum, crab-apple, and other small trees.

. . . at Black Hawk's Cave, in the eastern part of section 4, ‡ the river cuts through a ledge of . . . limestone, of which about 16 feet in thickness is here exposed. Black Hawk's Cave is a name given to a natural crevice or a small cave in the rock, which formerly extended back into the ledge for some little distance, ¶ but which, with several other similar cavities in this ledge, has now been almost or entirely destroyed by the quarrying of the stone for the construction of a dam across the river at this point.

. . . *Peat*.—Small deposits of peat have been found in the prairie sloughs in various parts of this county, and also at one or two points along the Fox river . . . . On the western bank of Fox river, in the northeast quarter of section 4, township 36, range 6, § there is a bed of this substance, which occupies an area of probably seventy or one hundred acres, or even more, which has been used to some extent in the neighborhood as fuel, and is reported to have made a good fire. This bed will, I think, average six feet or more in depth, over the whole area which it occupies, and is probably the most extensive deposit of the kind in the county. <sup>20</sup>

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\* White elm = American elm (*Ulmus americana*).

† White maple = silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*).

‡ The cave was in Section 4, Township 36 North, Range 6 East (at the west end of Silver Springs State Park).

¶ According to J.F. Steward, who grew up near the former site of Black Hawk's Cave, "At the opening a man could stand, but at a distance of fifty feet the cave terminated in a mere crevice." <sup>291</sup>

§ This location is across the river from Silver Springs State Park.

## Early 1870s: "Reminiscences of an Old-Timer"

While composing his reminiscences about hunting game birds, Charles Cole put himself back 50 years, "in 1872, when I lived at Geneva."

I don't suppose there were ever any better duck resorts out of doors than the Fox Lake region and the country south of Chicago, the "Kankakee" and "Illinois Bottoms," Senachwine Lake \* and Bureau County, Illinois.

... In 1872 I was fifteen years old. We lived on the Fox River, which was in a direct line north and south with the flight. In passing to and from the resorts in McHenry County and the Kankakee and Illinois Rivers the ducks used to visit us in great numbers, following the Fox River valley to a great extent. I have seen some of the best shooting in the Spring when the ice was breaking up, or had run out of the river. Of course, everybody shot in the Spring those days. No one ever had a thought that the myriads of wildfowl that passed our way in the Spring and Fall would ever be fewer in numbers, for they were there in countless thousands.

... Not all the game in those days was wholly confined to ducks. We had plenty of quail and prairie chickens. Jacksnipe † were very abundant in season. We used to have the golden plover in immense flocks. They frequented the upland pastures and ploughed land. We would go out, several of us, and get in cover, perhaps behind an old fence, or ditch, with high grass around it, and then it was simply slaughter when the big flocks came over.

Along the river and around the shores of the small lakes and ponds were great numbers of sandpiper and killdeer, also sickle-billed curlew, ‡ though the latter occurred much more infrequently. I have not seen a golden plover in forty years. I suppose there are a few still in existence, but the great flocks of by-gone days are no more.

... In those never-to-be-forgotten days when we lived on the Fox River we had the passenger pigeon with us in the Spring and Fall. They were the genuine wild pigeons, the bird that is now absolutely extinct. In the Spring, generally during the first few warm days of April, they would make their appearance, coming north in small detachments of a dozen, two dozen, fifty, one hundred, and sometimes in flocks of more than a hundred. But usually in small flocks only. It was plain to see they were on the way to ultimate destruction, for the immense flocks of former days were gone. I have seen as many as a dozen small flocks in sight at one time in the Spring steadily flying north. Sometimes

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\* Senachwine Lake spans the Putnam-Marshall County line along the Illinois River.

† Jacksnipe = common snipe.

‡ "Sickle-billed curlew" might refer to the whimbrel, or the long-billed curlew, or both.

the flocks would be close together, often they would be strung out, and never at any time were they wild. A heavy toll was levied on the flocks as they passed over. They were beautiful birds to handle and look at, and the pity is that they are now no more. In those days we boys, and a great many of the men, shot with muzzle-loaders, thereby affording the birds a chance to get by with comparatively slight decrease in their ranks, for it took some time to reload after each shot. In the meantime several flocks would escape without being molested. I shudder to think what would have happened to the poor birds had we all been equipped with breech-loaders and the murderous pump and automatic guns of today! <sup>80</sup>

### **Circa 1872: "Barrington, Ill."**

Barrington was founded among the many lakes in the Fox River valley of northwestern Cook County. A handbill from about 1872 touts the natural amenities of the village and its environs:

THIS beautiful suburban village is located on the Wisconsin Division of the CHICAGO AND NORTHWESTERN RAILROAD, thirty-two miles from the Court House in Chicago. No place within forty miles of the great "Garden City" affords so many natural attractions as BARRINGTON. It is on *high and rolling ground*, commanding in site, affording a complete natural drainage, adjacent to most beautiful groves skirting Fox River, and others closer by; it has abundance of GOOD WATER, and within four miles of the wonderfully charming LAKE ZURICH, Honey, Grass, and Spring Lakes, \* all abounding in fish, and graced with beautiful pleasure boats. <sup>263</sup>

### **1872: *Combination Atlas Map of Kane County, Illinois***

Thompson and Everts, a map-publishing concern in Geneva, produced a lavishly illustrated atlas of Kane County. In the "Geographical and Topographical" section of their atlas, the publishers stated,

The Fox river . . . is one of the most beautiful streams in the State, — only acknowledging a rival in Rock river . . . — and its waters made up mostly from the sparkling springs which stud its banks, and from effervescing fountains, † unfailing in their supply. This river flows over a rocky bed from Clinton ‡ until

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\* Spring Lake is the central attraction of Spring Creek Valley Forest Preserve. This body of water was also known as Mud Lake.

† Nineteenth-century writers commonly employed *fountain* as a poetic synonym for "spring." Springs were so numerous along the banks of the Fox River in the vicinity of Geneva that the publishers might have felt justified in their hyperbolic assertion that the stream is largely spring-fed.

‡ Clinton = South Elgin.

some distance below the southern line of the county, and its banks are fringed with beautiful groves, and bordered with the loveliest of green fields, platted here and there in gentle slopes, amid the openings of young forests, which are zealously guarded by river residents, to embellish and beautify their homes. \* <sup>298</sup>

The *Combination Atlas Map of Kane County* adds a note about Rutland Township: "Topographically, the Township is inclined to be uneven, with upheavings approaching river bluffs in their abruptness. Oak openings abound in considerable extent." † <sup>298</sup>

### 1873: "Geology of Lee County"

In the fifth volume of the *Geological Survey of Illinois*, James Shaw described the forest resources of the southern part of Lee County. This region includes Paw Paw Grove in the Fox River drainage as well as neighboring groves in the Green River valley:

Timber is scarce. . . . Lee Center Grove, Melugin's Grove, ‡ Pawpaw Grove, and a few smaller groves . . . afford about the only supply. The oaks, walnuts, sugar-maple, linden or basswood, and hickory are the prevailing kinds of timber, although almost every kind in the catalogues for northern Illinois may be found in the groves. <sup>265</sup>

James Shaw noted, "Hedge-growing and timber-growing are not geological questions, but they are great material interests, which are now attracting much attention":

Hedges are also grown to a considerable extent, and dispense with much fencing lumber. The osage orange here, makes an excellent fence when properly planted and taken care of. The history of this plant is peculiar. Many years ago it was extensively introduced in Northern Illinois. Miles of it were planted in hedges. There was great faith that it would prove an excellent fencing material, but the hedges were poorly planted and suffered to take care of themselves. As a natural consequence, poor cultivation and several hard winters caused the hedges to fail as fences. For several years the osage orange attracted little attention as a fencing material. But in course of time, a few hedges that had been properly cultivated grew into beautiful and successful fences, and public

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\* Thompson and Everts appear to have said that riverside oak openings were becoming young forests under the protection of landowners. Trees were maintained as young sprouts and shrubby "grubs" by recurrent wildfires in oak openings and barrens. These trees grew up into forests after wildfires were suppressed by farmers, as discussed in a footnote on page 151.

† Oak openings—an intermediate between open grassland and closed forest—were characteristic of rolling topography. Level plains were likely to be treeless because flat ground promotes the spread of wildfires. A very hilly landscape stops fires, allowing a dense forest to develop. Rolling topography allows the passage of occasional fires and promotes the growth of oak openings.

‡ Lee Center Grove and Melugin's Grove were in the Green River basin west of Paw Paw Grove.



attention was again turned to the osage orange. Miles of excellent fence may now be seen in these northern counties, and hundreds of miles are planted every spring. Instead of the few rows of straggling, ragged, unevenly grown bushes which used to deform the landscape, long lines of well-grown, compact, green shining walls of hedge plants may now be seen, which would defy a buffalo to break through them.<sup>265</sup>

In the same year that this volume of the *Geological Survey* was published, a De Kalb man invented barbed wire that would make Osage orange hedges obsolete.

### 1873: "Will Black Bass Take a Fly"

In the first volume of *Forest and Stream* magazine, a contributor who signed his name \*\*\* addresses the question—"Will black bass take a fly?"

EDITOR OF FOREST AND STREAM:—

I observe some discussion on this point in FOREST AND STREAM. Over thirty years ago I was in the habit of taking the black bass in this way in western waters. I found, however, that it was only in rapid water that they could be taken by casting. In the Rock and the Fox rivers in northern Illinois . . . , I have taken both the black bass \* and the rock bass by casting with bright colored flies.

. . . There is a fine sheet of water in McHenry County, Illinois, which is known as the Crystal Lake. About 1840 I visited it; there was then only one house near it, and there being no boat upon it I could not fish it. The next winter I sent out a skiff upon the sled of the nearest inhabitant, and in July, 1841, my friends and I drove to the lake and had a day's fishing. We trolled all round the lake, which is perhaps three miles long, and we killed fifty black bass, averaging three pounds each, two fine specimens of the northern pickerel † of about five pounds each, and a half bushel of rock bass and perch—about 200 lbs. of fish. Now there is a village of 2,000 inhabitants on the banks of the lake, and a row of tall

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\* Both the smallmouth bass and the largemouth bass were called black basses in the 1800s. This correspondent was writing about the smallmouth bass, as indicated by a remark at the end of his letter:

The naturalists have so much the habit of re-naming our birds and fishes every few years that is hard to keep up with their nomenclature, even if I knew which Professor was right. We used to know the black bass as *Centrarchus fasciatus*, following Cuvier and DeKay. Then Agassiz, I think, named it *Grystes nigricans*; and now Professor Gill calls it *Micropterus achigan*; and presently some other ichthyologist will hunt his Greek Lexicon for a still harder name. How are we simple anglers to decide when Doctors disagree? <sup>1</sup>

All three of these scientific names denote the smallmouth bass, currently known as *Micropterus dolomieu*.

† Northern pickerel = northern pike.

icehouses, from which the Chicago people cool their summer drink by the aid of a branch railroad to that fair city.

My greatest catch of bass in numbers, was made in April, 1842, in the Fox river, near Ottawa. In company with Delano, mine host of the Fox River House, the greatest sportsman of that region, I went to a part of the river about four miles from the village. We brought home that evening over a hundred black bass, all of one size, about a pound weight, taken with a minnow. The next day we set out again, followed by half a dozen fishermen, who were anxious to learn where we caught the bass—but Delano drove out of town in an opposite direction and baffled his pursuers. We got rather more that day than the preceeding, but of the same size. When we returned that night with a wagon box full for the second time, half the men and boys of the village were waiting to see our fish, and the third morning they followed us so sharply that although we outdrove them and got to work on our old ground before they arrived, yet, they found us out, and a cavalcade of fishermen appeared, headed by the County Judge, who, if I mistake not, adjourned court to find out where “old Delano” caught his bass. Of course our fun was over, and we packed up our tackle and departed. Our score for the three days was nearly 400 bass, all of one size, and all taken with live minnows—and they would touch nothing else.

. . . The bass can hold their own against the pickerel. Before the waters in the West were much fished, we used to find the two species in about equal numbers; but of late years the bass being the more choice fish, are more pursued, and are soonest exhausted.<sup>1</sup>

### 1874: “Fish Culture in Illinois”

Elgin hosted a convention on May 5, 1874. Two weeks later the meeting was reported on the pages of *Forest and Stream*:

The men who composed the gathering were earnest men, who had long viewed the subject of fish culture as one in which State aid, in the form of proper statutes, should be exercised in order to arrest the murderous means which have led to the extinction of the finest food fish on this continent.

. . . A temporary organization being effected, and a constitution adopted, the “Illinois State Fish Culturists’ Association” was born of the necessities and wants of the times, and must be regarded as the parent piscatorial institution of the State, taking its plan, as other institutions have done in other industries, as the guardian of Fish Culture in Illinois, which all its friends hope may evoke something from our law-making power by which individual interests of fish culturists’ may be protected, and means employed whereby our barren streams and waters generally may be restocked with such food fish as have become nearly extinct, and such foreign fish as may be found adapted to our waters.<sup>16</sup>

Nine of the eighteen delegates resided in the Fox River valley. The piscatory endeavors of two of these men were highlighted by the secretary of the newly founded organization:

At Elgin, Kane county, Illinois, are two trout farms, one of which is four years old. Dr. W.A. Pratt has an area of forty acres enclosed, which contains springs equivalent to filling a pipe fourteen inches in diameter, which have been utilized in supplying some twenty-five ponds where he has now many thousands of healthy sprightly trout disporting themselves as gaily as their progenitors were wont to do in the forest streams. . . . The Dr. finds trout-breeding as remunerative as those who have long been engaged in this industry, and finds it extremely difficult to keep a supply adequate to the demand for stocking new farms. Associated with fish culture the Dr. has a dairy of fifty cows and a nursery, all of which ought to make him happy. D.S. Hammond, near the city of Elgin, has a trout farm, with water facilities sufficient to extend the business of fish culture to the breeding of millions. He also is a dairyman, and these men have been sagacious enough to enlist and embark their capital in two of the best paying industries in Northern Illinois. <sup>16</sup>

#### 1874: "Progress of Fish Culture in Illinois"

The October 1, 1874, issue of *Forest and Stream* carries a follow-up to the "Fish Culture" article that had been published less than five months earlier. Nahum E. Ballou, secretary of the new Illinois State Fish Culturists' Association, reported,

"The mills of the gods grind exceedingly slow, but fine." While nearly every State of the Union has an efficient Fish Commission, and laws for the protection of fish, Illinois is far in the background in this great and important subject. Save what the writer of this article and Dr. W.A. Pratt, of Elgin, Ill., have done in the field, few kindly utterances have been made in behalf of this industry. Six months ago a few benevolent gentlemen united in a call for a State Association, which met in Elgin, and "The Illinois State Fish Culturists' Association" has grown out of that movement. The FOREST AND STREAM published the minutes of that meeting. On . . . September 17th, the first semi-annual meeting was held . . . . . The following proceedings of the meeting may not be without interest to the readers of your excellent journal:

K.K. Jones, of Quincy, in the chair. The proceedings of the last meeting were read by the secretary, N.E. Ballou, of Sandwich . . . .

. . . It was moved that Dr. Ballou and Dr. Pratt be directed to draft a law for the protection of food fishes . . . . Carried.

A general discussion took place upon the subject of fish culture by the members present.

. . . Dr. Pratt, of Elgin, said that we could all fish with a hook and line, and

that in the spawning season fish would not rise to a bait. Therefore, in fishing with a hook and line, we can be sure that we can catch only healthy fish.

K.K. Jones took issue with Dr. Pratt, and said he had caught fish out of his pond with a hook and line while full of spawn.

Dr. Pratt insisted, and mentioned the wall-eyed pike or jack salmon, which would bite only at certain seasons. The Doctor said that the perch required better water than most any other fish. The pickerel was a poor fish to his taste.<sup>17</sup>

Dr. Ballou concluded his report with a personal recommendation:

It is proposed to constitute a Fish Commission, and to procure laws for the protection of fish, for our State has sadly neglected this feature of State legislation. We have at least a half million acres of water area, and every means should be used to make it valuable as a source of food.<sup>17</sup>

#### **1874: *The Land & Fresh Water Shells of La Salle County, Ills.***

W.W. Calkins grew up in La Salle County during the era when the landscape was being converted to farms. After decades of studying freshwater mussels and snails worldwide, he wrote a monograph about the molluscs of his home county. In his prefatory remarks, Mr. Calkins observed,

The Helices, or land-snails, were formerly very abundant in all the timbered sections and along the rivers and creeks. . . . But the encroachments of the "Old Settlers" upon the forests have greatly reduced the numbers of living specimens within the last twenty years; and we may anticipate the time when the last snail will disappear from our geographical limits.\* The favorite home of the snail family is the deep shade of some forest retreat. In this country they are seldom found elsewhere, with perhaps the exception of a few species. And yet I remember the time, some twenty years ago, before agriculture had invaded our prairies, and when there was a dense growth of vegetation, that snails were quite common in situations remote from the timber regions. I frequently found them in my father's garden. . . . The country drained by the Illinois, Fox, and Vermillion rivers, and by our creeks, are the most productive of shell-life. In fact, the wooded portions are mainly within the drainage of these streams. At present, the valley of the Fox is the most prolific of specimens.<sup>62</sup>

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\* A fellow naturalist wrote of the land snails one hundred miles to the west near the Mississippi River: "The absence of timber, the frequent overflowing of our water-courses, and the great number of swine running in the timbered sections, has had a tendency to nearly destroy this interesting class of mollusks."<sup>189</sup>

Calkins cited the Fox River or the Fox River valley as the location for eight species of mussel and ten species of snail. He listed about 90 more species of mollusc in La Salle County; no doubt Calkins found many of these additional species along the Fox River even though he did not specifically cite the Fox valley as a collection site.

### 1874: "The Spawning Season"

In the December 31, 1874, issue of *Forest and Stream*, W.A. Pratt provided some guidance for operators of fish farms. Dr. Pratt's advice about how to deal with mink, muck, muskrats, and crayfish provides some indications of the environment at his trout ponds along the Fox River at Elgin:

We are now in the season for the spawning of the trout. Many people over the State as well as in other States have built hatching houses and are intending hatching their own trout eggs. There seems to be a larger interest now taken in fish culture than ever before . . . .

. . . Perhaps a word in relation to building trout ponds may be a benefit to some. Many persons have had trouble with crawfish burrowing through their dams, where they have built these dams of clay, or from a muck soil that does not allow the hole to fill up after the crawfish has burrowed through; and a leak once started only grows larger in a soil of this kind.

When gravel cannot be got, a brick wall of four inches, laid up in the centre of the dam, will prevent crawfish from going through; but where gravel can be secured it is far preferable to an embankment, as anything burrowing in the gravel, the material fills up after them, and if but a thick covering of gravel, say two feet, can be put on the side of the embankment, it will be found equal to all emergencies. If mink or muskrat should give trouble, the bank should be coated on both sides with gravel, as neither of these animals will burrow in this material. <sup>229</sup>

### 1875: "Fox River Fishing"

Under the pen name "Black Bass," a Batavia resident prepared the following essay for the edification of subscribers to *Forest and Stream*:

The Fox River of Illinois, from the Wisconsin line to its junction with the Illinois River at Ottawa, a distance of about one hundred miles abounds with fish common to the tributaries of the Mississippi, and probably second to none in numbers, variety and size. . . . fifteen miles of its upper water mingles with quite a number of lakes, some of them six miles long by three wide. Wild rice

from four to twelve feet high grows in about three-fifths of their waters. \* The deepest water is about forty feet. For twenty miles below the lake portion the river is from twenty to thirty rods wide, gravel bottom, water from two to ten feet and sluggish, and no rocks. For the next forty miles it is much narrower, more rapid, gravelly fords and fine pools, except the backwater of mill dams, most of the way through a limestone formation. The balance of its course is through sandstone, in some places walled in rock, water course narrow and deep.

The lake region has the following fish, which are not found, except in isolated cases, in the river: Muskalonge, the largest caught with rod and line (speaking of what I *know*) being 34 pounds, length, 3 feet 10 inches . . . ; other weights 28, 22, 16, 11, 10, and 8 pounds, but no smaller. With spears in Winter, *they say*, and I believe it, as high as . . . <sup>†</sup> pounds. These are not numerous. The black bass of the lakes <sup>‡</sup> differ from the river bass <sup>¶</sup> in form and color, but only trifling; . . . weight, 6 pounds; best catch that I know of, 135 pounds in two hours; the sixteen largest weighed 64 pounds; bait, live frogs. Silver bass <sup>§</sup> (so called) are plenty; . . . largest size, two pounds. Yellow perch, largest size, one pound, and last but not least, the gar; <sup>\*\*</sup> greatest length, 9 feet, they say. I say 5 feet that I know of. All the other fish are common to lake and river, except the river bass, or tiger bass, the best, gamist, and most cunning of any American fish, excepting the *salmonidae*. <sup>††</sup> The river bass, so far as I know, is not found in any of the lakes connected with the Fox River, and is a fish fond of swift water. . . . In thirty-two year's experience I have never seen one that weighed more than six pounds; greatest length, 22 inches; spread of tail, 8 inches. Every

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\* Ornithologist E.W. Nelson made note of this wild rice in the same year that Black Bass wrote about it. On November 10, 1875, Mr. Nelson found the western race of the sharp-tailed sparrow to be "very numerous . . . in the wild rice bordering Grass Lake, in Lake County, Illinois." <sup>207</sup> Earlier in the year, this inland form of the sharp-tailed sparrow had been named in Nelson's honor: *Ammodramus caudacutus nelsoni* (Nelson's sparrow, or the western short-tailed finch).

<sup>†</sup> The number is unclear. It may be 45.

<sup>‡</sup> Black bass of the lakes = largemouth bass. The author, "Black Bass," described the black bass of the lakes: "the sides are whitish green; greatest depth of color nearest the back; belly, white, in large specimens tinged with yellow; greatest length, 20 inches." He also remarked that these bass are "somewhat thicker set" than the river bass. <sup>42</sup>

<sup>¶</sup> River bass = smallmouth bass: "In color he is an ashy green, darkest on back and belly; sides tinged with yellow, and faint, tiger-like stripes running down on the sides." <sup>42</sup>

<sup>§</sup> Silver bass = crappie: "form, broad as long, and thin; color, white, with little dark mottles; mouth, small; eyes, large." <sup>42</sup>

<sup>\*\*</sup> Only the alligator gar attains the nine feet rumored here—but the Fox River is far from the range of this species. Sturgeons have been called gars; if the size of this Fox River gar is not exaggerated, perhaps it is the lake sturgeon.

<sup>††</sup> Trout and salmon are in the Salmonidae.

*The Fox River . . . was known to the Indians as Pish-ta-ke-sip-pe and was interpreted as Wolf River or Fox River.* <sup>26</sup>

other one of the experts who know how, when, and where to take bass, will talk about taking them that weigh 6½, 7, 8, and even 9 pounds. For ten years I have offered five dollars to see one, and yet they will not “shut up nor put up,” and I am none the poorer, only they do beat me fishing—with their mouth. In addition to the fore-named fish we have the pickerel; \* largest size caught of late years, 16 pounds; wall-eyed pike, 15 pounds; red horse, 11 pounds; rock bass, 1 pound; bull heads, 2 pounds; silver eels, † 7½ pounds. Of the dace family we have four varieties, the largest of which will not weigh more than eight ounces. <sup>42</sup>

### 1875: “Habits and Methods of Propagating Fish—Some Curious Facts”

Some curious facts about the American eel were related by Dr. W.A. Pratt at a meeting of the Illinois Fish Culturists’ Association:

It might be interesting to all to know that the common eel, contrary to most fish, go to the salt water to spawn . . . . . After becoming sufficiently matured, their instinct . . . carries them seaward again, during the Autumn, and two or three times has one of our mills in Elgin had its water wheel clogged by so large an amount of eels running down into it. <sup>230</sup>

### 1875: “Sea and River Fishing”

On May 24th Greenhead wrote to *Forest and Stream* magazine to tell about the sport fishery at Lake Geneva and environs. Subscribers read about it in the “Sea and River Fishing” column:

A good many fish are being taken with the spear from shallow waters, but angling has not yet commenced. About June 10th the annual cisco run at Geneva Lake begins, and there’ll be sport indeed. . . . Following the cisco run comes our regular fishing season, when may be had in any of the many beautiful lakes of this section capital sport with rod and line. Black bass, ‡ rock bass, pike-perch, pickerel, ¶ and yellow perch are abundant in all our waters, and the angler who does not have success must be lacking in skill, patience, or live bait. <sup>122</sup>

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\* Pickerel = northern pike.

† Silver eel = American eel.

‡ Black bass = largemouth bass and smallmouth bass.

¶ Pike-perch = walleye; pickerel = northern pike.

## 1876: "Birds of North-eastern Illinois"

In an article published by the Essex Institute, E.W. Nelson described the importance of stands of wild rice as breeding habitat for birds at Grass Lake on the Fox River in Lake County. For his account of the black-crowned night-heron, Mr. Nelson wrote,

Owing to its frequenting the almost impenetrable wild rice swamps this species would be overlooked on a transient visit to their haunt. . . . it was not until June, 1876, that I learned anything regarding their habits in this state. The middle of this month, in company with my friend Mr. T.H. Douglas, I visited Grass Lake, Lake County . . . . This "lake" is simply a widening of the Fox River, which flows through its centre, producing a shallow body of water a mile wide and about three miles long. A large portion of the lake is covered with a dense growth of wild rice. While collecting near a large patch of this we were surprised to see a number of night herons arise from the interior of the patch and commence circling about uttering hoarse cries. Upon examining the place we were still more surprised to find that the birds were breeding in this apparently improbable location. During this and the following day we examined, within an area of two acres, at least fifty nests of this species. They were all placed in the midst of particularly dense bunches of rice, the stiff, last year's stalks of which, converging slightly near the roots, formed a convenient base for their support. <sup>208</sup>

Forester's terns also depended on wild rice for nesting:

While we were collecting eggs among the wild rice patches, on Grass Lake, June 14th, Mr. Douglas observed a pair of these terns hovering near a small patch of *Sagittaria* \* leaves growing in several feet of water, and rowing to the spot found the nest, which was a loosely built structure of coarse pieces of reeds resting upon a mass of floating plants and concealed from view by the surrounding leaves. . . . The next morning fortune favored me, and, while passing between several floating masses of decaying vegetable matter I observed four small heaps of wild rice stalks resting upon one of these masses, and on a nearer view, to my delight they proved to be the desired nests containing eggs. . . . The only materials used were pieces of wild rice stems, which were obviously brought from some distance, as the nearest patch of rice was several rods distant. <sup>208</sup>

During the same month "while rowing among the numerous rice patches upon Grass Lake," Nelson and Douglas flushed a ruddy duck—an exceptionally rare find at this latitude during the period of breeding. In addition to these records from the breeding season,

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\* *Sagittaria* = arrowhead (*Sagittaria*).



Nelson found sharp-tailed sparrows "numerous in the wild rice bordering Grass Lake" on November 10, 1875. \* <sup>208</sup>

### 1876: "Fishing and Shooting in Illinois"

S.C.C. published his "Recollections of an Old Sportsman" in the June 15 issue of *Forest and Stream*. He recalled his sporting days during the first few years after arriving at Chicago in 1839:

Deer were then so numerous in Northern Illinois, that in one day's hunt, about 1842, in McHenry county, I saw at least fifty head, and my companion killed five—two at one shot—with a rifle. He got them in line and put a ball through both.

... I knew one of our sportsmen to drive in his buggy to Fox River in one day, forty miles, and kill one hundred grouse by the way.

... In 1840 the Calumet flowed through a dreary wilderness of marshes . . . .  
... About the same year we fished Crystal Lake, in McHenry county, a beautiful sheet of water that never before had a white man's boat upon it. Our sport was superb; we killed in one day 150 pounds of fine bass, besides some pickerel. That lake is now the centre of a village, has a border of ice-houses, and would probably be as promising a fishing place as the reservoir in Central Park. † <sup>260</sup>

### 1876: "Trout Culture in Illinois"

The editor of *Forest and Stream* reprinted this notice by W.A. Pratt of Elgin, a member of the Illinois Fish Commission:

Many of our trout brooks, made by springs, are just the home for trout, and we have several fisheries and more being established along the valleys of the Fox river. We have fine lakes and rivers, and some very fine trout brooks in Illinois, and the day is not distant when they will be stocked up the best varieties of game and food-fish. Our Legislature has been very backward in making laws for the protection of fish and fisheries in this State, and making appropriations; but I think there will be less reformers in our next Legislature, and men who are alive to the interests of the State.

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\* Wild rice is no longer abundant at Grass Lake or elsewhere in the Fox River Area. Thorough history botanists have documented and mapped wild rice in a total of eight counties in the Fox valley, <sup>202, 296</sup> but it is now "by no means as common as the map suggests." <sup>296</sup>

† The identity of the author, S.C.C., is not known. He may be the same as \*\*\*, who told the same Crystal Lake fish story on page 188.

The fish and spawn which were received by me from the General Government have been disposed of, the spawn having been hatched and the fish all distributed in our lakes and rivers. We also expect soon to receive some of the spawn of the land-lock salmon, which, when hatched, will be turned out in our small lakes supplied by our spring brooks. \*

The spawning season of the trout closes in this State about the first of January, and the spawn first taken has already commenced to hatch. <sup>231</sup>

### **1877: *Biographical Directory of the Tax-Payers and Voters of McHenry County***

The *Biographical Directory* preserves bits of information about ecological features in McHenry County's townships. First comes a comment about Dorr Township: "Unlike most of the towns, Dorr contains no prairie, her soil having been originally covered with oak openings, and the land being mostly clay." <sup>61</sup>

#### **Algonquin Township:**

Benjamin Douglas and Col. Huffman erected the first saw-mill, in 1839, on Crystal Lake outlet, about three-quarters of a mile from the Lake. A saw-mill was built at Algonquin village, in 1842, by A. Dawson, and another was built in 1840 on Chunn Creek, <sup>†</sup> five miles northeast of Algonquin, by 'Squire Chunn, and Job Toles, in company with a Mr. Northrop, put up a grist-mill on the same creek in 1862. In 1848, a grist-mill was erected by Burger & Cornish, on the outlet of Crystal Lake, on the Cornish farm. The grist-mill at Algonquin,

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\* The U.S. Fish Commission distributed trout and salmon eggs to be stocked in inland waters. An estimated 355,000 young fish and spawn of Atlantic and Pacific salmon were sent to Illinois in 1875-76, "mostly distributed in the Fox, Illinois and Rock rivers." <sup>258</sup> W.A. Pratt of Elgin reported in December of 1877, "The California salmon eggs came in very nice shape and hatched with but small loss." <sup>126</sup>

Efforts to introduce salmon to the Fox River met with temporary success. E.W. Nelson did not include salmon in his "Partial Catalogue of the Fishes of Illinois," published by the Illinois State Laboratory of Natural History in 1876. But S.A. Forbes, the director of the Laboratory, amended Nelson's list as it was being published: he added the Great Sea Salmon (*Salmo salar*) and the California Salmon (*S. quinnat*) to the list, both from "Fox River at Aurora and near Elgin." Professor Forbes explained in a footnote, "As this paper is passing through the press, I learn from Dr. W.A. Pratt, of Elgin, that he has taken these two species this summer, at the localities given. I therefore take the liberty of inserting them in this list." <sup>206</sup> The great sea salmon (*Salmo salar*) is now known as the Atlantic salmon. The California salmon (*S. quinnat*) of the Pacific Coast is commonly known as the Chinook salmon or king salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*).

<sup>†</sup> Chunn Creek = Cary Creek, which flows through Cary. The creek carries the surface drainage of only a few square miles. It must have been fed by a remarkable amount of groundwater to provide enough water to power a mill.

Nippersink is derived from an Algonquian language, probably Potawatomi: "Probably taken from *nippisse* (diminutive of *nippi* or *nippe*, 'water'), signifying small water, a pool or pond, and *ink*, for 'at' or 'place.'" <sup>311</sup>

on the east side of the river, was commenced by A. Dawson and finished in 1849 by Henry Petrie. The only brick-mill \* in the township is on Crystal Lake outlet, at Algonquin, and was built in 1850, by Dr. Thomas Plumleigh . . . . The saw mills are gone, but the grist mills are still in full blast and doing good business. <sup>†</sup>

. . . The village of Algonquin is pleasantly situated in the irregular valley formed by the junction of Crystal Lake Outlet with Fox River.

. . . At the time of settlement, the Indian trail across the river at the ford was still visible . . . .

. . . The water power of Fox River at this point is estimated at 100, <sup>‡</sup> not one-fourth of which is used by the mill at the at the east end of the bridge. Here is an abundance of power that needs nothing but capital and brains to put wheels in motion and develop wealth. <sup>61</sup>

#### Alden Township:

Had it not been for the prairie wolves, which at that time were plentiful, Alden might have gone without mutton some years longer than they did, and it is believed to be the only instance in the history of Illinois, at least, where wolves have had any hand in the importation or the exportation of sheep, but in 1839 Mr. Asahel Disbrow saved seven sheep from the wolves. Where they came from was unknown, but the wolves were certainly driving them. A few days afterward a Mr. Stafford, from Bigfoot, in the northeast corner of the county, called at Disbrow's and claimed the sheep, which the latter bought of him, and thenceforth wool and mutton figured among the staple productions of Alden.

. . . The source of the Nippersink is found in this township, in Mud Lake, a small sheet of water on the line between Sections 14 and 15, the lake itself having three inlets, the longest being from the southwest. <sup>61</sup>

#### Greenwood Township:

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\* This was a grist mill. A water mill might be constructed as either a "brick mill" or a wooden "frame mill."

<sup>†</sup> The 1885 history of McHenry County explains that "the saw-mills have fallen into disuse and decay for want of timber." <sup>155</sup>

<sup>‡</sup> This is 100 horsepower.

In 1841, W. Lake built a saw-mill on Section 11, \* for which the Nippersink furnished the motive power. † . . . Next, Toles & Brown about one mile below built another saw-mill, and in 1845, the same firm erected the first grist-mill . . . . . Job Toles, just below the old Lake saw-mill, in 1847, put up a second grist-mill . . . .<sup>61</sup>

Hebron Township: "Goose Lake lies within its limits, being partly on Sections 10 and 11."<sup>61</sup>

McHenry Township:

. . . water power is made available at McHenry village by compelling Boone Creek to turn the wheels of two flouring-mills, and drive the machinery of a planing mill . . . .

. . . A drive of four miles lands you at Pistaqua Lake, ‡ or a steamer takes you there by water, and the fisherman or hunter who, in the proper season, cannot enjoy himself there must be hard to suit.<sup>61</sup>

Nunda Township:

In 1844, James and Samuel McMillan, seeing a demand for a saw-mill, and having the necessary water power, erected one on Section 22, ¶ and sawed logs till 1863, when it was turned into a grist-mill . . . .

. . . Stickney's Run § . . . furnishes water-power for two grist-mills.<sup>61</sup>

Richmond Township:

At the time of the settlement, game, consisting of geese, ducks, grouse and deer, was abundant, while the Nippersink furnished plenty of fish to those who loved the rod.

. . . This town is well adapted to stock, and the creek affords a fine water power.<sup>61</sup>

To take advantage of this water power in Richmond Township, John White and Henry White "erected the first flouring-mill in the county." This mill was installed on Nippersink Creek in 1840. The county's first grist mill is thought to have been built in 1840 at Solon

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\* The village of Greenwood grew around this mill.

† From the 1885 history: "For nearly twenty-five years this mill was in constant use and did an occasional job of sawing up till five years ago . . ."<sup>155</sup>

‡ Pistaqua Lake = Pistakee Lake.

¶ The mill was on Stickney's Run.

§ Stickney's Run runs through the center of the township.

(now called Solon Mills) on the Nippersink. \* In 1844 yet another mill was put on the North Branch of Nippersink Creek at Richmond. In 1877 it was noted of this mill, "They have recently put in a steam engine, so as to run the mill independent of the creek, if necessary." <sup>61</sup>

Regarding McHenry County's wildlife in the 1830's and '40s, the *Biographical Directory* attests, "Deer, wolves, foxes and other animals at that time roamed over these prairies and through the openings, as many and free as the Indian . . . ; indeed, . . . much more was killed than was needed for the necessities of the settler." <sup>61</sup>

"No history of McHenry County would be complete" without an account of the ice business at Crystal Lake:

Crystal Lake ice has such a reputation for coolness and clearness, that the people of Chicago would not care to dispense with it . . . .

The Crystal Lake Ice Company, consisting of Joy, Frisbee and others, was organized in 1855, and put up some 7,000 to 9,000 tons of ice . . . . . the concern . . . from that time to 1860, shipped yearly 10,800 tons. The houses were burned that year and, till 1863, Crystal Lake ice was unknown in Chicago; but Joy, Smith and others organized another company, putting up and selling ice for the ensuing six years, when the Fire King closed them out a second time.

During these six years, the company put up and sold about the same quantity yearly that had been done by the company burnt out in 1860. From 1869 to 1873, the lake had a rest, the only ice cut being for private use or sent into Chicago by the carload, probably 2,000 tons yearly; then C.S. and J.H. Dole got possession of the lake, and, in the winter of 1873-4, they put up and filled six ice houses, each having a capacity of 1,250 tons, or 7,500 tons, besides shipping to different places 3,000 tons more—a total of 10,500 tons. The next winter the number of their ice houses was increased to eight, capable of holding 12,000 tons, whilst, during that winter, 7,000 tons was shipped, making 19,000 in all. In the winter of 1875-6, they filled their houses and shipped 1,200 carloads, making, altogether, 26,400 tons. This fall they are putting up four more buildings . . . .

These new ice houses will hold an aggregate of 14,416 tons, which, added to the capacity of the old ones, gives a total of 26,416 tons, the amount that will be put up this winter and, probably, half as much shipped.

. . . we may look to see those ice houses doubled in number within the next ten years . . . . <sup>61</sup>

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\* Yet another milling operation, Northrop Mills, was installed on the Nippersink close to the line between Richmond and Greenwood Townships. <sup>94</sup>

## 1877: "Fish Culture in Illinois"

This brief article in the November 1, 1877, issue of *Forest and Stream & Rod and Gun* has a misleading title because the subject is Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. But the error is minor: the lake is four miles north of the state line, and it drains into the Fox River.

Two hundred thousand California salmon eggs arrived at Geneva Lake, Wis., on the 16th instant, and were placed in the fish-house of W.K. Fairbank. They will be hatched during the winter, and turned loose in the lake early in the spring. These eggs were received direct from McLeod Lake, California, packed in two large crates, with ice and moss. They were taken under the direction of Professor Baird, United States Fish Commissioner at Washington. Mr. Fairbanks deserves great praise for his public spirit, as shown in his efforts to stock these waters with food fishes for the past four years. He has made liberal expenditure of time and money in furtherance of his plans, and maintained a hatching house at considerable expense. In 1875 he placed in Geneva Lake 170,000 Oswego bass; in 1876 the following fish were raised in his hatching-house and turned into the lake: 250,000 salmon trout, 112,000 white fish, 50,000 brook trout, 1,500,000 wall-eyed pike, and 200,000 California salmon. In the year 1877 he added a still larger number of various kinds of fish. A grand total of 8,657,000 fish have been successfully hatched and placed in the waters of the lake. In a few years Geneva Lake will afford the finest fishing in the world.<sup>257</sup>

## 1877: *History of Kendall County, Illinois*

The principal repository of information about Kendall County's early years is the Reverend E.W. Hicks' *History of Kendall County*. Near the beginning of his volume, Mr. Hicks described the Potawatomi who greeted white immigrants in the early 1830s:

Indians . . . had not then been lessened by emigration. The Pottawatomies were a fine race . . . .

. . . Waubonsie was the Pottawatomie chief, with headquarters at Aurora, and a smaller camping-ground and favorite residence at the mouth of Waubonsie creek, at Oswego. . . . His bark wigwam, at Oswego, covered a quarter of an acre of ground . . . . He claimed to have eight hundred ponies . . . .

. . . An Indian encampment was a novel . . . sight. . . . Wherever they encamped for a season, blue grass sprung up the season following, and those patches became both field and pasture for them. \*<sup>137</sup>

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\* Grazing by Indian ponies fostered establishment of Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*), which is not native to the Illinois prairie. Bluegrass was commonly reported at Indian villages in central and northern Illinois.

Hicks explained that the Potawatomi planted corn in bluegrass patches, and "the ponies pawing away the winter snow, nibbled there." He added, "Such places were always in the shelter of the groves"—which he described:

There was very little underbrush or second-growth timber in the groves, as there is to-day. The prairie fires kept it down. The old black oaks on the uplands were often useless to the settlers, so gnarled and tough were they from the constant fires of their younger days. As a consequence, groves were so open one could see through them, and see the Indians as they filed over the prairies beyond them. When the fires ceased, the groves began to spread, so that there is more timber in the country to-day than there was fifty years ago. The same cause has doubtless operated to produce our prairies.<sup>137</sup>

Hicks proffered a triad of theses about the origin of prairies:

There are three theories about them, which we may call the soil theory, the rain theory, and the fire theory. According to the first, prairie soil is not adapted to the growth of trees. But in answer to that, we find trees readily grow when planted. According to the second, lack of moisture is the cause, since it is claimed more rain falls along streams and marshes than on uplands. But trees when planted find moisture enough. According to the third theory, prairie fires were the cause, and this was the current theory among the early settlers. It is a curious fact that a fire which will destroy the last vestige of life in a tree, even burning the roots out of the ground, will let the grass roots escape unharmed, and the next crop will be more luxuriant than before. But for the streams and marshes which protected them, we should probably have had no groves, and but for the fires we should probably have had no prairies.<sup>137</sup>

The chronicle of white immigration into Kendall County provides glimpses of the environment of the Fox River valley. By 1830 nine families had moved to the series of groves that extended along the south side of the river. Peter Specie and Stephen Sweet "settled on a claim in Specie grove" \* east of present-day Yorkville. Vetal Vermet built a home on the big knoll at the southwest side of Holderman's Grove in Big Grove Township. Baily Hobson's family "stayed with Mr. Vermet until the middle of October, during which time they sowed some winter wheat and cut and put up a stack of hay on the edge of the Big Slough." † The Hobsons then built a cabin "in the timber below Newark, far from any neighbor." They decided to leave this claim and move to the Du Page valley "when the Indians commenced making sugar in the spring." ‡<sup>137</sup>

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\* This is the same as Piché's Grove visited by Juliette Kinzie in 1831.

† This Big Slough was in the southwest corner of Kendall County, in the headwaters of Roods Creek, which enters the Fox River above Sheridan. About 13 miles to the northeast, another Big Slough formed a branch of Morgan Creek, which flows to the river above Yorkville. Little Slough spread across part of the adjacent Aux Sable valley.

‡ The Hobsons left their new home when Potawatomi set up camp next to them (see page 274).

*But the past is gone. . . . The hazel brush patch has long since been cut down, and play-houses must be built of vulgar boards, and the creek where the minnows sped away, frightened at bare-legged boys, is dry. Days of old, farewell!*<sup>137</sup>

More whites arrived in 1831. One family decided not to move to the Big Woods \* because they were told that the "Big Woods country was very wet." Moses Booth made a claim at Apakesha Grove, † where "tall white oaks . . . formed the border of the grove." He soon moved to another claim "adjoining Big grove, ‡ where a mile of heavy timber would be between him and the north wind in any shape." Mr. Booth built his home "about twenty rods in the grove, on the south side."<sup>¶</sup> John Dougherty settled beside a spring in Aux Sable Grove, south of Oswego. He decided to clear woods instead of trying to cultivate prairie: "Mr. Dougherty . . . cleared up a little field with as much labor and patience as if prairie flowers did not bloom all around him."<sup>137</sup>

The Hollenbacks and several other families elected to live in the timber along Hollenback Creek and Clear Creek, two small tributaries of the Fox in the vicinity of Millbrook and Millington. Some families arrived on April 18 and "immediately began to make clearings to plant corn, for they had rather plant among the stumps than risk the prairie sod." One man decided to try growing crops in the prairie soil; he plowed and fenced 55 acres that summer. George Hollenback started a store in Georgetown (Newark): "It is perhaps needless to say that he sold but little of his goods for cash, but traded them to the Indians for muskrat skins."<sup>137</sup>

E.W. Hicks' account of the Black Hawk War provides further impressions of the region's ecology at an early date. When the uprising began in May of 1832, newcomers south of the river in Fox and Big Grove Townships fled Black Hawk's advance. According to Mr. Hicks, "The prairie grass was green, and wild flowers were growing where Newark now stands, but the fugitives had no heart or time to admire beauty . . . ." Three horsemen were able to outrun an attack near Newark because the Indians' ponies had strayed—seeking the green grass in a sunny little valley where "the hill each side was a great den for wolves and badgers." One group headed east from Hollenback's Grove toward Walker's Grove (Plainfield).<sup>§</sup> Their exodus halted temporarily, "the wagon having mired in a slough," but they unloaded the wagon and extracted it. Another group fled southwest

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\* The Big Woods was in southeastern Kane County, between Aurora and Batavia.

† Apakesha Grove was on the dividing ridge between the Fox River valley and the drainage of Aux Sable Creek, southeast of Newark.

‡ Big Grove was in southwestern Kendall County, southeast of Newark.

¶ E.W. Hicks stated that the Booth home "was not only the first house in Big Grove, but is, without doubt, the oldest existing building in Kendall county."<sup>137</sup>

§ The route from Hollenback's Grove toward Plainfield approximated the present alignment of Illinois Route 71.



toward Ottawa and "hid themselves in the thicket" \* at the point of timber along Mission Creek. † <sup>137</sup>

When open hostilities began, Ansel Reed was at Big Grove, planting a garden near "a pond a little out from the edge of the grove." Mr. Reed noted that Indians had been passing by frequently: "Their trail ran along by the grove, about on the line of the Newark and Lisbon road. There were three or four trails side by side. In some places, where the rain had washed them out, they were three feet deep." <sup>137</sup>

Mrs. Moses Booth hid at "the north-west corner of Collins' Grove, ‡ then called Duck Grove, because there was a large pond in it and wild ducks were plenty there." According to Ansel Reed, "The thicket was very dense" at Mrs. Booth's hiding place. She was joined by her husband and Mr. Reed, who recalled, "... we went farther into the thicket, over logs and fallen limbs, and then I unhitched the cattle and took them down to the duck pond, where there was a good bite of grass." When they left the grove for Ottawa, Mr. Booth "brought his wagon out of the almost impenetrable thicket." As the fugitives headed down the river valley, Reed's wagon mired "in the slough this side of Holderman's." ¶ <sup>137</sup>

A fort at Ottawa provided refuge. One day three men decided to leave the fort and go a few miles up the Fox River to "pick strawberries at Indian Creek." They were attacked there. One man was killed; one was wounded but "hid in a bunch of willows"; and one escaped. § <sup>137</sup>

According to the Reverend Mr. Hicks, wild hogs "after the Indian war rapidly increased in the woods and were added to by the stock of every new settler." He added, "Those wild hogs were often the most dangerous beasts that roamed the woods. Long nosed, long legged, gaunt and fleet, and savage as wolves; they could be caught alive only by separating them by dogs." <sup>137</sup>

The *History of Kendall County* includes a year-by-year record of the first decades of the county's growth. Extracts from this chronicle reveal some of the early character of the region, beginning with "The Year of the Early Spring":

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\* Brushy vegetation frequently provided cover for combatants and noncombatants during the Black Hawk War. A Dunkard preacher was among the first to be killed: "... as he was skirting Holderman's Grove, unconscious of danger, he was awakened from a reverie by shots fired from a foe concealed in a clump of underbrush." <sup>284</sup>

† Mission Creek joins the Fox River south of Sheridan.

‡ Collins Grove was a mile southeast of Big Grove along the route to Ottawa.

¶ Holderman's Grove was on the west side of this slough, which has been transected by Roods Drainage Ditch.

§ A year after this incident, Colbee Benton talked with one or two of the men who were involved. Benton learned that the men "were scouting about to observe the movements of the Indians, and when two of the party had carelessly got off from their horses to gather some strawberries, the Indians fired upon them." <sup>38</sup>

The year 1833 opened out splendidly . . . . The snow went away in February, and early in March the sheltered valleys and nooks by the groves were beautifully green, and by the end of the month, stock could live on the prairies anywhere.<sup>137</sup>

In 1834 "Mr. Schneider having finished Naper's mill \* the previous season, put up his own at the mouth of Blackberry Creek, † that spring . . . ." A Mr. Morgan started a sawmill on the Fox River in Oswego late in 1834. ‡ In the following year, .

During the fall a log school house was built in the center of Big Grove, so as to accommodate the settlers on the borders of the timber, each of whom made a path of their own among the trees and through the hazel and wild gooseberry bushes, along which the children went to school and the families went to meeting.

. . . At Millington the frame of the saw-mill went up, and the dam was started at a point opposite a large island, covered with heavy timber. Of the island, only a little remnant is left, and the saw-mill was carried away by the freshet a year ago.

. . . During the summer, John L. Clark and John K. LeBarron . . . bought out the renowned Specie, at Species grove . . . . . He said to Clark and LeBarron: "This is your boundary through the grove, and southward you will always be open to the Illinois river." The old man's "pasture," to which he could so calmly give a verbal warranty deed, was eighteen miles long, and now supports four or five thousand people.<sup>137</sup>

In 1835 James Mason bought a thousand-acre claim north of the river, centered on the mouth of Big Rock Creek. He "built his cabin among the trees down by the Greenfield spring" in Fox Township.<sup>137</sup>

In 1836 "Merrit Clark built a corn mill on the present site of Parker's mill" along the Fox River at Oswego. About the same time, "Mr. Ball built a mill on Big Rock creek, one mile south of Plano . . . ." Jesse Jackson started a sawmill at Milford (Millington): "It met a great want, and for ten years it ran night and day, and sometimes, by necessity, on Sunday. There were at times two thousand logs on the ground, and the mill would be six months behind on orders."<sup>137</sup>

That summer at Newark "a lot of Indians encamped at the edge of the village . . . and remained several weeks. When . . . their medicine man and his helpers had dug all the roots and gathered all the herbs they wanted in Big grove, they . . . departed."<sup>137</sup>

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\* Naper's mill was on the West Branch of the Du Page River at Naperville.

† Blackberry Creek enters the Fox River at Yorkville.

‡ At that time, "Hazel brush covered the present site of Oswego, and an Indian trail ran through it."<sup>137</sup>

When Kane County was established in 1836, its boundaries embraced present-day DeKalb County plus the northern tier of three townships in present-day Kendall County. A local poet put forth an effort "enshrining the advantages of the new county in rhyme."

The timber here is very good,  
The forest dense of sturdy wood,  
The maple tree its sweets affords,  
And walnut it is sawn to boards,  
The giant oak the axman hails,  
Its massive trunk is torn to rails;  
And game is plenty in the State,  
Which makes the hunters' chances great;  
The prairie wolf infests the land,  
And the wild-cats all bristling stand. <sup>137</sup>

During the winter of 1837 a man in Bristol Township split "fifteen thousand oak and walnut rails." <sup>137</sup>

In 1837 a grist mill was built at Millington, and a mill was put in place at Yorkville. A sawmill was erected at Millbrook, and a grist mill was added "some time afterwards." This mill was still operating in 1844, but eventually "the water ran low and finally the old mill was sold piecemeal." The chronicler of these events, E.W. Hicks, observed in 1877, "All our streams are lower to-day than when the country was first settled." <sup>137</sup>

1838: "During the summer the county was surveyed by government surveyors . . . . . The county was full of ponds and sloughs, and the season was wet and the chain carriers were not accurate. So section lines do not always agree . . . ." <sup>137</sup>

1845: "In Newark all was prairie sod east of D.C. Cleveland's, and after passing Big Grove, going towards Plainfield for ten miles, there was not a house or fence. Seth Sleezer in crossing that prairie caught seven young wolves, and brought them to town for exhibition." <sup>137</sup>

Notable events in 1846:

There was much sickness during the summer, so that in some localities it is still remembered as "the sickly season."

. . . Oswego drew considerable trade . . . . The bridge across Fox river was built that year, and N.A. Rising's saw mill, opposite the grist mill. <sup>137</sup>

. . . the "Grundy and Kendall Plank Road Company" was incorporated, to build a plank road and establish toll-gates between Morris and Lisbon. . . . the plan fell through; which latter fact every traveler well knows who has tried to engineer his struggling vehicle over the famous "Morris flats" in the soft and mellow spring time. A more continuously exasperating road probably never was discovered, though it has improved in modern days. <sup>137</sup>

1856: "Two grist mills were erected; one at Bristol, \* at the mouth of the Blackberry creek, . . . the other five miles further down the river, at the mouth of Rock creek, by Frederick Post. . . . He threw a dam across Little Rock creek for his grist mill, and another across Big Rock for his saw mill . . . . The saw mill dam was washed out in 1869." <sup>137</sup>

1859: "Another improvement made during the year was a bridge over the river, on the town line, at Post's mill. † It stood nine years, and was carried away by a freshet in 1868." <sup>137</sup>

1866: "A notable event . . . was the blowing up of Black Hawk's cave by Mr. Post, to get stone to build his new dam. ‡ The cave was in the limestone in the river bank, and was a crooked hole three feet high, four feet wide and thirty feet long. . . . The operation was witnessed by more than one thousand people from all parts . . . ." <sup>137</sup>

In 1868 a four-story woolen factory was erected beside the river at Millington. It operated for only a few years. ¶ At Yorkville E.A. Black's paper mill was being driven by six water wheels. §

1870: ". . . Frederic Post, finished the famous stone structure known as Post's dam, after four years of constant work. It crosses Fox river four miles below Yorkville." \*\* <sup>137</sup>

1872: "At Yorkville, Hutchinson's ice house was built—one hundred feet square, with a capacity of seven thousand tons. It was expected to ship thirty tons daily to Chicago during the summer." <sup>137</sup>

The *History of Kendall County* reviews wildlife during the 1830s:

Next to the Indians, the settlers' most inveterate enemies were wolves.

They existed in great numbers, and would often kill hogs that were fattening in the woods. . . . Wolf hunts were common. A stake would be set up, say, on the prairie beyond Lisbon. The settlers would be engaged, and would come in a

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\* The north side of the river at Yorkville was called Bristol.

† This bridge was placed where a bridge currently spans the river at Silver Springs State Park.

‡ The cave "owed its fame to the tradition that Black Hawk and his followers had hidden there." <sup>137</sup> The cave was on the Fox River south of Plano (see page 184).

¶ In 1877 E.W. Hicks noted that water in the millrace "can be heard wasting its power down below." <sup>137</sup>

§ This mill operated until the end of 1876. Hicks predicted in 1877 that the mill "will open again as soon as the paper market improves." <sup>137</sup>

\*\* The dam was eight feet high and 12 feet thick. A flouring mill was built but never used. By 1877 "The dam, too, which was intended to be almost as enduring as the earth, has been undermined by the power of the water . . . . Post's dam is no more." <sup>137</sup>

narrowing circle from miles in every direction, driving everything before them. As they neared the central point and the enclosed game came in view, the excitement became intense. The wolves and deer tried to run the blockade, but were beaten back from every point, until they were nearly crazy with fright. Then the slaughter commenced, and it was rarely that one escaped. After all was over an equitable distribution was made. In the hunt of 1835, eighteen wolves and twenty-four deer were killed. . . . These hunts, however, like every other amusement, soon degenerated. The settlers in some localities would privately agree to shoot their game on the way, and afterward come in for a share in the common stock, thus defrauding their neighbors from other places. This cheating brought the hunts into disrepute.<sup>137</sup>

When E.W. Hicks prepared his chapter about the county's fauna ("Our Neighbors"), his object was "simply to direct young readers especially to the treasures that lie around them, and incite them to a better acquaintance with their fellow inhabitants of the air and the soil." \*

Bisons were formerly here in immense droves, and forty years ago, in the eastern part of the county, their bones could be picked up by the wagon load.

. . . The elk, called moose and wapiti by the Indians, disappeared from this locality about 1818,<sup>†</sup> but deer are still occasionally found.

. . . Badgers were here in an early day, but are now extinct, while raccoons are as plenty as of old.

. . . Prairie wolves were at first very abundant, then became scarce, and are now becoming more numerous again. . . . The larger gray wolf<sup>‡</sup> has been seen here. The red fox burrows here, but they are not numerous. The gray or southern fox also occasionally puts in an appearance.

The wild cat and lynx, belonging to the cat family, have both been known here.

. . . The common fox squirrel, the gray or black squirrel, (for the color varies)<sup>¶</sup> and the flying squirrel, are all abundant here. . . . The chipmuk<sup>§</sup> is a lively

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\* For his account of the county's mammals, E.W. Hicks acknowledged the assistance of J.D. Caton of Ottawa, who wrote the classic monograph, *The Antelope and Deer of America*.<sup>65</sup>

† In giving the date of 1818, Hicks most likely was echoing an oft-repeated statement about elk in Illinois rather than basing his testimony on an original observation from the Kendall County region.

‡ Gray wolf = timber wolf.

¶ Gray squirrels with black fur were far more common in the 1800s than at present.

§ "Chipmuk" is an alternative name for the chipmunk.

little fellow, known to every body. The striped prairie squirrel \* ought to give up his name of gopher, as the true gopher † is a larger animal, and is found further west; the same may be said of the gray gopher. ‡ . . . The woodchuck, or ground hog, emigrated here after the whites came. . . . The beaver is a native of our county, but the trappers extirpated him many years ago.

. . . The brown rat ¶ and house mouse are of foreign extraction, and follow the industrious white man wherever he goes. . . . The muskrat, or musquash, is allied to the beaver, and is still common. The meadow mouse is abundant everywhere. § The long haired meadow mouse \*\* is less often seen. The white footed wood mouse †† may be distinguished from the house mouse by its white belly and feet. The jumping mouse ‡‡ has long hind legs, and travels like the kangaroo, by jumps. It lives in the woods. The dormouse ¶¶ lives on trees, and is allied to the squirrels. <sup>137</sup>

Mr. Hicks also mentioned the common weasel, §§ mink, otter, skunk, opossum, mole, long snouted shrew mouse, \*\*\* common black bat, ††† and larger gray bat. ‡‡‡ <sup>137</sup>

The *History of Kendall County* contains a five-page review of the county's birdlife. Mr. Hicks arranged his account into six orders: birds of prey, climbers, scratchers, perchers, waders, and swimmers. He also categorized birds by their nesting habits:

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\* Striped prairie squirrel = thirteen-lined ground squirrel.

† True gopher = plains pocket gopher.

‡ Gray gopher = Franklin's ground squirrel.

¶ Brown rat = Norway rat.

§ Meadow mice are voles. Hicks probably was referring specifically to the prairie vole.

\*\* Long haired meadow mouse = meadow vole.

†† White footed wood mouse = white-footed mouse (*Peromyscus leucopus*) or deer mouse (*P. maniculatus*).

‡‡ Jumping mouse = meadow jumping mouse.

¶¶ This reference to the dormouse is enigmatic. Dormice are members of an Old World family with no North American representatives. They resemble our tree squirrels. Hicks specifically included the flying squirrel in his list, so he apparently was not referring to flying squirrels when he listed the dormouse.

§§ Common weasel = long-tailed weasel.

\*\*\* Long snouted shrew mouse = shrew.

††† The common black bat might be any of a number of species in the genus *Myotis* (e.g. the little brown bat) or perhaps the big brown bat.

‡‡‡ Larger gray bat = ? hoary bat.

They have been divided according to their nests into miners, as the bank swallows; masons, as barn swallows; cementers, as chimney swallows; carpenters, as woodpeckers and nut-hatches; weavers, as the oriole; tailors, as the blue yellow back warbler; \* basket makers, as the vireos and red winged blackbird; felt makers, as the gold finch and hummingbirds; platform builders, as hawks and pigeons; ground builders, as ducks, &c.; dome builders, as the quail and meadow lark; those which make no nest, as the nighthawk and whip-poor-will, and those which lay their eggs in the nests of other birds, as the cuckoo † and cow blackbird. <sup>137</sup>

Listed as Kendall County's birds of prey are the turkey vulture ("turkey buzzard"), bald eagle, red-tailed hawk ("red-tailed buzzard . . . our common hen hawk"), rough-legged hawk, "band-tailed hawk," ‡ "black hawk," ¶ northern harrier ("marsh hawk"), "pigeon hawk," § red-shouldered hawk, swallow-tailed kite ("swallow tailed hawk, or kite"), osprey ("fish hawk, or osprey"), "screech owl, or barn owl," \*\* great horned owl, long-eared owl, snowy owl, and northern hawk-owl ("day owl"). †† <sup>137</sup>

Kendall County's "climbers" are the yellow-billed cuckoo, black-billed cuckoo, red-headed woodpecker, red-bellied woodpecker ("red-breasted woodpecker"), yellow-bellied sapsucker ("yellow-bellied woodpecker"), hairy woodpecker or downy woodpecker ("sapsucker"), ‡‡ and northern flicker ("golden-winged woodpecker"). <sup>137</sup>

Among the "perchers" are the ruby-throated hummingbird, chimney swift ("swift, or chimney swallow"), whip-poor-will, common nighthawk, belted kingfisher, kingbird, great

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\* Blue yellow back warbler = northern parula.

† The European cuckoo lays its eggs in the nests of other species.

‡ Band-tailed hawk = ? broad-winged hawk.

¶ Black hawk = ? Swainson's hawk. The name "black hawk" was most often applied to the rough-legged hawk, but E.W. Hicks listed both the rough-legged hawk and black hawk.

§ Although the name "pigeon hawk" is popularly applied to the merlin, this species has always been uncommon in Illinois. During the era when passenger pigeons were abundant prey, two more common raptors were called pigeon hawks: the sharp-shinned hawk and Cooper's hawk. (Robert Kennicott said of Cooper's hawk, "Follows the pigeon in their migration." <sup>171</sup>)

\*\* The common barn-owl was sometimes called a screech owl. The eastern screech-owl was sometimes called a barn owl.

†† The day owl or northern hawk-owl has rarely made wintertime visits to Illinois. E.W. Hicks may have included this species in his list on the basis of a specimen that was reportedly collected in Kane County in 1869. This collection is cited in a report by E.W. Nelson, <sup>208</sup> which was issued in the year before Hicks published his book. H. David Bohlen questioned this Kane County record in *The Birds of Illinois*. <sup>48</sup>

‡‡ Both these species were called sapsuckers during the 1800s.

crested flycatcher, "two peewees," \* American robin ("robin redbreast"), eastern bluebird, wood thrush, hermit thrush, brown thrasher, gray catbird, house wren, † common yellowthroat ("yellow-throated warbler"), hooded warbler ("black-headed warbler"), magnolia warbler ("black and yellow warbler"), yellow-rumped warbler, bay-breasted warbler, black-throated blue warbler, northern parula? ("yellow-backed warbler"), chestnut-sided warbler, yellow-breasted chat? ("yellow-breasted warbler"), blue-winged warbler, golden-winged warbler, orange-crowned warbler, brown creeper?, ‡ American redstart, scarlet tanager, summer tanager ("summer red-bird"), bank swallow, purple martin, shrike ("butcher bird"), vireos, nuthatch, tufted titmouse, dickcissel ("black-throated bunting"), bobolink, meadowlark, orioles, red-winged blackbird, brown-headed cowbird ("cow blackbird"), common grackle and rusty blackbird? ("the common blackbird, or, properly, rusty and purple-necked grackles"), common crow, and blue jay.<sup>137</sup>

"Scratchers": the rock dove ("barn dove"), mourning dove, passenger pigeon ("wild pigeon"), greater prairie-chicken, northern bobwhite ("quail"), and wild turkey.<sup>137</sup>

For the "waders" E.W. Hicks enumerated the sandhill crane, great blue heron, common egret ("white heron"), green-backed heron ("green heron"), American bittern ("bittern," "stake driver"), "two or three plovers," killdeer, and "several species of snipes, curlews, and rails."<sup>137</sup>

"Swimmers": the Canada goose ("Canada, or common wild goose"), greater white-fronted goose ("brant, or white fronted goose"), "eight or ten species of wild ducks," common merganser or red-breasted merganser? ("merganser . . . fish duck"), hooded merganser, teal, American wigeon, and grebe.<sup>137</sup>

Specific comments about birds in Kendall County:

The bald eagle has been known to nest here.

. . . The black-throated bunting<sup>§</sup> is one of the commonest birds in our pastures, and is familiar to everyone. The bobolink is called the rice bunting at the south. He is . . . not often seen here.

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\* Hicks' discussion of flycatchers is confusing. After stating that "the kingbird is known as the tyrant flycatcher," Hicks continued, "Two crested flycatchers and two peewees belong to the same family."<sup>137</sup> Hicks must have been thinking of the eastern kingbird when he listed "the kingbird." The great crested flycatcher must be one of Hicks' two crested flycatchers, but what species did he intend for the other? All of Illinois' flycatchers can display at least a slight crest. The "two peewees"? both the eastern wood-pewee and the eastern phoebe were commonly called pewees or peewees during the 1800s. Other small flycatcher species (such as the least flycatcher) were sometimes called pewees; often they were not distinguished from the eastern wood-pewee.

† In his list of perching birds, Mr. Hicks first listed "two wrens," and later in his list, "the pugnacious house wren, and one or two wren cousins."<sup>137</sup>

‡ Perhaps Hicks was thinking of the brown creeper when he wrote, "Some are creepers, viz, little wood birds that creep around the trunks of trees."<sup>137</sup>

§ Black-throated bunting = dickcissel.



... The wild pigeon is migratory, and does not stay with us. Prairie chickens are also familiar birds. Also the quail; said to be the only bird that will eat the chinch bug, and if that be true, farmers have a particular interest in his preservation. Wild turkeys were here in abundance when the country was new, but they are now rarely seen.<sup>137</sup>

Hicks concluded his ornithological discussion, "Our total list of birds number nearly two hundred separate species."<sup>137</sup>

Under the heading of reptiles, "In the turtle family, the painted turtle and snapping turtle in water, and the prairie tortoise \* on land, are common. Among lizards, the blue-tailed skink † and other small species, are occasionally found . . . ." Snakes: "We have but four poisonous serpents; the copperhead, and three species of rattlesnake, and all are nearly extinct." Mr. Hicks also mentioned the "common green frog," "toad," "water snake, or milk snake," ‡ "the little green snakes of summer and the gray snakes of autumn," "striped or garter snakes," and "adders." ¶<sup>137</sup>

One paragraph of Hicks' missive is devoted to the county's piscine inhabitants:

Fishes are divided into spine-finned and soft-finned. All our common river fish, but perch and bass, belong in the last order: suckers, sunfish, catfish, pike, pickerel, shiners, red-horse, &c. The muscalonge is a large kind of pike, sometimes caught in Fox river. Specimens have weighed thirty pounds.<sup>137</sup>

Hicks presented a generalized three-page discussion of insects and other invertebrates. He made two entomological comments that allude to the pervasive role of farm animals in the everyday life of Kendall County in the last quarter of the 19th century: he noted that the dung beetle ("the scarabee, or rolling beetle") is "so common along our roads," and he called the burying beetle (which buries dead animals) "one of the most useful we have."<sup>137</sup>

Chapter LVI of the *History of Kendall County* is "Our Plant Life":

#### TREES

We have from the soft basswood . . . to the hard ironwood or hornbeam. Oak, maple, ash, cherry, elm, &c., are found . . . . Hickory and walnut are natives . . . . So is the cottonwood . . . . . The balsam poplar, or balm of Gilead tree, is the medical member of the family. . . . The willow family—from

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\* Prairie tortoise = box turtle.

† Blue-tailed skink = ? five-lined skink or ? six-lined racerunner. The five-lined skink has the bluer tail.

‡ This snake was so named "because accused by our forefathers of sucking the cows."<sup>137</sup>

¶ The appellation "adder" was most often applied to hognose snakes, but was also used in reference to water snakes.

the tall white willow to the . . . osier willow of the brooks—belong to the same order. Wild apple and plum trees formerly abounded in the groves.

#### SHRUBS.

. . . One of our commonest shrubs is the sumach . . . . A variety of it is the dreaded poison ivy which climbs over fences or up the trunks of trees. . . . The bitter sweet is another poisonous vine, found on old fences or in thickets.

. . . The woodbine, or wild honeysuckle, \* is another well-known climber; also the wild grape vine, which, with the abundant raspberry, blackberry and gooseberry bushes, and crabapple, thornapple and plum trees of olden time, supplied the pioneers with fruit. First, in the spring, is the red-bud . . . ; the buffalo or service berry, with white flowers is next after. † Other shrubs, are black cohosh, blue cohosh, or squaw-root, leptandra, or black-root, ‡ and the prairie red-root, called New Jersey tea § . . . . But dearest bush of all is the familiar hazel, intertwined as it is with boyhood's memories.

. . . Of wild flowers and weeds we have a greater number than can be enumerated here. The following are the most common and most interesting.

#### WOOD PLANTS.

Adder's tongue, or rattlesnake violet . . . ; blood-root . . . ; cinquefoil, or five finger, a yellow spring flower, in barren woods, sometimes so thick as to cover the ground with a yellow carpet; columbine . . . ; Dutchman's breeches, or children-in-the-wood . . . ; yellow violet . . . ; Jack-in-the pulpit, or Indian turnip . . . ; mandrake or May-apple . . . ; prickly pear . . . grows on very stony

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\* The name "woodbine" has been applied to viny honeysuckles (*Lonicera*) as well as a number of other vines—both woody and herbaceous—including the Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), virgin's bower (*Clematis virginiana*), black bindweed (*Polygonum convolvulus*), and some members of the morning glory family (*Convolvulaceae*).

† Evidently "buffalo or service berry" refers to a member of the service berry or shadbush genus (*Amelanchier*). The shrub commonly known as buffalo berry (*Shepherdia canadensis*) begins to bloom about the same time as redbud and *Amelanchier*—but Hicks mentioned white flowers, which fits *Amelanchier* rather than *Shepherdia*. *Shepherdia canadensis* is a rare shrub that has not been scientifically documented from Kendall County even though its overall range indicates that it might occur in the county.

‡ Leptandra or black-root = Culver's root (*Veronicastrum virginicum*). Neither leptandra nor any of the preceding three species is a shrub.

§ The New Jersey tea (*Ceanothus americanus*) was commonly called redroot by the few generations who plowed its roots out of virgin prairie. A related species, *C. herbaceus*, is now more apt to be called redroot. Although Kendall County is within the overall range of *C. herbaceus*, this species has not been officially reported from the county.

land. Other kinds are, maidenhair, Greek valerian, or bluebells, \* ladies' slipper, or yellow moccasin flower, Solomon's seal, hawksweed, wood sorrel, brachyelytrum † . . . .

#### MARSH PLANTS.

Sweet flag, blue flag, and cat's-tail flag. ‡ The latter are often used for fishing torches. Wild oats § grow in ponds. Horse tail . . . . Pond lily; wild horehound; jewel weed; boneset, or thoroughwort, one of the ague specifics of the first settlers. § Arrowhead . . . . Sensitive plant, \*\* a yellow flower seen along sloughs in August. Cardinal flower . . . . Button snake root, a species of flag; †† the root steeped in milk is a cure for rattlesnake bites. On the edges of the long, narrow leaves are little spines like the rattlesnake's tooth.

#### PRAIRIE FLOWERS.

About our dooryards we find chickweed; the common plattain, from whose humble flowers we gather canary seed; and the low mallows †† . . . . From the tall mallows ¶¶ a good article of cloth has been made, and was exhibited at the Illinois State Fair, in 1871. Along our roads we find the white-flowered May weed; the taller smart weed, called water pepper in the old country; the still taller wild mustard; pigweed, ragweed, bindweed, fireweed, *ad libitum*. Along by the fences are sunflower, thistles, dandelions, burdock, and other docks . . . ; bunches of catnip . . . , and maybe a bunch of tansy ditto §§ . . . . The ground

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\* Greek valerian or bluebells = Jacob's ladder (*Polemonium reptans*)—not *Mertensia virginica*, which is now commonly known as bluebells.

† Brachyelytrum = long-awned wood grass (*Brachyelytrum erectum*).

‡ Cat's-tail flag = cat-tail (*Typha*).

§ Wild oats = wild rice (*Zizania aquatica*).

§ Boneset or thoroughwort (*Eupatorium perfoliatum*) was used as an anti-malarial medicine.

\*\* Sensitive plant = *Cassia*.

†† Button snake root = rattlesnake master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*). Plants with long, flat leaves (such as irises and cat-tails) were called flags—especially if they inhabit wet areas. Although rattlesnake master is not usually considered an aquatic plant, its original Latin name is *Eryngium aquaticum*. (*Liatris* has also been called button snakeroot.)

‡‡ Low mallows = velvet-leaf (*Abutilon theophrastii*). Although there are lower-growing mallows, Hicks provided a clue to the identity of this species by alluding to its fruiting heads, "which furnished our play-house cheese when we were boys." <sup>137</sup>

¶¶ Tall mallows = *Hibiscus sylvestris*, a Eurasian species.

§§ Perhaps "tansy ditto" made its way into print in this manner: Hicks was thinking of *tansy mustard* when he wrote "tansy ditto" on the line directly below "wild mustard"—and the typesetter

It is much to be regretted that a small tract of land in its natural state could not have been reserved as a park and the native plants given a home secure from the snout of the hog, the teeth of the sheep, and from fire and the plough. To coming generations many of them will be things of which they have no idea except as it is gathered from books and poor pictures.

— *Flora La Sallensis* (1897).<sup>147</sup>

ivy climbs the fence; the deadly nightshade, with its black berries, stands sullenly on its footstalk in the edge of the brush, and further on are noxious purslane and pokeweed, and the tall mullein. . . . Down by the creek are the sand burrs, which are such a terror to barefoot boys going after cows. Out in the meadow the first flower in bloom was the little hepatica, and on a northern exposure, too, and almost before the frost was out. Then soon came . . . the sweet buttercups . . . ; and the blue violets . . . . These were followed by phloxes, foxgloves, marigolds, tiger lilies, anemones, cowslips, \* blazing stars, lion's hearts † and golden rods, as well as the humbler strawberry, horsemint, white clover, milkweed, and the fragrant pennyroyal. . . . Spinach, ‡ with its pointed leaves, and stramonium or Jamestown weed §—called "Jemsen weed"—are tall plants. Other plants are the ground cherry; the sour sheep sorrel . . . ; the upland rattlesnake weed, § with its little pink and purple flowers; lobelia, or Indian tobacco; the fetid skunk cabbage; the common nettle; and the rosin or compass plant—so called because the leaves generally stood north and south. There are two kinds; one, broad leaf and smooth stem, and the other, narrow leaf and fuzzy stem; \*\* but the boys can get their chewing gum from either. Among the prairie flowers now rarely seen was the cup flower, †† that did not bloom until frost came.

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did not realize that Hicks intended "mustard" when he wrote "ditto" after "tansy" and beneath "mustard."

\* A number of spring wildflowers have been called cowslips, including the shooting star (*Dodecatheon meadia*), bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*), early buttercup (*Ranunculus fascicularis*), and marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*).

† Lion's heart = obedient plant (*Physostegia*).

‡ Spinach = ? lamb's quarters (*Chenopodium album*). "The leaves . . . are used for greens . . . ."

§ Stramonium or Jamestown weed = Jimson weed (*Datura stramonium*).

§ Upland rattlesnake weed = blazing star, gayfeather, or button snakeroot (*Liatris*).

\*\* The smooth rosin weed is prairie dock (*Silphium terebinthinaceum*). The fuzzy rosin weed is compass plant (*S. laciniatum*).

†† Cup flower = cup plant (*Silphium perfoliatum*).

## GRASSES.

. . . Red top grass\* and blue joint† are our most valuable native grasses. There are also meadow grass,‡ yard grass,¶ agrostis, &c. Herds grass,§ orchard grass and blue grass have been imported. Rye grass, spear grass,\*\* white grass, and others, are natives, but coarse and tall. Knot or couch grass,†† tickle grass, darnel, canary grass, cord grass, and chess, are noxious weeds. The seeds of the last make flour blue. A number of sedge grasses grow about ponds and sloughs. There are in Illinois about one hundred species each of upland and slough grasses.<sup>137</sup>

The county's soils and mineral resources are portrayed under the title, "Our Natural Possessions":

Grateful soil! . . . Kendall county crops have for their support the black humus, the slow products of sixty generations of vegetation.

. . . we have good peat in several places in the county, and especially on the north side of the river, near Wing's mill,‡‡ where a deposit of one hundred acres broad and six feet thick awaits the day when wood shall be scarce and coal shall be dear, in order that it may be utilized. . . . Peat is formed in bogs, which differ from sloughs in that the latter is simply black mire, while the former is a spongy mass held together by the rootlets of plants. Sloughs, too, are usually covered by an even coat of grass, while bogs are varied with grassy hillocks rising above the rest and having a firmer soil. Sloughs, when drained, will raise good crops, but bogs are comparatively worthless. There are two varieties of peat, viz: black and brown, the former being the more perfect; but that found in

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\* Current botanical manuals assign the name "redtop" to *Agrostis alba*, which is not native. Hicks includes agrostis as a separate entry in this list.

† Big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*) was commonly called blue joint grass. The grass now known as bluejoint (*Calamagrostis canadensis*) was rarely mentioned in early lists such as this one, but it was highly valued as a native forage grass. John Warder characterized *Calamagrostis canadensis* in 1863: "affording good pasture upon its wide leaves, that are greedily eaten by cattle."<sup>314</sup>

‡ Some possibilities for "meadow grass": fowl meadow grass or meadow spear grass (*Glyceria striata*), meadow fescue (*Festuca pratensis*), meadow soft grass or velvet grass (*Holcus lanatus*), and meadow foxtail (*Alopecurus pratensis*).

¶ Yard grass = ?goose grass (*Elusine indica*).

§ Herds grass = timothy (*Phleum pratense*).

\*\* Various species of bluegrass (*Poa*) have been called "speargrass," but they are not "coarse and tall."

†† Knot grass or couch grass = quack grass (*Agropyron repens*).

‡‡ Wing's mill was on the Fox River south of Plano.

this vicinity is generally brown. The deposit along the river, by Wing's mill, is by far the largest in the county. \*

... Passing from peat to sand, we have enough in this county for plastering purposes, and further we crave not.

... But our most valuable sand property is the Millington quarry of white sand, in the ancient formation known in geology as the St. Peter's sandstone. ... It forms a large part of the Illinois and Fox river bluffs.

... The sand itself is pure silica, nearly as white as snow. It is composed of rounded, transparent grains of crystalline quartz, and is found in such inexhaustible quantities in Kendall and LaSalle counties, that we might manufacture all the glass for the United States. It underlies Fox River above Millington, and juts out on the other side in a tongue of white sandrock, between two limestone quarries.

... In this hill, a quarter of a mile east of the quarry, a spring of cool water gushes out of a large crevice in the rock, and flows away over a bed of sparkling white sand. Close by, in a ravine, another spring issues from a tiny cavern in the sandrock, and one can hear the musical trickling of the water inside, as it falls on the stones. Between those springs and the quarry is a romantic looking waterfall, half hidden by wild grapes and ivy. No stream runs over it, but a deep channel is worn in the rock, showing that it has been in use sometime.

... we have an abundance of lime rock or limestone . . . . . There are some dozen quarries in the county.

... And finally, though coal mines are on our borders, we have wood at our doors. On our two hundred thousand acres of land we have twenty-five thousand acres of timber; not in a dense body, but in generous strips along the streams and in those beautiful upland groves which charmed our early settlers.<sup>137</sup>

The *History of Kendall County* provides a chronicle of weather extremes, beginning with the Deep Snow which blanketed the state during the winter of 1830-31. This snowfall was hardly documented in the Fox valley because the region had few English-speaking residents at the time. E.W. Hicks simply stated that the winter of the Deep Snow "set in early," and "The Indian ponies were unable to find their usual feed, and some of them died." †<sup>137</sup>

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\* According to a 1914 report about the peat deposit near Wing's Mill, "Two public roads were run over it, but have not affected its value."<sup>27</sup>

† E.W. Hicks mistakenly wrote that the Deep Snow occurred in the winter of 1831-32. The depth of the snow is described on page 248.

E.W. Hicks referred to a legendary winter with even more serious effects:

The buffalos went out with the French. Up to that time, as the Indians said, "they were as thick as trees in the forest," and roamed in vast droves over the prairies. . . . But in 1763 the snow fell, it is said, twelve feet deep—the severest winter ever known—and the buffaloes, cut off from their supplies, wholly perished. For fifty years or more, acres of bleaching bones, here and there upon our prairies, testified to the hard winter that destroyed nearly every buffalo east of the Mississippi. \* <sup>137</sup>

"Hard times" is how Mr. Hicks described the winter of 1832–33: "Corn was the principal food. . . . Pork was supplied from the pigs that survived the war, † feeding on acorns in the woods." The winter of 1834–35 was severe: "February 8th, 1835, the thermometer stood at thirty-five degrees below zero—the coldest day known for years." <sup>137</sup>

1837: "On May 22d, there was a snow-storm, and quite an amount of snow fell, which, though it remained but a few hours, was yet a phenomenon unusual enough to be remembered." <sup>137</sup>

1843–44: "The winter was . . . characterized by the excellent sleighing, which lasted without intermission from November to April. It set in cold November 18th, while flowers were yet in bloom, and the ice did not break up until April 9th. On April 7th, the river could be crossed on the ice." ‡ <sup>137</sup>

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\* Mr. Hicks remarked that the buffalo "went out with the French" because France transferred Illinois to the British in 1763, and Hicks dated the demise of bison to an extraordinary snowfall during the same year. Mr. Hicks' statement does not appear to be supported by any reliable evidence, and there are plenty of eyewitness testimonies to the contrary. There were "Buffilows in ABundance" along the Illinois River in 1763, <sup>200</sup> and they persisted in the region for many years thereafter. Following is a sampling of reports of bison in Illinois during the quarter century after 1763. In 1765 along the Wabash River: "Buffaloes, deer, and bears are here in great plenty." <sup>303</sup> In 1766 at the mouth of the Wabash: "The Herds of Buffaloe are hereabouts extraordinary large and frequent to be seen." <sup>10</sup> In 1770 near the mouth of the Wabash: "kill'd & salted a sufficient Qy of Buffaloe for our Provisions." <sup>210</sup> In 1773 near Havana: "Here is plenty of Buffaloe, Deer, Elk, Turkeys, &c." <sup>151</sup> In 1778 near the mouth of the Illinois River: "meadows abounding in Buffalo, Deer, &c." <sup>151</sup> In 1787 between Vincennes and Kaskaskia: "The country . . . abounds in buffalo, deer, bear, etc." <sup>276</sup> There are similar observations for the balance of the 1700s. The paucity of reports of bison from northern and central Illinois during the 1700s reflects the lack of reporters, not the number of bison. Most travel routes and white settlements during this era were confined to rivers in the southern part of the state. Bison persisted in northern Illinois well into the 1800s. In 1815 near Sheffield (Bureau County), there was "a small herd of buffalo, consisting of fifty or sixty." <sup>191</sup> As late as 1818 in northern Illinois, "small herds of buffalo were occasionally seen roaming through the country." <sup>191</sup> In 1831 a single bison was pursued in Lee County. <sup>191</sup> In 1835 bison were "seen occasionally" in Whiteside County. <sup>37</sup> In 1837 a single bison was killed at Troy Grove (La Salle County). <sup>114</sup>

† The Black Hawk War had been fought in the region during the previous summer.

‡ The era's legendary cold winter was in 1842–43, not 1843–44. It was possible to cross the Illinois River on ice at Ottawa as late as March 10, 1843. <sup>87</sup> At home in northwestern Indiana on

*La Salle mentioned the Fox River by its Indian name, "Pestogonki."*<sup>5</sup>

1856: "Eighteen hundred and fifty-six opened with a very cold winter—one of the coldest, indeed, that has ever been known. During the first two weeks in January, the thermometer several times indicated thirty degrees below zero, and for two months there was continuous cold weather and good sleighing."<sup>137</sup>

A chronicle of drought and deluge is preserved by the *History of Kendall County*. First, in 1840: "The year was ushered in by one of the largest spring freshets known. Fox River flooded all the lowlands along its course, and at Millington two acres of splendid logs were carried away. Only two such freshets have been known since, in 1857 and 1868." \*<sup>137</sup>

1844: "... the spring mud was something unknown before, and up to the first of June the roads were well nigh impassable for teams. The entire summer was very wet, keeping the roads bad and the streams flooded, yet a larger number of emigrants came through than in any one season during the seven years previous."<sup>137</sup>

1845: "During the season Titus Howe built the Yorkville dam. It was a favorable time, as the summer was very warm and dry, and the river low. There was no rain in this vicinity from May to December." †<sup>137</sup>

1856: "In the spring, great floods followed, and the Oswego bridge over Fox river was carried away."<sup>137</sup>

1857: "The spring ... opened with the most destructive freshet ever known on Fox river, caused by a heavy rain on February 6th, which melted the snow and broke up the ice and set the entire winter's crop free. All the bridges from Batavia to Ottawa were swept away . . . . At Oswego, Parker's saw mill was taken at a loss of three thousand dollars . . . . Such another freshet has not been known in this country; yet each winter the materials for such another accumulates, and it is a striking exemplification of the good-

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March 30, 1843, Solon Robinson wrote, "Never before since the country has been known by white men, has such a winter as this been known—" <sup>168</sup> He later elaborated, "The winter commenced the middle of Nov. and one of our citizens was frozen on the Grand prairie Nov. 17, 1842. . . . Snow continued very late, for here we had good sleighing into April." <sup>168</sup>

\* The 1914 *History of Kendall County* states that the flood of 1840 was "the greatest freshet ever known in the Fox River valley": "The floods of 1857 and 1868 approached, but did not equal it in magnitude." <sup>204</sup>

† According to a resident of Lisle (about 10 miles from Kendall County and the Fox River), the spring of 1845 was cold. Luther Hatch wrote to a relative in New Hampshire on June 5th,

The weather has been very cold . . . . We have frost every week. My corn is all killed and I have plowed up the ground where it was. Almost everything in the garden is killed. . . . Peaches are all gone and most of the plums . . . . Your flower beds look forlorn. The bees have not swarmed . . . . Winter wheat is now handsomely headed out . . . . <sup>166</sup>



ness of the providence of God that these materials are dispersed gradually, and rarely allowed to go out with the terrible and fatal rush of 1857.” \* <sup>137</sup>

1868: “The opening of the year . . . was signalized by another great freshet. The Oswego bridge was damaged, the Bristol bridge <sup>†</sup> damaged, and Black’s dam <sup>‡</sup> partially washed out . . . . Post’s bridge <sup>¶</sup> was entirely carried away, and three spans of the new Millington bridge were taken.” <sup>137</sup>

The Reverend Mr. Hicks offered some personal contemplations in his 1877 *History of Kendall County*. Reminiscing about “Prairie and Timber in ’39,” he noted that “quite a change had taken place since seven years before”:

The groves were nearly all surrounded with a cordon of farms, but the prairies as yet bloomed virtually unbroken. A traveler over the country to-day can have little idea of its appearance forty years ago, especially in summer time. The prairies waved with grass and were spangled with flowers of all hues—yellow predominating; and the views extended for miles, as there were no fences, houses or shade trees to break the vision. The groves were full of underbrush <sup>§</sup> and berries and dense with shade, while the tallest trees along the edges became well known way-marks by which the traveler directed his course. . . . Wild fruits and wild game were equally plenty. Groups of deer browsed along the water courses, or stood wonderingly on the edges of the groves . . . . Prairie chickens in abundance made love on the grassy knolls in the spring, and fattened in the fall, and as there were no game laws, they were shot and snared by scores. Quails were not the feeble remnant that divide up in pairs now-a-days, but they went in flocks, and were as abundant as the hazel thickets they hid in. Wild turkeys gobbled in the thicker woods, but were harder to catch. Badgers

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\* George Hollenback’s recollection of the event in Fox Township: “The ice freshet in the Fox River, February 7, 1857, did extensive damage in the town of Fox, carrying away the two bridges in the town, the one south of Plano, and the bridge at Millington, the ice doing considerable damage to the flouring mill.” <sup>143</sup>

A 1976 history of Aurora has photographs of this flood and its aftermath along the riverfront. The author of this book stated, “Floods in the Fox destroyed bridges almost annually, so Theodore Lake operated a ferryboat to handle ‘through’ traffic.” <sup>85</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Lake founded West Aurora.

<sup>†</sup> The Bristol bridge was at Yorkville.

<sup>‡</sup> Mr. Black’s dam on the Fox River was at present-day Silver Springs State Park.

<sup>¶</sup> Post’s bridge was beside Black’s dam.

<sup>§</sup> Here Mr. Hicks portrayed the groves as “full of underbrush,” but on page 202 he wrote of groves with “very little underbrush.” The difference may relate to changing times. The groves with very little underbrush were in the early 1830s when Potawatomi still lived in the region. The groves full of underbrush were in the late 1830s when “the groves were nearly all surrounded with a cordon of farms.” A belt of farmland would have kept prairie fires from burning into the woods, thus fostering the growth of underbrush.

burrowed in the sand banks, and prairie wolves howled half the night, and skulked cross lots in the morning . . . . Snakes were numerous, and along the timbered sloughs the passer-by was now and then startled by the whirr of the coiled rattlesnake. But both pleasures and annoyances of the pioneer class have gone to return no more. The prairie is cut up with roads as regularly laid as the streets of a city; the view is broken by shade trees; the forlorn badger has gone west, and the bank where he burrowed is planted to corn; wild fruit must be sought in the orchard, and game can grow only half as fast as it is wanted, and is protected by law; the groves are honey-combed by clearings, and the tall beacon trees have been made into posts. All is changed—and it is a change for the better. <sup>137</sup>

### **1877: *History of La Salle County, Illinois***

The Fox River drains the northeast quadrant of La Salle County. Elmer Baldwin portrayed the river and its watershed in his history of the county:

The principal northern tributary of the Illinois, and next to that river in size, is the Fox. Its waters are clear, and the extremes of high and low water are less than most other streams in the county; it is one of the best, if not the best, mill stream in the State, and there is more improved water power on the Fox, from Wisconsin to its mouth, than on any other stream in the State, and, with the exception of Rock river, probably more than all others. . . . Its banks for a few miles from its mouth are bordered by belts of timber, while higher up, the prairie in many places comes to the bank of the stream. It runs through a fine rolling and rich prairie. <sup>14</sup>

Mr. Baldwin recalled the Grand Prairie . . . and mused, "Whence came the prairie?"

A feeling of chastened personal dignity as the occupant of such a heritage, and of reverence for the power that fashioned it, forcibly impressed the mind, as, standing upon the vast, illimitable plain which spread in all directions, wave succeeding wave, and undulation following undulation, far away, till the earth and sky met and shut in the power of vision. It seemed as if a boundless ocean, set in motion by a powerful storm and then quieted, the bosom of the water smoothly heaving, all in motion, forming the most graceful curves and swells, had been instantly chilled, hardened to solid land—such was the prairie.

Standing on a swell of the prairie on a clear day in early summer, the luxuriant grass waving in the wind, the shadows of the summer clouds fitfully chasing each other on beyond the power of vision, the observer could fancy the ocean restored and the long swells again in motion; or, taking a stand in one of the numerous points of timber which extended either way from the large streams, an open grove, clear of underbrush and covered with a green sward, and the view taking in the alternation of timber and prairie, a scene was presented that for

extent, beauty and grandeur art can never expect to imitate, and having once been destroyed can never be restored.

Whence came the prairie? What peculiar conditions caused this region to grow grass alone, while all others grow timber?

The question seems partially answered by the relative location of the timber and prairie. The timber grows on the alluvial bottoms where partially protected from the prairie fires, or on the thin soil of the bluffs, while the rich and deep prairie soil and the alluvial, where exposed to the fires, grow grass and no timber. When the ocean receded from the rich and deep soil which had been deposited in its apparent quiet waters, as it was partially a swamp, the sedges and coarse grasses would soon grow with a luxuriance proportioned to the temperature, moisture and richness of the soil. \* Trees do not readily grow in such a soil, and if they did, it would require a large number of years to enable them to withstand even a moderate fire; but grass grows in a single season, and, when dry, furnishes sufficient fuel to effectually burn up or destroy any young timber sprouts of one or two years' growth that might exist. Thus we might expect no trees, but an annual growth of grass on the richest soil, and where exposed to the annual fires; while a poor soil growing too little grass for fuel to sustain an annual fire, and localities sheltered or protected in any way from the fires, would grow up to timber—and such was found to be the fact. Narrow

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\* Elmer Baldwin accepted a common theory of the day: prairie had become established upon the recession of a vast expanse of water. The principal proponent of this theory was Leo Lesquereux, one of the most prominent American scientists of his time. In the first volume of the *Geological Survey of Illinois* (1866), Professor Lesquereux asserted . . .

. . . no other conclusion can be taken than this: that all the prairies of the Mississippi valley have been formed by the slow recess of sheets of water of various extent, first transformed into swamps and by and by drained and dried. The high and rolling prairies, the prairies around the lakes, those of the bottoms along the rivers, are all the result of the same cause, and form a whole, an indivisible system.<sup>181</sup>

Lesquereux's ideas attracted many adamant adherents as well as decided detractors. Debate about the possible causes of prairie is immense in the 19th-century literature. Much commentary consists of perfunctory potshots and dismissive discourses—for example:

The theory very much in vogue before the laws of climatology were fully understood, which attributed the formation of prairies to the annual fires set by the Indians, is deserving only of a passing notice.<sup>98</sup>

And . . .

No person ever appeared more charmed with his favorite idea than the bold Lesquereux with his pet theory for the origin of the prairies.<sup>325</sup>

Among the best examinations of Leo Lesquereux's theory are John D. Caton's missive (quoted in part on pages 173 to 179) and an article (not quoted here) in the May 1878 issue of the *American Naturalist*.<sup>131</sup>

strips of land between streams or branches of streams were generally timber land. The soil on the top of the bluffs and near the streams was, and is, invariably thin, \* and not as well adapted to grass as the prairie—this soil is nearly all timber, and has the additional advantage of protection in one direction by the stream. The smooth and level surface would facilitate the progress of the annual fires, while a rough, rocky and uneven surface would check them. The great extent of the region over which these conditions existed would aid the spread of the fire when started, and some part of so extended a region would be likely to take fire, while if divided into small and isolated tracts like the present fields, fires would be seldom known. Lightning alone would be a sufficient cause for the annual firing of so large a tract, and this, at an early day, was doubtless the agent that effected it.

It was the opinion of the early settlers, that at that time, the prairie was encroaching upon the timber; in fact, the bluff timber was all old, and a majority of the trees injured by the fire, and there was no young growth; an ox gad or a hoop pole could not be found except in some sheltered nook of the bluff, or on the sheltered alluvial bottoms, but as soon as the barrens, as they were termed, were protected from fire, they rapidly grew up with a thrifty crop of well-set timber, showing that the fire had been the only impediment to that result.

The prairie, although protected from fire, did not rapidly grow to timber, for the reason there were no roots or germs to start from, as there was in the barrens, but the principal reason was, that no tree will grow readily in the unbroken prairie sod, as most of the settlers found by dear experience—but the timber did spread to the prairie, first a few hazel bushes, these would hold the leaves at the roots, thus mulching and killing the turf, then a few crab apples, then oak and hickory. †

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\* In his 1906 *History of La Salle County*, U.J. Hoffman explored the relationship between thin soil and woodland:

People wonder why trees grew only along the bluffs and banks of streams, though we know trees will grow on the prairie. The most acceptable theory is that because of the washing of the soil on the hills near streams, the soil was not so rich and was subject to drought and grass did not flourish, so the seeds of trees readily took root. Farther back from the streams the land was wet and swampy. Here grass grew luxuriantly and every year was burnt off by prairie fires. The fires were stopped by the barren land near the streams and thus the young trees were not destroyed. But out on the prairie the fierce flames of the burning grass killed every tree that started.

The grass sent numerous roots deep into the earth. These were not destroyed by the fires but lived and multiplied for ages, decaying they filled the earth with their remains thus forming the black soil. On the hills by the streams the grass roots did not form and the soil remained its original color. <sup>140</sup>

† The 1836 *New Guide for Emigrants* explains it this way: "As the fires on the prairies become stopped by the surrounding settlements, and the wild grass is eaten out and trodden down by the

There was probably a time when, from the recurrence of wet seasons, a general moist climate, or other cause, the timber had encroached upon the prairie, else there would have been no timber—but the whole history since the waters retired, and evidently been a contest for supremacy between the two.

At the date of the white settlements the timber had retired to the banks of the streams, to the thinnest soil and to the low bottoms, and in most cases was still retiring. As proof of this, it was noticed that in many instances the extreme points, the outposts or picket lines of timber had retired and left roots and stumps burnt to or under the surface, yet in reach of the plow, mementos of its former status.

Most of the bluff timber was stationary or decaying, very little making a thrifty growth, and as the young sprouts were annually killed, it was impossible for the timber to hold its own. The writer has a vivid recollection of the first fire he witnessed, \* which was a very severe one, passing through the timber. Hundreds of trees were on fire to their extreme tops, presenting in a dark night a most magnificent but terrific view, much less enjoyable from the fact that so much timber was being destroyed. Those trees burnt for several days, and a frequent crash and thud told that the monarchs of the forest, the growth of centuries, were yielding to their conquering foe,—a most conclusive answer to the question, why is it that timber does not grow on the prairies? Oaks and hickories are the most hardy and least injured by fire, consequently were the only varieties on the bluffs, and if these were receding before the common enemy, it could not be expected that the more tender varieties could exist at all.

On the sheltered bottoms were found all the varieties of timber common to the climate, that is, where the timber had obtained the ascendancy, so as to prevent the growth of grass sufficient to sustain the fire.

Black and white walnut, linden, elms, sycamore, ash, maples, etc., were found in abundance, but were not found on the bluffs, as they would be killed by a fire that would leave the oaks and hickory unscathed.

Points of timber occupying a bend or angle of a stream, well out on the verge of the timber point, and on the prairie soil, often consisted of walnut and other varieties of bottom timber, proving that such a soil was well adapted to the growth of different varieties of timber—a truth also proved by the successful cultivation of artificial groves and belts.

After the lapse of more than forty years, the old timber has nearly all been removed, and the fires checked and finally effectually stopped by the improve-

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stock, they begin to assume the character of barrens; first, hazle and other shrubs, and finally, a thicket of young timber, covers the surface." <sup>223</sup>

\* Elmer Baldwin came to La Salle County from Connecticut in 1835.

ments of the settlers; that which was then timber lands, or barrens, has grown a thrifty crop of young timber, not only of oak and hickory, but where the soil is deep and rich, a sprinkling of walnut, linden, and other varieties of what was termed bottom timber, being then confined to such localities. The rapidity with which timber spontaneously starts wherever the germs exist, and its rapid and thrifty growth, show that our soil is inherently a timber soil, and that in the not very distant future, our State will be better supplied with good timber than those States originally covered with a heavy growth.

... There can be no question but that the immense demand over all the prairie region for lumber, and the readiness with which that want is supplied, must, within the life of another generation, exhaust the supply, and the warnings of thoughtful and sagacious men, to guard against the danger, ought to be heeded. The supply once exhausted can not be restored for generations—the one to two hundred years required to produce a perfected growth of full-size timber is quite an item in the count of time, and a long period to wait for the production of a crop—and it will be wise to husband our resources and save while we can, having at least a thought for the future. The timber growing in Illinois will all be wanted, and at a price that will pay for its culture. The railroads built, and to be built, which have to renew their ties every eight or ten years, will consume all the timber the State can produce, and when the lumber region fails, as fail it must, there will be a still greater amount needed for building and fencing purposes.<sup>14</sup>

Baldwin recalled prairie farming:

At an early day the sod was turned by an ox team of six to ten yoke, with a plow that cut a furrow from two to three feet wide.

... It was found that the best time to break the sod was when the grass was rapidly growing, as it would then decay quickly, and the soil soon be mellow and kind; but if broken too early or too late in the season it would require two or three years to become as mellow as it would be in three months when broken at the right time. Very shallow ploughing required less team, and would mellow much sooner than deep breaking.

The first crop was mostly corn, planted by cutting a gash with an axe into the inverted sod, dropping the corn and closing it by another blow along side the first. Or it was dropped in every third furrow and the furrow turned on; if the corn was so placed as to find the space between the furrows, it would find daylight; if not, it was doubtful. Corn so planted would, as cultivation was impossible, produce a partial crop, sometimes a full one. Prairie sod turned in June would be in condition to sow with wheat in September, or to put in with corn or oats the spring following. Vines of all kinds grew well on the fresh turned sod, melons especially, though the wolves usually took their full share of these. After the first crop, the soil was kind, and produced any crop suited to the

climate. But when his crops were growing, the settler was not relieved from toil. His chickens must have shelter, closed at night to protect them from the owls and wolves; his pigs required equal protection; and although his cows and oxen roamed on the wide prairie in a profusion of the richest pasture, still a yard must be made for his cows at night, and his calves by day. The cows were turned in with the calves for a short time at night, and then the calves turned on the prairies to feed during the night; in the morning the calves were turned in and the cows turned out for their day's pasture; this was necessary to induce the cows to come up at night, for if the calves were weaned the cows would fail to come. And the stock all needed some protection from the fierce wintry blast, though sometimes they got but little. Add to this, the fencing of the farm, the out-buildings, hunting the oxen and cows on the limitless prairies through the heavy dews of late evening and early morning, going long distances to market and to mill, aiding a new comer to build his cabin, fighting the prairie fires which swept over the country yearly, and with his family encountering that pest of a new country, the fever and ague, and other malarious diseases, and the toil and endurance of a settler in a new country may be partially, but not fully appreciated.<sup>14</sup>

#### Unplowed prairie served as pasture:

The wild grass of the prairies, in its primitive state, made excellent pasture and hay. With the range the early settlers had, their cattle would put on more flesh, and in less time, than on any other pasture, either wild or tame. Having their choice from the boundless sea of verdure by which they were surrounded, they, of course, selected the best and most nutritious varieties. The sedge, which grew only along the sloughs, was the first to start in the spring, and was then eaten with avidity, but was entirely neglected when the grasses proper made their appearance. The bent or "blue joint," \* which grew mostly along the sides of the sloughs, or, as the settlers expressed it, "between the dry and wet land," was preferred to all other varieties, particularly when mixed with the wild pea vine, as it often was. These together made hay of superior quality, which stock of all kinds preferred to any other, without exception; and its yield was immense; but as this was selected for hay, and the stock fed constantly on it, it was rapidly exterminated, so that in a few years that portion of the ground

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\* This grass is *Calamagrostis canadensis*, which is still commonly called bluejoint grass. Although big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*) often went by the name "blue joint" during the 1800s, it was not called bent grass. The stated habitat of Elmer Baldwin's "blue joint" ("between the dry and wet land") and its associate ("the wild pea vine") fit *Calamagrostis canadensis*. The wild pea vine might be groundnut (*Apios americana*), marsh vetchling (*Lathyrus palustris*), or perhaps another viny legume.

An 1858 reference about forage grasses says of *Calamagrostis canadensis*, "The blue joint is very common on low grounds. It is generally considered a valuable grass. It is eaten greedily by stock in the winter, and is thought by some to be as nutritious as Timothy."<sup>96</sup>

where it grew became almost bare of vegetation, after which the upland grass, or that growing on the dry prairie, was selected for both hay and pasture, that is, within the range of the stock; but by going back on the unoccupied prairie, as was frequently done, for some miles, as the settlements thickened, the bent and pea vine were found in rich abundance. And the older and more experienced oxen, and other members of the herd, learned to seek these rich pastures, so far out that days were sometimes spent in recovering them.

The upland grass, which for many years formed the staple feed for stock, was a very good article, but immensely inferior to the choice virgin pastures which greeted the herds of the first comers.

On all the prairie pastures neat cattle were remarkably thrifty, and free from disease, and in some respects horses were peculiarly so. It was a singular fact, that a horse reared on the prairie never had the heaves, and horses from other localities, badly afflicted with that complaint, on being turned on the prairie pasture, or fed with prairie hay for a few weeks, were invariably fully cured. It was attributed to the medicinal qualities of the resin weed, \* of which there were numerous varieties, and of which horses were very fond.

... Horses fed upon prairie hay, and even on the pasture, were peculiarly subject to a disease, often fatal in a short time, called colic, which is much less frequent since the introduction of the tame grasses. Early mowing and close feeding rapidly exterminated the wild grass of the prairie, which, like the buffalo and the Indian, seemed destined to fade out before the steady advance of civilization. The settlers did everything in their power to effect this, by late burns and close grazing, thereby removing the fuel that sustained the annual fires, so much dreaded. If a tract of prairie had been enclosed, so as to entirely exclude all kinds of stock, and the grass cut for hay as late as the middle of August, each year, it could have been preserved indefinitely, and would have been a curiosity to future generations—as the profusion of native flowers, so much admired by all who ever saw them, would have been preserved with the grasses.<sup>14</sup>

Under the heading of PRAIRIE FIRES:

The yearly burning of the heavy annual growth of grass on the prairie, which had occurred from time immemorial, either from natural causes or from being

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\* In his 1877 catalogue of La Salle County plants, Professor Rinaldo Williams listed all three of the region's resin weeds: the polar plant (*Silphium laciniatum*, now known as compass plant), prairie burdock (or prairie dock, *S. terebinthinaceum*), and *S. integrifolium*.<sup>14</sup> Williams did not give a common name for *S. integrifolium* (now commonly known as the rosin weed), which is not unusual for such lists in the 1800s. Most early listings of resin weeds (rosin-weeds, etc.) mention only *S. laciniatum* and *S. terebinthinaceum*. The compass plant was mentioned far more often than the other *Silphium* species. Williams listed a fourth *Silphium*, the cup-plant (*S. perfoliatum*); this plant is not usually considered to be a resin weed.



set by human hands, was continued after the white settlers came in, and was a source of much annoyance, apprehension, and frequently of severe loss. From the time the grass would burn, which was soon after the first frost, usually about the first of October, till the surrounding prairie was all burnt over, or if not all burnt, till the green grass in the spring had grown sufficiently to prevent the rapid progress of the fire, the early settlers were continually on the watch, and as they usually expressed the idea, "slept with one eye open." When the ground was covered with snow, or during rainy weather, the apprehension was quieted, and both eyes could be safely closed.

A statute law forbid setting the prairie on fire . . . . But convictions were seldom effected, as the proof was difficult, though the fire was often set.

Fires set on the leeward side of an improvement, while very dangerous to the improvements to the leeward, were not so to the windward, as fire progressing against the wind is easily extinguished.

Imagine the feelings of the man who, alone in a strange land, has made a comfortable home for his family; has raised and stored his corn, wheat and oats, and fodder for stock, and has his premises surrounded by a sea of standing grass, dry as tinder, stretching away for miles in every direction, over which the wild prairie wind howls a dismal requiem, and knowing that a spark or match applied in all that distance will send a sea of fire wherever the wind may waft it; and conscious of the fact that there are men who would embrace the first opportunity to send the fire from outside their own fields, regardless as to whom it might consume, only so it protected their own.

Various means were resorted to for protection; a common one was to plow with a prairie plow several furrows around a strip, several rods wide, outside the improvements, and then burn out the strip; or wait till the prairie was on fire and then set fire outside, reserving the strip for a late burn, that is, till the following summer, and in July burn both old grass and new. The grass would start immediately, and the cattle would feed it close in preference to the older grass, so that the fire would not pass over it the following autumn. This process repeated would soon, or in a few years, run out the prairie grass, and in time it would become stocked with blue grass which will never burn to any extent.

. . . all such effort was often futile, a prairie fire driven by a high wind would often leap all such barriers and seem to put human effort at defiance. A prairie fire when first started goes straight forward with a velocity proportioned to the force of the wind, widening as it goes, but the centre keeping ahead—it spreads sideways, but burning laterally, it burns comparatively slow, and if the wind is moderate and steady, is not difficult to manage, but if the wind veers a point or two, first one way and then the other, it sends the side fire beyond control. The head fire in dry grass and a high wind is fearful, and pretty sure to have its own way unless there is some defensible point from which to meet it.

... The usual way of meeting an advancing fire is to begin the defense where the head of the fire will strike, which is known by the smoke and ashes brought by the wind long in advance of the fire. A road, cattle path or furrow is of great value at such a place; if there is none such, a strip of the grass can be wet, if water can be procured, which is generally scarce at the time of the annual fires. On the outside, or side next the coming fire, of such road or path, the grass is set on fire, and it burns slowly against the wind till it meets the coming conflagration, which stops of course for want of fuel, provided there has been sufficient time to burn a strip that will not be leaped by the head fire as it comes in. This is called back-firing; great care is necessary to prevent the fire getting over the furrow, path, or whatever is used as a base of operations. If it gets over and once under way, there is no remedy but to fall back to a more defensible position, if such an one exists.

If the head of the fire is successfully checked, then the forces are divided, half going to the right, and half to the left, and the back-firing continued, to meet the side fires as they come up; this must be continued till the fire is checked along the entire front of the premises endangered, and the sides secured.

Various implements were used to put out a side or back fire, or even the head of a fire in a moderate wind. ... A bundle of hazel-brush does very well ....

... The premises about the residences and yards being tramped by the family and domestic animals, after a year or two, became tolerably safe from fire, but the fences, corn and stubble fields were frequently burnt over. When the prairie was all fenced and under cultivation, so that prairie fires were among the things of the past, the denizens of the prairie were happily released from the constant fear and apprehension which for years had rested like a nightmare on their quiet and happiness, disturbing their sleep by night, and causing anxiety by day, especially when called from home, knowing that on their return they might look on a blackened scene of desolation, instead of the pleasant home they left.

... And here it may be well to throw a little cold water over the thrilling and fearful stories, got up to adorn a tale, of hair-breadth escapes of travelers and settlers from prairie fires; such stories are not told by the old settlers, who know whereof they speak. It is true, a family might encamp in the middle of a dense growth of dry grass, and let a fire sweep over their camp, to their serious injury. But with ordinary intelligence and caution, a traveler on the prairie need have no fear of a fatal catastrophe, or even of any serious danger. If the head of a fire is approaching, it is usually an easy matter to get to one side of it, and when it has passed, pass over the side fire on to the burnt prairie, which can easily be done, by getting on to a spot of dry, rolling prairie, where the grass is seldom more than eight to twelve inches high. Or, if the head fire is too wide, and its speed too great to allow getting around it, then at once set a fire to leeward, and when it has burnt a short distance, put out the fire on the windward side of the place of setting, and pass on to the burnt prairie and follow the fire

till far enough from the dry grass to be out of danger. There are places on low, moist prairie bottoms, or sloughs, where the grass and weeds were much heavier than on dryer land, and their burning was terrific and dangerous; but these places could be avoided, as an approaching fire could be seen a long distance, giving time to prepare for its coming. \*

The early settlers will ever have a vivid recollection of the grand illuminations nightly exhibited in dry weather, from early fall to late spring, by numberless prairie fires. The whole horizon would be lighted up around its entire circuit. A heavy fire, six or seven miles away, would afford sufficient light on a dark night to enable one to read fine print. When a fire had passed through the prairie, leaving the long lines of side fires, like two armies facing each other, at night, the sight was grand; and if one's premises were securely protected, he could enjoy such a fire exhibition hugely, free of cost; but if his property was exposed, his enjoyment of the scene was like a very nervous person's apprecia-

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\* Solon Robinson, an eyewitness to prairie fires in the morainal region of extreme northwest Indiana, lent his voice to debunk the widespread notion that prairie fires were universally horrible holocausts. In 1839 after reading an account in an Eastern periodical about the "burning of a prairie, and a whole family that perished in the conflagration," Robinson wrote to protest the overly dramatized image of prairie fires:

Such tales as this are vastly amusing to us who dwell upon the great western prairies; but to those who know naught of them, it is a wonder how we escape from such "a vast sea of fire," as they suppose annually "rolls in terrific grandeur," over the whole face of the country. Let me assure you that all these wonderful fire stories are more smoke than fire.

The idea of burning men, oxen, wagons, horses, and every thing that happens to be in the way, belongs to the great humbug family.

The soil of prairies is as diversified in character as that of a timbered country . . . . The great body is dry, tillable land, and in a state of nature, is covered with a thick short grass . . . . When dry and dead in the fall of the year, it is very easy to burn, and will make just such a "sea of fire" as would a late mown piece of timothy meadow. Unless the wind is blowing with great fury, it is easy to extinguish, by beating it with a bush, board, shovel, or even an old hat; and a man can pass across the line of fire with all ease, or ride through it, or run away from it. I have often done each . . . .

'Tis only in the great marshes . . . that the numerous poetical descriptions of "a burning prairie" have any application. Upon some of these grow a very rank growth of vegetation, six or eight feet high in places, but generally about equal to a very good piece of mowing meadow, which makes a great fire, and would endanger the life of man or beast to come in contact with it.

. . . It seems to be the delight of some writers to propagate error; but no person who has ever traveled over a prairie country, will believe that man or beast ever lost life in the "great conflagration" of dry grass which covers the land, which will not average more than six inches high. If the growth was very great, it could not be turned under with the plow at mid-summer, which is the time that it is sought to be done by every good farmer.<sup>246</sup>

tion of the grand and majestic roll of thunder—the sublimity of the scene lost in the apprehension of danger. <sup>14</sup>

Under the topic of “Amusements,” Elmer Baldwin recalled “circle hunts” which were carried out during the era before the prairie was fenced:

The abundance of game made hunting and fishing a very delightful recreation, and the successes in those pastimes then, if truthfully recounted now, would be regarded as an old man’s hunting story, to be believed or not, at pleasure.

... Wolf hunts have been made exciting sport. By previous concerted agreement, the settlements on the circumference of a large prairie would move in line toward a flag in the centre, driving the wolves and other game before them, closing the line so as to make a complete circle as they approached the centre-pole, where the game was shot or killed by dogs. Tin horns, cow bells, and all instruments that could be used to make a noise, were carried by the company to arouse the game. It was exciting sport, but generally the discipline and leading were bad, an open space was left for the wolves to escape, and the result was more noise and sport, than game. <sup>14</sup>

Early residents suffered from malaria and other deadly or debilitating diseases:

... a new country is ever cursed with a double amount of sickness. There are but few localities in the United States where malarious disease was not developed by clearing off the timber or breaking the prairie sod. Bilious fevers and agues were the most common form, and however exempt any locality may be from these diseases after a few years of culture, the pioneer almost always had to face them.

... Seasons have occurred when whole neighborhoods were prostrated at once ....

... Such sickness was confined to the last of summer and fall. ... It was a common remark that when the bloom of the resin weed and other yellow flowers appeared it was time to look for the ague. The first spring flowers on the prairie were mostly pink and white, then followed purple and blue, and about the middle of August yellow predominated, and that was about the season for ague to commence.

While the immense amount of vegetation which covered the prairie was rapidly growing, it doubtless purified the air, and made that season healthful, but when the mass of vegetation ceased growing it reversed the process; it imbibed oxygen, and exhaled nitrogen, and the atmosphere became impure, and a cause of disease. Added to this was the decay of the prairie sod; this was usually turned in June, and each settler commenced his improvement near the house. Walk across such a breaking in a warm evening in August or September, and the effluvia from the decaying sod was found to be quite offensive, and must have sent sickness and suffering to the little cabin alongside.

High water in spring, flooding the bottoms and filling the lagoons and low places along the streams, and then drying off with the hot sun of July and August, was a fruitful cause of disease, and in such localities it was often quite sickly, while the high prairie was comparatively exempt.

. . . One old lady, weak and petulant from a long siege of ague, looking out on the prairie after a heavy rain, exclaimed, "This is the most God-forsaken country under the sun; it is fit only for Indians, prairie wolves and rattlesnakes, and they have about got possession; I wish it was sunk!" and then, checking herself, said, "but that ain't much of a wish, for it wouldn't have to go down over fifteen inches to be all under water."

The fall of 1835 was quite sickly, but 1838 was much more so, and probably there was more sickness and more deaths in proportion to population, in 1838, than in any year since the settlement of the country. . . . An excessive spring flood that covered the bottoms till the middle of summer, and then dried off with extreme hot weather in August, sufficiently accounts for that exceptional season. . . . When the land around a residence had become thoroughly cultivated, the inmates ceased to have the ague, the tilled soil readily absorbed the rainfall, and no doubt the deleterious gases of the atmosphere; but whatever the cause, the annual sickness so annoying for many years gradually disappeared as the country became improved. Malarious disease has nearly ceased, and the county is one of the most healthful locations in this or any other country. \* <sup>14</sup>

Elmer Baldwin recalled the severe drought of 1838, followed by extreme cold at the end of the year:

The winter of 1838 was very cold, and having been preceded by a very dry summer, <sup>†</sup> and consequently low water, the supply of water for milling purposes soon became exhausted, and as there was no commercial communication with the outside world but by the river, <sup>‡</sup> and that frozen nearly solid . . . . <sup>14</sup>

Information about the former ecology of the Fox River valley can be gleaned from Elmer Baldwin's accounts of each township. Dayton Township was the site of some of the earliest white habitations along the Fox River. According to Mr. Baldwin,

Dayton had the first flouring mill in the county <sup>¶</sup> and the first woolen mill

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\* Malaria is not caused in the manner described above. It is spread by mosquitoes.

<sup>†</sup> From J.M. Peck's *Traveler's Directory for Illinois*, published in 1839: "During 1838, the western streams were the lowest, and the season from June, the driest ever known within the memory of man, steamboat navigation on the Illinois was interrupted almost entirely after the 20th of July." <sup>224</sup>

<sup>‡</sup> Baldwin was referring to the Illinois River.

<sup>¶</sup> Green's Mill at Dayton was the first grist mill on the Fox River.

run by water, in the State. At one time, about 1834 and 1835, . . . it had a flouring mill, . . . a saw mill, . . . and stores . . . .

The dam across the Fox river is maintained by the State. It was built to turn water into the feeder for the canal \* . . . .

. . . The flouring mill and woolen mill are both in use, and a paper mill has recently gone into operation; and there is water power for many more.

The towns of Dayton and Rutland were settled simultaneously . . . . They are separated by Fox river, and between them lies the rapids of that stream, furnishing an excellent water power and from where the feeder for the Illinois and Michigan Canal is taken.

. . . John Green, and wife, Barbara Grove, came from Licking County, Ohio, in the fall of 1829. <sup>†</sup> He brought the irons for a saw and grist mill by team over-land, and millwrights to put them up. Mr. Green lived . . . in Rutland, until 1832, when he removed to Dayton. He built a saw mill and put in a run of stone in 1830, and a flouring mill in 1832. . . . He had nine children . . . . David . . . in company with his brother Jesse <sup>‡</sup> . . . has run the large woolen factory at Dayton—the first one run by water in the State. It was built in 1840, and enlarged in 1864. <sup>14</sup>

The Fox River separates Dayton and Rutland Townships:

The town of Rutland . . . is bounded on the south by the Illinois river, west and north by the Fox . . . . Its location is an enviable one . . . . its western and northern line is washed by the Fox, with its rapids and heavy water power . . . . This region of country is only just in its infancy, and the womb of time is pregnant with startling events to be developed in the distant future. <sup>14</sup>

Mission Township is upstream from Dayton and Rutland Townships:

The Fox forms its northern and western boundary, and Mission creek runs westwardly across the town near its centre. There was some heavy timber on both the creek and the Fox. The face of the country is rolling, and the soil dry and fertile.

The first white occupant of what is now the town of Mission, was Jesse Walker, who established a mission in 1826, . . . of the Methodist Episcopal Church, at

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\* The Dayton dam supplied water to the Illinois and Michigan Canal via an aqueduct.

<sup>†</sup> The Greens' second winter along the Fox River was the Winter of the Deep Snow. David and Jesse Green reportedly trapped 300 prairie-chicken and "a large number of quail" during that winter. <sup>235</sup>

<sup>‡</sup> An excerpt from the recollections of David and Jesse Green is on page 45.

the head of Mission creek, on Section 15, for the conversion of the Pottawatomie Indians \* . . . . The Indians in considerable numbers were occupying an island in the Fox, near the mouth of Somonauk creek † where they had cultivated corn and vegetables and made the vicinity their head-quarters.

. . . The mission was barren of results, and was abandoned early in 1832, and the buildings were burnt by the Sauks the following summer. <sup>14</sup>

A financial crash in 1837 brought hard times to the region, but, "There was no danger of starving; there was plenty of breadstuff, beef, pork, venison, prairie chickens . . . . Of fruit there was none, except wild plums, gooseberries and crab apples . . . ." <sup>14</sup>

The *History of La Salle County* includes a catalogue of flowering plants by Professor Rinaldo Williams. The author stated, "The . . . list embraces but few species that have been personally identified by the writer of this article, during a residence of twenty years in the county." Williams listed nearly 600 species and admonished, "The time is not distant when many of the species here enumerated will not be found in the county. The fringed gentian, for example, is becoming every year less common in our pastures." <sup>14</sup> Williams' listing is county-wide, and it does not indicate which species occurred in the Fox River valley. ‡

Elmer Baldwin included a chapter about the fauna in his history of La Salle County. He introduced his treatment of mammals under the heading of . . .

#### BEASTS.

The Fauna of this locality, from the open and exposed character of the country, did not embrace those animals which delight in the seclusion of the dense forest—the bear, the panther, was not known; or, if known, only as transient visitors. But those adapted to the country appear, from the testimony of French explorers and other sources, to have existed in immense numbers. It was a country prolific of animal life—but limited in species. <sup>14</sup>

Mr. Baldwin did not accept a legend which maintains that bison were largely extirpated during a severe winter prior to the county's occupation by white people:

Seventy-five years ago, the buffalo, in immense herds, swarmed over the broad plains of Illinois, and fattened on the rich prairie pasture. Their bones were scattered profusely over the prairie when the settlements first commenced.

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\* A first-person account of the establishment of this mission is on page 43.

† Somonauk Creek enters the Fox River at Sheridan, in the northwest corner of Mission Township.

‡ The most comprehensive early list of the plant life of La Salle County and the surrounding region is *Flora La Sallensis*, published in 1897 (page 298).

There was said to be a tradition that they were nearly exterminated by a hard winter with an immense depth of snow. But it is well known that the buffalo retreats south on the approach of winter, and the situation of the bones would not indicate any wholesale slaughter from any cause. Each skeleton was by itself, and they were apparently of different ages, as indicated by the different stages of decay, and no great number existed in the same decaying stage. And the natural mortality from old age or accident among such immense herds would account for all the bones then existing. \* <sup>14</sup>

Baldwin repeated a common notion that bison migrated across the Mississippi River rather than being exterminated in Illinois: "Like the Indian, they have gone toward the setting sun, and the place that now knows them, will soon know them no more."

And the deer have followed the buffalo. The first settlers, and even those who came in twenty-five years ago, will testify to the immense number of deer that tempted the skill of the hunter. They could be started from almost every thicket or point of timber. They could daily be seen in droves of four or five to twenty-five, and even 35 to 40 have been seen together. They were sometimes a serious nuisance—they would eat the limbs of young fruit trees . . . . And they were nearly as destructive as so many hogs in the ripened corn. A farmer would frequently have three or four acres of unpicked corn caught in the first deep snow, and when the snow melted, four or six weeks after, would find it all harvested by the deer. . . . They were easily killed . . . . Experienced hunters often made it a profitable business killing them for the market. They gradually diminished before the advancing settlements, and had nearly all left the country in 1860. The last one killed in the county known to the author was killed on the Vermillion, in 1866, since which time none have been seen.

. . . The hunter and his game have yielded to their destiny, while the farmer, and the flocks and herds that go and come at his call and feed at his hand, occupy their heritage. The flocks and herds that first replaced the buffalo and deer have, in turn, given place to those of more perfect form, and they, too, must yield to a better and more perfect race, when that better one claims the right.

. . . Of beasts of prey, the number was very limited.

Felines.—The Canada lynx was occasionally met. It lives on rabbits and birds, sometimes on young pigs and poultry, but otherwise is harmless; it is a stupid

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\* Francis Parkman mentioned that one of the founders of Utica (several miles west of the mouth of the Fox River) had seen a big accumulation of bison bones: "Mr. James Clark . . . told me that he once found a large quantity of their bones and skulls in one place, as if a herd had perished in the snow drifts." <sup>217</sup>



animal, easily shot or caught in traps. The wild cat, or bay lynx, \* was more plenty but not numerous; were destructive in the hen roost. Both of the foregoing have disappeared.

*Canis lupus*.—The large gray wolf † was only occasionally seen. They sought more seclusion and a better hiding place than this region afforded. But the prairie wolf here found their natural habitat, and existed by thousands. They are a bold, impudent, and mischievous animal, living on rabbits, birds, lambs, pigs, poultry, green corn, watermelons, berries, and almost everything that comes in their way. They burrow in the ground, usually on some high ridge of the prairie, to rear their young . . . . . Hunting them on horseback, with dogs and grayhounds to lead, was exhilarating sport. . . . if the wolf did not reach the covert of a thicket or timber, was pretty sure to yield up his skin. A single horseman, well out from timber, could ride over and eventually tire out and kill a wolf, if his steed did not tire first . . . . The wolves would frequently make a bed on a bog, ‡ or ant hillock, by crawling under the grass, which, when killed by frost, was nearly the color of the wolf, and excavating so as to bring his body about even with the surface with a perfect fit, his head on the side of the hillock in a good position for observation, and then wait for his prey. The writer passed within three feet of one in that position, when perceiving a pair of eyes among the grass . . . .

. . . The prairie wolves are not yet exterminated. For a number of years they were not seen or heard, having retreated to the large unsettled prairies, but they were probably as much surprised as the early settlers to find those, then solitudes, filled with an enterprising, dense population, and now disturbed in their favorite haunts, they have scattered over the State, not very numerous, but enough to prove a decided nuisance.

. . . The opossum . . . are found in quite limited numbers. It is said they were not here before settlement and for some years later. Their temporary advent was not to them a success, and being easily caught they will soon disappear.

The raccoon is an inhabitant of the woods, living in hollow trees in heavy timber; they visit the settlements in pursuit of green corn and chickens. Our open country is not their favorite home, yet they are found in limited numbers in the vicinity of the streams and timber belts.

The ground hog, or woodchuck, though occasionally seen, are so few as to be hardly an item in the fauna of the country.

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\* Wild cat or bay lynx = bobcat.

† Gray wolf = timber wolf.

‡ In this context a *bog* is a tussock of grass or sedge.

The skunk was seldom seen at an early day, but have rapidly increased in the last few years. Though sometimes destructive to young poultry, they are doubtless, on the whole, a benefit, living almost entirely on beetles, grasshoppers, crickets, and other insects and larvae. Their good acts far overbalance their evil ones, yet they could not be recommended for pets.

The badger was barely known to be a resident here. A few were caught at an early day, but are not known here now.

The gray rabbits \* are very numerous both on timber and prairie. They increased rapidly after the settlement of the country. They are sometimes very destructive to nurseries, young fruit trees and shrubbery, gnawing and girdling the trees. Immense numbers are killed without seeming to diminish their numbers, as they breed like rabbits.

... The fox squirrel is of a red or fox color . . . . . They have gradually increased with the settlements, there having been but few found here at first.

The chipmunk, or ground squirrel, † was not found here for several years after the settlements commenced; they are now quite common. . . . He has not yet acquired the reputation of his eastern congeners, digging up the newly planted corn.

The flying squirrel differs from all the squirrel family . . . . . It . . . differs in being nocturnal in its habits, and consequently is not often seen even when quite numerous.

Of the spermiphiles, or prairie squirrel, we have, or did have, two varieties—the striped and gray. ‡ The gray variety is more than twice the size of the striped; their habits are the same. The gray were never as numerous as the striped, and have now nearly or quite disappeared. The striped variety are yet quite numerous, but when the country was new they were much more so, and a great enemy to the farmer's corn at the planting season. In Northern Illinois and Wisconsin they are erroneously called gophers. The spermiphiles all hibernate . . . . . They select some bank or sand ridge that will not be flooded, and at the bottom of their hole excavate a space that will hold from a third to half a peck, which they fill with leaves and dry grass.

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\* Gray rabbit = eastern cottontail

† Chipmunk or ground squirrel = eastern chipmunk.

‡ Striped spermiphile or striped prairie squirrel = thirteen-lined ground squirrel; gray spermiphile or gray prairie squirrel = Franklin's ground squirrel.

... The gopher, like the mole, lives beneath the surface. \* ... It is claimed they are not found north of the Illinois river, but they are very plenty south of it. † To kill them, put a grain of strychnine in a small potato and drop in the run-way.

Otter were found along all the principal streams, and frequently caught. They are very seldom seen now.

... Beaver were numerous at the time of the French explorations, but disappeared before the American settlement.

Mushrat ‡ were, and still are, numerous, frequently building their winter homes in the ponds on the middle of the largest prairies.

Mink are quite plenty over all the country. ... they draw the principal efforts of the trapper. But they are very prolific, and are likely to hold their own. They are about the worst enemy that preys on the poultry yard.

The small brown weasel, ¶ though not numerous, are yet a great pest among the poultry.

... The Norway rat soon followed the emigrants, and in a few years became immensely numerous. ... the profusion of the cereal grains all exposed made this the paradise of rats. Yards filled with corn cribs, standing for three or four years, became infested with numbers innumerable. They go and come, sometimes swarming like the locusts of Egypt, and then leaving for several years. The black rat, so common seventy years ago, disappeared immediately after the introduction of the Norway species, which is a larger and much more powerful and sagacious animal. The country has gained nothing by the exchange.

... The common mouse was a native of the prairie, and no sooner was a house completed and occupied than the mice asserted their right to a place therein, and they held it, as no buildings then erected would exclude them. Now they are no more annoying here than elsewhere. §

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\* Gopher = plains pocket gopher.

† This claim is correct. The pocket gopher does not occur in the Fox River valley.

‡ Mushrat = muskrat.

¶ Small brown weasel = long-tailed weasel. The region's other weasel species, the least weasel, is too small to kill a chicken (see a footnote on page 302).

§ Baldwin probably had in mind the Old World house mouse (*Mus musculus*) as well as native mice in the genus *Peromyscus*. The house mouse commonly inhabits houses, but it is also abundant outdoors. *Peromyscus* species will leave the out-of-doors to live in buildings.

The long-tailed, or jumping mice, \* are found in the timber occasionally, but they are not numerous.

The short-tailed, or meadow mice, † are very numerous, and have increased with the settlements; they are often very destructive to orchards and shrubbery. Any tree or shrub left in the fall, with grass or other mulching about the root, is liable to be girdled by these rodents. This is prevented by removing everything down to the naked earth from the tree, and trampling heavy snows solid about it.

Bat. . . . We have only two or three closely allied varieties of the insect-eating kind . . . .<sup>14</sup>

At the beginning of his discussion of birds, Baldwin mused,

The prairie region could not boast of as full a list of the feathered tribes as a timbered country. In fact, the more common singing birds were at first almost entirely wanting, and one of the causes of discontent and homesickness was the absence of the well-remembered bird music, which made the groves and orchards of the older States vocal with song. This was more marked away from the timber, but even along the edge of the timber, where the first settlements were made, it needed groves, orchards, and gardens, and especially the fruits they bore, to make an acceptable home for the birds of song. The constant roar of the prairie cock, the distant whoop of the crane, the bittern's solitary note, and the yelping of the prairie wolf, was to a homesick ear a poor exchange for the cheerful song of the robin, the thrush, the cat bird, and the oriole of the orchards, and the vireos and warblers of the groves.<sup>‡ 14</sup>

The following is from Baldwin's 10-page discourse about the county's birdlife:

The robin was not generally seen here for several years after settlements commenced. At length a solitary pair might be seen in the timber, but the orchard and garden, their favorite home, did not exist, but when they did, the robin

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\* Long-tailed mouse or jumping mouse = meadow jumping mouse.

† Short-tailed mouse or meadow mouse = vole, of which two species are common. The meadow vole is particularly noted for its habit of feeding on the tender bark of young trees. The other common species of vole in Illinois is the prairie vole.

‡ Several writers remarked about the paucity of familiar songbirds in undeveloped sections of Illinois. For instance Thomas McKenney, descending the Mississippi River in the summer of 1827, came to "the line where the civilized and savage limits meet" at Keokuk: "And here, too, we began to hear the lowing of cattle, and to see the half-tamed horses and hogs, and to be charmed with the singing of birds."<sup>199</sup> Ornithologist J.A. Allen noted the lack of many familiar birds in the prairie wilds of Iowa in August of 1867. He characterized the prairie region as lacking the American robin, eastern bluebird, barn swallow, common crow, chipping sparrow, song sparrow, and "other sparrows." Allen predicted that the bird fauna would change as virgin tracts are "converted to cultivated farms, with orchards, clumps of sheltering trees, and wind-breaking hedges."<sup>8</sup>

quickly occupied them in plentiful numbers. The robin is so close a companion of civilized man, and so nearly connected with the rural population and all the recollections of childhood, that, during its absence for the first few years of pioneer life, it was sadly missed, and its advent greeted with sincere satisfaction. \*  
... It is true, the robin is fond of cherries and small fruits, but it is better to plant an extra tree or two for their use than to dispense with their pleasant company.

The cat bird, like the robin, came in gradually as the country improved. It is ... a familiar inhabitant of our thickets, groves, and hedgerows, frequently rearing its young in the garden or hedge, and becomes quite familiar; if kindly treated, will come to the steps and even into the house for the crumbs daily thrown for its use.

The brown thrush—thrasher—sandy mocking bird, † is a delightful singer. It came a little earlier than the robin, but at first only a few in number; they are now numerous.

... The bluebird is usually the first arrival of our migratory birds at the close of winter ....

... Titmice, or chickadees, are a hardy bird ..... We have several species. ‡

... The nuthatches are among the most nimble and active creepers ....

... The wrens are a numerous family, of which the house wren may be taken as a type. It is an impudent little creature, very pugnacious and apt to show bad temper, are particularly spiteful toward swallows and martins, sometimes taking possession of their nests. ... They are two or three species only with us; they are not numerous, but increasing.

... Warblers, are a family of small birds, embracing an immense number of species. They mostly inhabit the thick woods .... In a heavily timbered region they are found in immense numbers, but we have but a few species, of which the summer yellow bird ¶ is one.

... Of the tanagers we have a single species, the scarlet tanager, ... becoming quite common.

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\* Some Illinoisans took special note of the advent of robins. The 1866 gazetteer of Madison County says that robins "came less than thirty years ago." <sup>119</sup> W.C. Flagg of Madison County was more specific: "Robins came about 1842 or 43." <sup>59</sup>

† Brown thrush, thrasher, or sandy mocking bird = brown thrasher.

‡ The tufted titmouse and black-capped chickadee are common residents of La Salle County. Baldwin is unlikely to have noted the Carolina chickadee or boreal chickadee.

¶ Summer yellow bird = yellow warbler. (The other "yellow bird" is the American goldfinch.)

. . . Of swallows we have the barn swallow, building in barns or other out-buildings.

The cliff or eave swallow, unknown here till within the last twelve or fifteen years, naturally congregate in large numbers and build their ball-shaped nests on high overhanging cliffs, but recently have taken to building under the eaves of barns, nearly covering the sides of the building. They are flycatchers, and are said to use up the mosquitoes in the locality where they stop.

Bank swallow, sand marten, like the foregoing, are gregarious, and collect in the breeding season in large numbers, and make holes for their nests in some bank or river bluff.

The blue marten—marten \*—usually build in boxes prepared for them by those who enjoy their social, cheerful ways.

. . . Of the waxwings, we have the Carolina waxwing, cedarbird, cherrybird. † They are not residents here, but visit us occasionally. They are very destructive to cherries; a flock of them will clean a cherry-tree of its fruit in a few minutes, without saying by your leave.

The greenlets, or vireos, are like the warblers in their habits. Our open prairies tempt but few of them to stop with us.

. . . Of the shrikes we have the great northern shrike, or butcher bird ‡ . . . .

. . . We have several varieties of the sparrow. The chirping sparrow, or chipping bird ¶ of New England, is either not here, or varies from its eastern type, which it is said to do, and still more further west. The song sparrow, field sparrow, and other varieties, are plenty . . . . The snowbird, § the lark bunting, \*\* or white-winged blackbird, the indigo-bird, †† the cardinal or red-bird, not native here but kept in confinement for its song; towhee or chewink, a well known inhabitant of woodlands and thickets; . . . all are well known here . . . .

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\* Blue marten or marten = purple martin.

† Carolina waxwing, cedarbird, or cherrybird = cedar waxwing.

‡ Great northern shrike or butcher bird = northern shrike.

¶ Chirping sparrow or chipping bird = chipping sparrow.

§ Snowbird = dark-eyed junco.

\*\* *The Birds of Illinois* describes the lark bunting as a rare vagrant from the Great Plains. <sup>48</sup>

†† Indigo-bird = indigo bunting.

... bobolink . . . or rice-bird . . . , yellow headed blackbird, grackle, or crow blackbird, \* field, or meadow lark . . . . The above were here when the settlements commenced. The orchard oriole, . . . and the Baltimore oriole, golden robin, firebird, or hangnest † . . . ; both of them are fine singers . . . . They only come among us after the country has become well settled.

... The ravens were about as numerous as the crows before the settlement by the whites.

The raven is only distinguished from the crow by its much larger size and its croaking note. A homesick woman said every thing here was change; even the crows were so hoarse they could only croak.

The crows have increased with the settlements. They have a better reputation here than their eastern congeners, where they pull the young corn; here they are not accused of that as yet.

... Everyone knows the jay, with its blue dress . . . . . though he sometimes eats the early apple, (who would not?) and it is said he has a bad habit of disturbing the young of other birds, yet he may be slandered, and all have their failings; he could not well be spared from the fall and winter landscape, and he may well be tolerated about the cattle-yards on a winter morning, where he picks up occasionally a stray kernel of corn.

... Fly-catcher—Kingbird—Bee Martin. ‡—A pugnacious, quarrelsome bird . . . ; he is accused of eating bees, but, like all bad characters, is very likely to be accused unjustly. He is a habitual fly-catcher, and probably destroys a thousand noxious insects to one bee . . . .

Pewee, pewit, phoebe. ¶—A small bird . . . ; its song resembles the word "phebe" . . . . It builds under bridges, eaves of out-buildings or house-porch . . . .

... Goatsuckers.—The whippoorwill is the most noted of the family . . . .

... the night hawk flies by day . . . .

... Swifts, Chimney Swallows. §— . . . They build in chimneys.

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\* Grackle or crow blackbird = common grackle.

† Baltimore oriole, golden robin, firebird, or hangnest = northern oriole.

‡ Fly-catcher, kingbird, or bee martin = eastern kingbird.

¶ Pewee, pewit, or phoebe = eastern phoebe. Both the eastern phoebe and the eastern wood-pewee were formerly known as pewees.

§ Swift or chimney swallow = chimney swift.

... Hummingbirds.— ... The ruby-throated hummingbird is the most common in this latitude ....

... The belted kingfisher is found plentiful along our streams. ... They burrow in the banks of streams, where they rear their young.

Family Cuculidae, Cuckoo—The yellow-billed cuckoo is the only one with us. It is ... a shy and solitary bird, yet frequenting orchards and thickets in the vicinity of dwellings ....

... We have the red-headed woodpecker .... The golden-winged woodpecker, highholder, flicker, or yellow hammer, \* is also common. There are several other varieties found in the timber, and they are all useful.

... There is a variety called sphyrapicus, or sap-sucker † .... They make a horizontal row of round holes sometimes entirely around the tree, repeating the process several times, so as to remove all the inner bark, and girdle the tree. They prey mostly upon evergreens, doing great injury.

... The little screech owl ... is quite common. ... The long-eared owl ‡ ... is the only variety that breeds here except the above. The great gray owl ¶ and the snowy or white owl ... are natives of the boreal regions, but travel south during the winter and are frequently seen at that season.

... The red-tailed buzzard, or hen hawk, § is quite common and well known.

The sharp-shinned hawk is of medium size, of great courage, and very active. Will pick up a chicken in presence of the mistress of the poultry yard, and do it so adroitly as scarcely to be noticed.

The rusty crowned falcon, sparrow hawk, \*\* is one of the smallest, and preys upon small birds. This, with the cooper, or chicken, hawk, †† includes about all that are now common in this locality.

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\* Golden-winged woodpecker, highholder, flicker, or yellow hammer = northern flicker.

† Sphyrapicus or sap-sucker = yellow-bellied sapsucker.

‡ Long-eared owl = great horned owl—not the species now known as the long-eared owl.

¶ Bohlen listed the great gray owl as a “hypothetical” species in Illinois, <sup>48</sup> primarily on the basis of early reports from the northern part of the state by Kennicott <sup>171</sup> and Nelson. <sup>208</sup>

§ Red-tailed buzzard or hen hawk = red-tailed hawk.

\*\* Rusty crowned falcon or sparrow hawk = kestrel.

†† Cooper hawk or chicken hawk = Cooper’s hawk.



A medium sized, reddish colored hawk, called prairie hawk, \* were very numerous at an early day. They were constantly on the wing, hovering near the ground, and living on mice and insects mostly. They have now entirely disappeared.

Osprey, fish hawk.—Are quite common along our principal streams, subsisting exclusively on fish.

Bald eagle.—This emblem of the Republic lives mostly on fish, and is a piratical parasite on the osprey.

. . . Mankind makes indiscriminate warfare on the hawk family, for the reason that they sometimes take a chicken, but they destroy immense numbers of insects, mice, moles, rabbits, and reptiles, and with few exceptions are our benefactors.

Family Cathartidae, Vultures.—The well-known turkey buzzard † is the only specimen of this family. It is . . . useful as a scavenger.

. . . The wild pigeon ‡ are only visitors here, their breeding places are in the dense forest. They come and go as food serves; like all wild birds and mammals, they congregate where food is most plentiful and most to their taste.

The turtle-dove, or mourning dove, are numerous . . . .

. . . The numerous varieties of the tame pigeon ¶ claimed to have descended from some of the wild varieties . . . .

. . . The wild turkey was found here by the first settlers, and still holds its own, or is probably increasing, owing to the better protection furnished by the increase in timber.

. . . The pinnated grouse, or prairie hen, § was once very numerous, congregating in flocks in the fall to the number of two or three thousand, and when the flock rose on the wing the noise resembled distant thunder. They were shot and taken in traps in any amount wanted. The attempt to protect these birds by game laws has resulted in their rapid extinction; hunting is prohibited till the chicks are nearly grown, consequently the birds are tame, and with trained

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\* Prairie hawk = prairie falcon.

† Turkey buzzard = turkey vulture.

‡ Wild pigeon = passenger pigeon.

¶ Tame pigeon = rock dove.

§ Pinnated grouse or prairie hen = greater prairie-chicken.

dogs, when a covey is started, the last bird is killed, the slaughter is literally murderous.

The ruffed grouse, or partridge of New England, are not common here, a stray one is occasionally seen, and the peculiar drumming sound for which this bird is noted, is heard from the thick timber but seldom.

Quail—Partridge of Virginia, Bob White.—These pretty and useful birds have largely decreased since the settlement of the country. The practice of every boy that can carry a gun for mere sport shooting the little innocents should be discountenanced. . . . Is man a beast of prey? he is—but should he be?

Family Charadriidae, Plover.— . . . The prairie was formerly the favorite haunt of a number of species, but they now give us but a passing call as they go and return from the breeding grounds farther north.

. . . American woodcock, a favorite bird for sportsmen, plenty in some localities. Long-billed curlew, once numerous on the prairie, called prairie snipe, now gone to a newer and wilder region. The sandpiper, godarts, \* tattlers, † are sometimes seen; these last are all shore birds and waders.

. . . The blue heron ‡ is common. The white heron ¶ is quite numerous at certain seasons . . . .

. . . Bittern, Indian Hen, Stake Driver, Pumper. §—Once numerous, are still found about the ponds of water on the prairie.

. . . Blue bittern. \*\*—This bird has been injured by a vulgar name †† . . . .

. . . The brown, or sand-hill crane . . . . . They feed mostly on grains and insects, frequenting the high and dry prairie, but building their nests on the margin of ponds or streams. . . . They are a social, playful bird, collecting in groups on the prairie, where they were frequently seen dancing cotillions. . . . They were once numerous here, and a conspicuous object on the prairie, and their shrill whoop one of the frequent and conspicuous sounds that greeted the early pioneer. But they seldom stop here now; their scream is heard high

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\* "Godarts" appears to be the result of a typographer misreading "godwits."

† Tattler = lesser yellowlegs and greater yellowlegs.

‡ Blue heron = great blue heron.

¶ White heron = common egret.

§ Bittern, Indian Hen, Stake Driver, or Pumper = American bittern.

\*\* Blue bittern = green-backed heron.

†† One name for the green-backed heron refers to its habit of probing dung in search of food.

in air, in spring and fall, as they go and return to and from their breeding places in the far North, away from civilization.

. . . Rails, Coots, etc. — . . . from the absence here of their favorite haunts, they are but seldom seen.

. . . The Canada, or wild goose, brant \* and ducks, once to some extent reared their broods and summered here, but with the exception of a few species of ducks, they all pass by for their summer haunts in a newer region, but they are plentiful in spring and fall as a supply of food tempts them to tarry. Gulls, pelicans, loons, swans, and other water fowl, are seen, some of them frequently in large flocks, along the Illinois river and other large streams, as occasional visitors, but none of them make this locality their home. <sup>14</sup>

Both reptiles and amphibians are treated under the heading of REPTILES:

The reptiles common to this latitude are not plenty, notwithstanding the wide circulation of the Illinois snake stories.

Turtles.—The soft turtle <sup>†</sup> is common about the large streams. The snapping turtle and speckled turtle <sup>‡</sup> are about all in that line. A few small lizards are seen, but very rare. <sup>¶</sup>

Snakes.—Were once numerous but are fast disappearing. The yellow-banded rattlesnake, "*Crotalus durissus*," <sup>§</sup> are occasionally met with, but have so far diminished as to cease to be a terror to the timid.

The prairie rattlesnake, Massasauger, "*Crotalophous tergeminus*," <sup>\*\*</sup> once so numerous, are only occasionally found. . . . The copper head . . . is not found here.

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\* In the 1800s and early 1900s, the snow goose and greater white-fronted goose were often called brant. The name "goose" often was reserved specifically for the Canada goose. Current ornithological nomenclature assigns the name "brant" to a small member of the goose family, *Branta bernicla*, which is rarely seen in Illinois.

<sup>†</sup> Soft turtle = softshell turtle.

<sup>‡</sup> "Speckled turtle" is an alternative name for Blanding's turtle, but perhaps Mr. Baldwin applied the name to some more common species.

<sup>¶</sup> In addition to true lizards and skinks, salamanders were often called lizards during the 19th century.

<sup>§</sup> Yellow-banded rattlesnake, *Crotalus durissus* = timber rattlesnake.

<sup>\*\*</sup> Prairie rattlesnake or Massasauger, *Crotalophous tergeminus* = eastern massasauga.

*The Mascoutens, the people of the prairies, . . . occupied the region roamed over by the buffalo at the head of, and over the prairies that border, our historic river, the "Pestecuoy" . . . . The name of the river, variously spelled by the French traders, in all Algonquin tongues, was that of the great bison . . . .* <sup>291</sup>

Of harmless snakes, we have the water snake, the blowing viper or sissing adder, \* the bull snake, a very large and beautiful reptile, black snake, † striped snake, ‡ and green snake. These are not only harmless, but useful. They destroy immense numbers of field mice and other vermin. One good sized bull snake is worth more than a dozen cats to destroy rats and mice, and yet nearly every one kills a snake, and in doing so the farmer kills his best friends. The immense increase of the field mice, "Arvicola riparia," ¶ so destructive to young trees, is mostly due to this senseless war on the snakes. . . . There is room enough in the world for these harmless reptiles and us too, and by relentlessly destroying them we break the harmony of nature's balance and do irretrievable injury. The dangerous poisonous reptiles should be destroyed, but the harmless ones have a right to protection, and our best interest demands that a senseless superstition should no longer mar the wisdom of nature's laws.

Batrachia. §—The warted toad is quite common. The tree frog \*\* may be heard from his perch whenever the increasing moisture in the atmosphere calls forth his thankful song.

The bull frog is not common, and his deep bass is missed from the summer evening concerts of animated life.

The green frog †† is found where the moisture and other surroundings suit his taste, but less abundant than in the Eastern States.

The peeping frog †† is found where water exists for any length of time, and it is singular how soon a pond formed on dry ground will develop this noisy little batrachian. <sup>14</sup>

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\* Blowing viper or sissing adder = hognose snake.

† The common kingsnake, rat snake, and racer have been called black snakes.

‡ Striped snake = garter snake.

¶ Field mouse, *Arvicola riparia* = meadow vole.

§ Batrachia are tailless amphibians.

\*\* Gray treefrogs and the western chorus frog have been called tree frogs.

†† Baldwin's "green frog" might include leopard frogs and the pickerel frog in addition to the green frog.

‡‡ Peeping frog = spring peeper.

## 1877: *The Past and Present of La Salle County, Illinois*

### The Winter of the Deep Snow:

During 1830 and 1831 the great snow fell. It began on the night of December 29th, 1830, and reached the depth of two and one half feet. Just one week from that time, (Jan. 5th,) another storm occurred, the fall of which was as deep as the former. Both of these settled to a general depth of five feet on the prairie. By successive thawings and freezings, a crust of several inches in thickness was formed, over which the prairie wolves would run the famished deer. . . . In the spring the snow went off quite rapidly, producing one of the greatest floods ever known on the river. \* <sup>114</sup>

### 1877: "History of Lake County"

Elijah Haines authored the 1852 *Historical and Statistical Sketches, of Lake County* (page 143). When he prepared a new "History of Lake County," Mr. Haines needed to cover another quarter century of happenings—but his depictions of the landscape are much the same in the two volumes. The following quotations consist of updated descriptions of the Fox River valley that do not appear in the 1852 history. First is the Township of Ela:

The groves of this town are Long Grove, <sup>†</sup> Deer Grove <sup>‡</sup> and Russell's Grove. <sup>¶</sup>

. . . There is a beautiful lake in the western part of this town, called Lake Zurich, covering about 500 acres . . . . This lake became known at first as Cedar Lake, from the large number of cedar trees around its banks. <sup>117</sup>

### Township of Grant:

The Pistakee Lakes, so called, . . . are a chain of lakes in the western part of the county, which are attracting much attention of late as a place of resort for hunting and fishing, especially the locality within this township. These lakes are three in number. The first is commonly called Grass Lake, and the second, Fox Lake. <sup>§</sup>

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\* This is the Illinois River.

<sup>†</sup> The west end of Long Grove was about three miles southeast of Lake Zurich, about a mile beyond the limits of the Fox River Area.

<sup>‡</sup> Deer Grove was about three miles south of Lake Zurich, at the very edge of the Fox River Area. According to the 1902 history of Lake County, "Deer Grove was a favorite resort for the fleet-footed animal." <sup>26</sup>

<sup>¶</sup> Russell's Grove was about three miles east of Lake Zurich, about a mile east of the Fox River-Des Plaines River divide.

<sup>§</sup> The third is Pistakee Lake.

Although forty years have elapsed since the settlement of the country around these lakes was commenced, yet that portion in the immediate vicinity presents nearly as wild an appearance to-day as at the beginning. This results largely from the peculiar topography of the country. In some places the land is low and marshy. The shores of the lakes are irregular, interrupted by innumerable nooks and points, and within the lakes are several islands. <sup>117</sup>

#### Township of Grant:

Before the settlement of the country, this was a place of general resort for the Pottawattomie tribe of Indians. This was within their country. Here were their villages and most extensive cornfields. The lakes were filled with fish; the waters were covered with wild fowl, and the country around abounded in game. \*

... This was, at that day, the great corn country of this tribe, especially that portion lying in and about the northern part of this township.

The Lake and McHenry plank road, † during the days of its existence, passed through the southeastern part of this township, on Section 36. <sup>117</sup>

The growing population of the Fox valley required mills to saw lumber and to grind grain. The first mill dam in the Fox valley of Lake County was put on Sequoit creek in Antioch during 1839. ‡ A sawmill was built on Squaw Creek in western Avon Township about 1850, and it "was in successful operation for many years." In Cuba Township a sawmill was installed on Flint Creek near its junction with the Fox River, but "it was abandoned many years ago." <sup>117</sup>

In addition to these and possibly other mills in the Fox valley, others were built in the Des Plaines valley and in the strip of land draining directly into Lake Michigan. These mills required an adequate and dependable supply of water power . . .

But, strange as it may appear, out of the twelve water-mills that have been erected in the county from first to last, nearly all have disappeared. The evaporation and other causes following the improvement of the country so reduced the supply of water that the mills could not be operated thereby, hence one by one they have become abandoned. <sup>117</sup>

Although changes in hydrology have been blamed for the demise of water mills, other factors were sometimes responsible. Because Lake Zurich is on the watershed divide between the Fox River and the Des Plaines River, it has no potential for developing water power.

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\* Grant Township's natural bounty still existed in 1912, according to one report: "Fish abound in the waters and wild fowl is plentiful." <sup>127</sup>

† This right-of-way is now Belvidere Road.

‡ This dam powered a sawmill. A steam-powered grist mill was added in 1856. <sup>326</sup>

A steam-powered sawmill was installed at Lake Zurich as early as 1843 or '44—"the first steam engine in the county applied to any kind of machinery." A grist mill was later added. But in 1877 Elijah Haines reported, "both have long since disappeared." \* <sup>117</sup>

### 1877: "Sea and River Fishing"

The June 21, 1877, issue of *Forest and Stream* carries the following notice in the "Sea and River Fishing" column:

Illinois.—Our correspondent "Theo." of Huntley, Illinois, sends us an account of three days' fishing in Fox Lake about the first of June, which yielded a goodly number of pickerel and a large amount of sport. This lake also contains pike, <sup>†</sup> and bass of three varieties. He says:

"Fox Lake is one of a small chain of lakes situated on the Fox River, in McHenry and Lake Cos., Ills.; is 3½ or 4 miles long ½ to 1½ miles wide, and one of the finest resorts for the lover of the rod and gun to be found in the State. Two fine club houses are already built, and there will be more as soon as the place and its advantages are more widely known.

The lakes in the fall are full of wild rice, and wild ducks are abundant." <sup>124</sup>

### 1877: *The Sportsman's Gazetteer and General Guide*

Six pages of Charles Hallock's *Sportsman's Gazetteer* are devoted to listings for Illinois. The entry for Cook County describes several lakes in the Fox River drainage of Lake County that are within easy reach of Palatine:

*Palatine.* Pinnated and ruffed grouse, quail, partridges, <sup>‡</sup> many varieties of ducks, snipe, plover, wild pigeons. Lakes Zurich, Diamond, Grass, Honey, and Bangs, <sup>¶</sup> are in the vicinity, and afford excellent fishing. Of these, Lake Zurich

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\* In addition to the steam-powered mill, a windmill was grinding 15 to 20 bushels of grain per hour at Lake Zurich in the early 1850s. <sup>127</sup>

<sup>†</sup> According to the most common usage of the time, Theo's "pickerel" probably are northern pike, and his "pike" probably are walleye.

<sup>‡</sup> The region had three gallinaceous birds: the greater prairie-chicken, ruffed grouse, and northern bobwhite. Prairie-chickens have been called pinnated grouse. Bobwhites have been referred to as quail as well as partridges. Ruffed grouse have also been called partridges.

<sup>¶</sup> Lake Zurich, Bangs Lake, Grassy Lake, and Honey Lake are in the Fox River drainage in the southwest corner of Lake County. When Hallock listed Grass Lake, he was referring to Grassy Lake, which is next to Honey Lake—not Grass Lake on the Fox River in the northwest corner of Lake County. Diamond Lake is a few miles east of the Fox River valley in the drainage of the Des Plaines.

may be especially mentioned. The village of the same name is on its shores, and has two good hotels for summer guests. The lake is belted all around with groves of timber, among the openings of which grass-plats slope down to the pebbled beach. Its waters abound with fish of various kinds, the principal of which are pickerel and black bass. Reached via the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad. Excellent hotels. <sup>125</sup>

#### Kane County:

*Batavia.* The Fox River, from the Wisconsin line to its junction with Illinois River at Ottawa, a distance of about one hundred miles, abounds with fish common to the tributaries of the Mississippi, and probably second to none in numbers, variety and size. At the head of the river are a number of lakes abounding in mascalonge, black, silver, rock and river bass, yellow perch, gar, pickerel, wall-eyed pike, red horse, bull heads, silver eels, and four varieties of dace. \*

... *Geneva* is built on terraces on both sides of Fox river, which is well stocked with black bass, pickerel, pike, sun, and other fish.

... The surrounding country is rolling, and is about equally divided between prairie and timber. The county affords fine shooting in season. Pinnated grouse, quail, woodcock, partridge, and other game abound. *Nelson's Lake*, *Johnson's Mound*, and *Harrington's Island* <sup>†</sup> are popular resorts, one to seven miles from the village. <sup>125</sup>

#### Lake County:

*Fox Lake.* Fine hunting in the neighborhood. The duck shooting is excellent. <sup>125</sup>

#### McHenry County:

*Cary Station* is one mile from Fox River, in which is excellent fishing. See *Batavia*, Kane County. Reached via the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad, thirty-eight miles from Chicago. There is a fine hotel, where sportsmen will receive every attention.

*Crystal Lake.* The lake affords good black and rock bass, pickerel and perch fishing.

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\* This inventory of fishes must have been derived from an article that appeared in *Forest and Stream* two years earlier (page 192).

<sup>†</sup> Nelson Lake and Johnson's Mound are several miles southwest of Geneva. Herrington's Island is in downtown Geneva.



... *Harvard*. The Twin Lakes \* are twenty miles distant; a line of stages runs to Geneva, which see.

... *McHenry* is sixty-six miles from Chicago, on the banks of Fox River. It has three hotels. Five miles distant, a chain of small lakes extends eastward some thirty miles. These lakes are full of fish, and along their shores game is found in abundance.

... *Richmond* is on the banks of Neipersink River. † The Twin Lakes are three miles from the station, and furnish excellent fishing. Game abounds in the vicinity.

... *Ridgefield*. Excellent shooting and angling in the vicinity. <sup>125</sup>

### 1878: "A Catalogue of the Fishes of Illinois"

In his enumeration of the state's ichthyofauna, Professor David S. Jordan cited several species from the Fox River and from Crystal Lake. He provided habitat information for one species. The central mudminnow, whose natural habitat includes marshes and small streams, was showing its adaptability: "Common in ditches near Crystal L., McHenry County." <sup>163</sup>

### 1878: *The Past and Present of Kane County, Illinois*

*The Past and Present* introduces Kane County by portraying its natural resources:

Its chief source of wealth . . . is its rich prairie soil, drained by the beautiful Fox River, . . . and by several smaller streams and tributaries . . . . Something less than one-fourth of its area is covered with woodland; and its timber, when the country was new, was of a superior quality, including black walnut, hickory and the many varieties of oak, which are still common in its groves. Its geological deposits which appear to the view are limestone. All exposures of rock are, with one slight exception, along the banks of the river. At any point along the valley, a removal of a few feet of soil discloses this rock . . . . . Peat is extensively ranged over portions of the surface of the northern townships, especially in Rutland and Hampshire . . . . Water is found in nearly every part of the county by sinking wells from ten to fifteen feet below the surface. <sup>329</sup>

*The Past and Present* chronicles the advent of whites into the Fox River valley, "beginning with the Hoosiers, who came into the country as early as 1833, following closely upon the

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\* The Twin Lakes are in the Fox River valley of McHenry County, Illinois, and Kenosha County, Wisconsin. Elizabeth Lake extends across the state line, and Marie Lake lies entirely in Wisconsin.

† Neipersink River = Nippersink Creek.

rear guard of Scott's army upon the settlement of the Sauk, or, as it is commonly known, the Blackhawk war." \*

They located on the southern side of groves and in sunny exposures beside streams and springs . . . .

. . . The Alexanders came to Geneva from Southern Illinois, about 1835 . . . .  
. . . Haight built his house near the large spring <sup>†</sup> just opposite the old Webster House that was in Geneva. . . . At Dundee, around its sheltering mounds so picturesque and beautiful, and beside its clear, unfailing springs, Rice and Dewees squatted and built the Spring Mills, supplied with power by the springs which flow from the mounds . . . .

. . . The Ashbaughs had a huge Hoosier breaking plow, with which, and a team of eight yoke of oxen, they broke up prairie in nearly every town in the northern part of the county. . . . John R. Tucker bought a large tract of land in the northern part of Campton . . . . On the old Tucker homestead can be viewed one of the rarest landscapes in this region.

Just south of the house, as the road rises to the summit toward St. Charles, the beholder stands in the center of a magnificent sweep of prairie and timber. To the west and southwest stretches a natural basin of prairie, the horizon of which is bounded by the wooded slopes in the southern part of the town. . . . Eastward are the woods on the river . . . . . Southward, the view is closed in by the grove of noble old oaks, a portion of the original forest which has been left standing, thanks to the discovery of coal and its general use for fuel.

. . . The first ripple of the incoming tide of Eastern immigration . . . showed itself in 1834 in Kane County, while Waubansie, the war chief of the Pottowatomies, and his people yet held possession of the country.

. . . It was the discovery of a counterfeit \$10 bill . . . that took Allan Pinkerton from the cooper shop and started him on the road which has led to his world-wide fame. A stranger came into Dundee one summer afternoon in 1850, <sup>‡</sup> and Pinkerton . . . soon fell into familiar conversation with him. . . . The next day Pinkerton and the stranger took their way to the mounds that rear their beautiful rounded summits to the northwest of the village, and there upon the greensward,

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\* U.S. Army troops under the command of General Winfield Scott crossed the Fox River in Kane County during the Black Hawk War of 1832.

<sup>†</sup> One name for nascent Geneva was Big Spring. <sup>89</sup> The Geneva Historical Society's 50th Anniversary publication says, "This spring, which flows at the approximate rate of 15 gallons per minute, is located on the south side of State Street between River Lane and First Street." <sup>312</sup>

<sup>‡</sup> Allan Pinkerton established the Pinkerton Detective Agency and the U.S. Secret Service. The incident which started Pinkerton's detective career occurred in the 1840s, some years before the date given here.

beneath the umbrageous shade of the old oaks, the stranger laid before the canny Scot several packages of crisp \$10 notes . . . .

. . . In the . . . western part of Kaneville, \* there is dwelling a sturdy, thriving class of worthy citizens, known as Pennsylvania Dutch.

. . . They came in 1846 and afterward . . . . They hold their camp meetings alternately at Lone Grove and Pigeon Woods, and attend them *en masse*. †

. . . The German immigration, which began in the Northwest about 1836, with a single family, has become an irruption. . . . Nearly every sale of a farm in . . . the eastern portion of Kane County, is made to a German. The eastern portion of Dundee, Elgin, Geneva, Batavia ‡ and the Big Woods—or what was once that fine body of timber—are almost wholly occupied by this energetic, pushing, thriving race of Saxons. They have subdued the once famous Big Woods, and what, but twenty years ago, was one solid body of splendid oak, hickory and maple, is now finely cultivated farms, with scarcely a stump to be seen to tell the story of what was once there.

. . . Peter H. Johnson has one of the finest farms in Blackberry. § Johnson's Mound, the highest point of land in the county, is situated on the farm, and Mr. Johnson's dwelling is built on a commanding point on the side of it, and overlooks the country for miles around. It is a great summer resort for picnics and excursions. § . . . David Howard . . . was at work at that time (1844) building the stone flouring-mill on the west side of the river.

. . . Caleb A. Buckingham . . . kept the poll list at Geneva . . . . On the list are the names of Joshua E. Ambrose . . . and John N. Donals, . . . whose claim was just south of the Judge Lockwood homestead, and included 160 acres of the best timber in the Big Woods, which remained intact up to three or four years ago, when Mrs. Baird sold it to L.P. Barker, who has bought and cleared off more acres of solid timber, in that grove, than any other man. <sup>329</sup>

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\* Kaneville Township is on the west side of Kane County, west of Batavia.

† The camp meetings were for the Evangelical Association of North America. A remnant of Lone Grove is protected in Lone Grove Forest Preserve in Kaneville Township. The Pigeon Woods straddled the Fox-Kishwaukee River divide in Hampshire Township.

‡ The author was referring to the eastern part of Dundee, Elgin, Geneva, and Batavia Townships—rather than the towns.

§ Blackberry Township is in the south-central part of Kane County, west of Batavia.

§ Johnson's Mound is in Johnson's Mound Nature Preserve, part of Johnson's Mound Forest Preserve.

The chapter about Aurora Township describes the pursuits of John Peter Snyder, \* who moved to the Fox valley after erecting a sawmill at Naperville:

In the Fall of 1833, in company with his brother, . . . "Peter John," . . . he took up a claim on Blackberry Creek, † and built another saw-mill. . . . he and "Peter John" were located, in the Fall of 1834, on land now occupied by the North Aurora Manufacturing Company's Works, ‡ hammering away at still another saw-mill. ¶ When he arrived there in 1834, he says that the McCartys had commenced their improvements below. § . . . in a new country, the greatest benefit is conferred, not by the one who erects a school house or a church, but by the man who builds a mill. They precede all other improvements, and are the beacon-lights in the van of civilization. The dam across the river at North Aurora was also built by the Snyders.

The first mill was burned a number of years after its completion, and John Peter built another, which is still standing.

. . . Turning now to North Aurora, we find several small manufactories there which deserve brief mention. The grist-mill, a good wooden building, was commenced in 1862 . . . .

. . . Like Montgomery, North Aurora has excellent water power \*\* . . . .

. . . The geology of Aurora Township may well be mentioned . . . . . The huge granite boulders which abound throughout the prairie country . . . are occasionally seen in all parts of the township, being often formed of a conglomerate, but not unfrequently of pure granite. They are popularly called "hard heads." 329

In its review of the pioneer era, *The Past and Present of Kane County* states, "Fox River was no chain of stagnant mill ponds then, but clear as a New England brook meandering from its home in the mountains." The free-flowing Fox attracted Joseph McCarty, a millwright from New York who helped establish the white settlement of Aurora:

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\* This millwright's name is spelled Schneider in other history books.

† The mill was at the mouth of the creek, at Yorkville.

‡ The North Aurora Manufacturing Company's mill had four sets of millstones and could produce 100 barrels of flour a day "besides custom work." 35

¶ The *Commemorative Biographical and Historical Record of Kane County* notes that "much of the timber of the Big Woods was cut into lumber" at this mill. 35

§ Aurora was once known as McCarty's Mills. One early arrival recalled Joseph McCarty "digging granite boulders to form the first dam" at Aurora. 329

\*\* The North Aurora Sash, Door and Blind Manufacturing Company built a two-story water-powered mill in 1869. 35

. . . hearing of a good site for a mill up the Fox, McCarty hired a prospector . . . ; and following the course of the river they arrived, on the first day of April, 1834, at the Indian village occupied by Waubansie, chief of the Pottawattomies, and two or three hundred of this warriors, just north of the present site of the city of Aurora, on the west side of the river . . . . The banks of the river, which have long since been stripped of much of their sylvan glory, were then thickly wooded, and along the east side the native forest trees had attained a remarkable size in many places, and formed a continuous wood extending from the vicinity of the present city to Batavia. This forest, afterward known as the "Big Wood," the Indian village, and the whole of the land now occupied by the city of Aurora, had been included in a tract ten miles square, set apart by the United States Government as an Indian reservation, but had subsequently been purchased by treaty with Waubonsie and his tribe . . . . On approaching that part of the river bank opposite Stolp's Island, \* a landscape of unusual beauty was presented in their view. . . . The ripples dancing over the limestone bed were as clear as

"The bright waters of that upper sphere,"

while the tangled shrubs with which the margin of the island was covered, the stately and grand forests of oak which rose gloomily along the eastern bank, all contributed to form a delightful picture to the eye . . . .<sup>329</sup>

Joseph and Samuel McCarty built a mill dam on the river at Aurora. † The first lumber was sawed there in June of 1835. The Potawatomi were gone from the Fox River valley by the following year. The first grain was ground at McCarty's mill in February of 1837. Charles Hoyt arrived in the spring of 1841 and built a four-story grain mill with four sets of grindstones:

This, at the time, was the largest flouring mill on Fox River, and was a landmark all over the West. . . . Blackhawk Mill continued in successful operation, with scarcely a day's interruption, until . . . 1875, when the building was destroyed by fire.<sup>329</sup>

The river in downtown Aurora is divided by Stolp's Island into two channels. In the fall of 1836, the east channel was bridged, but . . .

. . . being a light wood structure it was swept away, by a freshet in the following Spring.

In the Spring of 1838, a subscription paper was circulated to obtain funds to rebuild the bridge. . . . This bridge was in turn swept away, and was again rebuilt across the east channel in 1843 . . . .

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\* Stolp's Island is in the Fox River in downtown Aurora.

† According to the *Commemorative Record* of Kane County, "The location was just suited to Mr. McCarty's mind, the river having a solid rock bottom favorable to dam building."<sup>35</sup>

... The year 1847 witnessed the greatest flood which has devastated the banks of Fox River since their first settlement. \* A sudden thaw late in the Winter broke up the ice while it was still thick, and Stolp's Island was completely submerged, while the saw-mill, Eagle Mills, Moore & Howe's wagon factory and the sash factory of Reader & Merrill were all more or less damaged. † The total loss was estimated at \$100,000. <sup>329</sup>

The chapter about Aurora concludes, "Its water power is extensive and unailing; it possesses excellent quarries of building stone, in positions easily accessible; and in general its natural advantages are unsurpassed." <sup>329</sup>

The next chapter addresses Batavia Township:

Col. Joseph Lyon . . . settled in Batavia early in 1834 . . . . . Capt. C.B. Dodson . . . settled . . . a mile and a half south of Batavia village, in June, 1834. . . . No sooner had Capt. Dodson settled than he commenced building the first saw-mill in the county, at the mouth of Mill Creek . . . .

. . . during the same year the settlement was increased by the arrival of . . . Titus Howe . . . . . Howe was the first to utilize the water power of the town, by building a dam and a frame for a saw-mill at the lower end of the island in 1835, but the dam was carried away in a flood the following Spring. The property was purchased by Van Nortwick, Barker, House & Co., and the saw-mill removed and operated by them further up the stream.

. . . A bridge was constructed in 1837 across the Fox River . . . ; and in 1843, a second one, further up the stream. In 1854, the bridge from the East Side to the island was built, of the stone for which Batavia is so justly noted. In 1857, owing to some deficiency in its structure, a portion of it was carried away by a freshet, but it was immediately rebuilt by the town ‡ . . . . . Preparations are now being made to erect a similar one from the island to the west bank . . . .

. . . After purchasing the water power of Titus Howe, and removing the saw-mill, Van Nortwick, Barker, House & Co. built, near the site of the Challenge Mills, in 1837, the *Batavia Mills* . . . . . An extensive business was carried on until 1872, when the establishment burned down . . . . It contained three run of stones, and a capacity of 500 barrels of flour per week.

. . . In 1844, John Van Nortwick erected a saw-mill upon the island. A planing-mill was attached to it at a later date . . . .

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\* The great Fox River flood was in 1849, not 1847.

† The sawmill survived the 1849 flood, but 27 years later "it was swept away by a freshet and broken in pieces by the angry flood." <sup>35</sup>

‡ "The people here had the usual experience with their first bridges, that was, being washed away. This was a common experience all over the country." <sup>35</sup>

*Some cartographers spelled it, as applied to the river, Pesticoui, and Tonty spelled it Pestegonky . . . .*<sup>287</sup>

. . . The Island Mills, named from location on the southern part of the business section of the island, were put up as flouring-mills, in 1859 . . . .<sup>329</sup>

In Geneva Township, "The absence of wood and water deterred, for several years, settlers from locating . . . east and west of the cluster of pioneers along the river":

Particularly on the West Side, where a small prairie stretched away into the present Township of Blackberry, was this absence of woodland calculated to discourage Eastern men; but before the close of the year 1839 the real value of this section was seen to be superior, in many respects, to any other in the township, and the land had been generally taken up. Its value has greatly increased since then, not merely from its being settled and cultivated, but from the disappearance of many of the sloughs, which formerly rendered large tracts along Mill Creek worthless. This creek was reported by the Government Surveyors as a navigable stream for steamers—a statement too prodigiously absurd to require comment . . . .

. . . In these early times there were few routes of travel . . . .

. . . The most noted and doubtless the only one of these trails through Geneva extended from Chicago westward to Geneva village, past the present site of the cheese factory, south of the big spring, near Haight's old house, and thence on across the township to Galena. This trail was traveled by the Herringtons, in 1835, and by the earlier settlers, and a part of it at least was at a later date surveyed and regularly laid out, thus becoming the permanent thoroughfare.

. . . No road in Northern Illinois traverses a more beautiful country . . . .<sup>329</sup>

Daniel Haight was the first white resident of Geneva, arriving in 1833:

The early settlers always selected a position near some good spring as a site for building, and Haight's shanty of unhewn poles or small logs just west of where the cheese factory now stands, near one long distinguished from others in the vicinity as the "Big Springs."

. . . Nothing could surpass the river and its wild scenery then. . . . Hour after hour . . . Pottawattomie fishermen might be seen in his light canoe, erect as the spear . . . which he posed in his hand . . . . . Ten, fifteen, or even twenty feet are no security from his keen eye and unerring aim, and monsters which are never drawn from that river in the present degenerate days were then secured daily. . . . the old settlers say that it was not unusual to obtain, in Fox River, fish weighing sixty or seventy pounds.

. . . There were several arrivals in 1838 . . . .

... About the same time, the first bridge was constructed at Herrington's Ford, \* ... but was swept away before completion. Several built since then have met the same fate, and one, erected in 1857, ... was removed to make way for the elegant iron structure ... built in the Winter of 1868-69 .... The first dam was built early in 1837, and was immediately followed by a saw-mill, on the East Side .... In 1844, Howard Brothers built the first grist-mill, upon the opposite bank.

... The flouring-mills of Geneva form the most important business interest of the village. Three companies are in successful operation .... Half of the ... mill owned by Bennett Brothers & Coe was erected as a paper mill by Alexander & German in about 1846. ... An addition of equal size was made of brick on the north side of the original part in 1868, and in its furnishings is considered the best flouring establishment on Fox River. It contains nine sets of stone and a capacity for manufacturing one hundred barrels of flour per day. † 329

In St. Charles Township during the early 1830s, "the borders of Ferson's Creek were entirely covered by a thick growth of blue beech, ‡ and in this wood the Indians were encamped." Elijah Garton and John Laughlin arrived at the future site of St. Charles in 1834:

Wolves carried off the sheep, howled beneath the cabin windows, and were shot within twenty feet of the doors. Mr. Laughlin states that during the year after their arrival one of Mr. Garton's cattle died, was dragged forth upon the prairie, and seven wolves successively shot while devouring the carcass. Fifty deer were frequently seen in a single herd, and the same informant states that he shot them upon the Garton farm in numbers too great to present to the skeptical eye of the modern reader.

... The land upon that side ¶ along the timber was generally taken up in 1834. ... Much of the prairie which is now arable and contains some of the most valuable land in the country then lay throughout a large part of the year submerged beneath the waves .... During the year 1835, settlers and land speculators poured into the township in swarms, and by the close of the year 1837, we consider it safe to state that there was not an acre of land worth taking, in St. Charles, unclaimed.

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\* Geneva was known as Herrington's Ford.

† The Geneva Historical Society's 50th Anniversary publication has a good review of Geneva's mills. 312

‡ Blue beech = *Carpinus caroliniana* (American hornbeam or musclewood).

¶ Land east of the Fox River was the most popular choice among early white immigrants to St. Charles Township.



... The region is peculiarly interesting to an admirer of the beauties of nature. ... Several little islands darken the transparent stream, and one, the upper, is covered with a luxuriant growth of low reeds and willows; a natural but thin covering of trees softens the rude angles in the hills, from whose rocks two noisy brooks, one above and the other below the Elmore farm, leap from successive terraces, forming sparkling cascades, on their way to the river; and the residences in the vicinity—all of stone quarried from the ledges which form their adamantine foundation—present ... a view as pleasing, in all its outlines, as any which will be found in a journey through the country.

... The earliest saw-mill outside of the city limits was erected about 1845, by Lewis Norton, on Norton Creek.

... The Spring Brook Factory was first built and operated in 1867 ...

... A company ... was formed in 1836, and laid the foundation for a new town. ... During the same season, the company built a dam across the river, and erected a saw-mill on the East Side, just above where the ruins of the carding mill now stand. The old building remained there a number of years, but was taken down about 1850.

... the first saw-mill ... was in operation in November, 1836.

... Abel Millington ... commenced, in the Spring of 1838, the erection of ... a grist-mill, upon the West Side ... The mill is now owned by R.J. Haines.

... The earlier settlers of the town crossed the river by means of a ferry; but in the Summer of 1837, ... a wooden structure was raised ... It was subsequently carried away, and several have since been built in the same place, one of which was put up about 1857, ... and was replaced ... by the elegant iron one which still spans the river.

... A.N. Locke built a carding-mill in 1837, which ... is now standing vacant, upon the East Side.

... In 1840, Read Ferson built a blacksmith shop on the East Side, which was converted, in the following year, into a paper-mill \* ... Paper is said to have been in it for some time by hand ... The East Side grist-mill was built about 1845 ...

... Malarious diseases yielded to the lowering of the beds of the river and water courses, constantly going on, thus increasing the rapidity of their currents; the

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\* The paper mill was powered by the Fox River. According to a descendant of one of the men who started this mill, "The Butler and Hunt mill, built on the Fox River at St. Charles, presumably started in 1840 was unquestionably the first erected within the State." <sup>150</sup>

cultivation of the soil, the thinning of the densest strips of timber, prairie fires, better water, and other causes . . . .

. . . Within the past Summer (1877), Martin Switzer has erected, upon the West Side, on the bank of a never-failing spring-brook, a stone cheese factory of vast dimensions . . . .<sup>329</sup>

Proceeding up the Fox River, "the last months of the year 1836 found cabins dotting the prairie from South Elgin to Dundee," and . . .

In the Fall of 1836, a dam was commenced . . . about eighty rods below the present one, at South Elgin . . . . During the Winter, the dam was finished, but was carried away the next Spring. It was well built, but a mistake was made in constructing it upon the sand instead of placing it on the rocks above. In the following year, therefore, a second one was . . . placed in the proper position. As a result it remained, and, in 1838, a saw-mill was built upon the East Side, and was soon in operation removing the forests in the neighborhood; and three frame dwellings soon took the place of log ones.

. . . About 1848, G.M. Woodbury proposed to . . . erect a flouring-mill . . . . The offer was accepted, and a stone mill, . . . three stories high, arose upon the East Side . . . . The privilege upon the opposite side was sold to H. Brown, and the agreement in regard to it was likewise fulfilled.

. . . Returning to South Elgin, we find a bridge constructed across the river at the point where Woodbury Mill stands, about 1850. A portion of it was subsequently carried away by a freshet, and repaired. . . . In 1852, a paper-mill was commenced . . . .

. . . About this time, \* the dairy business began to receive attention. Previously there were not over 800 cows in the entire township. Now there are at least 12,000. The country, which was every acre of it claimed at that time, produced only about 4,000 pounds of butter and 1,000 pounds of cheese per annum. Now there are 2,000,000 pounds of cheese, and 550,000 pounds of butter made annually in the same area. . . . The first butter factory in the West was the one at Elgin . . . . . The cheese factory at Udina was erected . . . in 1870 . . . . . The factory at South Elgin was opened in the Spring of 1878 . . . . . The factory possesses peculiar advantages from having three large springs near at hand, of unusual size and containing water at a very low temperature . . . .

. . . the West Side Flouring-mill, † has a cheese and butter-tub factory . . . which contains machinery operated by a shaft from the adjoining mill.<sup>329</sup>

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\* The time was about 1859.

† This mill "had four run of stone, a capacity of 100 barrels daily, and continued to provide power well into the twentieth century."<sup>6</sup>

The chapter about Elgin Township ends, "It is . . . well watered, but contains little waste land and is peculiarly adapted to the dairying business, which has been pursued by the inhabitants with such magnificent results."<sup>329</sup>

In the early spring of 1835 Hezekiah and James Gifford were newly arrived in Chicago from New York, intent on finding a new home in the West. After failing to find suitable land at Milwaukee, they were told how to find the upper reaches of the Fox River. After they had walked downstream for several miles, an Indian ferried them in a canoe to the west bank, where they stopped for the night.

Upon the earliest break of day, they were up and on the march. Creeks were waded and marshes crossed, yet still nothing but a wilderness spread out before them.

. . . Weakened by hunger and travel, they continued southward. Night again settled around them, . . . sleep disturbed by the howling of wild animals near their cold couch. Early in the day, they came to Nippersink Creek, \* in the present county of McHenry, and were obliged to wade the stream, waist-high . . . .<sup>† 329</sup>

The Giffords finally came across a family near the future site of Algonquin, where the Fox River flows from McHenry County into Kane County. After eating and sleeping and eating . . .

. . . they left the dwelling of their liberal host, and a few miles further brought them to the present site of the city of Elgin, where they were enchanted with the beauty of the scenery—the rapidity of the clear stream, the woodland on either bank, almost free from underbrush, and the fields as beautiful as if already waiting the harvest—and here they determined to locate.<sup>329</sup>

James Gifford founded the city of Elgin. With no mill to grind their grain, early residents had to haul grain to "Green's Mill (now Dayton),<sup>‡</sup> and a settlement near Joliet, where a set of mill stones had been attached to a saw-mill."<sup>329</sup>

A road was soon laid out to the east and south, crossing about 12 miles of open prairie to Meacham's Grove (now Bloomingdale). But "the road . . . was such that the wayfaring man might err therein unless diligent attention was given to the blazed trees through the woodland and the furrows across the prairie."<sup>329</sup>

Accordingly, several teams were attached to a fallen tree at Elgin, and the settlers, turning out *en masse*, drove them to a point half way between the two

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\* The waters of Nippersink Creek mix with the Fox River about six miles south of the Illinois-Wisconsin line.

† James Gifford's story is told in the first person on page 84.

‡ Green's Mill was on the Fox River a few miles above its mouth.

places, leaving a deep track the entire way, and were there met by a delegation from the grove with a similar path marker, and all were refreshed by an Independence dinner of corn cake, cold bacon and coffee. \* <sup>329</sup>

Returning to Elgin . . .

In 1836, the Indians left . . . .

. . . In 1837, Mr. W.C. Kimball came to the growing hamlet and set about developing its resources . . . . A dam was built across the river by Folsom Bean, a mill-race dug upon the West Side by Mr. Kimball and upon the east by Mr. Gifford, while the former put up a saw-mill and the latter quite a good grist-mill, which stood for years at the head of the race. Later, it was used for a slaughter-house <sup>†</sup> . . . .

. . . Elgin people . . . suffered great inconvenience . . . from the lack of a bridge. On one occasion, . . . two young ladies . . . were obliged to take off their shoes and stockings and wade the river . . . . . A rude wooden structure was accordingly raised in 1837, one of the abutments standing immediately in front of, and within two or three feet of, Healy's shop, so much has the channel of the stream been narrowed since that day. <sup>‡</sup> In 1849, the bridge was carried away by a freshet, and was replaced by a more substantial one of the same material, which remained until 1866, when it was removed for a handsome iron one.

. . . Mercantile enterprise was first displayed in Elgin by the appearance, in 1836, of a frame store . . . . . The dam . . . went out the following April, but was replaced by another during the Summer.

. . . *A Woolen Mill* was erected in 1844, five stories high . . . .

. . . *The Elgin Butter Company* . . . dates from 1870, and has made an aggregate of 144,000 pounds of butter and 190,000 pounds of cheese per annum. <sup>329</sup>

White migration to Dundee Township began in 1834 and quickly increased in 1835. Immigrants were met by the resident Potawatomi:

Prominent among the Pottawattomie Indians, who still lingered, in meager numbers, along the river, was a chief by the name of Nickoway, who, with his

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\* The job was done on the 4th of July 1836. The path approximated the current alignment of U.S. Route 20.

<sup>†</sup> Slaughterhouses were placed beside streams so that offal could be flushed away by flowing water.

<sup>‡</sup> This depiction must have edified readers in 1878 who knew the location of Healy's shop. The author was showing how much the downtown area had expanded by filling the river channel.

followers, inhabited a cluster of wigwams a little below where the brickyard now lies. This once powerful tribe had dwindled to an insignificant hamlet . . . .

. . . Mr. Jesse Oatman . . . relates a curious incident of a visit which he and several of the other settlers made to the Indian wigwams, shortly after his arrival. They found the families comfortably situated, for Indians, with four or five acres of land in cultivation, about eighty rods below the brickyard. There were six huts and perhaps twenty-five Indians. As the strangers entered the dwelling of the principal warrior, the mother of the family was engaged in plucking the feathers from a sandhill crane, which one of her relatives had shot. . . . She then poured a few beans into a kettle of water, doubled up the bird, . . . placed it upon the beans, to stew, and hung the kettle over the fire. This was the first Sunday dinner which Mr. Oatman saw prepared in Dundee . . . .

. . . About half a mile below the village of Dundee, one Davis attempted to build a dam at a very early day—hired a number of men to work for him, and partially dug a mill-race—but possessing no means sufficient to complete it, he suddenly left . . . .

. . . Dundee Village was laid out in 1836 . . . . . In the Spring of 1836, Thomas Deweese commenced the erection of the Spring Mills, which are still in successful operation. The motive power was obtained from several large springs upon the East Side, a much cheaper mill site than the river bank, as the power in that stream at this point is not good. The Spring Brook, however, tumbles down a height of forty feet, furnishing excellent facilities for moving an overshot wheel . . . .

. . . In 1838, Increase Bosworth opened a store . . . . The first bridge at Dundee was built in the Winter of the same year. It was a wood structure, and, having been carried off in a freshet, was replaced by one which was at length removed for the iron one which still spans the stream.

. . . In 1877, a steam grist-mill was built upon the East Side . . . .

. . . A mile northwest of Dundee lies the Village of Carpentersville. . . . The village was first settled in 1837 . . . . In the Spring of 1838, John Oatman & Sons and Thomas L. Shields built a mill-dam there, with the intention of conveying the power to Dundee, and about the same time erected a saw-mill and commenced converting the surrounding forests into lumber. Valuable black walnut logs were drawn there from Plum Grove, \* Cook County, and the patronage was equally extensive upon all sides.

. . . In 1844, a carding-mill and cloth-dressing establishment was started between Dundee and Carpentersville . . . .

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\* Plum Grove was east of Elgin along Salt Creek in southeastern Palatine Township.

. . . The grist-mill, still running upon the East Side, was erected about 1845 . . . .

The village was . . . laid out July 15, 1851; \* and about the same time, the first bridge was built . . . . It was replaced by an iron one in 1869. <sup>329</sup>

We turn attention to townships west of the river. First is Sugar Grove Township, west of Aurora at the south end of Kane County:

Its surface, though gently undulating, presents more of the features of the prairie than that of the adjoining township on the east, and its name, Sugar Grove, was given by the Indians, from a beautiful grove of sugar maples situated mainly in Section 9. The earliest settlers recollect seeing the remains of sugar camps, scars upon the trees, and sap troughs strewn upon the ground, at the time of their arrival in the country, and there is no doubt that the Pottawatomies had manufactured there, as late as 1833, the saccharine food . . . . The first settlement in the township was made by a party from Ohio and New York . . . .

. . . they . . . arrived in Sugar Grove on the 10th day of May, 1834 . . . . Taking up their abode in a vacated Indian wigwam, which stood in the edge of the grove, they commenced building a more convenient residence . . . .

. . . The land throughout this and the adjoining townships had not been surveyed by the Government at the time of its settlement, but was taken up by the pioneers, and staked out in farms of such shape as suited their convenience, the main consideration being that there should be a grove of good timber included within the limits. The beautiful and fertile *prairie* farms, which are now the most valuable in the country, were then considered almost worthless, and were the last to be claimed. <sup>329</sup>

Kaneville Township lies northwest of Sugar Grove Township, in the headwaters of the Rock Creek drainage system:

Kaneville, like Virgil, was one of the latest settled townships in the County. Several farms remained unsold as late as 1845, while at the public Government sale only forty acres of its unsurpassed prairie lands were disposed of. Yet Kaneville was partially populated years before. <sup>†</sup>

Job Isbell . . . settled in the Fall of 1835, . . . cut and stacked a quantity prairie hay . . . .

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\* This is the village of Carpentersville.

<sup>†</sup> The Fox River townships have always had the densest populations. The prairie townships—distant from the river—were occupied latest. The 1850 Census documented these demographics. Kane County's five river townships supported more than half the population of the county (a total of 16 townships). In Kendall County most of the populace lived in the four river townships. Two of the three most populous townships in McHenry County bordered the Fox River; Nippersink Creek flows through the third most densely peopled township in McHenry County. <sup>180</sup>

... It is peculiar circumstance, but one easily explained, that nearly all of the earlier settlers selected timber or rolling lands instead of prairie. They were Eastern men, and naturally prejudiced in favor of Eastern scenery; and then their distance from lumber markets made it essential that there should be some wood upon their tracts with which to build their first cabins and supply them with fuel. At that time, the magnificent timber with which the groves abounded was no minor inducement. Those who have only seen Northern Illinois is its present aspect will be inclined to regard this statement with astonishment, since scarcely a tree above mediocre size can be found in an entire grove; but then, entire forests of the choicest oak and black walnut towered for a hundred feet above the surrounding prairie.<sup>329</sup>

Rutland Township is the middle of three townships on Kane County's north border. About half of Rutland Township drains to the Fox River, and half to the Kishwaukee:

The surface of the country is uneven and rolling, with occasional high points or bluffs rising rather abruptly. It is well timbered, with oak mostly, and the soil of the higher lands produces all the root crops in abundance, while the more marshy lands are in demand for meadow and pasturage.

The first settlement in Rutland Township was made by E.R. Starks . . . . He . . . took up a claim in the Fall of 1835.

... Indians were numerous when Starks first located . . . .

... The railroads of the township are the Chicago & Pacific and the Galena Division of the Chicago & Northwestern. The last mentioned road was built through the township in 1852 . . . . . After the road had been graded, there came quite a freeze, on the breaking up of which a large hole "fell in" on the present site of Gilbert's Station, \* and in the graded work. It seemed to be without bottom, and the more they tried to fill it the less progress appeared to be made. Entire trees were dumped into it, and all kinds of rubbish poked into its capacious maw with little avail, until some of the more superstitiously inclined decided that, if it was not the bottomless pit itself, it must be the famed "Symmes' Hole." † Finally, after industriously employing the whole corps of workmen for several days upon it, they succeeded in filling it.<sup>329</sup>

Plato Township is south of Rutland Township and west of Elgin. Melting snow in Plato Township finds its way to the Fox River via Tyler Creek and Ferson Creek:

... the first settlement was made in Plato Township in the early part of 1835.

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\* Gilbert's Station = Gilberts.

† In the early part of the 19th century, John Symmes promoted the theory that the Earth is hollow and can be entered by a hole at each of the poles.

... Indians were plenty in the country at the time of the early settlement of the township. When Mr. John S. Lee came to the town, in 1835, there were large numbers, he informed us, in this section. ... The last of them were removed to their reservation, in 1836 . . . . <sup>329</sup>

Campton is the central township of Kane County. Its waters are conveyed to the Fox River by Ferson, Mill, and Blackberry Creeks. The first white man to claim land in Campton Township was John Beatty, in 1835:

When Mr. Beatty came to the township, he states that an Indian trail extended across it upon the south from Ohio Grove, \* thence east past Lilly Lake, across the Robert Garfield farm, thence through the lot now occupied by the cemetery to a point about a mile and a half east, where it branched, one fork bearing southward to Waubansie Town † and the other reaching the river a little south of St. Charles.

About 1838, a company from St. Charles . . . drove an ox team attached to a fallen tree to the settlement of Oregon on Rock River, thus marking a road the entire distance, a portion of which lay in Campton. ‡

Prairie breaking was an important industry in those days . . . . . Mr. Beatty broke extensive tracts in the Summer of 1836. His team consisted of six yokes of oxen, and the price charged was \$3.50 per acre. ¶ He states that he plowed the first furrow in the township.

... In the course of time, a plank road was laid from St. Charles to Canada Corners, § with the design of extending it to Sycamore, but as it did not promise to become a profitable enterprise, it was never completed \*\* . . . .

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\* Ohio Grove was along a branch of the Kishwaukee River near Sycamore in De Kalb County.

† Wabaunsee's town was at Aurora.

‡ This road has evolved into Illinois Route 64.

¶ In neighboring Kaneville Township a man charged \$25 to plow five acres of prairie, and he required the landowner to help by driving the team. The owner paid the prairie breaker by splitting 2,500 fence rails for him. <sup>329</sup> A British investigator provided the following estimates from southern Illinois: "In the bottoms where the timber is good, many trees will make four or five cuts without a limb; affording from 150 to 200 heavy rails. It is reckoned a good day's work for a man to cut down, log off, and split up such a tree into rails. From 100 to 150 rails among good timber, is a good day's work; among timber of an inferior quality of course so many cannot be made." <sup>212</sup>

§ Canada Corners was near Lily Lake.

\*\* Plank roads were constructed by laying wooden boards across wooden stringers. Judson Fiske Lee wrote a good historical review of the development of the region's plank road system. <sup>180</sup>

Kane County's *Commemorative Record* (1888) provides further details about the plank road west of St. Charles. The St. Charles and Sycamore Plank Road Company was formed in 1850. Grading



... A steam saw-mill was built near the old homestead of the Chaffees, for the purpose of sawing the plank for the road which passed there, but it was never used for any other purpose. Previous to its erection, Dr. John King had built, on Lilly Lake Creek, \* a mill which contained a single up-and-down saw, and was operated occasionally for several years, but, the power being insufficient, it never sawed a great amount of timber.

... Campton Township is well diversified between prairie and wood land, and contains but few tracts of the former which are not under excellent cultivation.<sup>329</sup>

Blackberry Township lies south of Campton Township in south-central Kane County:

The township is crossed from north to south by Blackberry Creek, which, with several small tributaries, are fringed with a thick growth of oak and other timber, which originally extended over the entire western third of the town, and was early named Lance's Grove. The surface in this region is unusually rugged for Kane County, the creek in some parts of its course meandering through deep gorges, like the mountain streams of the Eastern States. ... Nelson's Lake lies partly in Blackberry and partly in Batavia, and its outlet, Lake Run, flows to the southwest into Sugar Grove Township, where it unites with Blackberry Creek. The township contains but little lowland, but the streams referred to furnish, with their affluents, water in sufficient quantities, and the soil is of an excellent quality.

... The first settlement in Blackberry was made by William Lance and his son John, early in May, 1834. ... The Spring of 1834 is said to have been one of the mildest on record in the State, and vegetation was already far advanced when the Lances arrived on the banks of the river.

... As might have been expected, the grove was entirely claimed, † before settlers began to establish themselves upon the open prairie, and there were not a few of the pioneers who believed that much of the land which is now the most valuable in the State would never be inhabited. Taking a claim without timber or running water seemed to them an undertaking sufficiently wild to warrant the indictment of a man for insanity.

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and paving began in the spring of 1851. By mid-May 300,000 planks had been distributed along the right-of-way. Some planks were sawed at Batavia and St. Charles, and more were purchased in Chicago. The road operated as a toll highway "for a number of years," but the company was out of business by 1860. Planks were taken up and burned as fuel at a paper mill and a hotel in St. Charles.<sup>35</sup>

\* Lilly Lake Creek = Ferson Creek.

† The author was referring to Lance's Grove, bordering Blackberry Creek.

... The earliest road through Blackberry was laid from Sugar Grove to Chicken Grove, \* about 1837 . . . . The first mills were wooden mortars scooped from oaken blocks, while common iron wedges served for pestles.<sup>329</sup>

Big Rock Township forms the southwest corner of Kane County. Big Rock Creek drains the township south to the Fox River below Plano:

As early as 1834, claimants had taken up large tracts in Little Rock † . . . . The first actual white settler, of whom any satisfactory records or traditions remain, was found occupying the banks of Big Rock Creek, in 1835.

... A saw-mill was built in 1837 . . . on Big Rock Creek, . . . which continued in active operation for a number of years.

... The name of Big Rock was the Indian name of the creek, and at the time of township organization in 1848, under Government survey, it was bestowed on the township, a name it has ever since borne.

... As an agricultural region its soil is rich, well watered and productive. Corn is the principal crop, though other crops are cultivated to a considerable extent.<sup>329</sup>

### 1880: "Attractions at Fox Lake"

The January 17 issue of *Chicago Field*, a sporting magazine, carries a letter from a wag named Tadpole:

Enough has been said and is now known of Fox and its adjacent lakes, to justify further allusion to the topography of this favorite suburban resort of Chicago and other sportsmen in northern Illinois. Not only to the hunter and angler do these neighboring lakes afford the most alluring charms, but also to the tourist and invalid, who can find here new springs of life, without incurring the expense and jarring inconvenience of long journeys, and those magnificent distances, so often prescribed by physicians to the patient who might well be spared the exhausting cares and annoyances of endless travel when there is a "Bethesda" ‡ almost at the threshold of his door.

Ten years ago these lakes were comparatively unknown, and only frequented by a discreet few from Chicago . . . . Little by little, however, the prestige of the

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\* Sugar Grove was along the middle reach of Blackberry Creek in Sugar Grove Township. Chicken Grove lay to north, on high ground between the Fox River valley and the Kishwaukee basin in the southwest corner of Plato Township. The roadway between Sugar Grove and Chicken Grove has become Illinois Route 47.

† Little Rock Township is in Kendall County, immediately south of Big Rock Township in Kane County.

‡ Bethesda is a Biblical place with healing waters.

place spread abroad, and clubs were formed . . . . Nor are private residences now wanting to diversify the scenic beauty of these verdant shores. The last addition to our local architecture is Colonel Lippincott's mammoth hotel . . . . Some four acres of beautifully wooded land are attached to this colossal building. These grounds will be invitingly laid out for lounging purposes, tenting, archery, swings for the young, and rustic benches in romantic situations, where the pensive smoker can distill his silent wreaths of snowy imagery and the aged philosopher calmly sit to retrospect his early life.

. . . A large amount of fish have been caught this Summer, and notwithstanding the increase of visitors, there seems to be no marked diminution in the catch. Numberless specimens have been taken out of the water during the season, weighing more than ten pounds, but these must be looked upon rather as exceptions.

Black bass, pickerel, \* and wall-eyed pike may be considered our staple fish, though many persons may take great delight in hooking all the other promiscuous kinds, such as roach, silver bass, † rock bass, catfish, perch, and bullheads, all of which can be obtained at all times . . . . It should be remembered that the five and ten-pound fish, though captured ever and anon, have conveniences which must be waited on, as it is not always their sovereign will and pleasure to follow the angler's boat and anticipate his thoughts.

. . . At this time of writing, the lake is open again, ‡ and the ducks and geese once more are on their way North. <sup>297</sup>

Tadpole carped about the State Fish Commission's stocking program:

A great deal is said and written about the achievements of our state fish commissioners, but Fox Lake has so far been out of their beat. A few *ovae* of the Salmonidae ¶ would be quite as welcome in this *terra incognita* of Fox Lake (*Foxum lacustrum*), § as in all those obscure pond-holes all over the state which seem to run a corner on spawn. Of all the millions of eggs constantly imported from California, Germany and Japan, I hope our local legislative member may induce the House to appropriate of carp and salmon, each one wedded pair for us. <sup>297</sup>

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\* The identity of pickerel is discussed on page 2.

† Roach = sunfish; silver bass = crappie.

‡ The ice had melted.

¶ The family Salmonidae includes salmon and trout.

§ *Foxum lacustrum* is a comic attempt to Latinize "Fox Lake."

## 1881: *History of Lee County*

"The first settlers located around Paw Paw Grove," according to the chapter about Wyoming Township in the *History of Lee County*:

This is still a charming piece of forest. It is some three miles long, and from one to two miles wide. . . . A small tree or shrub . . . grows freely in this grove and bears a sweet, edible fruit . . . . This is the papaw. It was a favorite with the Indians, and gives its name (somewhat changed in spelling) to a considerable number of places. When the white settlers first came "the timber," as they called this tract, contained about two thousand acres. Unlike other groves, it was free from underbrush. The sugar maple was very abundant. There were many large black walnut trees, four kinds of oak, the hickory, and cottonwood, with a few butternuts and sycamores. "From one of the maples that grew here," says a well known physician, "in 1855, I sold considerable lumber and had left enough wood to supply all the fires of my family for a year." Plums, blackberries and gooseberries were also plentiful here. On the east side, near the county line, was an excellent spring, where the water bubbled up from the bottom, pure, sparkling and abundant, and never freezing in winter. At the northwest corner was another, in all respects equal to the former, and with a volume that seemed inexhaustible. It was the great and constant feeder to Paw Paw creek. These springs were treasures in those early days when water fit to drink was rarely seen by travelers in the west. James Goble, who came in 1837, says he has frequently seen an acre of wagons camped around the latter spring, where now stands the Oak Grove creamery, supplied by this same spring. The prairie grass of this region was remarkable in quantity, and equal to grain in quality, while in the lowlands a rider on horseback could tie the tall, rank slough-grass \* together above his head. Yet it was very healthy and free from ague.

. . . Deer were formerly numerous here, though they have long since disappeared. Prairie wolves are still found. A grand hunt was made for the latter February 9, 1848. A circuit of about twenty-five miles was enclosed by the sportsmen, but it is reported that only one wolf was killed, and that by Chief Shabbona.

. . . The "August flood," familiar to all old settlers, began on August 19, 1851. † Says John Buchanan: "It rained incessantly three days and nights, and the sky was in a perfect blaze; many thought the last day at hand. We did not leave the shanty during the time. Families could not get provisions." . . . The destruction to grain was immense; not half a dozen stacks but were a total loss.

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\* Slough-grass = prairie cordgrass (*Spartina pectinata*).

† This deluge was in 1850.

D.M. Harris swam his horse three times in reaching Harding, where he found the creek a quarter of a mile wide.

... In the early settlement "The Big Field," as it was called, was established by common agreement for the protection of crops, no one being allowed to turn stock upon the area until a specified time. ... The three cottonwoods on the Ritchie place, measuring nearly four feet in diameter, were planted by the hand of Rhoda Rogers in 1838. ... The first hedge raised in Wyoming township, if not in Lee county, stands on the west line of Sec. 21, ... and was grown by Ira Baker. He found 13,000 osage plants, \* where some discouraged peddler, no doubt, had thrown them away, and put them to grow in that place.

... The surface is diversified by ridges, and at almost every point drainage is easy, often without artificial aid. Ague and malaria seem not to have been known, or at least not enough to be noticed.<sup>112</sup>

### 1882: "Geology of Du Page County"

C.D. Wilber's article is "mainly devoted to a consideration of the unfailing, omnipresent question, viz., 'What is the Origin of the Prairies?'" Dr. Wilber critiqued Professor Leo Lesquereux's "lakebed" theory (see a footnote on page 222) in depth. He concluded, "The evidence of prairie origin deduced from the disappearance of lakes, large or small, is therefore rejected as not sufficient."

This leads to another inquiry, viz., Which is the normal condition of the surface; which has priority, prairie or woods? ... Have we not a problem quite as intricate in explaining the existence and permanence of forests as in presenting a theory which explains their absence?

... After searching all that is known upon the subject, we may see that both prairie and forest are natural conditions, and that it is in the power of man to make or unmake, to have either surface, or to combine the two in any manner united to his use or caprice.

... The superior vital force of grass growths, aided by favorable conditions, enables them to exclude timber growths, except where protected by natural barriers. The constant and free action of these relative forces maintains the present boundary between prairie and timber areas. Whenever these forces are inconstant, or irregular, or suspended by human agencies, the relative areas of each are varied or changed.

... Grass is called "an annual" plant, yet in an enlarged sense it is perennial. There is more vitality in the rhizoma or roots of grass, than in the oak or palm.

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\* Osage plant = Osage orange (*Maclura pomifera*).

Whatever may destroy a tree or shrub brings no harm to grass. An ocean of flame may sweep over the prairie and consume every living thing, and leave the plain a parched and desolate waste, yet in a month the grass is green over the entire area, but the trees are dead. What required ten, twenty or a hundred years to accumulate as forest or grove, can be replaced only by the same number of years, while grass will come to its best estate in the summer time of every year. I offer this primal and fundamental relation between grasses and trees, as the present and procuring cause in a theory to explain, philosophically, the origin of the prairies: <sup>325</sup>

Wilber presented his philosophical explanation in the form of a rambling discourse about the Providential characteristics of grasses and grasslands, avowing, "Grass is the forgiveness of nature—her constant benediction." And "Forests decay, harvests perish, flowers vanish, but grass is immortal." Returning to the secular:

The forest, however, in its strife for the mastery or possession has its peculiar advantages. From its deep shades it excludes the grasses. The lack of light and warmth in the twilight of vast forests—"the boundless contiguity of shade"—partly paralyzes vegetable growth of all kinds, and nearly obliterates all traces of grass. The shrubs and undergrowth are dwarfed into insignificance, and appear unwelcome, like lank beggars in a lordly court.

Grown trees, however, with their spreading branches, bearing coronals of leaves, yearly increased in this manner their own bulk, and at the same time deepen the shade that deprives the shrub or sapling and grass of their bread of life. By this regime the forest attains its majesty, and maintains its regal splendor for centuries. By this economy, with its steady bracing and blending of woody fiber, the tree trunk lengthens towards the sun . . . . On the border, between the forest and plain, both grasses and trees show the decimating effect of antagonism in the struggle for existence. Trees of high growth and rank never grow into columns; but, with branches near the ground, dwindle into groves in bush forms. Among them, but with abated force, the grasses spread, and afford only tolerable pasture. It is evidently a drawn battle, or an attempt to compromise under a flag of truce. The effect of annual fires over prairie areas is nearly uniform. It is one of the constant forces, varying, of course, in direction and power with the wind, but passing over, year after year, nearly the same areas, and meeting the same barriers to stay its progress, thus keeping the same border line between the two kingdoms. These fires may have originated ages ago, from the ordinary lightning, or what is more probable, they were caused by the same means that now maintain them, viz., human agency. From time immemorial, the Indians have, generally in the autumn of each year, fired the prairie or grass plains, producing thereby that peculiar phenomena called Indian summer. By these annual fires, they secure two results, viz., first, the game is driven to the timber, where it can be more easily taken; and second, the grasses being burned, the bare prairie affords free vision against invasion,

and also facilitates speed, whether for assault or retreat. Compelled thus by a twofold necessity to annually burn the prairies, it is easy to see that they must have maintained for ages the areas that were fixed by natural barriers in the indefinite past—established with no prospect of change, except by a change of policy under a different race of men. In this case the successful invaders of the present vast population of farmers must speedily revolutionize the Indian policy and the former boundaries between prairies and groves.<sup>325</sup>

## 1882: *History of Du Page County, Illinois*

In his *History of DuPage County*, Rufus Blanchard chronicled the travels of Bailey Hobson and his family. Before the Hobsons became the first white residents of Du Page County, they tried to make a new home along the Fox River in Kendall County:

In 1830, they removed to the present site of Newark \* . . . .

. . . With the opening of March, 1831, the work was again resumed . . . .  
A new dilemma now arose. More than a hundred Indians had just encamped hard by their house for the purpose of making maple sugar in an adjacent grove . . . .

. . . In this emergency, Mrs. Hobson formed the resolution to transport her family to a small settlement a few miles distant at what was then called Weeds', and now Hollenback's Grove. † . . . On the way, she had a dangerous slough to cross, ‡ where the track was buried beneath the flood . . . . The fourteen cattle were . . . driven over and all herded safely in the grove, where they were kept on browse and what grass they could find on the early spring sward.<sup>43</sup>

The Fox valley extends into a small part of western Du Page County—primarily Wayne Township in the northwest corner and Naperville Township in the southwest corner. Sarah and John Warne moved to the edge of the Fox River timber in Naperville Township in

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\* Newark is south of the river on the west edge of Kendall County.

† Later in his account of the Hobson family's adventures, Rufus Blanchard gave the name correctly as "Weeds' (now Holderman's) Grove." Hollenback's Grove was northeast of Newark along Hollenback's Creek. Holderman's Grove was south of Newark along Roods Creek.

‡ Holderman's Grove was separated from Kellogg's Grove by Big Slough, which formed the headwaters of Roods Creek. Several of the prairie groves on the south side of the Fox River in Kendall County were edged by wetlands. Species Grove was separated from Aux Sable Grove by another Big Slough. When Bailey Hobson sought out Peter Piché at Species Grove in November of 1830, he was overtaken by darkness and had to camp without shelter: "On waking, he found, to his surprise, that he had encamped within full sight of the Frenchman's dwelling, but was separated from it by a swamp." In the following spring Hobson set out from Holderman's Grove for Species Grove, "But traveling was bad, and his progress slow. Late in the afternoon he got 'stalled' in a slough."<sup>241</sup>

1834. According to the *History of DuPage County*, "About four miles west of their place were camped about fifteen hundred Indians \* . . . ." <sup>43</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Warne's home served as the Big Woods post office for 10 or 12 years.

In March of 1835 Solomon Dunham and Edmund Bartlett set out from Chicago to choose new homes on the east side of the Fox River in Wayne Township:

The two men threaded their winding way around the sloughs till they reached the fertile prairies on the fringe of the timber that skirts the eastern banks of Fox River, just west of the present site of Wayne Station, <sup>†</sup> and here they each bought claims to lands.

. . . Sometimes large numbers of Indians would encamp near the house and remain a day or two, but never did any harm, except to sometimes take what salt they wanted to eat . . . , Mrs. Bartlett says that if they ever took any they soon brought its equivalent in value in fish caught from the Fox River or venison shot from the groves . . . . . The country was alive with wolves for the first few years, and they continually came howling around the house like thieving dogs after bones, and it was no unusual thing for them to come to her door at night and quarrel together over bacon rinds or other food thrown out.

. . . The early settlers here took their first corn to mill . . . near Naperville . . . .

. . . the wolves often followed the horse and rider all the way home, if late in the evening . . . . . There are yet a few of these animals sneaking about in the groves adjacent, and six of them were killed in 1881. <sup>43</sup>

Joseph Tefft moved to the Fox River valley in 1835. He informed Rufus Blanchard about the few settlements that greeted him along the river:

Where Aurora now is, he found on the west bank of the river a log cabin, where Mr. Wilde lived . . . . On the east bank were some settlers also, but not more than two or three. Two and a half miles up the river was the Indian burying-ground . . . . . the country was still occupied by a remnant of Waubonsie's subjects. . . . Further along, a man named Clybourne had a saw-mill on a branch of the Fox River coming in from the west, near the present site of Batavia. At the present site of Geneva lived James Herrington . . . . At the present site of St. Charles lived Mr. Fersons . . . . Four miles to the north lived Rice Faye . . . .

. . . Farther up, where the army trail crossed Fox River, <sup>‡</sup> lived Mr. Kendall . . . .

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\* The Warnes lived at Eola. The Indian settlement four miles to the west (near the mouth of Indian Creek) would be in downtown Aurora today.

<sup>†</sup> Wayne Station = Wayne.

<sup>‡</sup> The Army trail crossed the river midway between St. Charles and South Elgin.



... At Elgin was a log cabin on the west side of the river . . . . Phineas Kimball lived on the east side . . . .

... There had been a large Indian village between the present city of Elgin and Dundee, where about three acres of land still bore the marks of their rude agriculture. Similar signs were also apparent at South Elgin, where even some of the tent poles of the Indians were standing where their frail tenements had but recently stood.

... Fox River was then full of fish, which were caught by the settlers and sometimes salted down for table use in the winter. Beyond these beginnings on the river-bank westwardly, was a waste of prairie presenting no attraction to the settler till the Rock River was reached.<sup>43</sup>

Unlike the Grand Prairie of central Illinois, the Fox River valley was largely converted to farmland before the arrival of railroads. The rail line from Chicago did not reach Elgin until January of 1850—and it would have been months later if Edward Brewster had not accommodated the rail company's need for ties:

He was then living on his farm, at the Little Woods, three miles below Elgin, and he . . . gave the company . . . liberty to cut ties from his grove, without which privilege the road could not have been finished before another summer, for navigation was about to close, \* and ties could not have been procured from any other source.<sup>43</sup>

### **1882: *History of Grundy County, Illinois***

The Fox River Area barely extends into the northwest corner of Grundy County in Nettle Creek Township. This township "originally consisted almost entirely of level prairie land," so it was well suited for ranching. Three men arrived in the early 1830s and "went into cattle raising, feeding them on the public lands, wherever water and grass afforded the most eligible site." Neighboring farmers were forced to build fences around their fields to exclude free-ranging livestock of the ranchers, resulting in "some quite serious differences" between crop-growers and stockmen.<sup>30</sup>

### **1883: *Portrait and Biographical Album of De Kalb County, Illinois***

Two topics in the *Portrait and Biographical Album* are "Wolf-Hunting" and "Snakes":

In early days more mischief was done by wolves than by any other wild animal . . . . . The most effectual, as well as the most exciting method of ridding the country of these hateful pests, was that known as the circular wolf hunt, by which all the men and boys would turn out on an appointed day, in a

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\* Railroad ties could not be brought to Chicago by boat when Lake Michigan was frozen.

kind of circle comprising many square miles of territory, with horses and dogs, and then close up toward the center field of operation, gathering, not only wolves, but also deer and many smaller "varmint." Five, ten or more wolves, by this means, would be killed in a single day. The men would be organized with as much system as a small army, every one being posted in the meaning of every signal and the application of every rule. Guns were scarcely ever allowed to be brought on such occasions, as their use would be unavoidably dangerous. The dogs were depended upon for the final slaughter.

. . . In pioneer times snakes were numerous, such as the rattlesnake, adder, milk-snakes, garter and water snakes, and others. If, on meeting on of these, you would retreat, they would chase you very fiercely; but if you would turn and give them battle, they would immediately turn and crawl away with all possible speed, hide in the grass and weeds and wait for a "greener" customer. These harmless snakes served to put people on guard against the more dangerous and venomous kind.<sup>67</sup>

### **1884: *History of Cook County, Illinois***

The Fox River valley of Cook County is largely limited to the two northwestern townships, Hanover and Barrington. In his monumental history of Cook County, Mr. A.T. Andreas described the big woodland that once extended across Hanover Township:

Originally there were about twelve sections of timber in the town, in a belt about two miles wide, which, commencing near the middle of the southern line, extended northward and then northwestward until it reached the Fox River. The largest trees in this grove were, when white men first settled here, about three feet in diameter. Most of the timber now consists of second growth, and the largest of the trees scarcely exceed eighteen inches in diameter, and the area has been diminished about one fifth. The name of this grove was originally Independence Grove, but later it became known as Hoosier Grove, on account of the first settlers in the township having come from Indiana, and settled in or near the edge of the timber.<sup>11</sup>

Mr. Andreas told a different story about woodland in neighboring Barrington Township:

The surface of the town is elevated and somewhat rolling. Originally the town was three-fourths prairie and one-fourth timber, in groves. The trees were, however, mostly small, and having since been permitted to grow there is now more timber to the same area than when the first settlers arrived.<sup>11</sup>

When the first whites came to live in Barrington Township in 1834, about 500 Potawatomi dwelled in one of the groves. "The Indians soon retired and subsequently only visited this town in smaller numbers at more and more distant periods."<sup>11</sup>

## 1885: *History of McHenry County*

"Altogether, McHenry County offers to the summer tourist, or health-seeker, many enticing features, and in this respect is unexcelled by any portion of the State," attests the *History of McHenry County*:

The heat of summer is rendered agreeable by refreshing breezes which blow almost constantly. \* The air is pure and bracing; the scenery, varied by lakes, streams, groves and prairies, is attractive and picturesque; there is abundance of pure water to be obtained from wells, streams and natural springs.<sup>155</sup>

Turning to other natural resources . . .

The county is somewhat unequally divided into prairies and woodlands, the former being in the excess. Good timber is abundant, and the people are supplied at home with all that is required for fuel and fences as well as much that is suitable for building purposes. Timber is fully as abundant now as when the country was first settled, improvement having caused the prairie fires, with their attendant destruction of forests, to cease, while the use of wood has scarcely kept pace with its growth. The prairies, stretching their broad and grassy surface between the groves, present an interesting natural phenomenon, and inasmuch as more than half of McHenry County is composed of them, the question of their origin cannot fail to interest the local reader. †

. . . The Fox River, rising in Wisconsin, flows south . . . . This is a noble stream . . . .

. . . Small lakes, or ponds, are quite abundant in this county. They vary in character, some being surrounded by a firm shore, others bordered by marshes and low, wet land, thickly covered by grasses and weeds. Some of them have an extraordinary depth compared with their size. There are also numerous sloughs of varied extent. These wet prairies usually have a peaty soil of variable depth.<sup>155</sup>

The chapter about Algonquin Township states,

In section 6 lies the noted Crystal Lake . . . . The outlet to this lake furnishes

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\* The editors also admitted, "The climate is characterized by severe cold in winter and frequent sudden changes."<sup>155</sup>

† The volume continues with a lengthy discussion of theories about the origin of prairie. Soil and climatic factors were considered as possible causes. Even though the previous paragraph acknowledges that prairie fires destroy trees, the editors did not mention fire among the possible reasons for treelessness.

quite a valuable stream . . . . Big Spring Creek \* . . . also furnishes fine water privileges for stock. The placid stream known as Fox River, with its low banks, resembling the River Nile in its calm, steady flow through the low lands, passes through this township . . . .

. . . Benjamin Douglass and Colonel Hoffman built the first saw-mill in the township in 1839. It was situated on Crystal Lake outlet, about three-fourths of a mile from the Lake. In 1842 A. Dawson built a saw-mill at Algonquin Village. One was built in 1840, by Chunn & Toles, on Chunn Creek. † These men, in company with Northrop erected a grist-mill on the same creek in 1862. Burgess & Cornish erected a grist-mill on the Cornish farm. It received its power from the lake outlet, and was built in 1848. The grist-mill on the east side of the river at Algonquin was commenced by A. Dawson and completed by Henry Petrie, in 1849. In 1850 Dr. Plumleigh built a brick grist-mill at Algonquin Village, on the lake outlet. It is still doing a good business as well as the other grist-mills, but the saw-mills have fallen into disuse and decay for want of timber.

. . . The quiet village of Algonquin is pleasantly situated in a small, triangular valley at the junction of Crystal Lake outlet with Fox River.

. . . The Indians once had a trail leading across this township. It crossed Fox River where the mill-dam now stands, at which place the stream was fordable.

. . . Mineral springs, the attractiveness of the scenery, the opportunities afforded for boating and fishing—all combine to render the place a very pleasant summer resort. <sup>155</sup>

#### Greenwood Township:

The western portion of the township and along the Nippersink in early day, was heavily timbered, but at present only second growth timber is to be found. The Nippersink, which courses its way across the northern portion of the township, affords many water privileges to those who live in that vicinity. <sup>155</sup>

#### Hartland Township:

Originally this township, was principally timber land with scarcely a patch of prairie in it, and to-day is one of the best timbered in the county, though fine farms are to be found all over the township, especially on the north and east sides. <sup>155</sup>

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\* Big Spring Creek = Spring Creek, which enters the Fox River opposite Cary. There was a water mill about two miles above its mouth in 1872. <sup>94</sup>

† Chunn Creek = Cary Creek, which flows through Cary. The surface drainage basin of Cary Creek is only a few square miles. The stream must have been fed by an unusual amount of ground-water discharge to provide enough water to power mills.

Nunda Township:

Nunda: Iroquois for *hills*.<sup>118</sup>

A few years prior to 1850 the county gave a bounty of \$15 for each wolf's scalp that had been taken within the limits of the county. This was a bonanza for the hunters, and not only was this county scoured in search of the valuable prey, but adjoining counties robbed of wolves, which were brought alive across the line into this county where they were killed and bounty claimed on the scalps. Nunda Township distinguished itself in those days by one of its citizens building a wolf den and there placing cubs, which he was able to capture, till they became six months old, when he scalped them and claimed his reward under the law.<sup>155</sup>

Richmond Township:

The village of Richmond was laid out in 1844 . . . .

. . . The mill built in 1844 was erected by Cutting & Purdy. It was . . . two and a half stories high. It is still in use but remodeled, improved and enlarged.

. . . The first saw-mill in the township was built at Richmond in 1839 . . . .<sup>155</sup>

McHenry Township:

John Steffer, working near Ringwood, April 24, 1863, ate wild parsnips, \* being ignorant of their poisonous qualities, and was killed by them.<sup>155</sup>

Spring Grove, in Burton Township:

This place is named for the spring and the grove surrounding it.

. . . In 1843 a grist-mill was erected by Blivin. It was operated until 1882, and is now out of repair.<sup>155</sup>

The *History of McHenry County* chronicles three big storms in the Fox valley:

A snow storm early in December, 1856, blocked up roads and railroads so effectually that travel by any method was impossible for several days.

. . . Monday, June 9, 1874, a very severe storm caused heavy damage in this county and elsewhere. Trees, houses, barns, fences suffered severely. The damage was especially great at Harvard, McHenry, Union and Richmond.

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\* This "wild parsnip" might be poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*) or water parsnip (*Cicuta maculata*). *Flora La Sallensis* calls *C. maculata* "a dangerous poison."<sup>147</sup> The wild parsnip in today's botanical books (*Pastinaca sativa*) is the same species as the edible garden parsnip.

... On September 7 and 8, 1875, Northern Illinois and Southern Wisconsin were visited by a very heavy rain storm which caused immense damage to fields, roads, crops and buildings.<sup>155</sup>

A chapter about "Farm Drainage" begins, "It would be hardly fitting to close this work without referring to the above subject, for ...

... out of the 384,400 acres of land comprising McHenry County, nine per cent., or 34,956 acres, are wet land and totally unfit for cultivation . . . . On this land the farmers of this county are paying taxes and yet receive from it no income, while the wet spots stand, a menace to the health of the family and a blotch on the appearance of the farm.

... The writer had shown him, adjoining Crystal Lake, on the extensive farm of C.S. Dole, Esq., a large tract of beautiful land, as productive as a garden, upon which his informant assured him that he himself had a few years since speared fish.<sup>155</sup>

The bulk of this chapter discusses manufacture of farm drainage tiles and installation of tile drainage systems.

### **1888: *Commemorative Biographical and Historical Record of Kane County, Illinois***

In its introduction to Kane County, the *Commemorative Record* states, "The county is well watered by Fox River and its tributaries ...

Fox River is, for a prairie region, a remarkably steady stream, but this is accounted for in the fact that it drains Lake Geneva, in Wisconsin, Fox and Pistaka Lakes, in Northern Illinois, and numerous other smaller bodies of water in the same region, besides being fed by springs all along its course. . . . Fox River furnishes excellent water power from one end of the county to the other, and dams have been constructed across it at Carpentersville, Elgin, South Elgin, St. Charles, Geneva, Batavia, North Aurora, Aurora and Montgomery, while others which existed in an early day were located at other points along the stream, and were not of extensive proportions. The general course of the river is southerly, and the scenery along its banks is remarkably fine. Its channel is dotted with numerous islands, some of which are very large and have become valuable property, as is the case at Batavia and Aurora. At the great bend, in St. Charles Township, the stream sweeps along the north shore of a low, wood-crowned limestone bluff, and, with its islands and the beautiful shores, presents a most picturesque and inviting scene.

... Nelson's Lake, in Batavia and Blackberry Townships, and Lilly Lake, in Campton, once contained a considerable amount of water, but the system of drainage adopted in late years has robbed them of their dignity as lakes. The

first settlers found in certain portions of the county quite extensive tracts of low, marshy lands, which were called "sloughs," but judicious drainage has reclaimed the land covered by them, in most instances, and heavy crops of corn, etc., are raised where once was only a miry bog.

. . . The principal timber area of the county lies along Fox River, and includes the tracts to which the names of Big Woods and Little Woods were given by the early settlers. The former lies principally in Aurora and Batavia Townships, and the latter in St. Charles, and the timber cut from them in the early days was a source of large revenue to the owners of the land. The wisdom of cutting it so clean was rather questionable, however. Every township in the county possessed a fair quantity of timber, Kaneville and Blackberry having the smallest supply. Oak is the predominating variety, although hickory, maple, elm, basswood, wild cherry, ash, black walnut, butternut, wild crab-apple and various other species abounded to some extent. In the way of shrubbery the hazel bush occupies the greatest area.

The surface rock underlying Kane County belongs to the silurian formation, and mostly to the Niagara group. . . . With one exception, all the rock outcroppings are along Fox River. The exception is in the forks of Big Rock Creek, in the township of Big Rock, on Section 26, where the Niagara outcrops in several places.

The strata in the Niagara formation are of varying thickness, from an inch or less to two feet or more in the Aurora and Batavia quarries. From Montgomery to a point above Batavia, the exposure is almost continuous. Between Geneva and Batavia the rock dips below the surface, but appears again at Geneva, and is thence nearly continuous to the line of the Minnesota & North-Western Railway in West St. Charles, when it again disappears for a distance of nearly three miles. It shows a fine exposure in North St. Charles. At South Elgin it appears and is extensively quarried for building purposes.

. . . Owing to the limestone formations, nearly all the springs and streams are of hard water. There are a few exceptions in the case of wells sunk wholly in gravel, and deep mineral bearing springs which come up from sandstone formations, as in the case of artesian wells and the medicinal springs on the west side of the river, in the city of St. Charles.

. . . An extensive peat bed occurs between Dundee and Carpentersville, covering, probably, 160 acres, and there are lesser deposits in other places. One of the latest to develop was a short distance southeast of Aurora, which became fired accidentally, during the drouth of 1887, and burned until heavy rains extinguished the fire.

Most of the timber now existing in Kane County is a second growth, the original heavy bodies having been principally cleared away.<sup>35</sup>

The bulk of the *Commemorative Record* consists of biographies of Kane County residents, but about 300 pages focus on the land. The following excerpts describe the 13 townships that lie entirely or largely within the Fox River valley. Seven towns along the river are discussed under their own headings. First is Aurora Township:

The resources of the township include the best farming lands, considerable timber, numerous fine springs, an abundance of excellent clay for the manufacture of brick and tile, and plenty of limestone for building and other purposes. A large portion of the timbered tract known in the early days as the "Big Woods" lay within the township, extending southward to the site of the city of Aurora, but the timber was mostly cleared away within a few years subsequent to the first settlements in the locality.<sup>35</sup>

#### City of Aurora:

Three Indian trails led to the spot, the principal one traveled by the Pottawatomies leading from Waubonsie's Village at Aurora, via Plainfield, to a point a little below Joliet. In places it was worn a foot deep. This trail angled across what is now the eastern portion of the city, through the little prairie mentioned, touching about at the intersection of North Fourth and Claim Streets, and striking the river opposite the upper end of the present C., B. & Q. shop yards. There was also a trail leading down the river on the east side, through Holderman's Grove (a little east of Millington) and on to a small Indian village in the vicinity of Morris. There was a minor trail which led westward to Shabbona Grove, where dwelt the old chief Shau-ba-nee and his tribe, but it was of small importance and but little used.

. . . The year 1849 is memorable because of the visitation of the Western region by the cholera in its worst form. Aurora did not escape, and for two weeks there was a veritable reign of terror among the inhabitants. . . . The fact is also mentioned that during the prevalence of the disease the river bore a green tint and emitted a peculiar odor, which prevented horses from drinking the water.\*

. . . The Spring Lake Cemetery was laid out . . . 1865, and consists of forty-five acres of ground on the east side of Fox River, at the southern city limits . . . . A strip of low land near the center of the tract, fed by springs, it was the original intention to convert into a lake, but the work has not yet been accomplished.<sup>† 35</sup>

#### Batavia Township:

To the first settlers this part of the country was called the "Big Woods," and where is now Batavia was spoken of as "the head of the Big Woods." The Big

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\* Asiatic cholera is caused by a bacterial infection, spread via contaminated food and water. Perhaps the condition of the river was caused by an algal bloom.

† This springy area was eventually converted by excavating part to make a pond and filling part to make dry ground.



Woods lay on the east side of the river, and were some twelve miles in length, and averaged about three miles in width, \* following the course of the river to near where Aurora now is. It was in this grand old forest that the old chief, Waubonsie, had made the last home of his tribe east of the Mississippi.<sup>35</sup>

#### Batavia Village:

There is as beautiful and rich country surrounding the village as can be found in all this lovely valley . . . . . Then, too, there were the "Big Woods"—the name this locality was first known by to the settlers. This was a great body of timber land that lay on the east side of the river and extended south to near Aurora. From the river's bank it extended back on an average of over three miles, and the great old oaks and the walnut trees that heavily cumbered the ground told the new settlers that here was abundance of the very best timber for centuries to come, they forming their estimates upon the wants of the outlying country around, and never anticipating at that time that soon would come the railroads and be transporting to all the outside world so much, especially of the walnut timber, made from these ancient forest trees.

. . . The remarkable advantages to the village coming from its quarries is seen by the stranger when he views for the first time the great and elegant rock built structures on every hand. . . . The first regular quarry was opened in 1842 . . . .  
. . . No other point in the valley presented, in so prominent a degree, all the advantages of stone, timber, water and soil as did this place . . . .<sup>35</sup>

#### Big Rock Township:

This township derives its name from Big Rock Creek . . . . Into this stream empties Welch Creek . . . .

. . . Following along the two streams is an excellent body of timber land, and thus, as it lay in a state of nature, it was well drained, watered and supplied with timber. Beautiful springs—some of them, no doubt, of artesian water—are to be found along the creeks and at other points. One strong characteristic of the waters in the lower portion of Big Rock is that it never freezes in winter.<sup>† 35</sup>

#### Blackberry Township:

The west part of the township is abundantly timbered with choice hardwood timber. The streams are fed by springs with their clear, cold waters, and these springs are numerous.

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\* The Big Woods had an irregular shape. It was about 7 to 8 miles long, and up to 4½ miles wide.

† This open water indicates that much of the flow was contributed by groundwater discharge.

When first settled there were small portions only of this land that was swampy or too wet for cultivation, and soon after its settlement and the breaking of the original strong prairie sod appeared little drains that carried away the waters rapidly. . . . The beds of the creeks pass through some deep gorges, and the banks in a state of nature were lined with heavy forest trees.

. . . There is scarcely any swamp or waste overflow lands in this township.

. . . E.G. Morse . . . drove a horse team . . . to this township, arriving in March, 1841. . . . Mr. Morse made the first claim and improvement out in the prairie between the timber of Blackberry and that in Campton Township. He entered Government land, paying \$1.25 per acre. To his new settlement there was no road in any direction at that time. He assisted in laying out the present one. He located in the northern part of the township, as conveniently to the timber as he could get. He was like nearly all the new comers, and desired to keep close to the timber.

. . . In time, they secured roads in every direction, and, like nearly all Illinois highways, they were either the best or worst in the world, just as it happened in the season. . . . the constant experience was just when the thing was in greatest need, the raging waters would carry away the average bridge, that had, the dry fall before, been erected as a permanent and great improvement. This was the average general experience of all in the early days of bridge building. In fact, it is not quite certain yet in some parts of the State but that the next spring freshets will start toward the Gulf its usual assortment of Illinois cheap wooden bridges. The engineering was very poor as a rule; and then, there is this further fact, that, as the country has settled and drains have been made, the waters run off a little faster every year and, consequently, the streams tend every few years to "break the record" in the matter of high water marks made always so authoritatively by "the oldest inhabitant." <sup>35</sup>

#### Campton Township:

The map of the town would indicate the timber portions as the tracts are cut into small lots from ten to thirty or thirty-five acres each, each tract furnishing the timber supply to some adjacent or distant farm.

. . . John Beatty staked the first claim ever made to land in Campton Township, in 1835. . . . He followed an Indian trail and entered in what is now Campton, at its southeast corner. . . . It was a beautiful prairie tract, just south of a grove of timber land. He built his camp fire, and this was the first smoke from the fire of the first locating pioneer that ever rose upon the air, or excited the attention of the wild game in this township. . . . in 1836 he assisted in removing the Pottawattomie Indians west of the Mississippi River, from Northern Indiana and this portion of Illinois. In the summer of 1836 he was occupied in breaking prairie for settlers in the country round about. Young people of this day have

no idea of what a work this was of first plowing this prairie land. The sod was so tough, and the roots of the grass and weeds so hard, that it took six or eight yoke of cattle to pull the plow which had to be made for the especial purpose. Many a sod eighty rods long \* has been turned, and from end to end there would be no break in it. To see the plow now as fast as two horses can walk turning over the loose black soil, which, except in color, is more like plowing in a bed of ashes, gives no faint idea of first plowing the sod land before it had been pastured enough to kill out the strong and tenacious roots of the native grasses. At one time the price for prairie breaking was \$3.50 an acre. † <sup>35</sup>

#### Dundee Township:

Fox River passes through it from north to south, near its center. In it is a part of the noted rich Fox River Valley, and the hills and bluffs of that stream, and the small streams on the west, and the two still smaller drains on the east, give it, as it lay in a state of nature, ample drainage. It is one of the richest agricultural townships in the State, and, when first seen by the pioneer, it must have presented a pleasing picture to the eye. In all sections is an abundance of excellent water, and in Fox River were the evidences of an exhaustless water power, awaiting the use of civilized man. Along the streams were great bodies of splendid timber, and all over the county were fine groves, where the farmer could combine his timber and prairie farm in such proportions as he chose to appropriate. Nature had provided all the heart could wish; had apparently fixed it for the abode of civilized man; and, when it passed from the waste possessions of the Indian to the industrious and ever-advancing white man, it was but fulfilling that one high purpose to which the fruitful portion of the earth should be appropriated. <sup>35</sup>

#### Dundee Village:

It possessed natural beauties of scenery, and the clear and sparkling waters of Fox River ran past and stretched away in the distance like a silvery thread. In the clear, cold waters was a great abundance of choice fish, and in the dark woods was game in plentiful supply, and in the spring and fall of the year the river and lakes were vocal with the migrating water birds. Here were water, timber and stone, and rich and beautiful lands. . . . The east side, in the matter of water power, possessed advantages over the other side. Here several large springs formed Spring Brook, that went sprawling down a height of forty feet, furnishing a natural water power for the old-fashioned overshot water-wheel . . . .

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\* Eighty rods (1320 feet) is the length of a side of a quarter-quarter section, which is a 40-acre square.

† It could cost more to plow prairie than to buy it. The minimum price for Federal land at auction was \$1.25 per acre.

... In the spring of 1836 Thomas Deweese commenced the construction of the Spring Mills. \*

... the people saw that they must have a bridge across the river at this point.

... This wooden structure was carried away by the spring freshet. ... The second wooden bridge was built. It stood until it was well worn, when it was replaced by their present fine iron structure.<sup>35</sup>

#### Carpentersville:

It is a noted manufacturing point, the water power being excellent, and the great forests that surrounded it, as it lay in a state of nature, were composed of valuable timber, among which was a large supply of black walnut. Soon after the Carpenters located at this place John Oatman, sons, and Thomas L. Shields built a dam across the river. Plumb Grove<sup>†</sup> walnut lumber was soon cut at the saw-mill erected on the river ... , and the lumber was sent in quantities to Chicago.

... A carding mill and cloth-dressing concern had been erected in Dundee in 1844 .... This was ... removed to Carpentersville. ... it was added to and converted into a manufactory of flannel and stocking yarn. ... A gristmill was put up on the east side in 1851.

... In 1851 a bridge was built across Fox River. ... It was torn down, and the elegant iron bridge erected in 1869.<sup>35</sup>

#### Elgin Township:

The surface of the country is considerably diversified, and the eye rests upon beautiful rolling prairie, groves of timber, and along the streams the more broken and abrupt territory, which approaches the dignity of bluffs and hills. The immediate vicinity of the river is full of picturesque beauty .... The location of the city of Elgin has given it the popular appellation of the "bluff city," a name which is easily appreciated upon beholding the site. The diversified nature of the surface renders the township easy of drainage. Many fine springs abound, and it has become one of the widest-known dairying sections in the United States.<sup>35</sup>

#### City of Elgin:

The lack of a bridge was in the first years of the settlement was a source of much inconvenience. ... The channel of the river opposite the present

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\* Although both Spring Brook and the Fox River were harnessed at an early date, a 1908 book about Kane County reports, "The manufactures of Dundee are not extensive, owing to the want of sufficient water power."<sup>165</sup>

<sup>†</sup> Plum Grove spanned a big bend in Salt Creek about 12 miles east northeast of Elgin.

business portion of the city was then much wider than now. . . . This was in the summer of 1837. The bridge, a rude wooden structure, was built . . . . The bridge was carried away by the spring freshet in 1849, \* and replaced by a more substantial one of the same material, which stood until the spring of 1866, when an iron bridge was constructed . . . . . The great rise in the river in April, 1881, carried the bridge away.

. . . in the year 1845, intermittent and bilious fevers became epidemic among the settlers and raged furiously. †

. . . The ice business in Elgin has been for many years one of the most extensive industries of the place, and Fox River is lined with mammoth ice-houses, having a capacity for storing many thousand tons. . . . the total amount of ice handled here probably exceeds 150,000 tons annually. <sup>35</sup>

#### South Elgin:

A bridge was constructed across the river about 1850 . . . . Part of it was carried away by the freshet of 1857, but the structure was repaired and used until 1868, when an iron bridge . . . was built. <sup>35</sup>

#### Geneva Township:

There was much here to attract the eye of the early pioneer as it lay in a state of nature. It all lay north of the Big Woods, and the Fox River, passing through from north to south, was skirted on either bank with a thin fringe of timber. The pioneers were from the old States where were . . . heavy old forests. . . . hence, those men tried to find places in Illinois as near like their native hills and woods as possible. Southern Illinois had been settled nearly

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\* The disastrous flood of 1849 occurred on March 11 and 12. It resulted from "the sudden melting of the immense quantity of snow to the north," so the water carried great masses of ice. This flood destroyed or damaged dams and bridges at Elgin, St. Charles, Geneva, and Batavia. A dam and other structures were injured at Aurora. An embankment along the river at Montgomery was washed away. The dam at Bristol (Yorkville) was swept away, as was the bridge at Ottawa. The *Commemorative Record* sums up, "Other disastrous floods have since occurred, the heaviest being in 1857 and 1887, great damage being done by both." <sup>35</sup>

At Ottawa the flood of 1849 reached "the highest point touched since the county was settled." This high water was exceeded by one foot in late January of 1855 when ice-laden floodwaters destroyed the Fox River bridge and damaged the canal feeder at Dayton. The bridge across the Illinois River at Ottawa gave away "when the ice came out of the Fox River" in 1855. <sup>156</sup>

† Malaria was known as intermittent fever or bilious fever. Because malaria is spread by mosquitoes, it was often severe during rainy summers that provided plenty of breeding ponds—but 1845 was exceptionally dry. An early historian of Kendall County wrote of 1845, ". . . the summer was very warm and dry, and the river low. There was no rain in this vicinity from May to December." <sup>137</sup> Water became stagnant and polluted during such seasons, and people suffered from water-borne diseases—including typhoid, which was sometimes called bilious fever. <sup>242</sup>

three-quarters of a century before the people learned that the prairies were ever intended for the actual habitation of man. They looked upon them as dreary desert waste places, where grew the tall prairie and swamp grasses—originally as tall as a man's head on horseback—and that these grasses were chiefly a curse and a terror, and only produced the awful prairie fires, that swept across them annually like storm-tossed oceans of flame. . . . the great prairie fires . . . were but little less terrifying than the bloody visitations of the painted savage. When the grass was dry in the fall, people slept uneasily at night. They would plow spaces around their homes and property, would take every possible precaution, but this they knew was small security. Certain grasses would break by the wind and soon cover over the bare places or here and there form embankments, and the winds would carry the blazing bunches of grass at times such great distances that no precautions could make one safe. A century from now the stories of the great prairie fires that once swept like an ocean over the prairies of Illinois will read like a wild fiction, and people will wonder how such stories could have been invented. But now there are thousands of people in the State that have seen them in all their awe-inspiring grandeur—grand, terrible and sublime. There was a time in the settlement of the State when even the children would know that a prairie fire was coming by seeing the commotion of the animals and birds of the prairie, and those that lived in the prairie and woods alternately. The keener senses of the animals and birds would warn them hours before the human senses could realize the swift coming besom of destruction. Then he or she, who was a child in Illinois fifty or sixty years ago, will recall their nights of horror when all the older members would be roused by the cry of fire that would pass through a settlement, and all old enough would turn out to fight the flames, while the little ones in all their terror would be left at home. One hour of a child's life thus spent, when it is just old enough to realize something of the impending horrors, is more than a lifetime of the most exquisite torture. In all of childhood's imaginings and sufferings from fancied terrors, there can be no one thing that can so deeply strike the iron in its soul as this night cry of a prairie fire. A gifted, strong pen is needed to give posterity a true picture of a prairie fire, yet it should be written, because it was a thing indigenous to the great prairies and the early days that happily have passed away. Then again, the prairies at first were hardly cultivatable land. They were, as a rule, swampy and boggy. Hardly could you find even the tallest hills in the prairie but upon the hillsides were what the settlers called seeps (or sipes) at one time; no flowing water from them, but only in the driest season would they be passable on horseback. The sod would bear up a man, but almost anywhere on the prairie, in the spring of the year, you could stand and jump and alight on the sod, and you would see it quiver for a rod about you. It would have every appearance of simply being a strong sod resting upon water.

But about the time the people first came to this part of Illinois it came to be known to some that a little natural drainage would soon follow the settlers, and that good farms could even be made on the prairies. But a strong preference

still maintained among settlers of making their homes in the woods, and they hoped to use the wild prairies forever as pastures for their stock. But here they met another difficulty, the "greenhead"—a prairie fly that at one time could actually kill stock on the prairie if they could not get to the timber. And it is not many years ago, since men traveling on horseback would reach the edge of a wide prairie, and be compelled to lie by until night on account of the greenheads. How could these people know that these pests would disappear with the native prairie grass? Indeed, how could they know that pasturing the prairies with domestic animals would soon change the grasses entirely, and that the bluegrass would thus superseded the reedy, native grasses? All this had to come to them by experience.

... Along the banks of Fox River were skirts of timber, though no heavy bodies of it in this township.

... In 1833 Daniel S. Haight ... found his way to where is now the city of Geneva. ... here, finding a beautiful spot, an abundance of water, the flowing crystal river, an abundance of fuel, he ... settled down.

... John R. Baker and wife made their land claim in the southwest part of the township, near Mill Creek, in 1837. There is much reason to think that Mr. Baker was the first one to boldly go into the prairie proper to select a farm. The others who claimed to have done this prior to him were more in fact clustering about the first settlers who had taken up all the timber in and about the village of Geneva.

... The roads of the country were originally buffalo trails, as they once would go in great herds in their regular migrations over the country. ... They seemed to have certain routes, and over these they would pass at regular intervals. These travels came in time to be interfered with by the Indians, who hunted them for game . . . . . On these great buffalo highways were found the Indian villages and wigwams of some of the most powerful tribes. The immense herds of buffalo in their travels would come to a large stream, and here they would regularly go into camp, to use an expression applied only to human action. They would stop, and for days tramp and eat down all vegetation for a wide space, dig out mud holes and wallow in the thick mud, and each would be dreading to cross, yet all seemed to understand well enough that they would cross and not turn back on their trip. They had no leader bold enough to make the plunge. If they had had one of that kind they would no more than have paused when they came to the stream. All seemed to equally dread to lead the way across, and all were eager to follow any one that would lead. When there was nothing more to eat on their grounds they would commence to circle, and every time those on the inner side would push those next the water a little and little closer to the water's edge. After a time as they would again come around they would push the outside ones into the deep water, when they would boldly turn their heads for the opposite shore and all would follow. A singular fact is

that where the buffalo would have longest bivouaced there in time would be found the largest Indian villages, and these in turn are the places where we have built our great cities. In other words, the buffalo and then the Indians were the natural engineers to point out to civilization the natural sites for their great cities. This is true of every city in America at least. And it is, in nearly every instance, true that the early roads of the country are now the great trunk lines of the railroads, and these were but following the buffalo and Indian trails. \*

. . . A noted route passed from east to west through Geneva Township, which crossed the river at Geneva. This afterward became the great highway between Chicago and Galena, and finally the great railroad route. This no doubt was a buffalo and Indian highway before America was discovered . . . . . It became a white man's great traveled route as soon as there were white men here to travel on it.<sup>35</sup>

#### City of Geneva:

In 1833 there settled, in what is now the city of Geneva, one Daniel S. Haight, who built his cabin most convenient to what was called Big Spring, to designate it from the many other but smaller springs in that vicinity.

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\* This discourse in the *Commemorative Record* of Kane County is neither good ethology nor good history. It is part of a large body of lore about bison "engineers" and early roads. The false premise: humans followed trails that had been established by bison. The actual fact: humans inhabited the region for many thousands of years before bison arrived. Archaeological and paleontological evidence indicates that bison may not have migrated into Illinois until about a thousand years ago, and the bison population may have been quite low until about the year 1600 or later—after humans had been living in the region for millennia.<sup>109, 232, 266</sup> For spirited assertions that bison trails were precursors of modern highways, see writings by Bradsby,<sup>53</sup> Hulbert,<sup>149</sup> and Garretson.<sup>102</sup> Frank Roe has provided a skeptic's view of the "buffalo trail-highway link."<sup>253, 254</sup>

The *Commemorative Record's* notion of "great herds" and "immense herds" does not invoke an accurate image of the likely number of bison in the region. French explorers and missionaries counted bison in the hundreds or few thousands. The earliest enumerations of bison in the region were made by Marquette and Jolliet in 1673, after they had descended the Mississippi River and ascended the Illinois River. Marquette reported seeing "a band of 400."<sup>300</sup> Jolliet reported seeing as many as 400 but usually groups of 30 to 40.<sup>282</sup> Hennepin reported "herds of two and even four hundred" after visiting the Illinois valley in 1679–80.<sup>134</sup> In 1680 La Salle wrote about the Illinois Country, "The buffaloes are becoming scarce here since the Illinois are at war with their neighbors; both kill and hunt them continually."<sup>220</sup> Liette accompanied a hunt conducted by the Illinois tribe in June 1688; they set up camp about five miles from Starved Rock, and killed 120 bison on the first day. A total of 1,200 bison were killed during this hunt, which ranged as far as 50 miles from Starved Rock and extended over a period of days or perhaps weeks.<sup>220</sup> The highest estimate may be from Rasles, who wrote of herds of 4,000 and 5,000 bison in the Illinois Country in 1690–91.<sup>302</sup> *The Mammals of Illinois* states that 7,380 bison were found drowned on the shore of the Mississippi River in Mercer County on May 2, 1807<sup>141</sup>—but the date, the count, and the location are in error. The statement is based on a May 18, 1795, report of 7,360 drowned bison on the Qu'Appelle River near the Saskatchewan–Manitoba border.<sup>318, 81, 188</sup>



... One of the most beautiful spots on Fox River is Herrington's Island, in that stream, at Geneva. On this, when the settlers first came, was an Indian encampment.

... The sawmill, dam and bridge, built ... in 1837, were washed away by the next spring's high waters.<sup>35</sup>

#### Kaneville Township:

The surface of the country is gently undulating prairie, with a deep, rich alluvial soil. Portions of it when first settled were wet and peaty, and where there was peat in the soil it was, until better drained, wet and cold, producing only the coarse, rank swamp grasses. Its sweeping prairies were rich feeding grounds for stock, and for years immense crops of prairie grass were cut and cured by the settlers for feed for winter. ... The notable spot was Lone Grove, which stands near the center of the township. This was a choice body of timber land, and was almost the only temptation to the eyes of the early settlers. It was made up of great old oaks, walnuts, hickory, and a great variety of other hardwood timber.

... The first public road laid out in the township passed through the village of Kaneville. The road led from Sugar Grove to Ohio Grove.\* ... In that section of country there was no great necessity for bridges across the streams ... because the two small streams that head in Kaneville are but insignificant drains, and their most serious freshets were never troublesome affairs.

... The land in Kaneville, excepting Lone Grove, being nearly all prairie,<sup>†</sup> was the last to be taken up by claimants. ... immigrants ... would learn that there was plenty of unclaimed land ... about Lone Grove. ... They settled about this grove like swarming bees; the first settling in the grove and the outside circle being constantly extended by new arrivals that were forced to take what was left. And here, as often happened all over the State, in time the last would be first in value. What was thought by the first pioneers to be refuse or worthless land proved in the end to be the best.<sup>35</sup>

#### Plato Township:

It is bountifully supplied with water and timber. The surface of the country is undulating, and is sufficiently broken along the streams only to give it good drainage.

... The entire population in Plato, for some time after their coming, had to go to mill at Naperville, in Du Page County. ... The first road therefore was the

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\* Sugar Grove was about five miles southeast of Kaneville in the center of Sugar Grove Township. Ohio Grove was about seven miles northwest of Kaneville on the Kane-De Kalb County line.

† Kaneville Township was about 90% prairie.

one leading . . . toward Naperville. It was laid out chiefly by Mr. Griggs . . . . It made no pretensions to following section lines, and owing to the streams on the way and in hunting for eligible crossings, and to the further fact that sometimes Griggs would lose his way and wander about for a while, trying to strike the "bee line," it was not a very straight and narrow way, but was, in the prairies at least, broad, and, in places, winding. When more settlers had come with the years there would naturally be more wagons on the road, and when the prairies were burned off, and teams would be in the act of going each way at the same time, they could see each other in the distance, and instead of going so far out of a due course in following the wagon tracks around the loops, they would cut across, and thus the road was naturally much shortened.<sup>35</sup>

#### Rutland Township:

The surface of the country is broken in portions, and in the early day, before draining, there were parts that were wet and swampy. . . . Nearly one-half of the country was originally covered with heavy timber, and everywhere are springs of flowing water that were dotted over the land apparently to invite the coming of the pioneers.<sup>35</sup>

#### St. Charles Township:

When first settled the township contained not far from 8,000 acres of timber, 5,000 of which were included in the large body known as the Little Woods, so named in contradistinction to the Big Woods lying in the towns of Aurora and Batavia. . . . The bulk of the timber consisted of oak of various kinds, with a mixture of hickory, hard maple, elm, black walnut, basswood or linden, American aspen, cottonwood, black, white and blue ash, sycamore, soft maple,\* ironwood, willow, wild cherry, with groves of wild plum and crabapple, and other varieties. Along Fox River, in a few localities, were scattering red cedar trees which, with one or two exceptions, have entirely disappeared.

. . . The township, when first visited by white men, was divided into about three-fifths rolling prairie and two-fifths woodland, though a great portion of the second growth timber was then small and of little value. The bulk of the prairie was on the west side of the river and, per consequence, that of the timber on the east side.

Geologically, the township is underlaid at greater or less depths by the Niagara limestone . . . . . This stone is quarried in several places along the river on both sides, notably at Cedar Bluff, situated a mile below the bridge on the east side of the river, where a small stream, which rises in the timber to the north, has cut a deep gorge through the rock. In the early days this glen was overhung with a scanty growth of red cedar. Both glen and trees have long since disappeared before the quarryman's pick and bar.

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\* Soft maple = silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*).

... Fox River traverses the township in nearly a southern direction, after making a great detour on Sections 2, 3, 10 and 11. Its average channel before the erection of the dam was probably something over 100 yards in width, but varying from 75 to nearly 200 yards. The channel broadens for a mile in the great bend, encompassing a group of islands, some of them originally wooded, and forming one of the most picturesque localities in the county. Below the mouth of Ferson Creek is, or rather was, another fine island, though the accumulations of years have made it a part of the main land. Above the head of this island is the widest expanse of water in the township. The bed of the river for a considerable portion of its course in the township is composed of horizontal layers of limestone; the remainder of its course is over a stony, gravelly or sandy bed.

Ferson Creek ... rises a few miles west of Elgin . . . . . The first three miles of its course in St. Charles is through a low, level, but not marshy prairie, between banks of slight elevation, which it often overflows. The lower three miles are between picturesque and, for the most part, wooded bluffs, lying from twenty rods to a half mile apart, between which it brawls over a stony or gravelly bed.

... Numerous springs are found in many localities, especially along the river, south of the Norton Creek.

... Drift boulders \* are frequently found bordering the river and sparingly in other localities.

... The trails of the red men were numerous in this region, when it was first settled by white men. One of the most noted was what was known as "Waubonsie's Trail," which followed the course of the river on the west bank and took in all the prominent springs in its course. As late as 1845 this trail was plainly visible across the lands and lots lying north of the old Ira Grandy spring . . . . Another large trail leading west from Chicago to Rock River, crossed Fox River, near where the dam now is, and followed the ravine from the west side creamery up through Dean Ferson's land, and thence bore west over the prairie. A third came from the northeast and reached the river by way of the Cedar Bluff ravine. A fourth diverged from the Chicago trail, near Wayne Station, † and crossed the river at the big bend, in the northeast part of the township, a half mile below where the new Illinois Central Railway bridge now stands.

... The most memorable floods since the settlement of the county have been those of March, 1849, when the first bridge was carried away; February, 1857, when a second bridge disappeared, and April 18, 1881, when the most extensive

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\* These boulders are part of the material laid down by glaciers, known as "drift."

† Wayne Station = Wayne.

flood in the history of the country was experienced. This flood caused very little damage in St. Charles, but above and below bridges, dams and buildings were carried away or seriously damaged. All these were ice floods, the water raising below the dam from eight to ten feet.<sup>35</sup>

#### Sugar Grove Township:

This is one of the richest and most beautiful townships in Illinois, a State that is rapidly becoming the garden and granary of the rich and fertile Mississippi Valley. . . . Its gently rolling prairie, its valley brooks winding their way, embanked with heavy forest trees, or the garden flowers of the prairie; its inviting sugar tree grove and its lone sentinel trees . . . ; the birds and flowers, the timid deer grazing upon these rich natural pastures, and . . . the fat soil beneath, inviting the husbandman to come and partake thereof. . . . In all this abundance of inviting beauties the one conspicuous object to attract the attention of the discoverers was the grove of sugar trees, situated mostly on Section 9 . . . . It was thus instinctively named *Sugar Grove*. Indeed, in the Indian vernacular, it was called by this name . . . . They had met and made sugar here for many years. It lay in the way of their thin trail that traversed the State in crossing from the lakes to the Mississippi River. . . . this part of the country was the domain of the Pottawattomies, and it was said that these Indians made their last sugar gathering here as late as 1833.<sup>35</sup>

These excerpts from Kane County's *Commemorative Record* close with a perennial concern, the weather. The earliest report is from a St. Charles resident who recalled,

The winter of 1834 set in early. A deep snow fell on the 1st of November, and what few families were scattered through the country were scantily supplied with provisions. It was reported at one time that there was but a half barrel of flour among all the settlers from Aurora to Dundee. . . . There were no regular roads: people traveled from one grove to another, avoiding the sloughs as best they could. It took a week to go to Chicago and return.<sup>35</sup>

Eight years later came another exceptional winter season:

The winter of 1842-43 is remembered by old settlers as the "cold winter." Fox River was closed by ice on the 4th of November, and teams crossed upon the ice bridge the following day. A settler near the south line of the county drove down the river on the ice to Yorkville, April 5, 1843. Snow fell during the winter sixteen inches deep, and there were forty-two or forty-three snow storms between November and March.<sup>35</sup>

The next winter was unusually mild. A Batavia resident kept a diary that documents the "open winter" \* of 1843-44. Three inches of snow fell on October 14, but it melted quickly. There was more snow in early November, but it melted by the 9th. Farmers were able

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\* An "open winter" is one in which lakes and streams remain open or unfrozen.

to plow until a snowfall on November 23; afterward periods of rain alternated with snow through the 12th of January. The *Commemorative Record* sums up the succeeding months:

The balance of the winter was remarkably open, and there was sleighing only from the 3d to the 18th of February. Wild geese were noticed flying northward February 24, and farmers began plowing March 9. The succeeding season was very wet, the rivers and creeks being frequently more than bank full.<sup>35</sup>

### 1890: *Lee County Times*

The *Lee County Times* was published in the village of Paw Paw at the west end of Paw Paw Grove. On June 27, 1890, the newspaper reported on a deadly tornado ("cyclone") that struck seven days earlier:

The first account of this frightful visitation is from a point twelve to fifteen miles, a little south of west from the village of Sublette, . . . where a number of cattle were killed . . . .

. . . The grim destroyer did not pause a moment to witness the devastation wrought, but hurried on across the fields; the road running south from Paw Paw \* was crossed . . . .

. . . The gyrating terror next entered the grove; its path here was from twenty to forty rods wide, in which trees were twisted off, pulled up and strewn about. . . . The storm passed on through the grove about one mile and a half, when it apparently became exhausted near James Harper's place, after tearing down his orchard.

. . . The little brook near the schoolhouse was swollen by the heavy rain into a creek, and the water was two to four feet in depth. Men plunged into the stream and searched for the victims. . . . The spectacle was shocking in the extreme.<sup>†</sup> . . . All day Saturday, Sunday and Monday the track of the cyclone was thronged with visitors from the surrounding country. An excursion train came from Rochelle, Sunday.

. . . The trail of the storm presents many curious features. Trees were pulled up by the roots; some were twisted in two, leaving the stumps in the ground. Others have the bark pulled off. Osage hedges are torn up. Chickens and other fowl are found entirely denuded of their feathers. Dead cats, rats, dogs, hogs, horses and cattle, in various places.

. . . The trail varies from ten to forty rods in width—probably averages twenty rods. Preceding the tornado was an electric storm, with considerable rainfall.

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\* A road on the south side of Paw Paw Grove is named Cyclone Road.

† The teacher and at least 14 students were killed.

Immediately following was a tremendous downpour. On either side of the track a heavy rain with thunder and lightning, prevailed.

. . . In some places the ground was torn up and in others the grass and grain were nipped off close to the center where the most energy was displayed, showed a width as above stated. \* <sup>285</sup>

### 1891: "A Big Drain"

The *Aurora News* announced the start of two reclamation efforts. One project would drain a small valley on the southeast edge of Aurora. The other would drain a bigger valley immediately to the south, making Waubensee Creek into a drainage ditch:

The contract has been let for a large tile drain extending from the Benson Tile Works to Fox river. This drain will be nearly two and a half miles in extent, eighteen inch Joliet tile to be used . . . . . By this improvement all of that low, springy territory lying southeast and south of the city limits, and considerable property inside the present corporation, will be effectually drained, and over three hundred acres of land that is now practically useless reclaimed and rendered highly valuable. During the coming year doubtless this entire property will be on the market and will be among the most desirable in that portion of the city. Work . . . will be hurried along as fast as possible. Then the contract for the big Waubonsie slough will probably be let soon, and this is a job of much greater magnitude. It will consist of an open ditch three miles or more in length, to empty into the river at Oswego. This ditch will be seven feet in width at the bottom and twenty-four feet at the surface—and it is expected that it will drain the entire Waubonsie slough territory. The . . . intention is to have the work pushed through immediately. <sup>12</sup>

### 1891: "Drainage & Tile Notes"

The December issue of the *Drainage Journal* features a notice about Millington, a village beside the Fox River on the Kendall-La Salle County line:

A very large amount of tile draining has been done in the vicinity of Millington, Ill., this season. An exchange says that "Farmers are each year becoming more fully alive to the benefits of tile drainage." It is also a fact, (so they say,) that snow melts away sooner on drained than undrained land, hence the drained soils are ready for the plow sooner. <sup>39</sup>

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\* Eight years later the *Lee County Times* detailed the passage of another deadly wind along approximately the same path from Sublette to the vicinity of Paw Paw. Although this tornado was not reported to have passed through Paw Paw Grove, the newspaper did mention destruction of trees in the neighborhood: "Trees of venerable age and large proportions are now dismantled monarchs, reduced to kindling wood." <sup>285</sup>

## 1892: *Portrait and Biographical Record of Lee County, Illinois*

This volume presents a sketch of Oliver Johnson, who moved to the west side of the Fox valley in 1836:

He . . . went to what is now De Kalb County, locating at Johnson's Grove, two miles east of Shabbona. . . . the Chief was a frequent visitor at Mr. Johnson's house. At that time his nearest neighbors were at Somanauk, seven miles distant, and deer, prairie wolves and other wild animals had not yet fled before the advancing steps of civilization.<sup>40</sup>

The above remark about wildlife is typical of portraits of Illinois pioneers that were produced by biographical publishing houses around the turn of the century. Another example of this kind of writing is in the biography of Abram Christiance, who came to Malugin's Grove \* in 1835:

He . . . saw the scene of his future home a wilderness, where deer and all sorts of wild game roamed at pleasure over the uncultivated prairies or through the timber, whence often at night the howls of the wolves disturbed the slumbers of the few settlers that had ventured within their domain, and Indians were still living in the very grove where he chose the location of his future abode.<sup>40</sup>

When Alexander Gilmore arrived at Malugin's Grove in the same year, "Deer and other kinds of game were plentiful and the Indians still lingered around their old hunting grounds."<sup>40</sup>

## 1897: *Flora La Sallensis*

Part I of John W. Huett's *Essay toward a Natural History of La Salle County, Ill.* is titled *Flora La Sallensis*—which is Latin for "Flora from La Salle." This monograph treats about 1,030 species and varieties of flowering plants and ferns—both native ones as well as those introduced into the wild. Huett's *Flora* is not limited to La Salle County: he described it as a "Catalogue of the Plants of La Salle County, Ill., and the adjacent counties of Kendall, Grundy, Livingston, Marshall, Putnam, Bureau and DeKalb, and in general for that part of the state north of the latitude of Bloomington."<sup>† 147</sup>

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\* Malugin's Grove = Melugin's Grove, several miles west of Shabbona's Grove.

† The geographic scope of Huett's flora is ambiguous. Perhaps he listed some plants that were not known from La Salle County but were found in adjacent counties. Or perhaps he meant to say that the flora of La Salle County can be expected in adjacent counties and generally for Illinois north of Bloomington. He concluded this part of his essay by remarking, "A few plants confined to the shores of Lake Michigan are not found in La Salle County."<sup>147</sup>

John Huett relied on three previous studies to supplement his own fieldwork when compiling his catalogue of the flora: R. William's botanical list in *History of La Salle County* (1877, described on page 234), a list by H.L. Boltwood (1883), and a list by C.F. Johnson (circa 1895).

The Fox River valley extends across only about one-quarter of La Salle County, so John Huett's *Flora* cannot be considered a precise list of plants at the south end of the Fox River Area. Huett cited the Fox River as the location for only one species: *Nymphaea odorata*, the fragrant water lily. Huett listed *Pinus resinosa* (red pine) without further comment. At present the only known locality for native red pine in Illinois is on the Fox River bluff at Sheridan in La Salle County.

A few species in *Flora La Sallensis* can be credited to the Fox River Area with more or less certainty on the basis of Huett's annotations. For instance *Solanum carolinense* (bull nettle) was found along the "C. B. & Q. track N.E. of Ottawa," and *Trifolium procumbens* (*T. campestre*, low hop clover) was annotated "C. B. & Q. tracks N. part of Ottawa, 1882, not seen since."<sup>147</sup>

John Huett remarked, "The immediate vicinity of Ottawa offers to the botanist a very large variety of plants, a number much greater than is usually found in so restricted an area. Some 350 species of plants belonging to more than 50 orders and some 175 genera may be obtained within a radius of two miles of the courthouse."<sup>147</sup> About a third of this two-mile span encompasses the Fox River valley, so the river and adjacent slopes must have contributed substantially to this great floral diversity. The most outstanding botanical area was the Reddick farm (a highly diverse site with limestone, sandstone, and peat), less than two miles from the Fox valley.

### 1898: *An Essay toward a Natural History of La Salle County, Illinois* *Part II—Geology and Zoology*

As part of his effort to "collect and arrange what is known concerning the Natural History of this great county," John W. Huett published the second volume of his *Essay toward a Natural History of La Salle County*. Huett discussed the Fox River and other streams under the heading "Water Power of La Salle County":

When the county was first settled it was obvious that the grain produced here must either be taken East to grind or mills must be built here, and the Green's located at Dayton \* because the Fox river offered sufficient power and a favorable situation for the erection of a mill, and at that point, a dam still spans that stream, and its waters not only drive machinery at that place, but a part of them is brought to Ottawa and furnishes the hydraulic company's power here.

Of course, the main source of power in the county is the Illinois river. . . . Of its affluents in La Salle county, water powers have been developed on the Big Vermillion, Fox and Pequamsauggin, on the Illinois itself, and on Indian creek, † a branch of the Fox.

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\* Dayton is about four miles above the mouth of the Fox River.

† Indian Creek is the first major tributary of the Fox River above its mouth.



The Illinois sends down, when at its greatest heighth, about 65,000 cubic feet of water per second, but at its lowest stages as little as 1,070 cubic feet per second, or one sixty-fifth of its greatest flood volume. When the country was new the floods were less excessive and the stream did not fall so low as now. The whole drift of man's improvements has been to cause the river to rise more rapidly, fall more quickly, and to reach a lower stage in times of drought than it did prior to the settlement of this region . . . .

. . . The Fox river furnishes a constant power of about 600 horses at Ottawa, and as this represents about half its power, the total is about 1,200 horse power, but the water of this stream is used again for a mill near Sheridan, and furnishes a fine power at Milford-Millington, \* once improved, but now in ruins—altogether not far from 2,500 horse power.

. . . The Big Vermillion is too unreliable to demand any consideration, . . . Pequamsauggin, Little Vermillion, Tommyhawk, a branch of the last, and Indian creeks have all dwindled to insignificance. So capable is man in his unreasoning anxiety to get rich and to improve every inch of land around him, that he stops not to inquire what the result of his improvements will be, but rashly ventures to destroy the delicate balance of conditions which the Creator has instituted to secure the greatest possible good with the least waste. We have been assured by a gentleman, who knew whereof he spake, that when he was a boy he frequently went swimming in Mission creek, † in a place where, at the same time of year, it is now dry every season. It must also be remembered that at one time river steamers came to Ottawa a part of the year with reasonable regularity. These facts suggest the question, Has the rainfall diminished? To this the answer must be no. Man has no power to attract or drive away rain, and all the fine stories told of the increased rainfall in Western Kansas and Nebraska by land speculators and railway land agents are myths, as too many have found to their cost. But man drains swamps and sloughs, cuts down the forest and prepares the way for a rainfall to rush to a creek or river as fast as it falls, and, as a consequence, he has disastrous floods, low or dried up streams, and must deepen his wells year by year. "As a man soweth so shall he reap," and in nothing is this more true than when he destroys the balance of the Creator's works.

But other questions aside, we think it is clear that La Salle county is rich in the possession of unusually good and valuable water powers to the amount of not less than 10,000 horse power for the Illinois, all of which can be concentrated at Ottawa and Marseilles, and 2,500 horse power for the Fox, a power not excelled, if it is equalled by that of any other county in the State, and yet by far the

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\* Millington is on the La Salle-Kendall County line. Part of the town was once called Milford.

† Mission Creek enters the Fox River about seven miles above Indian Creek.

most of this from sloth and want of enterprise, or from the grasping avarice of those who own the sites that must be developed, is to-day running to waste. No wonder Ottawa fails to grow.<sup>148</sup>

Under the topic of "Mineral Waters," a spring on the Fox River is described:

Debolt's spring, situated about nine miles northeast of Ottawa, on the east side of the Fox river, is a sulphur spring, yielding a large quantity of water and a favorite resort for picnic parties. \* It rises from the St. Peters sandstone, and was formerly a place of much beauty, but the scenery has been greatly damaged by some rattle-headed blasting. We are not burdened with scenery, and it is to be regretted that many people do not know a beautiful thing when the Creator places one in their hands.<sup>148</sup>

To introduce his section about zoology, Mr. Huett wrote,

The animal life of the county has, of course, undergone considerable changes since the first settlement. Some animals have disappeared, usually the larger and fiercer or more destructive, while others which follow in the footsteps of man have come in.<sup>148</sup>

The following pages present John Huett's list of vertebrate animals. Each species is listed according to its current name, as given in standard reference books. If a name in Huett's list differs from the currently accepted common name, the nomenclature used by Huett is in parentheses. † The first list consists of mammals:

Bison (Bison or Buffalo): "Bos Americans must at one time have been numerous, as their skeletons were found scattered over the prairie by the early settlers, but the animal had disappeared."

White-tailed deer (Deer): "Cervus Virginianus was common for many years. One was killed on the Big Vermillion in 1866, the last, it is believed, killed in the county. They were so numerous as to be very destructive in the corn fields."

Canada lynx: "—was occasionally seen."

Bobcat (American Wild-cat): "—was more common but not numerous."

Timber wolf (large gray wolf): "—was not a common animal, although occasionally seen."

Coyote (Prairie Wolf or Cayote): "—was abundant. They were not pleasant neighbors, not dangerous, but troublesome, as they had excellent appetites, and were not at all fastidious as to what they ate."

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\* An 1877 volume about La Salle County mentions this site: "One of the finest sulphur springs in the West is situated a few miles above Dayton, and with a little improvement would make an excellent summer resort."<sup>114</sup>

† Although Huett listed scientific names for almost all of the species, most of these Latin binomials are not repeated here.

Fox: "Probably *Vulpes macrourus* \* is occasionally found. It much resembles the red fox *V. fulvus*, but is larger and has longer fur."

Raccoon (Raccoon or Coon): "—while not common, is not unknown to many of our readers."

Woodchuck (Woodchuck or Ground-hog): "—is also found here at the present time."

Striped skunk (Skunk): "—was scarce when the first emigrants arrived, and has become more common with time."

Badger: "—was occasionally seen in the early days of settlement, but has long been extinct."

Eastern cottontail (Gray Rabbit): "—is very common, and has greatly increased since the advent of the white man. . . . they are a dangerous article of food, being very often infected with tape worm, which, whatever eats them, is liable to take from them."

Fox squirrel (Western Fox Squirrel): ". . . is occasionally seen in the timber."

Eastern chipmunk (Chipmunk or Ground Squirrel): "—came in after the settlement of the country, but is not very numerous at present."

Flying squirrel: ". . . is frequently seen in the woods."

Thirteen-lined ground squirrel (Striped Gopher): "—is very common."

Franklin's ground squirrel (Gray Gopher): ". . . was less common than the former, when the country was new, and is now nearly extinct."

Plains pocket gopher (Pouched Gopher): "—lives mostly under ground and on roots, and is not common." †

Otter: "—was in early days common along the rivers; now extinct, or nearly so."

Beaver: "—was plenty when the country was first settled, and is now seldom seen."

Muskrat: "—is found along our rivers in considerable numbers."

Mink: ". . . is often met with."

Least weasel (Small Weasel): ". . . very destructive to poultry, is not uncommon." ‡

Black rat: "The black rat . . . was common in early days, now extinct; . . . is generally exterminated by *Mus decumanus*." ¶

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\* *Vulpes macrourus* = gray fox.

† The pocket gopher does not range north of the Illinois River, and it has never been found in the Fox River Area.

‡ This animal's scientific name (*Putorius vison*) and its description ("a small, slender animal, the body six or seven inches long") show that Huett was referring to the least weasel rather than the long-tailed weasel. Huett's remark about this species' diet is contradicted an eminent mammalogist who wrote, "It feeds primarily on mice, and should it catch a baby chicken, which it is not known to do, it would be such a small chick as to have little value." <sup>157</sup>

¶ *Mus decumanus* = Norway rat.

Norway rat: "—appeared soon after the settlement of the country began, and is found everywhere. . . . It is often called wharf rat."

Meadow jumping mouse (Jumping Mouse or Long-Tailed Mouse): "—is found in the timber; rather scarce."

Mice and voles: "The Deer Mouse, Short-tailed Mouse, White-footed Mouse.—*Hesperomys leucopus* \*—is very common, and often called meadow mouse or field mouse. It is probable *H. Michiganensis* † and *Arvicola Pennsylvanicus* ‡ are included in the last. The common mouse or house mouse . . . was found here, and was in the early days more troublesome than at present."

Opossum: ". . . is said to have immigrated to this part of the world after its settlement. It has nearly, if not entirely, disappeared."

Moles: "*Scalops argentatus*—the prairie mole is very common and a very troublesome visitor in gardens. It is larger than the common mole and more silvery in color. *S. aquaticus*—the common mole, is probably an inhabitant of the county. We presume also the star-nosed mole *Condylura cristata*." §

Bats: "The little brown bat—*Vespertilio subulatus*—a small olive brown animal is frequently seen; also probably *V. noctivagans*, larger, and hair with silvery tips. The red bat—*Atapha noveboracensis*—is sometimes met with." § 148

The topic of birds is introduced,

Birds are generally not so plentiful in a prairie as in a timbered country, consequently the number of species found within our limits is not so great as that found in an equal area in other places. But as there are here some tracts well suited to the habits of water birds, quite a number of these either make this their home, or visit it annually, and we have thus a reasonable number and variety of birds. Our list is by no means exhaustive.

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\* *Hesperomys leucopus* = white-footed mouse.

† *Hesperomys Michiganensis* = deer mouse.

‡ *Arvicola Pennsylvanicus* = meadow vole.

§ *Scalops argentatus* and *S. aquaticus* are synonyms for the eastern mole. The star-nosed mole has not been documented with certainty from Illinois.

§ Although Illinois is home to about a dozen species of bat, local lists from the 1800s often enumerate only two or three kinds. Huett's listing of the red bat, the silver-haired bat, and a "little brown bat" is typical. The red bat and silver-haired bat are common species, distinctive enough to be recognized by nonspecialists. Several species might be combined under the name "little brown bat." Huett gave the scientific name of the little brown bat as *Vespertilio subulatus*, which has been applied to a number of bats, including the one species formally called the little brown bat (*Myotis lucifugus*).

Brown thrasher or wood thrush? (Brown thrush, wood thrush—*hylocichla mustelina*): "... cinnamon brown; a fine singer; came in after settlement began." \*

American robin (Robin, Robin Redbreast): "... came in a little later than the preceding."

Gray catbird (Cat Bird): "... came about the same time as the first."

Eastern bluebird (Blue bird): "This is one of the first birds to arrive in spring, and it sometimes suffers severely for its temerity in venturing so far north before the weather has become warm and settled."

Black-capped chickadee (Titmouse—*Parus atricapillus*—Black capped chickadee)

Boreal chickadee: "... may be found here ...."

Carolina chickadee: "... it is possible that *P. Carolinensis* may sometimes come as far north as this."

Tufted Titmouse: "... may be found here."

White-breasted nuthatch (White-bellied Nuthatch ... sap sucker):  
"... seen running up and down trees."

Red-breasted nuthatch (Red-bellied Nuthatch)

Brown creeper

House wren: "... common about houses."

Northern parula (Blue, yellow backed warbler)

Yellow warbler (Summer Warbler)

Yellow-rumped warbler (Yellow Rumped Warbler, Myrtle Warbler)

Northern waterthrush (Water Wagtail, Water Thrush)

Summer tanager (Summer red bird): "Not common."

Barn swallow: "Common about barns."

Cliff swallow: "Builds nests in cliffs along Illinois, also under eaves of barns."

Bank swallow (Bank Swallow—Sand martin): "Builds nest in holes in sand banks."

Purple martin (Martin, Purple Martin)

Cedar waxwing (Cedar bird, cherry bird, Carolina wax wing, Southern wax wing)

Vireos: "... several species visit us, but do not remain here for any length of time. They are forest not prairie residents."

Northern shrike (Great Northern Shrike, Butcher bird): "This bird sometimes winters here, making his home in evergreen groves."

Evening grosbeak

Purple finch

American goldfinch (Yellow Bird, Thistle Bird)

Snow bunting (Snow Bunting, Snow Flake)

House sparrow (English Sparrow): "Too common to need description."

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\* Huett's description of this bird fits the brown thrasher, which was sometimes called the brown thrush. He gave the scientific name of *Hylocichla mustelina*, which is the wood thrush.

Vesper sparrow (Grass Sparrow, Ground Bird, Bay Winged Bunting)  
 Grasshopper sparrow (Yellow Winged Sparrow): "Fields . . ."  
 Lark sparrow (Lark Finch): ". . . a prairie bird."  
 Song Sparrow  
 Dark-eyed junco (Snow Bird): ". . . common in winter."  
 Dickcissel (Black-throated Bunting)  
 Indigo bunting (Indigo Bird)  
 Northern cardinal (Cardinal Grosbeak, Red Bird): "Not often seen."  
 Rufous-sided towhee (Towhee Buntings, Chewink, Marsh Robin)  
 Bobolink (Bobolink, Reed Bird, Rice Bird)  
 Red-winged blackbird (Red Winged Blackbird, Swamp Blackbird)  
 Yellow-headed blackbird  
 Eastern meadowlark (Meadow Lark)  
 Common grackle (Crow Blackbird, Purple Grackle)  
 Northern oriole (Baltimore Oriole, Golden Robin, Fire Bird): "Sometimes  
     called Hangnest."  
 Orchard oriole: "The orioles came here after the settlement of the country."  
 Common raven (Raven)  
 Common crow (crow)  
 Blue jay: ". . . is common and well known."  
 Eastern kingbird (King Bird, Bee Martin): ". . . is not injurious  
     to bee-keepers."  
 Eastern phoebe (Pewee, Phoebe, Pewit) \*  
 Whip-poor-will (Whippoorwills, Night Jar)  
 Common nighthawk (Night Hawk, Bull Bat)  
 Chimney swift (Chimney swallow): ". . . nests in chimneys."  
 Ruby-throated hummingbird  
 Belted kingfisher: "Common along streams."  
 Yellow-billed cuckoo  
 Hairy woodpecker (Hairy woodpecker, big sap sucker) and downy woodpecker:  
     ". . . frequent evergreen trees which they sometimes girdle."  
 Red-headed woodpecker: "Common."  
 Northern flicker (Golden-winged woodpecker, highholer, flicker, yarup):  
     "Common."  
 Great horned owl (long-eared owl) and eastern screech-owl (screech owl):  
     ". . . are common . . ."  
 Northern hawk-owl (great gray owl) and snowy owl (great snowy owl):  
     ". . . are sometimes seen in winter."

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\* The three common names given by Huett (in parentheses) are confusing, but the scientific name he listed (*Sayornis fuscus*) shows that he meant to list the species now called the eastern phoebe.

Sharp-shinned hawk, Cooper's hawk (chicken hawk), red-tailed hawk (hen hawk or red-tailed buzzard), and kestrel (sparrow hawk or rusty crowned falcon): "... are common ...."

Bald eagle: "... is sometimes seen, but does not make this region his home."

Turkey vulture (Turkey buzzard)

Passenger pigeon (Wild Pigeon): "... never lived here, but visited the country in great numbers at times; is not so frequently seen as formerly."

Mourning dove: "... is not rare."

Wild turkey: "... once common is extinct."

Greater prairie-chicken (prairie chicken, pinnated grouse): "... is frequently seen ...."

Ruffed grouse (ruffed grouse or partridge): "... is met with, ... but seldom."

Northern bobwhite (Quail, bob white): "... it seems at present to be on the increase."

Plovers: "... none live here."

Killdeer: "... is often seen about wet places in the fall."

American woodcock: "... found in some places ...."

Sandpipers (Tringa), godwits, and yellowlegs (tattlers): "... are sometimes seen in wet places about ponds."

Long-billed curlew: "... is no longer found here."

Great blue heron: "... is found along the rivers."

Snowy egret (snowy egret, little white egret): "... is sometimes seen along our streams."

American bittern (Bittern, Indian Hen, Stake Driver, Pump Thunder):

"... is less common than formerly, but its ... notes are often heard."

Green-backed heron (green heron) and least bittern: "... inhabit wet places."

Sandhill crane (sandhill or brown crane): "... once very common, now seldom seen; sometimes heard as they pass over, going north in the spring."

Rails: "... are found about swamps."

Ducks ("several species"), Canada goose (wild goose), and brant (brent): \*  
"... once made this region their home, but have ceased to do so."

American white pelican (Pelican): "... is occasionally seen."

Iceland gull (White-winged Gull): † "... visits our streams."

Common loon (Great Northern Loon or Diver): "... is sometimes seen in the spring along the Illinois ...."

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\* Huett listed the brent as *Bernicla bernicla*, which is an old name for the brant (*Branta bernicla*). There are few credible reports of this Atlantic Coast species in Illinois. Nomenclature is confused because the greater white-fronted goose and the snow goose were also commonly called brant in the 1800s.

† Huett identified this bird as *Larus leucopterus*, which was the binomial commonly applied to the Iceland gull in the latter part of the 1800s. This listing probably is based on a misidentification of one of the more common species: the Iceland gull has rarely been reported from Illinois, but it is the only gull listed by Huett for La Salle County.

Trumpeter swan (swan): "... may be seen occasionally." <sup>148</sup>

Mr. Huett concluded his section about birds,

Other species will no doubt be found. The subject has not been carefully worked up, and much, remains to be done. Moreover, many birds are migrant and some follow man, while storms, the gun and the want of sound sense which characterizes man often destroy a species in a given territory. Hence we find changes constantly in progress. <sup>148</sup>

The next section treats reptiles:

Eastern box turtle (Box Turtle): "... not numerous."

Painted turtle (Painted Turtle, Mud Turtle)

Common snapping turtle: "Common."

Spiny softshell turtle (Common Soft-shelled Turtle): "Illinois and canal." \*

Five-lined skink (Lizards—Blue Tail): "... on rocks near old fair ground."

Eastern hognose snake (Spreading Adder, Blow Snake, Puffing Adder, Hognosed Snake): "... about the canons." †

Northern water snake (Water Snake, Water Adder)

Diamondback water snake

Graham's crayfish snake

Common garter snake ‡

Timber rattlesnake (Banded or Yellow Rattlesnake) and eastern massasauga (prairie rattlesnake or massasauga): "... both becoming very scarce." <sup>148</sup>

Huett also listed this confusing series of snakes:

Black Snake—*Bascaniom constrictor*—blue racer—*Coluber obsoletus*—green snake—*Cyclophis vernalis*—milk snake, spotted adder, house snake—*Ophibolus doliatus*, var. *triangulus*—bull snake—*Ophibolus calligaster*, are found in the county, the last quite common. <sup>† 148</sup>

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\* This entry refers to the Illinois River and the Illinois and Michigan Canal.

† Huett employed a variant spelling for *canyon* (or *cañon*).

‡ Huett added "probably *E. faireyi* and *E. proxima*." Both *Eutania faireyi* and *E. proxima* are names for the western ribbon snake.

† *Bascanion constrictor* and *Bascanium constrictor* are old names for the racer (also known as the black snake or blue racer). *Coluber obsoletus* is the rat snake. *Cyclophis vernalis* is the smooth green snake. *Ophibolus doliatus triangulus* is the milk snake. *Ophibolus calligaster* is the prairie kingsnake. The bull snake (bullsnake) is *Pituophis melanoleucus*.

Huett appears to have listed the milk snake in two places—by both its common name and its scientific name. He also seems to have listed "house snake" as the common name for *Ophibolus doliatus triangulus*, which is the milk snake. (Mark Twain referred to "house snakes" as "garters." <sup>309</sup>)



"BATRACHIA—FROGS, TOADS, ETC.":

Leopard frog (Leopard or Common Frog)

Bullfrog: "Common."

Gray treefrog (Tree Frogs or Tree Toads): "... are often heard, not so often seen."

American toad (Toad, Warty Toad): "... is found about every garden, and is the gardener's friend and assistant."

Spotted salamander (Large Spotted Salamander): "... is sometimes found in cellars and other damp, cool places."

Mudpuppy (Mud Puppy, water dog, dog fish): "... is found in still waters with muddy bottoms."<sup>148</sup>

John Huett prepared a list of fishes from publications that are not specific to the region; he termed his list "an approximation of the truth." His report also includes a generalized list of insects. He adapted a chapter about land snails from William Calkins' *Land & Fresh Water Shells of La Salle County* (page 191).

Huett provided a list of 55 more kinds of flowering plants to supplement his *Flora La Sallensis* (page 298). He also expanded a discussion of agricultural weeds put forth in *Flora La Sallensis*.

### 1898: *The Biographical Record of Kane County, Illinois*

*Wild* and *raw* are two adjectives that were commonly applied to virgin land by people who cleared and plowed it under. When George Marshall came to Kane County in 1844, "most of the land was still wild prairie and timber." When Elisha Weed bought 40 acres in 1845, the neighborhood was "nearly all raw, unbroken prairie and timber."<sup>261</sup>

The *Biographical Record* quotes the essayist Macaulay: "A people that take no pride in the noble achievements of remote ancestors will never achieve anything worthy to be remembered with pride by more remote generations." Many of the highest compliments in this volume attest how well the "Old Settlers" of Kane County improved their farms. A diligent farmer's wet ground was underlaid with "many rods of tiling" and was "well tiled throughout." Jonathan Tefft is lauded because his "entire farm is under a high state of cultivation." Likewise Robert Mink transformed his farm into "one of the most highly-cultivated tracts in the locality." Such commentary is typical of "county biographicals" produced at the end of the 19th century.

Jonathan Tefft moved west at the age of 18 and bought 110 acres northeast of Elgin:

Mr. Tefft is one of the few men yet living who saw almost this entire country in its virgin state, and has done as much as any other one man to develop its resources and make it the garden spot of the west. On his arrival here there

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The identity of his "spotted adder" is not known.

were but few cabins on the east side of the river at Elgin and but three on the west side. He has hunted deer on the present site of the city, and assisted in breaking the prairie on its present site. He remembers when the Indians came from the northwest to spear fish in the Fox river. <sup>261</sup>

John Wilcox was nine years old when his family moved to to a farm on the prairie about two and one-half miles northwest of Elgin. According to *The Biographical Record*,

When he was a boy he drove the breaking team of seven yoke of oxen to a great plow turning with each furrow twenty-seven inches of wild prairie sod, clean cut and as straight as a ribbon. . . . The lurid gleam of prairie fires against the dark horizon of night was a common sight, and the howl of prairie wolves at day-break and evening was often heard. Wolves and deer were abundant, sand hill cranes, wild geese and ducks abounded. Prairie chickens and quails covered the prairies, and vast flocks of wild pigeons darkened the sky in their annual migrations. The songs of the brown thrush, robin, oriole, cat bird, lark, bobolink and other birds filled grove and prairie with music. \* Myriads of wild flowers bloomed from every spring until late autumn, and it was indeed a beautiful and fertile land. <sup>261</sup>

Dr. William A. Pratt arrived "soon after a railroad was built to Elgin, <sup>†</sup> and when wolves and foxes were yet seen in the vicinity." The *Biographical Record* features his Cedarside Stock Farm:

. . . Cedarside farm, which adjoins the corporate limits of Elgin, is one of the best known farms in this section of the state. . . . Soon after electric roads were built to Dundee, the Doctor laid out a fine park of thirty-five acres, which he gave the name of Trout Park, making of it a fine summer resort. All kinds of outdoor amusements are provided for its patrons in the summer and Trout Lake is well stocked with brook trout . . . . <sup>261</sup>

## 1899: *Our Ducks*

In *Our Ducks: A History of American Ducks*, Henry Yorke lamented the passing of America's glory days of duck hunting:

Probably one of the best examples of the effects of drainage, resulting from cultivation and settlement, can be found in the state of Illinois. During the early seventies the above state, with the adjoining one of Indiana, furnished the highways of all the large flights east of the Mississippi River, with the exception of the coast. These may be divided into the Mississippi, Illinois and Wabash river

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\* To the contrary, many of the familiar songbirds were scarce or absent before the land was converted to farms (see page 239).

<sup>†</sup> Rail service arrived in 1850.

flights, all of which diverged and spread over the entire state, both spring and fall, in every conceivable direction.

. . . The Illinois River flight commenced above St. Charles Flats, \* spreading all over the American Bottoms, † working up over the lakes lying on both sides of the river until it reached Fox River, then over the Fox Lake Region north. <sup>334</sup>

Dr. Yorke chronicled the drainage of the state's prairie wetlands and river backwaters. In the end "hundreds of miles of water, sloughs and glades were rendered almost duckless, where a few years before they swarmed in hundreds of thousands." After shooting opportunities in wetlands south of Chicago were "reduced to nothing" about 1880, wildfowlers increasingly turned their attention to the upper Fox River valley:

Again, the progressive ambition of shooters to own club houses, cottages, etc., on good shooting and fishing grounds, led them up the Fox Lake Region. Thus the glory of the shooting throughout the state of Illinois, once teeming with wildfowl the roar of whose wings could be heard for miles, has gone into history as a thing of the past . . . . Stopping spring shooting and propagating new or restoring old grounds in a similar manner to that the fish commissioners are now using afford the only remedies I can suggest to induce the birds to drop in, roost, feed or play a short time, instead of passing over. Cultivation, drainage, increase of population and railways have certainly been great agents in causing this sad duck loss; although, shooting before sunrise and after sunset, and long shots upon the hazard of chances have done their share in days past. <sup>334</sup>

## 1899: "Pollution of Streams"

The 1896-1898 *Report of the Illinois State Fish Commissioner* says this about the subject:

One of the most frequent complaints reaching us is the pollution of streams by allowing the waste from factories, paper mills, etc., to escape into them.

. . . The destruction of fish from this source is great, and some legislation touching on the subject should be enacted. Several times during the past seasons we have been called upon to investigate the great mortality among the fish, presumably from this cause. At several points on Fox river, particularly at Elgin, . . . we have made personal investigation, and while we could not determine just what was the cause and definitely locate it enough was ascertained to leave no doubt in our minds that fish were destroyed by those conditions.

Pollution of the waters to an extent sufficient to kill fish, must surely present a menace to the public health and some vigorous efforts should be put forth to

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\* The St. Charles Flats lie south of the mouth of the Illinois River.

† The American Bottom extends south along the east side of the Mississippi River below Alton.

arrest and prevent further danger from such causes. The ordinary sewage from towns emptying into the rivers is enough of itself to endanger life and health, but when to that is added acids and other poisonous matter, it would seem that such conditions would call for legislative assistance.<sup>154</sup>

**1901: *Genealogical and Biographical Record of Kendall and Will Counties, Illinois***

Graham G. Hunt, proprietor of Mini-ni-yan Springs, is featured in this volume. Hunt's farm was on the north side of the Fox River near Yorkville:

In 1893 he discovered the spring here. The land was marshy and he had spent considerable money in tiling. One day he found a spring had broken through, throwing a stream as large as a man's wrist a foot above ground. Having suffered for ten years with rheumatism he tried this water, and in about six weeks had recovered sufficiently so that he could put on his coat. From that time on he improved rapidly, and since then he has, by means of this water, been able to cure many people similarly afflicted. . . . Being a combination of mineral water with gas, it is very effective, as the volatile properties of the gas are mainly curative.

The springs cover sixty-five acres. . . . The name given the spring is Indian, meaning "Health-giving water." It is Mr. Hunt's plan to have a sanitarium here at no distant day . . . .<sup>41</sup>

**1901: *Report of State Fish Commissioners***

Carp feature prominently in biennial reports of the State Board of Fish Commissioners during the late 1800s and early 1900s. The commissioners' report for the period from October 1898 through September 1900 reviews the current status of carp and some of its history in Illinois. The United States Fish Commission stocked the first carp in the public waters of Illinois in 1885. \* A total of 29,900 carp were planted at 17 locations throughout the state. The Fox River's share was 2,000 fish, released at Aurora. In the following year another 2,000 carp were put into the river at Aurora. This stocking program was continued for some years. As a result, by the end of the 1898-1900 biennium, the fish commissioners could report,

The waters, particularly in the Illinois river, Fox lake, Calumet lake and river and many of the smaller streams, have become thickly populated with the carp, which, from the very rapid growth and development, added to their immense powers of propagation, has filled the waters to repletion.<sup>280</sup>

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\* Carp were supplied to Illinois landowners for stocking in private ponds as early as 1881.<sup>97</sup>

Fox Lake is again mentioned under the heading "Removing the Coarse Fishes":

The commissioners have adopted the plan of permitting the removal of the surplus of coarse fishes from lakes and streams . . . .

In many of the lakes that are fed wholly, or in part, by springs, such as Fox lake, for example, carp have increased in great numbers, as they can not well be kept down with hook and line. Citizens and owners of property on the lake petitioned to have a warden appointed under whose supervision they might remove the gars and dogfish, and, at the same time, the surplus carp. This arrangement was made and we sent Mr. G.R. Ratto, one of our best wardens, to Fox lake to attend to this work. This was accomplished, and over 60,000 pounds of carp were taken out. We were much surprised to find carp of such large size and in such great numbers where the water was of such low temperature. A number of the carp weighed forty pounds or over, and one was taken that weighed fifty-five pounds. While taking out the carp, a muskalonge weighing forty-nine pounds was caught. \* <sup>280</sup>

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\* The fish commissioners offered a bit of an apology and some defense of carp:

As a money producer the Illinois waters have never had its equal, and while there are many objectionable features resulting from its introduction into parts of the State, etc., as a whole it has to the mass of the people been of vital importance. In spring lakes where the percentage of game fishes run high, natural breeding grounds for the basses, it has probably worked some harm. Not on account of destruction to the spawn and other fish as alleged, by its combative tendencies, but from the fact that as a vegetable feeder they destroy, to some extent, vegetation and keep the water stirred up. This objection however, can not be made in the greater portion of Illinois waters.

Great flat lakes, with muddy bottoms line both sides of the Illinois river for a greater part of its length. The Illinois river itself, from its character, is a natural home for them and a proper proportion of bass, and crappie are always found everywhere, and as constantly increasing as are the carp. There is and can be no reason to regret their introduction in such waters. We have no need to defend them or their usefulness, the figures and facts show for themselves. A glance at report of Illinois River Fishermen Association will show the results.

Some criticism has been made as to the act of the commission in introducing them into our waters, but mainly from the anglers' standpoint. In fact we have been told that the carp have so depleted the wild grass of some of the lakes that it has caused the wild ducks to change their breeding grounds. And intimations have been made that not even the corn fields adjacent to the river were safe from their invasion. Be that as it may, as stated before, while in some few localities the carp may not be just what people want, but the fact remains that the carp are giving to the people of the State more employment, more money, and more food than all other of our native fish combined, and the prejudice early existing is fast giving way, and almost every hotel table in the State, carp on bill of fare, can occasionally be found. <sup>280</sup>

## 1902: *History of Lake County*

This accompaniment of the *Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois* looks back on the 19th century and compares it with the beginning of the 20th century:

West of the Des Plaines are more than fifty lakes, many of them with sandy beaches, their borders set with native trees, and their waters teeming with fish. Along Fox River . . . there were at an early day forests of considerable magnitude. At frequent intervals, even in what are called the prairie townships, are groves of wide extent. It's soil is fertile; it's productions varied.

. . . And what a country it was! It is not easy for those who drive along the public highways of the present time to imagine how this region looked to the pioneers. Then there were no fences. The underbrush had been kept down by fires and did not obstruct the view. There were native trees of vast size. In the spring and autumn every slough and pond contained water and in every depression was a running stream. The native grass was of luxuriant growth. There was a wonderful wealth of brilliant blossoms on very acre of dry land. The fires, which almost annually swept across the prairies, did little harm to the groves and forests and seemed to just fit the country for the wonderful crop of grass and the vast floral display that came year after year. The settlers drove everywhere unhindered, save by the sloughs or streams, and it required close watching, in the maze of tracks, to know which was the right one to follow to reach a given point. Approaching a slough or runway he sought to avoid the track of every other traveler, in order to escape the rut cut through the sod, and so made a wholly new track, to the right or left of those who had preceded, thus adding to the difficulty of finding the correct route.

The fencing of the farms, the laying out of roads, the bridging of streams, the cutting away of forests, and the cultivation of the soil have changed the appearance of the entire country to a marked degree. Tile and surface drains have taken the water from the sloughs and ponds, and made tillable the overflowed lands of the long ago. Some of the lakes are smaller than formerly. The creeks that once carried water to the mill-wheel have shrunk to tiny brooks.

. . . Water fowl were abundant for many years. Indeed, for a long time they nested in this region. In the spring and fall the lakes and ponds were often fairly covered with ducks and geese. Deer were frequently seen, and became even more plenty for a few years after the Indians left than they had been before, as the settlers did not follow them as closely as their dusky predecessors had done. It was not uncommon for them when the snow was deep to come into the yards where cattle were kept and feed from the stacks of hay. But in time they were killed off, a few, however, making their home in the O'Plain \* woods even as

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\* O'Plain = Des Plaines River.

late as 1871. Prairie chickens and quail rapidly increased after there were ample grain fields in which to feed, but the traps and guns became too numerous, and now it is a rare thing to see a covey in this region. Wild cats and lynx were frequently killed. There was an occasional bear encountered in the timber, but the hunters followed them so closely that all were dispatched in a few years. Wolves were not so readily disposed of and proved the sheep grower's worst enemy. Even as late as the early 'Seventies they were so troublesome that a sportsman with a pack of hounds was employed to hunt them down. The farmers joining him, the woods and prairies were scoured, with the result that only an occasional wolf has been seen in the county since, the few noticed probably having strayed down from the timber regions of Wisconsin.

... The rail fences cost immense labor and consumed vast forests. Not infrequently great piles of rails were destroyed by fire running through the woods, miles of fencing being annually consumed by prairie fires. The principal fuel of the people for thirty years after the settlement of the county was wood.

... Until about 1873 the locomotive furnaces were fed with wood. The early houses and stables were of logs, and wood was the fuel of almost every household until 1865 or later. Because of this the magnificent forests found by the pioneers were rapidly depleted. Kindly Nature has sought to restore the wasting groves, but the droughts of recent years have made still farther inroads upon the growing timber and a marked change as regards the wooded appearance of large portions of the county is the result.

The early settlers set out peach trees quite as freely as they did apple trees, and in the early 'Fifties vast quantities of peaches were grown in the county, some of the farmers selling hundreds of bushels. The market was glutted for a year or two and thousands of bushels annually went to waste. A winter of unusual severity destroyed the trees, and this industry has not been successfully resumed, although in recent years those who have peach trees have peaches. Apple orchards, once productive and profitable, have fallen victim of natural pests or of neglect and largely disappeared.

... Wheat was a principal product of the farmers of Lake County for twenty-five years. Then came the destructive chinch bug, and the consequent failure of the crop.

... At one time, and for several years, Lake County stood second in the 102 counties in Illinois in the number of sheep assessed.

... Stock raising and stock feeding has always had attention. Dairying is the one farm industry, however, which has steadily grown from its inception.

... Plank roads were tried but proved unsatisfactory.

... Saw mills, of which there were a score in early times, have served their purpose and disappeared. \*

In pioneer days it was not uncommon for hogs to stray away and become in a few years almost savage.

... In the near vicinity of Wauconda is a stray tamarack forest of several acres, † and near by it, and at one point farther west, are natural cranberry swamps. There is also a cranberry marsh adjacent to Cranberry Lake, in the township of Avon. In early days Samuel Garwood ‡ gathered as many as 200 bushels of cranberries annually from this marsh.

... The "Big Sag" is the name of a marshy tract of land embracing a thousand acres or more in the townships of Avon and Fremont. ¶ Some portions of this tract is a peat bed, as is the case with many of the sloughs in the county. During the dry autumn of 1901 a fire smouldered for many weeks, burning the peat down to the earth beneath over more than one hundred acres of this tract. 26

### 1903: *Lost Meramech and Earliest Chicago*

John F. Steward grew up near the Fox River at Plano. As a boy he roamed the rural environs of present-day Silver Springs State Park. § As a man he researched and wrote about the history of his beloved Fox valley.

The early French knew the Fox River as the *Pesteguouy* (*Pisticoui*, *Petricoui*, etc.), which was their rendering of the local Algonquian name for bison. A few maps from the French era label the Fox River as *R. du Rocher* (River of the Rock). Steward surmised that the stream was renamed the Rock River after bison had been eliminated from the region. He thought that the most salient feature of the valley after bison was a pair of rocky prominences along the river south of Plano, near the mouth of Big Rock Creek:

After the passing away of the buffalo, from which the river took its first known name, no more noticeable feature characterized it than the rounded rocks at Meramech.

... So prominent are these rocks, each more than an acre in extent, that the beautiful Pestekouy lost its name to be called Rivière du Rocher. \*\* 287

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\* Not all these sawmills were water-powered.

† The tamaracks are in Wauconda Bog Nature Preserve.

‡ The 1852 history of Lake County gives this man's name as Gunwood.

¶ Fremont-Avon Ditch drains part of the complex of wetlands that once extended across the township line.

§ Steward knew the springs in the park as Sylvan Springs.

\*\* Although Steward presented his idea with the authority of truth, he was speculating.



In the immediate vicinity of these two rocky bluffs was a cave, which had been quarried away decades before Steward explored the area:

Before the white man's destructive hand had wrought havoc by taking building material for a dam from the cliff on the eastern shore, a spring flowed from it through a crevice which, for a distance, it had eroded wide and high. To this roomy part, extending fifty feet into the rocky ledge, early settlers gave the name Black Hawk's Cave.<sup>287</sup>

Steward was familiar with the site of an ancient village along the Fox River south of Plano. After years of research he concluded that this must have been the location of Meramech, a town that several old French maps place somewhere along the Fox River. He further concluded that a nearby hill (now called Meramech Hill) was the location of a Mesquakie (Fox) fortification. The French and their allies \* besieged and annihilated hundreds of Mesquakie in 1730. Mr. Steward's conclusion about the site of this siege has been discredited; the battle took place in the Grand Prairie far south of the Fox River.<sup>†</sup>

### 1903: "Pollution of Streams"

In its biennial report for 1900-02, the State Board of Fish Commissioners lamented the condition of the state's streams, particularly the Fox River:

Very many of the finest streams in the State are today only sewers. We have had our attention directed to the effect of such pollution on the Fox river several times, and fish have been found dead in large numbers for miles below some manufacturing plant, undoubtedly killed by the introduction into the river of the poisonous washes. A careful examination of the water and bottom of the river showed a very dirty condition, to say the least. The Fox river, once one of the best of inland streams, with clear, pure water and clean rock bottom, we found one of the dirtiest, with the bottom covered with a deposit of filth which could not help being a menace to health wherever the water was used. What is true of the Fox river is fast becoming a universal condition, so far as our rivers are concerned. If there were no alternative it might be considered mere fault finding to call attention to this matter, but as we now have a system of sewerage which effectually controls all waste and sewage, and renders the escaping effluence practically cleaner than the water of the river, there is no excuse for

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\* France's allies during this siege included members of the Peoria, Kickapoo, Mascouten, Potawatomi, Miami, Missouri, and Cahokia tribes.

† Soon after the defeat of the Mesquakie, a French official located the siege "in a Plain situated between the River Wabache and the River of the Illinois, About 60 Leagues to the south of The Extremity or foot of Lake Michigan, to the East South East of le Rocher in the Illinois Country."<sup>305</sup> *Le Rocher* is Starved Rock.

a continuance of this practice, and legislative action should be had to prevent the existence of the present conditions. \* <sup>278</sup>

## 1904: *History of Kane County*

Chapter I of the *History of Kane County* is titled "Indians." Editor John S. Wilcox described the main settlements of Potawatomi in the county:

In 1833 the principal village of this portion of the tribe extended loosely along the west bank of Fox River from the site of the present city of Aurora to Mill Creek; †

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\* In its next biennial report, the State Board of Fish Commissioners repeated its plea:

Again your commissioners would respectfully call attention to the great damage to fish ensuing from pollution of the streams of the State, and urge such legislation as will correct the abuse. . . . The beautiful cold, clear rivers of the State are fast becoming only common sewers, and cannot help being a menace to life and health. If there were no other means than the use of the rivers to care for sewerage and refuse, it would be a different proposition, but with septic devices that will take care for it and do it well, there would seem to be no reason why proper legislation should not be had. <sup>279</sup>

Another two years later, the commissioners again brought the problem of pollution to the attention of readers of its biennial report:

We recall a number of the smaller rivers which were once clear, clean streams, but which are now only the outlets for the refuse of manufacturing establishments or for sewerage of towns along their banks. Personal observation has shown a deposit in them that is not only a menace to the fish life of the stream, but the breeding place of diseases that destroy human life as well. <sup>281</sup>

After seven more years, in 1914, the State Game and Fish Conservation Commission expressed its continued exasperation:

Many of our streams and some of our lakes are so badly polluted that fish are destroyed in large numbers as a consequence. In many instances waters that once contained a good quantity of good fish are now practically depleted because of pollution.

The commission has given considerable attention to this matter, but so far has not been able to put an end to the evil.

Manufacturers have gotten into the habit of turning into the streams poisonous waste from their factories and seem to regard it as something of an infringement on their rights when they have been notified that they must stop killing our fish with their poisonous refuse matter. Some of the manufacturers with whom this matter has been taken up have shown a disposition to do something to prevent their poisonous waste from getting into the water and killing the fish.

The custom has prevailed for so long that there is sure to be considerable difficulty in stopping the continued pollution of our fish waters. However, the commission has not despaired of making a great improvement over the present bad condition. <sup>101</sup>

† The mouth of Mill Creek is about five miles upstream from downtown Aurora.

and a smaller village in command of Nic-o-wah was located on the east bank of the river, just below where Dundee now stands, in the sheltered glade known as "Granny Russell's Hollow." <sup>29</sup>

Chapter II is "Topography and Flora":

In this middle valley of the Fox there were no bad lands. . . . The woodland and prairies abounded in game, and the streams were teeming with excellent food-fishes. There were no tangled forests, no large impenetrable swamps nor vast prairies, but a continued succession of gentle, sloping hills and smiling valleys, covered with rich verdure and beautiful forest glades. The flower-bedecked prairies were bordered by fair woodlands and dotted with shady groves.

Through that portion of the valley now included within the boundaries of Kane County, the Fox River held its course from the north nearly due south. Its waters were clear and pure, fed by innumerable creeks and springs, and it was not connected with any large sloughs or swamps. Its bed was clean gravel with a few short stretches of limestone rock; its channel of quite uniform depth, with a quick, steady flow or current, while its banks, both in prairie and woodland, along its whole course, sloped gently to the water's edge. . . . upon each bank, very many fine brooks and contiguous springs were feeding its whole course with their pure, cool waters. In ordinary times it was never a deep stream; but in those early days, when the whole surface of the land was covered with the tough prairie sod, like an almost impenetrable thatch, the heavy rains and, in spring, melting snows, poured volumes of water into all its tributaries, that frequently overflowed their banks and so filled the river that it became a torrent impassable to man or beast. And, when the ice broke after a severe winter and came sweeping down with the spring freshet, its force was irresistible, and the first bridges and dams were swept away like straws before the mad floods. Probably the river itself, and also each of these tributary streams, have diminished nearly one-half in size and flow of current. The winter cutting of thousands and hundreds of thousands of tons of ice from its frozen surface, and the erection of so many dams and bridges, together with the constant diversion of so much of its water for the use of the fine cities and towns along its bank, have so diminished its volume and current that it is now easily controlled.

. . . A number of lakes or ponds, covering from fifteen to eighty or more acres each, formerly existed along its western water-shed. Nelson's Lake \* on the line between the townships of Batavia and Blackberry, and Lily Lake, just east of the Campton and Virgil line, were probably the largest and deepest of them. Quite a body of deep water covered a portion of the northwest quarter of Section 8,

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\* The water level in Nelson Lake has been lowered by ditching, and part of the lake basin has been mined for peat, but much of what remains is in Nelson Lake Marsh Nature Preserve.

and another larger, but shallower, lay on the east line of the southeast quarter of Section 16, both in Elgin Township. The latter was the source of the north branch of Ferson's Creek, and Lily Lake was the source of the south branch. There were many other smaller ponds in the county.

The greater absorption of the rainfall by the earth under cultivation, and a thorough system of open ditches and covered tiling, have completely drained these reservoirs, and the former sloughs; and today these low-lying lands are among the most productive in the county. Each township has one or more clear running spring brooks . . . .

The banks of the river and of its principal tributaries were usually bordered with a fine growth of forest trees, the white, black, red and burr-oaks being most numerous; but there were also shag-bark and bitter hickories, \* white and black ash, sugar maples, black walnut and butternut, several varieties of elms, basswood, poplar, † sycamore trees, and a few cedars. On the east bank of the river there was a body of magnificent timber, extending from the south line of the county northward to Batavia, called the "Big Woods," and a similar growth, reaching from Geneva to the north line of St. Charles Township, was called the "Little Woods." These tracts were covered with a growth of hardwood trees, standing so thickly and of such stately proportions as to fully justify their designation as "timber lands." There were many splendid oaks, maples and black walnuts, whose massive boles would square over two feet, which rose straight as arrows, with a height of thirty or forty feet to the first spreading branches which formed their lofty crowns, and whose huge limbs often produced logs sixteen feet in length that could be split into rails. For many years these timber lands produced large quantities of hewed and sawed timber, ties, planks and boards, for building dams, mills, bridges, plank-roads, railways and various other structures; while also supplying rails, stakes and posts for fencing, and fuel for the communities located along the river.

On the northeast quarter of Section 1, in Elgin Township, there was a small tract of very remarkable forest and plant growth known as the "Cedar Swamp." ‡ Each variety of the forest trees above mentioned reached their perfection here; and, in addition, there were great red and white cedars, ¶ not tall but with low immense trunks, and very large branches. From single points

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\* Bitter hickory = bitternut hickory (*Carya cordiformis*).

† The name "poplar" has been applied to a number of trees in the genus *Populus*, including the eastern cottonwood (*P. deltoides*), quaking aspen (*P. tremuloides*), and big-tooth aspen (*P. grandidentata*).

‡ Part of the old Cedar Swamp is in Trout Park Nature Preserve.

¶ Red cedar = eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*); white cedar = northern white cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*).

of view more than a dozen varieties of splendid forest trees could be seen in close proximity, besides very many species of rare and beautiful swamp and woodland shrubs, plants, ferns, flowers and grasses. Copious springs of clear, cold water bubbled up from the depths of boggy hillsides, over which you could pick your cautious way on slimy, moss-covered logs, and into whose oozy depths one could easily thrust a pole amid submerged decaying logs ten or fifteen feet. Mr. Burgess Truesdell, an educated gentleman and student, and a close observer of nature, declared that, on no other so restricted space, had he ever seen or read of an equal variety and beauty of plant life. A half-dozen sparkling streams hurried to the near-by river, and in their pure, cold water the fastidious brook trout were successfully propagated in later years. Until despoiled by the greedy hand of man, it was indeed a scene of rare forest beauty.

Each of the townships lying away from the river had woodland amply sufficient for the buildings and fences of the early days, and for domestic use as fuel. It is doubtful if a fertile area equal to Kane County could be found in which prairie, woodland and water were more equally and favorably distributed.

Beside these trees of larger growth, were found the smaller varieties—iron-woods, willows, wild cherries, crab-apples, thorn-apples, wild plums and the like, in great abundance. Hazel, blackberry, raspberry, gooseberry and black currant bushes grew in great profusion; and wild grape vines made luxuriant growth along the borders of the streams. The nuts and mast, and the wild fruits of the forest furnished, in early times, quite abundant, and always palatable and wholesome, food for man, beast and bird. The open prairies were thickly covered with rich verdure from the nutritious upland grass to the coarse wire and the rank broad-leaved grasses, and the rushes and lilies of the sloughs and ponds. Over both woodland and prairie, from early spring until the sharp frosts of near-by winter, there passed a constant procession of bloom and beauty. How delightful to recall, even in fleeting visions and happy memories of those early days, the lovely panorama of the spring, summer and autumn time. First, the springing grasses, the pussy willows and hazel tassels, the opening buds of the young hickories and the shy blooming of the wind flower; then the snowy white of the fragrant hawthorn and wild plum, the immense bouquet of the crab-apple in bloom, the wild rose and eglantine, the beautiful beds of phlox, the great swaying lilies, the brilliant cardinal flower ("green knight with a scarlet plume," the children called it); the wonderfully delicate tinted lady-slipper, and all the bright and lovely procession of wild flower and fruit that swept on through the glowing summer, until the chill winds of autumn ushered in the golden Indian summer, with its soft air and mellow haze. Upon the broad canvas of green verdure, nature painted pictures of exquisite color and charming loveliness.

Though now nearing life's radiant sunset, what man or woman is there who lived in this favored land in the pioneer days, who does not still recall, with a thrill of pleasure, the delicious wild-strawberries and the yellow ground-

cherries, that bloomed and ripened on the sunny slope of some familiar hillside; the deep blue of the indigo plant ("horse-fiddle"); \* the tall sunflower-like rosin weed, † whose broken stems exuded such delicious white gum; the swaying golden-rod and innumerable daisies and asters; the wood anemones and mandrakes or "May apples;" and, with greater or less distinctness, dear memories of his or her chosen favorites among the countless varieties of lovely wild flowers that, in rich profusion, decked with beauty and fragrance this home of their childhood? Many, very many, of these are lost and gone; yet J.H. Becker, Esq., an ardent lover of nature, furnishes this list of blossoming shrubs and plants that still may be found in quiet nooks undisturbed by cultivation: Blood-root; rue; wood anemone; star-flower; mandrake; spring beauty; Dutchman's breeches; white trillium; wild sarsaparilla; Solomon's seal; false Solomon's seal; dog-wood; red-berried elder; white and yellow wood-sorrel; poison ivy; Virginia creeper; ox-eyed daisy; Indian pipe; field chickweed; white and yellow water-lily; poke-weed; wild carrot; yarrow; water-parsnip; arrow-head; jimson weed; white, blue and purple asters; boneset; marsh marigold; dog-tooth; yellow, white and purple violets; celandine; yellow and white lady-slipper; small yellow and white lady-slipper; meadow lily; wood lily; pond lily; yellow star-grass; butter and eggs; St. John's wort; mullen; jewel weed; evening primrose; black-eyed Susan; golden-rod; elecampane; wild and swamp sunflower; stick tight; tansy; milk-weed; bouncing Bet; fire-weed; columbine; wake robin; painted cup; cardinal flower; honey-suckle; liverwort; phlox (many varieties); geranium; blue-eyed grass; blue flag; spider wort; Indian tobacco; white and blue gentian; fringed gentian; skunk cabbage; Jack in the pulpit; wild hyacinth; pussy willows; buttercups; wild roses; leeks; rosin weed; ground cherry; strawberry; cat tail; red root, and many varieties of ferns. <sup>29</sup>

### Chapter III, "Wild Animals, Birds and Reptiles":

The Indians told the early settlers a tradition related by their fathers of a very long and very cold winter, many years ago, when the snow covered the tops of the young trees and remained very late in the spring. As the story goes, the cold was so bitter and so steady that many Indians and all the game perished, being starved and frozen; that very late in the spring there was a sudden change to summer-like weather, accompanied by a warm, heavy rain; that it rained for many days, melting the snow so fast that the land was deluged with water, when many more of the Indians were drowned; also that the savage beasts which had lived through the cold upon the carcasses of the starved and frozen animals,

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\* The indigo plant or "horse-fiddle" with deep blue flowers is the blue wild indigo (*Baptisia australis*). The authors of *Plants of the Chicago Region* considered this species to be introduced from farther south or west—even though it has been found growing in the wild a few times in Kane and adjacent counties, sometimes associated with native prairie plants. <sup>296</sup>

† The various rosin weeds are discussed in a footnote on page 227.

were all drowned in the flood. They showed marks and scars, high upon the trees, which they declared had been made by the drift and ice upon the rushing torrents.

... unquestionably this was once the habitat of the bison and elk. ... the early settlers found indubitable proofs of their former presence in the decaying skulls, horns and bones of these animals which remained; and also in the numerous paths and "wallows" which were said to have been made by the buffalo. \*

... The Indians also told of the time when their fathers would encircle, on three sides, great numbers of buffalo and quietly stalk and drive them toward the high bluff of the Illinois River, a little below Ottawa—still known as "Buffalo Rock"—and, at the proper time, by suddenly rushing, leaping and shouting at the herd, throw it into a wild stampede, and plunge it in a mad frenzy over the precipice upon the rocks below, thus killing hundreds of them at a single drive. †

... Occasionally a bear, a panther ‡ or a timber wolf was seen, but these were only individual instances, and so rare as to give no trouble to the pioneers. Prairie wolves were very numerous, but they should not be confounded with the coyotes of the western plains. They were much larger and bolder than the latter. In size they were midway between the timber wolf and coyote. Many a good dog would hesitate to give battle to a full-grown one, and a pair were more than a match for any dog. ¶

... The common red deer § were very abundant, and were often seen in herds of ten or a dozen. From 1840 to 1850 many men made the winters profitable by hunting them for sale upon the market. Rabbits swarmed in the timber and openings, and raccoons and fox-squirrels were abundant. Foxes were not numerous; neither were there many wild-cats of any kind. Occasionally a Canadian lynx was found. None of the water-courses bore indication of the

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\* This statement about buffalo bones and wallows appears in both the 1904 *History of Kane County* and the 1908 *History of Schuyler County*.<sup>25</sup> This is an example of boiler-plate editorial policy, by which a statement is copied from one county history book to the next.

† Buffalo Rock is a mile-long mesa on the north bank of the Illinois River, about four miles below the mouth of the Fox. A cliff on the south side of Buffalo Rock drops directly into the river. All the known accounts of hunting bison at Buffalo Rock are in the form of a legend; for example Governor Reynolds wrote in 1854, "Tradition says, the name was given to this place, as the hunters in olden times, drove the buffaloes on the rock or elevation, and forced them off over a precipice at the other angle. They were killed by the fall, and their flesh shipped to New Orleans. At all events, this is the name the Buffalo Rock enjoys."<sup>238</sup>

‡ Panther = mountain lion.

¶ The only native canid intermediate in size between the timber wolf and the coyote is the red wolf (*Canis rufus*), which has never been scientifically documented with certainty from Illinois.<sup>141</sup>

§ Common red deer = white-tailed deer.

presence of beaver at any time, but now and then an otter was taken. These animals were observed upon the river as late as in the '50s. Muskrats were very numerous, and their houses may still be occasionally seen along the water-courses. Minks, weasels and skunks seem appurtenant to civilization, and are about as numerous and about as destructive of domestic fowls now as they ever were. A large gray gopher \* and innumerable little striped gophers † were found in the country, and are still here, each quite destructive of the newly planted grain. There were, and still are, plenty of chipmunks, also of fox-squirrels, and a few black and gray squirrels ‡ in the woods. Wood-chucks and house-rats and mice came with civilization, but moles and field-mice were here when the first settlers came. The soil had never been turned by the plow and their snug burrows thus destroyed, and the collective broods of all sorts, varieties and species of creeping, crawling, jumping creatures that find shelter on and under the surface of the earth, had multiplied and increased without measure, and incredible numbers of insects—some very beautiful and others exceedingly repulsive—swarmed on every side during the whole warm season.

Many varieties of small, innocuous snakes were found in great abundance—the common milk-snake, water-snake, striped (or “garter”) and green snakes being most numerous. Scores of the mottled water-snakes could be seen on any quiet bright summer day about the log, brush and dirt dams at the saw-mills, sunning themselves in the warm light, and slipping quickly and silently out of sight upon the approach of an intruder. There were at least a dozen varieties of harmless snakes that, in the early days, abounded in great numbers. The rattlesnakes, called by the Indians “Massasaugas,” were also very numerous. . . . They were a very poisonous reptile and, unless their bite were quickly attended to, it was liable to result seriously. To man, or to the faithful dog, it might prove fatal. Horses and cattle avoided it with terror; yet upon them its virus rarely, if ever, produced death. Hogs manifested no fear of it whatever, and sought it for food. The hog utterly indifferent to its strike, would greedily seize it with his teeth, put his front feet upon it, and tear it to pieces and devour it. A courageous dog would sometimes seize one near its head and shake its life out so quickly as to escape its fangs; but usually he received a venomous stroke that seemed to produce intense agony for several days, yet rarely proved fatal. The massasauga was a dull, slow-moving, stupid creature, apparently incapable of fear. . . . These reptiles were usually equipped with three to eight rattles, yet occasionally one was killed having fifteen or more “buttons”,—even up to twenty. Each rattle or button was said to represent a year of life . . . . It was held a religious duty to destroy every rattler that was discovered, and the duty has been so fully observed that they are now practically extinct.

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\* Gray gopher = Franklin's ground squirrel.

† Striped gopher = thirteen-lined ground squirrel.

‡ The gray squirrel has black individuals and populations.



... Some of the boys would handle the striped and the little green snakes as pets, carrying them in their pockets. They were really as harmless as grasshoppers. Many tales were told in the pioneer times of "vipers," "adders," "Moccasins," and "blow snakes," \* as venomous reptiles that should be carefully avoided; but it is exceedingly doubtful if any such serpents were ever actually found here. There were many vicious "snapping turtles," and the common land and water tortoise † was abundant. Frogs and toads were, of course, numerous. Along the borders of the low lands, very many little circular embankments of clay two or three inches high, would be noticed surrounding the entrance to the perpendicular smooth round well of the little crab, or crawfish, that, it was said, always went down until it found water.

Innumerable land and water-fowl made this their permanent or their migratory home. With the melting of the snow in the early spring, the brant, goose and duck made their appearance. ... The few we see now are as nothing compared to the thousands of the early days. They nested and reared their numerous broods along the river, creeks, and reedy ponds. ... Their numbers may be inferred from the fact that, after a heavy summer rain, in a little temporary pool of water formed in a depression of the prairie, now part of the cultivated field of one of our dairy farms; as they took wing from the pond, seven ducks were brought down by the discharge of a single-barreled shot-gun. Prairie chickens literally swarmed over the prairies, and numberless coveys of quail whistled in prairie and woodland. The children caught them by dozens in "figure-four" and other traps. ‡ The drum of the partridge ¶ was heard in the heavy timber, and in startled flight, they whirled from copse to copse through the groves.

During the summer time there were many sand-hill cranes. They came in spring at about the same time as the geese, or a little later . . . . . they were seen descending upon the prairies, in localities from which they rarely wandered far during the summer. They were exceedingly wary and shy, and they seemed to prefer the gravelly knolls and dry summits of the prairie. . . . A species of bittern, the children called "thunder pumps," § inhabited the marshy places, and snipes of different kinds, and plover and woodcock were numerous on the prairies and lowlands. Rarely, but now and then, stately snow-white swans,

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\* The hognose snake has borne the undeserved reputation of being a venomous viper, adder, moccasin, or blow snake.

† The prairie tortoise is the box turtle. Perhaps similarly shaped aquatic species were considered "water tortoises."

‡ A figure-four trap consists of an inverted box, propped up by a trigger that is shaped like a figure 4. When an animal nudges bait on the cross-arm of the 4, the box falls over the animal.

¶ Partridge = ruffed grouse.

§ Thunder pump = American bittern.

were observed floating majestically upon the still water places or sailing in the quiet air.

Immense flocks of wild pigeons, in their season, actually darkened the sky, and they passed like the sound of a mighty rushing wind. Myriads moved on northward, while other myriads tarried here. In some favorite grove or clump of trees, which they chose for their nesting or roosting places, they broke down the branches with the weight of their numbers. If permitted to settle upon a field of late sown spring wheat or oats, they would devour the seed or young grain, in a few minutes destroying the whole seedling. The women and children guarded the crop, and "scare-crows" were rigged to frighten them away. Thousands and thousands of them were netted and shot. It is said that the species is now utterly extinct.

The "brown thrasher," \* robin, lark, bobolink, cat-bird, whip-poor-will and many other song birds in great numbers filled the air with their delightful notes. . . . The Baltimore oriole <sup>†</sup> and scarlet tanager flashed amid the foliage; the red-headed, golden-winged <sup>‡</sup> and spotted wood-peckers <sup>¶</sup> . . . , the gaudy, jaunty blue-jay . . . , and the beautiful little blue-bird . . . . In the quiet evening . . . was heard the plaintive cry of the whip-poor-will. In the long twilight of the summer evenings how many night hawks there were . . . .

. . . Our historic bald eagle and the great gray eagle <sup>§</sup> were frequently seen . . . . The smaller varieties of raptores were very abundant and, from the large hen-hawks <sup>\*\*</sup> down to the bee-eating king-bird, and the unconquerable little shrike or soldier bird, they waged relentless warfare upon each other and upon the smaller birds, reptiles and insects. There were four or five varieties of owls; the great horned, the equally large gray owl <sup>††</sup> and the little barn screech-owl <sup>‡‡</sup>— the latter being most numerous. Crows were scarce in the early days, and if there were any of them here when the white man came, they have largely

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\* Brown thrasher = brown thrasher.

† Baltimore oriole = northern oriole.

‡ Golden-winged wood-pecker = northern flicker.

¶ The hairy woodpecker has been called the big spotted woodpecker, and the downy woodpecker has been called the little spotted woodpecker.

§ Gray eagle = golden eagle.

\*\* The name "hen-hawk" or "chicken hawk" has been given to a number of large raptors, including the northern harrier, Cooper's hawk, and red-tailed hawk.

†† Gray owl = ? common barn-owl.

‡‡ The eastern screech-owl has been called a barn owl, and the common barn-owl has been called a screech owl.

increased in numbers, notwithstanding the mistaken and cruel warfare incessantly waged against them; but the large black-bird, \* with his rich plumage, and the brilliant red-winged starlings † were then, as now, very abundant. The singular little tame brown "cow black-birds" ‡ were also very numerous . . . . The assembling in the fall of the clouds of black birds, preparatory to southern migration, was interesting to observe.<sup>29</sup>

In Chapter VI, "Early Home-Seekers," John Wilcox described the labors of the immigrant farmer and the threat of prairie fires :

Before . . . work is completed, whatever of crop he had planted is beginning to ripen, and the upland prairie grass, which made excellent hay, was ready for the scythe. Fortunately, crops growing upon new sod needed very little cultivation . . . . . The light crop of the first year, and the prairie hay, the farmer and his family harvested without help. . . . The grain was secured in round stacks generously topped with slough hay, and the hay was stacked in long ricks, so placed as to form wind-breaks for the stock. The cabin, sheds and stacks were in close proximity, so that they could be most easily protected from the awful prairie fires. Early in the fall the farmer "back-furrowed" a wide strip of plowed ground around them all; and, as soon as the grass was dry enough, when there came a still day with no wind, he "back-fired" and carefully burned a much wider girdle outside the plowing, to further protect against the late fall and the spring fires that were liable to come sweeping, with terrible fury, around the little home, scattering the kindling sparks far and wide.

The prairie fires were a sharp menace and dread to the early settlers. The whole prairie land was covered in summer with a dense growth of grass and flowering plants, from one to two feet in height, with frequent rosin-weed and other stalks five or six feet tall, while in the sloughs the thick coarse foliage was doubly as rank. In the fall, when matured and killed by the frost, and then thoroughly dried by the warm winds of the beautiful Indian summer, this vast mass of evenly spread vegetation was dry and inflammable as tinder,<sup>†</sup> and blazed forth at the least touch of flame and sped away, in ever widening area, actually "upon the wings of the wind." Words cannot exaggerate the awful terror and sublimity of the great fires which once swept, like oceans of flame, over the wide prairies, and people will marvel at the tales of their magnificent fury. The mysterious instinct of all wild creatures seemed to warn them of the approaching danger,

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\* Black-bird = common grackle.

† Red-winged starling = red-winged blackbird.

‡ Cow black-bird = brown-headed cowbird.

<sup>†</sup> Smoke from widespread wildfires of Indian Summer created a hazy atmosphere and spectacular sunsets. The *Commemorative Biographical and Historical Record of Kane County* speaks of "the Indian summer season of smoky haze and great red sunset."<sup>35</sup>

before any sense of man could discover cause for alarm, and their terror told him of the impending peril. Then came the faint odor of burning vegetation, the scarce perceptible darkening of the sky and the total hush of the breeze, when suddenly, out of the unnatural stillness, away yonder leaped the monstrous sheet of flame, sweeping onward with incredible speed. The child of sixty years ago will still recall, with a thrill of horror, this awful menace and the frantic struggles to save the cabin home. Backward against the wind it only crept, and a child could control or extinguish it; but with the wind, it rushed with the full velocity of the current on which it rode, a solid sheet of flame flashing high in the air, and with fierce heat, instantly burning the life out of any living creature caught in its fiery breath. The great sheet of roaring flame rose and fell with the wind that swept it onward; yet it passed as quickly as it came. Whatever could withstand its scorching heat one dreadful minute was safe, for the blackened land in its wake was fanned by a cool breeze the instant it had passed. During the autumn time the evening sky was often lurid with the light of prairie fires, some of them miles away. Buildings or stock were rarely destroyed, but much fencing and many stacks of hay or grain were ignited and consumed.<sup>29</sup>

A biographical sketch of Joseph McCarty portrays the site of Aurora when it was Wabaunsee's village:

Joseph McCarty, the founder of Aurora, . . . left his home . . . in the fall of 1833, accompanied by a young apprentice . . . in quest of a desirable water-power and "mill privilege" in the West. . . . at Ottawa he met a man . . . who agreed to explore with them the Fox River. The three proceeded up the valley of the Fox and were charmed with the beauty of the country and evident fertility of the soil. On the first day of April, 1834, . . . they reached the Indian village of "Wah-bn-seh," and here McCarty found the full realizations he had so far, so long, and so diligently sought. The east bank of the stream was covered with the magnificent timber of the "Big Woods." On the west side he often caught glimpses, through the park-like openings, of the fertile prairie stretching away to the distant groves and horizon. In mid stream of the river lay a lovely wooded island. A few yards below the island, the river swung gracefully westward and flowed, in shallow, rippling current, over a pebbly, rocky bed . . . . No more charming scene could be imagined.<sup>29</sup>

While Joseph McCarty set to work building a mill dam at Aurora, James Gifford and company were prospecting for a mill site:

. . . the lovely landscape, where the city of Elgin now stands, attracted their admiring attention. It seemed to them a vast park rather than an uncultivated wilderness. The steep, though not precipitous, hills on the west bank of the river were covered with great white and black oak trees, and patches of smaller trees, and hazel and berry bushes grew in the more open places. The whole imposing hillside and narrow level bank to the river's verge was green with the grassy verdure of early spring. For a half mile or more in width on the east

side, over the gentler hills and valley slopes, were scattered the low topped, wide-spreading burr oak trees, with no undergrowth and carpeted beneath like a grassy lawn. The view was open and unobstructed to the timber lands that are now the beautiful city park. It reminded them of the great old orchards in New York. The firm, gravelly bed of the stream guaranteed a solid foundation for a dam, and the rapid flow of the river indicated the fall of water necessary to insure the requisite power for mills. There was also a long, narrow slough paralleling the river for a half mile or more, near to its east bank, that with little expense could be converted into a raceway for distributing the power acquired by a dam.<sup>29</sup>

A sawmill was running at Aurora by 1835, and a grist mill by 1837. Both a sawmill and a grist mill were operating at Elgin by 1837. Meanwhile the Fox River was in the process of being dammed for mills at North Aurora, Batavia, Geneva, St. Charles, Dundee, and Carpentersville. All these mills may have been preceded by a sawmill on Mill Creek, a tributary of the Fox below Batavia. Dam-building continued through the 1830s: "About 1838 or 1839 George and Calvin Tyler began operating a saw-mill on the creek bearing their name, and John Hill commenced running a like mill on Popple Creek." \*<sup>29</sup>

A few of the stately white-oak trees of the olden time still stand as beautiful souvenirs of the former splendid timber of the country, in the lovely "Mill Creek Park" . . . .

— Kane County (1904).<sup>29</sup>

Bridging proceeded apace with damming:

The first bridge to span the river was erected at Aurora in 1836, and in the same year one was built at St. Charles. Bridges were constructed at Schneider's mill,<sup>†</sup> at Batavia, at Geneva and at Elgin in 1837, and at Dundee in 1838. The first Carpenterville bridge was built in 1851.<sup>29</sup>

Chapter IX describes "Early Settlers and Their Struggles":

The lives of both men and women were strenuous with toil and beset with many discomforts. . . . It was at once an urgent necessity to subdue the wild land, . . . and it required a strong team to break the prairie sod. Neighbors could combine their forces and make a team of three or four yoke of oxen, . . . with the strongest plow attainable . . . .

. . . The breaking plow was, of course, heavy and strong in all its parts. By the attaching clevis it could be regulated to cut a sod from twenty to thirty or more inches wide, and two to four or five inches in thickness. Three inches was

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\* Tyler Creek and Poplar Creek debouch into the Fox River at Elgin.

† Schneider's Mill became North Aurora.

usually considered the best depth of furrow. . . . When in good order, one of these big plows would sever a grub or red root \* an inch or two in diameter with scarcely a perceptible shock. The boys would kill some worthless dog, tan his hide, and cut it into strips of suitable width, and then braid them into a firm lash ten or twelve feet in length. Fine young iron-woods † grew along the clay banks of the creeks, and they would select one for a stock that was about an inch and a quarter to an inch and three-quarters thick at the butt and some ten feet long, straight and tapering evenly to the size of one's little finger and full of spring. These made a whip with which a stout boy, walking near the center of a seven-yoke team, could raise cruel welts and sometimes bloody stripes upon the backs of the leaders or of the beam oxen, and with which he often wickedly cut down many a luckless bird. They generally laid off the ground that was to be broken into "lands" either fourteen or twenty-one paces wide, and of course as long as the piece that was to be plowed, which was often a half mile or more. Sometimes they encircled the whole field. Around and around these "lands" or squares toiled the slow breaking-team, turning the broad furrows of grass and flower-covered sod. And toward the constantly diminishing area of grass and flower concealment converged the many reptiles and swarms of creeping, crawling, jumping creatures whose haunts were being destroyed, until the lessening space was fairly alive with the repulsive collection.

The driver was usually a sturdy barefoot boy, "in his teens," and back and forth in their midst he picked his wary footsteps, especially alert to avoid the dangerous "massasauga," ‡ that infested all the land. Right glad he was, when the narrowing "land" permitted him to walk in the smooth cool furrow on the opposite side from the team. And as these creatures fled from the narrow cover, he very often, almost severed the gliding snake, or scurrying gopher, with a stroke of that long terrible whip. . . . at noon . . . the cattle grazed upon the prairie, yoked . . . . At sunset they were . . . unyoked and turned out for the night.

. . . At daylight in the morning the boy was up and away after the oxen . . . . He was wet to the waist with the night dew, and the saw-edged wire grass ¶ cut his tough feet painfully . . . .

This first plowing killed the grass and flowers very thoroughly, but the mass of tough roots decayed slowly, and required fully a year or two for the sods to entirely disintegrate.

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\* A *grub* is the root mass of a shrub or a tree that has been maintained in a shrubby form by recurrent fires. The redroot plant is New Jersey tea (*Ceanothus americanus*).

† Two small tree species are called ironwood: *Carpinus caroliniana* (musclewood, American hornbeam, or blue beech) and *Ostrya virginiana* (hop hornbeam).

‡ The massasauga is a prairie rattlesnake.

¶ "Saw-edged wire grass" might be prairie cordgrass (*Spartina pectinata*).

... Corn was usually planted upon sod with an axe. With a stroke of the axe, carried in one hand, a hole was made in the sod; with the other hand a few kernels of corn were dropped into the opening, and a shuffle and pressure of the foot upon the spot covered the seed. ... very little cultivation given, yet quite fair crops of corn were often produced. ... The green fields of winter-wheat made rich pasturage for the wild deer.

... The ordinary yield of wheat was from twenty to forty bushels to the acre. Oats, barley and rye produced bountifully. Properly cultivated corn made from fifty to eighty bushels to the acre and continuous replanting did not appear to exhaust the soil.

... Flies, mosquitoes, gnats, millers and varieties of flying bugs were far more abundant than now.

... The little clock or looking-glass shelf in the cabin was usually ornamented with a display of Indian stone-hatchets, and flint, spear and arrow-heads, and by strings of blown-out wild bird eggshells, ranging from the large sand-hill crane and the wild-goose egg, to the tiny ones of the wren and humming bird. There were also a number of massasauga rattles, of varying sizes and number of buttons. Perhaps a wasp's nest, of unusual size or peculiar shape, decorated a corner of the single room.

... The wild fruits were abundant during the short season, but they quickly passed, and for months there was no fruit to be had save the scant supply of very choice "preserves" that good house-wives carefully prepared. ... Game and fish were abundant, but the men were too busy to capture or prepare them for food. In winter the children caught great numbers of prairie chickens and quails in traps . . . .

Often when the fish were "running," the men of a few neighboring families would procure a seine and have a day's profitable sport at the river . . . . A successful sweep of the net brought to land at least a bushel or two of fine pickerel or red horse, whichever was running. Pickerel were preferred. ... A reliable man tells of helping to catch, near St. Charles in 1837 or 1838, with a four-rod seine, and dress and salt ten barrels of fine pickerel in one day. ... These fishing excursions, turkey-shoots and wolf-surrounds were the larger sports of the men . . . .

... After about 1840 Chicago furnished a reliable cash market for the surplus wheat product of the farm . . . .

... No work whatever had been done upon the roads, and at about this date (1837-1840) the first bridges over the streams were being built. There was very little fencing to interfere and teamsters picked their own way through and around

the sloughs in wet weather. It was by no means unfrequent for them to drive into the wet slough as far as the struggling team could move the load, then carry the sacks across on their backs, hitch the team to the rear end of the wagon and draw it back in the deep cuts its wheels had made in the wet sod to firmer ground. They then put the team in place again at the pole, drove over where the sod was uncut and reloaded the sacks of grain. In the late fall of 1848 or 1849, two men and a boy of fifteen spent a whole afternoon in taking two loads of Kane County wheat from the east end of Meacham's grove \* to Cottage Hill (now Elmhurst), a distance of two or three miles across the prairie to the terminus of the Galena & Chicago Union Railroad. They would "back" half a load across a slough, and by doubling the team draw the other half load over. How many times they waded sloughs carrying a two-bushel bag of wheat cannot be told; the labor of it the reader may imagine. <sup>29</sup>

The *History of Kane County* includes an account of each township. Batavia and Geneva Townships jointly comprise Congressional Township 39 North, Range 8 East:

Township 39 . . . has ever been in all its material aspects and resources, as attractive and desirable as can well be imagined. The soil is deep and very fertile; prairie and woodland could not be more conveniently alternated; the beautiful river, frequently widening to encompass many picturesque islands, holds its course almost due southward across its center; many charming spring brooks wind their way through its highly cultivated and thoroughly improved farms; . . . and exhaustless quarries of the finest building stone . . . are found in many places along its banks. The main Indian and army trail † passed near its eastern border, and it included the opening between the two bodies of heavy timber known as the "head of the Big Woods." ‡

. . . There is little or no doubt that a well-worn Indian trail . . . crossed the river at the head of Herrington's Island; † and along this trail Daniel S. Haight prospect-ed in 1833, and built his cabin beside the then noble spring on the west bank of the river. In summer the stream could be easily forded; in winter it was solidly ice-bridged, and, in time of freshet, one had to avoid the necessity of crossing it at all. <sup>29</sup>

Big Rock Township, in the southwest corner of Kane County, is drained by a tributary of the Fox River:

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\* Meacham's Grove has become Bloomingdale.

† The U.S. Army took a trail through this area during the Black Hawk War.

‡ The "Head of Big Woods" was between the Little Woods at St. Charles and the north end of the Big Woods at Batavia.

† Herrington's Island is in Geneva.



... along the branches of the Big Rock Creek are fine bodies of heavy timber.

... The shape of the farms and location of the highways of this rich agricultural township ... most forcibly indicates the eager desire of the early settlers to attach wood and water to their homesteads.<sup>29</sup>

Blackberry Township embraces the headwaters of Blackberry Creek, which enters the Fox River at Yorkville:

Nelson's Lake \*—now nearly dry—lies partly in Blackberry and partly in Batavia Township.

... from Elburn station in the northwest corner of the township, south to Sugar Grove, there was heavy timber in the early days.

... The first settler in this township was a remarkable man . . . . . He found a location near the southeast part of the heaviest body of timber on Blackberry Creek near the present northwest corner of Section 28, which he thought (and truthfully) one of the most delightful spots on earth . . . .<sup>29</sup>

Campton Township is in the center of Kane County:

There is no township in the county in which the pioneers found the indispensable wood and water more bountifully provided and conveniently distributed; while bordering the woodlands were the inviting tracts of open land, scarcely large enough to be called prairie, entirely free of rocks and bushes and ready for the plow, the wild grasses and flowers alone covering the rich black soil of seemingly exhaustless fertility. The southerly branch of Ferson's Creek † had its rise in Lily Lake near the north line of Section 18 and, passing eastward across the entire township, in the early days was a stream of very respectable dimensions, in the spring being filled with pickerel and red-horse suckers, seeking the shoal waters in which to deposit their spawn. . . . At first the water for all daily household use was obtained from the spring, creek or shallow well at the edge of the slough; and for fully twenty years, the farmers depended upon these for stock water. . . . In the later 'thirties, Dr. King . . . built an up-and-down saw-mill on Lily Lake Creek ‡ on the northwest quarter of Section 14 . . . . . This lake is now practically dry, and doubtless its former bed will soon be cultivated land. The effect of the drying up of the water reservoirs and shrinking of the stream is one of the problems future time must solve, we hope without serious detriment to posterity.<sup>29</sup>

"Bonny Dundee" Township spans the river in the northeast corner of the county:

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\* Nelson Lake and environs are described on pages 369 to 375.

† Ferson Creek flows into the Fox River at St. Charles.

‡ Lily Lake Creek = Ferson Creek.

Thompson's Creek, \* . . . emptying into the river near the southeast corner of Section 27, is the principal flowing brook, while from its romantic hillsides, many springs supply brooklets of pure water delightfully cool in summer, and in the coldest weather free from ice for quite a distance from their source—a condition peculiarly attractive in the early days. The current of Thompson's Creek had formed at its mouth a gravel bar reaching quite across the river, which the pioneers thought the best ford in the county at times of high water.<sup>29</sup>

Elgin Township lies along the Fox River south of Dundee Township:

Tyler Creek takes its name from the Tyler family who, in 1835, settled on Section 2 near the township line, and about 1837 or '38, built a saw-mill on this stream some forty rods below the crossing of the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway. . . . Otter Creek—or the north branch of Ferson's Creek—heads in what was once quite a body of permanent water lying on the Henry Sherman and Cyrus Larkin farms, almost exactly in the center of the township, and within a mile of the long southerly bend of Tyler Creek. The low land intervening almost permits the water of the stream passing to the pond, and following this outlet to the river. About a mile south of the Sherman Lake there used to be another pond on the Douglas farm. These were both prairie ponds, and the south two-thirds of this township, from the river west as far as, and in places beyond, Ferson's Creek, was prairie land and well supplied with water. Nearly all the township east of the river was covered with woodland, as also were the western and northern portions.<sup>29</sup>

Kaneville Township is in the headwaters of Big Rock Creek, which joins the Fox south of Plano:

. . . the pioneers were fond of woods and hills, and this portion of the new country seemed a low prairie, save a little woodland in the northeast, and a grove near the center, so isolated that they called it Lone Grove. The two branches of Big Rock Creek head respectively in the eastern and the western portions of Kaneville, in wide low bottom lands, that, before settlement, grew rank high grass, and were too wet to be attractive.<sup>29</sup>

Plato Township is west of Elgin:

Its west line is on the summit of the divide between the Rock and Fox Rivers, and its three or four small spring brooklets, or lowland drains, flow to the creeks emptying into the Fox. They furnished in the early days an abundance of good water for household and stock, conveniently distributed over a large portion of the township. Chicken Grove, near the southwest corner, was a body of fine heavy timber, principally oak of several varieties; but there was also

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\* Thompson's Creek = Jelkes Creek.

considerable hickory, maple, black-walnut, and butternut. . . . The general surface is quite level, yet sufficiently undulating to afford good drainage. The soil is excellent and small tracts of alternating woodland and prairie rendered it an inviting region to the pioneers.<sup>29</sup>

Rutland Township straddles the subtle watershed divide between the Fox River and the Kishwaukee River:

The surface of this township was far more broken into knolls and short ranges of hills—some of them quite high, and with deep sloughs and water-holes between—than any other portion of the county, which greatly retarded its early occupation. Nearly all the dry land was covered with oak openings,<sup>\*</sup> but there was no real timber land in the township. . . . The meandering brooks that drain it can scarcely be traced to any distinctive head . . . . The one arm of Tyler Creek reached to the sloughs in the neighborhood of Pingree Grove,<sup>†</sup> and the other to those about Gilbert Station.<sup>‡</sup> There was quite a pretty prairie lake near the center of the line between Sections 1 and 2 . . . .

About the winter of 1852 the contractors, grading the road-bed of the old Galena & Chicago Union Railroad, made a fill of six or eight feet across a frozen slough, a mile or so northwest of Gilbert's. When the frost came out of the ground the next spring, the embankment sank through the vegetable mold, or crust, that had formed over a hidden lake, and the company had a canal instead of a railroad embankment. Many pickerel, some of them fully eighteen inches long, besides other fish, were caught in this canal. It was very deep, and it proved an expensive job to fill it. While the road was being built, a temporary track was laid around this canal on the northeast, over which the trains passed while the filling was being done. A number of the cars used ran off the dump and were lost in the deep water. The hill skirted by the temporary track was all put into this hole, as was also a large portion of the hill at the north-western end of the canal.<sup>29</sup>

On its way to the Fox River, Blackberry Creek flows through Sugar Grove Township:

Of the ten agricultural townships in the county, no one can authoritatively declare either one to be the best. Yet it is often claimed for Sugar Grove, and few, if any, will doubt that it is at least "as good as the best." . . . Its northeasterly portion along Lake Run and Blackberry Creek is well covered with excellent woodland, portions of which, in the early days, was heavy timber and

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<sup>\*</sup> Oak openings are defined in a footnote on page 150.

<sup>†</sup> Pingree Grove is the namesake of a crossroads village on the line between Rutland and Plato Townships.

<sup>‡</sup> Gilbert Station = Gilberts.

the remainder—about two-thirds of the township—was beautiful prairie, with a skirt of timber at the southwest bordering a branch of the Big Rock Creek.

. . . Very early in the spring of 1834, Asa McDole left his home in the State of New York, and started . . . to explore the Far West. . . . Journeying westward they crossed the Fox River at Oswego, where there was one cabin on each side of the river, and thence pushed on nearly northward across the trackless country, until on the 10th of May, when, having camped in a most beautiful grove of maple trees near a pleasant stream, they made up their minds that nothing more desirable could be found. They saw plain indications that the Indians had been accustomed to making sugar from these trees . . . .<sup>29</sup>

### 1904: *History of Lee County*

The Fox River watershed of Lee County is limited to the southeast corner. It is almost entirely in Wyoming Township, which was originally named Paw Paw Township. Paw Paw Grove covered nearly four square miles of Wyoming Township and extended half a mile into Paw Paw Township of De Kalb County.

The *History of Lee County* states that Paw Paw Grove “was one of the largest, most beautiful and attractive pieces of timber in all the country.”<sup>24</sup> It had long been favored as a dwelling place; during the early 1800s it was the abode of the Potawatomi. After the United States acquired the region and before it was platted for sale, two small Indian reservations were established in Paw Paw Grove.

The first whites came to live at Paw Paw Grove in the winter of 1833–34. When the Potawatomi were subsequently sent to a western reservation, “a thousand Indians were encamped for a week at the Big Spring, at the northwest corner of the grove.”<sup>24</sup> This group was en route from Indiana to a reservation far across the Mississippi River. The exodus followed the Great Sauk Trail, which passed Paw Paw Grove on its way between Rock Island and Detroit. \* This part of the trail became a segment of Chicago Road.

The farms of 18 white families encircled Paw Paw Grove by 1840. Within the decade two horse-powered sawmills were in operation at the grove.<sup>24</sup>

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\* This road was called the Great Sauk Trail because the Sauk used it for round trips between their town near Rock Island and a fort near Detroit:

Over this trail, Black Hawk, with many of his warriors, made annual trips for a number of years, in going to and from Canada, to receive their annuities from the British Government. According to Indian tradition, this trail had been a great highway from East to West for many ages, and traveled by roving bands of savages. It ran almost on a straight line across the State, and in some places on the high prairie, it was worn down a foot or more below the surface. Although forty years have now passed away since it ceased to be used, it can still be traced across many farms, by the color of grass and grain.<sup>192</sup>

### **1904: "Status of Prairie Chickens in Illinois Counties in 1904"**

Eight counties in the Fox River valley are included in this survey by the State Game and Fish Conservation Commission. The survey determined that greater prairie-chickens in Cook County are "in good condition but not plentiful." DeKalb County: "Not very plentiful but on the increase." DuPage County: "Plentiful and increasing." Grundy County: "Plentiful and increasing." Kendall County: "Plentiful in the south; general increasing in west parts of county." Lake County: "A few only." McHenry County: "Plentiful." La Salle County: "Quite scarce." <sup>101</sup>

This tabulation was published in 1914, a decade after the survey was conducted. The Game and Fish Conservation Commission offered a hopeful note when it published the statistics: "Since this data was compiled there has been a decrease in the prairie chicken supply as well as in the supply of other game birds. Under the present system of game reservations, it is confidently expected that there will be a marked increase in the number of prairie chickens in the near future." <sup>101</sup>

### **1905: "Report of President Cohen, in Charge of Enforcement of Law"**

Sportsmen a century ago frequently voiced hatred against animals that compete with humans for fish and game. Nat Cohen, President of the Illinois State Board of Fish Commissioners, assailed the predatory predilection of gars:

These predatory ganoids gather as sentinels by the thousands at the mouth of every slough and outlet, lying in wait for the bass fry, after the parent fish leaves them to care for themselves. Few escape the onslaught of this army of water pirates. More game fish is annihilated by the gar in one year than violations of every character would annihilate in ten. . . . Mr. Triggs, of Chicago, to whom the commissioners gave permission to take the objectionable fish from the Fox lake region, took 10,000 pounds of these pests in one haul with the inch and a half mesh seine. Considering the utter worthlessness and destructive habits of this fish, is it not wiser to use tackle that will rid the waters of this enemy that is rapidly depleting our rivers and lakes of the gamey varieties? <sup>279</sup>

### **1907: "The Indian Chief Shabbona"**

L.A. Hatch's biography of Shabbona is one of the best reviews of the life and accomplishments of this Fox Valley resident. Professor Hatch set the stage for much of Chief Shabbona's life by portraying his home:

In the southern part of DeKalb county, Illinois, is found a small village that has been named after Shabbona. Not far from this village is to be found a grove known as Shabbona Grove. It was at this grove that Shabbona and his people made their home for many years. Those who live at the grove take pleasure in pointing out the spot where he pitched his wigwam. It was a beautiful place in

*The Fox river of the Illinois is called by the Indians Pishtako.* <sup>167</sup>

those early days nestled on the banks of a little stream. It was a small clearing in the wood well protected from the storms that raged during the winter. In the early years of his stay at this grove it was the home of his whole tribe, which by the way never numbered more than one hundred and thirty souls.

. . . At one time the grove at which he made his home was one of the finest in the state of Illinois. It covered an area of fifteen hundred acres. In it were found large white, bur, and red oak. No better black walnut trees were to be found anywhere than were found here. Outside of this grove extended great tracts of prairie land noted for their fertility. <sup>129</sup>

Professor Hatch added, "Shabbona was quite a hand at doctoring. The whites often called upon him to help them with their sick. Snake bites and wounds that would not heal he knew how to cure. He went to the woods and on the prairie and there gathered his medicines. His own good health and the good health of his family was pretty good proof of his ability along this line." \* <sup>129</sup>

### **1907: *Past and Present of De Kalb County, Illinois***

The *Past and Present* preserves a biography of William Sebree, whose family was with the first group of whites to move to De Kalb County:

On November 25, 1834, in company with his parents, . . . he came across the country in a prairie schooner from Bloomington, Illinois. They made the first permanent settlement in the county at Squaw Grove. <sup>†</sup>

. . . There were two camps of Indians—one north, near where the schoolhouse was located; the other south, near the gravel pit, south of the Chicago and Galesburg Railroad and west of Little Rock creek. The hunters were then away, leaving the squaws to take care of the camp, and from this circumstance it was called Squaw Grove. The little grove just east was called Papoose.

. . . The Sebrees tell some interesting legends of their Indian neighbors. . . . They tilled a little ground but depended chiefly on hunting, trapping and fishing for subsistence. The corn was a small variety, after the Yankee kind. Each hunter had a pony and a gun those days, but they still dexterously used bows and flint-point arrows. . . . Fish were secured mainly by spearing them at night. <sup>110</sup>

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\* Shabbona lived 84 years and is said to have enjoyed good health throughout his life.

† Hinckley has replaced Squaw Grove.

### 1907: *Past and Present of Will County, Illinois*

The Fox River valley extends into the northwest corner of Will County in Wheatland Township. W.W. Stevens, President of the Will County Pioneers Association, wrote about Wheatland Township,

It is wholly prairie, there never having been to exceed five acres of timber in the whole township. \* The land is rolling and all good, in fact, some of the very best land to be found in the county is in that township. . . . The inhabitants are all agriculturalists, and take much pride in the work. . . . One of their hobbies is the Wheatland plowing match, that comes off every fall on the farm of some farmer . . . . It is a big affair, and much more interest is taken in it than in the county fair. <sup>286</sup>

### 1908: *History of Kane County, Ill.*

This was the fifth work to be published about the history of Kane County, following volumes in 1878, 1888, 1898, and 1904. The authors of the 1908 volume took most of their information about the biota and environment from the earlier publications, so these details are not repeated here.

Chapter IV relates "What the Pioneers Found":

. . . Fox river ran a winding path from Dundee to Aurora . . . , everywhere wider than at present. The encroachments of the cities on its banks have at some points filled half the channel. Along its shores were abundant groves of oak and other trees yet common, but at most points now much thinned out. From Aurora northeastward, on the east side of the river, a veritable forest of thick wood extended to where Batavia now stands and two or three miles back from the river, known as the "Big woods." On the west side of the river from Batavia north of South Elgin another smaller wood existed, known as the "Little Woods." North of this, the banks of the Fox were thick with trees, but the growth did not reach far from the river.

. . . The prairie land was everywhere covered with a tall, rank, tough, native grass, often growing ten or fifteen feet high <sup>†</sup> over miles of prairie land.

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\* Mr. Stevens probably took this acreage figure from the 1878 *History of Will County*, which says, "We were informed by Robert Clow that the entire township contained but about five acres of timbered land; and at the time of the first settlements made in this part of Illinois, there were no such things known in the West as board or wire fences, and as stock was allowed to run at large, people were forced to put rail fences around their cultivated fields. Thus it was that the timbered land was taken up before the prairie, and for years the latter was deemed unfit for anything but pasturage, while many were of the opinion that they would never be cultivated." <sup>328</sup>

<sup>†</sup> The maximum height of prairie grasses is usually about half as tall as stated here.

. . . The cultivation of years, and the constant cropping of the grass, has entirely changed the nature of the plant life of the soil and rendered its cultivation easy.

Nuts of many kinds were found here native: walnuts, butternuts and hickory nuts being abundant; and hazelnut bushes everywhere among the trees. Maple trees furnished syrup and sugar. Wild raspberries, gooseberries, strawberries and blackberries were common; and in the swamps and low places mushrooms were plentiful. The writer has personally gathered all these varieties in the woods of the county within twenty-five years, but most of the trees have been cut down or have died out. Little wild product now grows.

Game of many varieties, most of which have now disappeared, were found throughout the country and adjacent territory and was hunted by the pioneers for food and sport. Deer herded in the wood in large numbers. Old settlers yet living tell of seeing fifty to a hundred in a herd in Plato and Burlington townships. It was a matter of small effort to go out on any morning in the '50s and return with venison for breakfast. The increasing population, however, soon destroyed or drove them away, and by 1860 it was a rare event to hunt deer with success. Wild cats were numerous in the wood and preyed on the settlers' chickens. The last were killed within twenty-five years. The lynx was also found in the woodlands until after the war. Wild pigeons came in flocks so numerous as to obscure the sunlight as they flew southward to their feeding grounds. Many a pigeon dinner was enjoyed by the early residents. It is told that in those days a hunter could sit beneath a dead tree and shoot scores of pigeons as they alighted on the bare limbs to rest. The sandhill crane, a bird not seen in this locality by many of this generation, was numerous in the early days. They built huge conical nests of grass and weeds in inaccessible swamps. They stood over four feet high when mature, their flesh is said to have been of excellent flavor. They were much hunted but difficult to bag. They would alight generally on a high knoll where the surrounding country would be visible. Wild duck and geese in large variety and in very great numbers compared to present meager flights were to be seen every fall and spring. Without decoy or other device for attracting them a hunter sitting in a hidden spot could in an afternoon bring down more birds than he could carry home. Quail by the thousand were found in the brush and field everywhere, but were largely destroyed by the trap and gun years ago. The fear of their extinction necessitated laws for their protection and they are again becoming more numerous and so tame, because not hunted, as to feed in the open field or barnyard. The crow was also present when the pioneers came and is still very numerous, doing now the same depredations he did then, and as wary of hunters and as destructive.\* Hunters from the settlements would camp out and destroy quail by the thousand.

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\* This statement about crows does not agree with other observations, summarized in a footnote on page 153.



Robins and the smaller birds yet numerous were here when the first settler appeared. \* Wolves were also plentiful and a continued burden to the white man, who was under the need of at all times protecting his stock and chicken yard against them. It was no unusual thing in the '40s for the men of the county to meet for a wolf hunt. A large number would form a circle many miles in circumference, some with horns and tin pans to raise the wolves and other animals by the noise. In the circle were men on horseback and afoot. All gradually narrowed in on the circle, shooting what came in sight and driving them toward the center. Many wolves were killed, but more of other kinds of game. Trapping and poison were also resorted to to rid the country of wolves, but they were so cunning that until a late day they continued to harass the farmer, and even now an occasional wolf is seen in an outlying district.

Many interesting stories are also told of the deer hunts of those days. During the winter of 1842 the snow was unusually deep and travel was made more difficult by a hard crust that formed on the surface of the snow after a thaw. The deer's sharp hoofs would cut through the crust, rendering their progress slow and making them easy prey for the dogs and the hunters. Many came to the farm yards for food and were shot down by the farmers.

Fish, too, were found in an abundance now undreamed of. Through the years the seine, hook and spear of an ever increasing population of Waltonians have depleted the fish supply until a few carp, perch, bullheads, with now and then a bass or pickerel of moderate proportions are the only reward of a day's fishing. Then, according to the stories of old residents (before the modern "fish story was needed to give length and number to a catch") the river teemed with fish of many choice varieties, such as bass, pickerel and pike, to secure which required none of the modern fly hooks and casting lines.

For building purposes and fuel the thick wood of high oaks furnished ample supply and were drawn upon as though inexhaustible. Now the original growth has disappeared and throughout the county only second growth timber is to be had.

. . . Prairie fires were expected every fall as the tall prairie grass dried. At places the grass remained uncut for many years and became thick and high. Once well started in a good wind, a prairie fire would travel as fast as horses could run and would destroy everything in its path. . . It was customary for all the farmers to plow the earth all around their buildings and land to be protected. Usually a space fifteen to twenty feet wide would be turned as a bunker for the oncoming flames. But often in a high wind the flames would jump the plowed space and ignite material on the other side. The more effective method of combating the prairie fire was what was known as "back-firing." This was done by

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\* This statement about robins is not supported by other observers (see page 239).

burning the grass away ahead of the approaching fire. Often the entire population of the neighborhood would "back-fire" and by leaving a large burned space in advance of the flames check their progress. . . . With the cultivation of the prairies and the replacing of the tall prairie grass by cultivated products these fires disappeared.<sup>165</sup>

Fish hatcheries at Elgin are highlighted:

In 1870 the late Dr. P.W. Pratt commenced the culture of fish and enclosed a park of some seventy acres of what was known to the early settlers as the "cedar swamp," lying on the east side of the river, one and a half miles above the city. The numerous springs in this "Trout Park" feed the ponds in which are reared the young *salmonidae*.<sup>\*</sup> This park was also at one time stocked with elk and deer. Some of the springs are believed to have valuable medicinal properties. This park has since become a popular resort for pleasure seekers, especially Germans from Chicago. Dr. W.A. Pratt continued to improve it after the death of his father in 1872.<sup>†</sup>

In the same year Mr. D.S. Hammond, of Hammond Station, on the Chicago & Pacific Railway, near the southeast corner of the city limits, commenced the business of pisciculture in a scientific way of building a system of capacious tanks and ponds of solid masonry, fed by bounteous springs of pure cold water, gushing up in a beautiful dell, surrounded by a grove of magnificent forest trees. Hammond's grove is also a popular resort for picnic parties from Elgin and Chicago.<sup>165</sup>

The first school in Geneva Township was opened during the winter of 1835-36: "The schoolhouse was a log cabin home, and enjoyed the unusual luxury of a stone floor of limestone rock, the limestone laying as nature had left it some million years ago."<sup>165</sup>

In Dundee Township, "Its high, beautiful bluffs and fine water power make it an ideal place for residence or industry." In the village of Dundee, "Grazing is of the best description, and the country abounds in fine springs of pure water." Carpentersville: "An extensive deposit of peat is located east of Carpentersville, covering from 100 to 160 acres. Attempts have been made to work it, but from some cause have not been successful. The bed averages six feet in thickness, and it is believed that a good quality of fuel might be prepared."<sup>165</sup>

Eugene Tanner was born in Aurora Township in 1841, and he lived there for more than six decades. His farm was in the northwest corner of the township:

The location is a choice one for many reasons and the high state of development to which the farm has been raised through the judicious and energetic manage-

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<sup>\*</sup> Salmonidae = trout family.

<sup>†</sup> W.A. Pratt's efforts to improve fishing are described on pages 189 to 192, 196, and 309.

ment of its owner . . . makes it an ideal rural home. . . . The country around it and the whole county present to the eye and observation of the visitor a very different scene from that to which Mr. Tanner was accustomed in his boyhood, when night was made hideous and alarming by the howling of the prairie wolves on many occasions, which frequently became so annoying that the elder Tanner was obliged to mount his horse and drive them back into the woods. <sup>165</sup>

### 1908: "The Medicinal Springs of Illinois"

In the decades before and after the beginning of the last century, mineral springs were used for crounotherapy. People imbibed and bathed in mineral-charged waters to restore and maintain health. The rare natural habitats of mineral springs were transformed into commercial operations. Wells were dug to increase the flow of springs, and water was bottled and sold. Some springs were excavated and walled to make pools, becoming the center of resort hotels and health spas.

According to Dr. George Palmer's 1908 report on medicinal springs, five were in the valley of the Fox. Two were close to the Kane—Kendall County line: Montgomery Magnesia Springs and Aurora Lithia Springs. Min-Ni-Yan Spring was near Bristol (now Yorkville), and Zonian Spring was near Elgin. Abana Mineral Springs were at Cary. \* <sup>215</sup>

### 1908: "The Topography and Hydrography of Illinois"

Professor Charles W. Rolfe's monograph includes the following remarks:

Fox River rises . . . a little northwest of Milwaukee. It flows south and southwest, emptying into the Illinois River at Ottawa, Ill. . . . The length of the river is about 150 miles. <sup>†</sup>

The low-water discharge is estimated to be 526 cubic feet per second, or 0.195 cubic feet per second per square mile. It is claimed that the stream has fallen off one-half in its low-water volume since the clearing and cultivating of the land and the draining of the swamps.

The drainage basin of the Fox . . . is an undulating prairie land with more or less woodland and some swamps. In this region the morainic ridges lie very close together and are often interlaced, thus making cups or kettles within which

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\* Before Dr. Palmer's report, the U.S. Geological Survey published a list of commercial mineral springs operating in 1902. This list includes five sites in the Fox River valley. White Diamond Spring (formerly Spouting Mineral Spring) was at South Elgin. Min-ni-Ni yan Spring was at Bristol (Yorkville). Three are listed at Montgomery: Aurora Lithia Spring, Blue Grass Springs, and Magnesia Spring. <sup>182</sup> Some of these springs are obviously the same as those listed by Dr. Palmer; others might be the same springs but with different names.

<sup>†</sup> The second edition of Rolfe's monograph gives the distance as 172 miles. <sup>256</sup>

lakes were formed. Some of these lakes have been drained so thoroughly that they have become small prairies, \* while in other places they have been unable to cut down their outlets sufficiently. We have, consequently, a series ranging from quiet land-locked ponds with gravel bottoms to marshes differing but little from the ordinary wet prairie or slough, peat bogs, and the dry prairie land. The bed of the swamps is generally more or less peaty, varying in composition from ordinary black swamp muck to true peat. A few of the lakes are from four to seven miles in length and a mile or more in breadth, while the others usually cover only one or two square miles, or even less. These numerous lakelets, ponds, marshes, and bogs furnish, in their aggregate, a considerable storage for flood waters, and the volume of the stream is consequently comparatively uniform and its changes of level are relatively slow. The water of the upper reaches of the river are usually clear except in times of flood, but the lower part of the stream is often very impure. Though much of the river bed below Elgin is in rock, the tributaries often bring large amounts of sediment, and various manufactories along the river discharge a large amount of refuse into the stream, and it has, of late years, become so foul that nearly all fish except carp and other filth-enduring species have been drowned out.

For a distance of nearly 75 miles from its source Fox River drains only a narrow strip among the morainic ridges . . . . In this portion of its course its fall amounts to only a few inches to the mile, and its bed expands at frequent intervals into lakes and marshes between which are short stretches having narrow and well-defined channels. . . . Fox Lake is simply a widening of the river-bed.

From the vicinity of Elgin to Yorkville the bed of the river is alternately rock and mud.<sup>255</sup>

### 1911: "Crystal Lake"

An investigative committee of the Illinois legislature reported the following:

Crystal lake is located in McHenry county near the village of Crystal Lake. Its average width is over 1,500 feet and its length is about 1½ miles. . . . The water is pure and as clear as its name would imply. The locality is a summer resort of considerable renown, and a Mecca for summer tourists. The environment is beautiful and fish abound in the cool spring waters of the lake.

. . . The chief commercial value of Crystal Lake at this time is the annual crop of ice secured by the Knickerbocker Ice Company. This ice is highly commended for its purity and is sold in large part in the city of Chicago—and thousands of tons are harvested.<sup>294</sup>

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\* Professor Rolfe was writing in terms of geologic time: lake basins were drained by long-term erosion, converting them to prairies.

## 1912: "Birds of Lake County"

Henry Kelso Coale prepared this paper with help from amateur and professional ornithologists in the Chicago region, including several Lake County residents. \* The report includes breeding-season records for a number of waterbirds and shorebirds in Lake County, including Grass Lake and Fox Lake.

Mr. Coale provided historical comments for three game birds. Passenger pigeon: "Formerly an abundant summer resident but now practically extinct." Greater prairie-chicken: "Once an abundant summer resident, now fast disappearing." Wild turkey: "George Hesler . . . and other old hunters of Lake County shot turkeys 40 years ago; no recent records." <sup>79</sup>

## 1914: "Big Grove Township and Villages"

N.P. Barnard's chapter in the *History of Kendall County* features two far-famed stands of trees at the south edge of the Fox River valley:

In early days there was a big grove in the center of the township, and from it, undoubtedly, the township takes its name. The growth comprised the larger part of Sections 9, 10, 15 and 16. Of this magnificent grove that stood almost intact down to 1860, little is now left, most of it having been cleared away for farming purposes.

. . . Timber in the early days was not only necessary for fuel, but the standing trees were required as a protection from the winds and storms that swept over the open prairies, in the vicinity of which the pioneers chose to settle.

. . . Holderman's Grove, which is in the southwest corner of the township, before the clearing off of the fine walnut trees which composed it, was called the finest grove in the State of Illinois, and near this grove the more discriminating pioneers settled . . . . <sup>22</sup>

## 1914: "Bristol Township and Villages"

Rob Roy Slough and smaller wet areas along Blackberry Creek and the Fox River gave Bristol Township a greater proportion of wetland than any other township in Kendall County. H.P. Barnes attested, "In the five years ending in 1910, alone, \$50,000 was spent for main drains in reclaiming 3,200 acres of land, 2,000 of which was known as 'Slough Grass,' 'Pond Lilly,' 'Bull Rush,' 'Muskrat Houseland,' and by similar names indicating its worthlessness for agriculture in the undrained state." <sup>23</sup>

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\* Henry Coale's report is accompanied by two papers on the local vegetation. <sup>139, 273</sup>

## 1914: *History of Kendall County*

Most of the information about wildlife in this volume was taken from E.W. Hicks' 1877 history of Kendall County (quoted on pages 207 to 212), but there are some differences. The 1877 volume says that bison bones could be picked up by the wagon-load "forty years ago"; the 1914 volume restates the time as "during the thirties and early in the forties." In 1877 "deer are still occasionally found," but in 1914 "of course there are none today." In 1877 red foxes and gray foxes were present in low numbers, but by 1914 "they, like the other wild animals have disappeared with the advance of civilization." The 1877 history says, "The woodchuck, or ground hog, emigrated here after the whites came"; the 1914 history says, "The woodchuck was used in early days for food, while the hide was made into whiplashes." <sup>27</sup>

Some additional notes about the county's natural resources:

Kendall County . . . has that which will yield countless treasure to those willing to labor intelligently—a fertile soil.

. . . Formerly Kendall County had a large amount of woodland, the beautiful groves of pioneer days attracting the early settlers to this locality, but now much of this valuable timber is gone . . . . . Kendall County's present prosperity has been built on . . . the soil.

. . . the marl beds along the bank of the river, near Fox Station, \* may be mentioned. Chemical analysis shows the marls to be rich in carbonate of lime to the extent of 95 per cent. The friable condition of the deposit (travertine from springs) renders the material ready for use on lands that, through sourness, have become unfit for the growth of legumes. <sup>27</sup>

This volume contains some remarks by N.T. Morley, who averred, "Few may know what caused these prairie lands and yet the explanation is simple":

In early times, throughout Illinois and neighboring States, great fires recurred each year with devastating regularity, and in some sections they are yet a menace. These terrible conflagrations swept everything before them, including young shoots that had secured a season's growth, and as this happened annually the saplings never attained any development, but were burned off each year close to the ground. In the meanwhile, the roots waxed mighty, and beneath the soil spread out for many feet. This fact explains the remarkable toughness of the virgin prairie sod. It was almost as difficult to break this sod as to clear off the forest growth. <sup>†</sup> Special plows were required for the purpose, and some

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\* Fox Station (now called Fox) is a railroad crossing on the south side of the Fox River about three miles west of Yorkville.

<sup>†</sup> This is a misstatement. A farmer could plow acres of prairie with less effort than needed to clear a fraction of an acre of forest.

years' time to entirely eradicate the underneath stumps, many of which were one hundred years old.

This was one of the difficulties with which the pioneers of Kendall County had to contend in making their farms into profitable investments.<sup>204</sup>

### 1914: *History of Lee County, Illinois*

Paw Paw Grove is featured in Frank Stevens' history of Lee County:

The paw paw grew luxuriantly here in early years. This tract of timber covered over two thousand acres then. . . . the grove contained thousands of black walnut trees, hard maple, oak, hickory, cottonwood, butternut and sycamore, plums, blackberries and gooseberries grew plentifully. On the east side not far from the county line, was a beautiful spring of rare water. At the northwest corner was another. This latter fed Paw Paw creek which runs from the northwest corner in a southeasterly direction and joins Indian creek . . . .

In the winter of 1833-34, Levi Kelsey with Joel Griggs made a claim and built a house in Paw Paw Grove. But fearing that he might be on one of the Indian reservations, \* Mr. Kelsey, in March, 1834, left . . . .

. . . The Indians induced Griggs to cut many trees with the expectation of finding honey. When after many failures he declined to continue, they tried to induce Mr. Kelsey, but he declined peremptorily. For his decision, he was dubbed "good she-mo-ka man" † . . . .

. . . To Daniel A. Town belongs the distinction of becoming the first settler of Paw Paw Grove; it was in the autumn of 1834.

. . . That fall, Mr. Town broke about twenty acres of prairie and sowed it to winter wheat. ‡

. . . The burial ground of the Indians in this vicinity was near the southeast corner of Paw Paw Grove; something less than an acre.

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\* Two one-square-mile sections of Paw Paw Grove were established as Indian reservations by the Treaty of Prairie du Chien in 1829.

† "Good white man."

‡ A longstanding debate among historians has centered around the question of where white immigrants usually established their first fields: in the prairie, or in a clearing in the woods? Early testimony shows that some farmers cleared woods rather than attempting to cultivate prairie, but men such as Mr. Town were routinely breaking prairie even before 1837, when John Deere invented a plow with an efficient, self-scouring moldboard that made it easier to turn prairie sod.

... On Aug. 19, 1851, \* rain began to fall and continued with out cessation for three days and nights. ... Nobody left his house. Provisions ran out. ... Crops were destroyed. Stocks were a total loss. Creeks were swollen inordinately and became roaring torrents. Fields were submerged for miles and great suffering followed.<sup>262</sup>

#### **1914: "Lands, Early Titles, Development and Reminiscences"**

Putting his thoughts on paper, Avery Beebe proclaimed that Kendall County is "more fertile, more enchanting, more beautiful, and more productive of the good things of earth" than any other place on Earth:

This little chosen spot of God's heritage, selected by the grand, sturdy old pioneers of Kendall County, has been richly blessed with all the advantages that kind nature ever bestows; with a surface replete with rich alluvial soil, and ever enduring vitality, not lacking in mineral deposits for man's needs, with its clear silvery streams . . . that pour their pure crystal liquids into the placid Fox and Illinois Rivers. All of these were densely skirted with abundant timber for the use of the early settlers . . . . . They sought out these rural spots in the valleys of the Fox . . . .<sup>34</sup>

#### **1914: "Live Stock and Its Improvement in Kendall County during the Past Fifty Years"**

A.D. Havenhill was a stockman and life-long resident of Kendall County. He grew up south of the Fox River in Big Grove Township, southwest of Yorkville. Here are excerpts from an essay that Mr. Havenhill prepared for the *History of Kendall County*:

... the early settlers coming in covered wagons, so-called prairie schooners, brought with them a horse or horses. . . . These early settlers generally located along the streams whose banks were covered with timber, or they crossed the prairie to the inland groves, which were found on the land slightly elevated above the broad, flat, surrounding country.

... the introduction of the hog during the primitive days of Kendall County was done by the early settlers. Usually a few pigs in a box or crate were tied to the prairie schooner, and when settlement was made they were turned out to shift for themselves, and as there was nothing growing at that time on the broad prairies upon which they could subsist, they naturally took to the timber belts where wild plums and fruits were plentiful, and walnuts, butternuts, two varieties of hickory nuts and the many kinds of acorns were produced in large quantities. Upon them the pioneer hogs fed, and most excellent bacon was developed, and all the settlers had to do when the family got out of meat was

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\* The storm was in 1850.



for the man to take a rifle, go out cautiously into the wood, and help himself. However, man, with his sharp axe and ruthless hand, wellnigh exterminated all of those fine nut-bearing trees, and other means had to be adopted for providing proper food for the hogs.

. . . When quite a chunk of a lad I used to go to the groves to gather some of the fruit and nuts, . . . and one day while searching in Big Grove, the largest tract of timber in Kendall County, for plums, the old dog who always accompanied me, suddenly aroused one of the mother hogs which had a litter of small pigs. A warning note was sounded and almost immediately the whole woods seemed to be alive with wild hogs. I immediately beat a retreat, and fortunately for me and the old dog, a large oak tree had blown down near the thicket, resting partly on its roots, and the other end on its tops. The log must have been about six feet from the ground. I was soon on top of that, and to make it a little safer, I climbed one of the branches until I was fully ten feet from the ground, where I could plainly see what was going on. The old dog by this time had come out of the thicket into a small opening near the prairie, followed by a surging mass of these wild creatures, who seemed to form a circle in the small clearing protecting the little ones in the center, while the outside of the circle presented a solid front of long-nosed, sharp-toothed, frothing open mouths. It seemed to me then that here were more than 500 of them. . . . Needless to say, I did not get any more plums or nuts that day, nor did I want any.<sup>130</sup>

### 1914: *Water Resources of Illinois*

A.W. Horton's monograph for the State Rivers and Lakes Commission is a major repository of information about water levels in streams. This report tabulates discharge measurements for the Fox River at Sheridan in 1905-06 and at Ottawa in 1903. The following remarks are from Mr. Horton's general description of the Fox River drainage basin:

There are several lakes in the upper portion of the basin, the chief of which are Fox Lake and Geneva Lake. These lakes tend to regulate the flow to some extent.

. . . about 30 per cent of the basin in Wisconsin is forested. There are practically no forested areas in Illinois.\*

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\* A.W. Horton applied a restrictive concept of what comprises a "forested area." Regarding the entire Illinois River basin, Horton stated, "There are practically no forested areas in the basin."<sup>145</sup> He said that there are no forested areas in the Kankakee, Des Plaines, Kaskaskia, Embarras, or Little Wabash valleys.

At the beginning of the 20th century when Horton prepared his report, upland forests probably were at their low ebb in Illinois, covering the least total acreage in history. There were some extensive bottomland forests, but not along the Fox River. Upland forests have since recovered much of their former extent, but bottomland forests have continued to lose acreage to drainage and clearing projects as well as flooding by reservoirs.

... There are a number of suitable reservoir sites in the basin at which storage might be developed, but the value of the land which would be flooded would probably prohibit their construction.<sup>145</sup>

### **1914-15: *Report of Survey and Proposed Improvement of the Fox River***

The State Rivers and Lakes Commission completed a survey of the river in 1915. One purpose of the project was to compile information about the river's current and historical hydrology. \* Chapter I of the Commission's report is a "General Description and Physical Features of the Fox River Valley":

The Fox River has its source in the northern part of Waukesha County, Wisconsin, and flows in a southerly direction to Aurora, where the course changes to the southwest and continues in this general direction to Ottawa, where it empties into the Illinois River.

There are several moderately large lakes tributary to the Fox, and an almost innumerable number of small lakes and ponds. Numerous creeks also empty their waters into its channel. These lakes and ponds are about evenly distributed

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\* The Rivers and Lakes Commission provided the following background about its concerns:

In the days of the early settlers, before roads had been constructed, the streams and water courses were used largely as a source of water supply for man and beast and as a highway of communication and transport. Later, as the population increased and cultivation became more extensive, crude dams were built and water wheels were installed to operate grist mills and the streams were utilized as a source of power. With the development of steam engines, the discovery of natural fuel beds and the opening of highways, the streams fell into general disuse, excepting for the more important waterways. For many years the people generally forgot and neglected them and they became dumping grounds for private individuals, public corporations and municipalities along their banks.

Of recent years these neglected water courses have forced themselves into prominence. As the timber was cut off and the land given over generally to cultivation the bared earth surface no longer retained, as of old, the water that fell upon it, so that periodic floods became the rule. Periods of high water were followed during the dry months by protracted low water, so that the indiscriminate sewage and wastes thrown into the channel were no longer carried away, but were deposited along the bed of the stream and soon made themselves known as a nuisance and by the epidemic that soon followed. In these ways the streams forced themselves to the attention of the public.

As motor boats and automobiles came into more general use, an ever-increasing proportion of the people have awakened to the natural beauties of the streams and valleys and have demanded that their long neglect shall cease. Capital also has come to appreciate the value of cheap power. Conservation of natural resources has been given national prominence, and the public is more and more realizing that with proper attention the waterways are an invaluable asset, whereas, neglected and forgotten they become a menace to life and property.<sup>4</sup>

between Wisconsin and Illinois, and have a combined area aggregating about forty square miles. The principal lakes drained by the Fox River are Channel, Grass, Marie, Fox, Nippersink, Zurich, Crystal, Pistakee, and Round lakes. . . . The drainage basin of the river is about 2,580 square miles, of which 1,680 are in Illinois.

Another notable feature of this river is the large number of islands between Ottawa and McHenry, Illinois, a distance of about 97.80 miles. There are 254 islands ranging in size from a fractional part of an acre to 35 acres in extent. Above the McHenry dam \* there are no islands until Pistakee Lake is reached. In the lake district there are several islands of more or less pronounced shore lines.

The total length of the river is approximately 140 miles and the total fall is about 470 feet, making an average fall of 3.36 feet per mile. From its source to where it enters the lake region it is a shallow, sluggish stream of about fifty feet average width and has very little fall. Through the lake region it winds through swamps and lakes, having a very narrow channel, which, at times, is practically lost in the reeds and swamp growth. It enters Grass Lake through a large swamp of several square miles area. This swamp is dense and thick, the wild grass, reeds, and cat-tails attaining a height of seven or eight feet.

Below the Fox Lake region the river changes from a narrow, winding stream to a straighter and swifter one of more than twice its former width. The channel becomes well defined, and the character of the country grows more hilly and rolling, as is characteristic of the glacial formation and in which we find no outcropping of natural rock until we reach South Elgin, where Cincinnati limestone is found. About two miles farther down stream the river makes a short bend to the right and then to the left, passing through a large fault in the limestone. At Sheridan the limestone disappears and sandstone takes its place and shows its presence in ledges and cliffs, first on one side and then on the other, of from twenty to seventy-five feet in height.

The bed of the river for the lower seventy miles is rock, and outcropping of natural rock occurs along the banks. The river has a fall of 137 feet in the last forty-seven miles and an average fall of six feet per mile for the last five miles above the mouth.

Just above Dayton . . . occurs a succession of rapids with a fall of 19.20 feet in a distance of 6,460 feet. The rapids flow over the natural sandstone formation, upon which are spread large granite boulders. The last mile of the river is near-

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\* McHenry Dam is about three miles below McHenry in McHenry County. It has been renamed William G. Stratton Dam. (A dam was built at McHenry in 1887, but it was opposed by farmers whose land was jeopardized by flooding, <sup>198</sup> and it was removed.)

ly straight and at Ottawa it passes through a fault in the sandstone and empties into the Illinois River.

In the upper portions of the river within this State the banks are generally low and frequent swamps border the river first on one side and then on the other. Near Algonquin and Cary the river flows through rolling country with small hills on either side. The central portion of the river is again flatter, and from Yorkville to the mouth rougher country predominates, with frequent rocky banks twenty to seventy-five feet above the water.

The valley of the Fox River is fertile and thickly populated. By the census of 1910 the population of the cities and villages on the Fox River is 104,673, and that of the townships bordering Fox River, inclusive of the villages and cities in the respective townships, is 130,588. In 1900 the cities and towns had 90,345 people, or a gain of slightly more than 15.8 per cent during the decade. During the same period the total population increased 12.2 per cent.

. . . The most important interests are those of agriculture and dairy products, although there are also important manufacturing industries at Carpentersville, Batavia, Elgin, St. Charles, Geneva, Aurora, and Montgomery.

. . . Owing to the numerous beautiful lakes and ponds and the proximity to Chicago and other large cities, there is a large temporary population during the hot months, especially in the Fox Lake region. The Fox River valley has become a summer resort district, furnishing boating, fishing, and hunting in season. The good gravel and macadam roads along this valley make this a thoroughfare for motor tourists. The drive from McHenry through Crystal Lake, Algonquin, Elgin, St. Charles, Geneva, Batavia, Aurora, and southward is famous for the beautiful scenery and the accommodations for travelers. Repairs and improvements are under way that will eliminate the famed Algonquin hill, and considerable stretches of concrete road have already been built near Geneva, Batavia, and Aurora. The Starved Rock Trail from Chicago to Aurora and Ottawa is a well-known highway, and the Lincoln Highway will ultimately introduce many more tourists to the beauties of the Fox River valley.

There are a great many boat houses in use by the owners of the more permanent improvements along the river where motor and row boats are kept during the year. There are also at McHenry and in the lake district large motor boat garages, where boats are stored and where all repairs can be made. A number of "clammers" are engaged in hunting for fresh water pearls, and the reports of lucky finds appeal to the sporting instincts of those willing to undertake the hardship of the search in hopes that chance may bring them a large stake.

The State of Illinois Game and Fish Conservation Commission has closed the Fox River and its tributaries to the commercial fishermen, and has established a fish hatchery at Spring Grove on Nippersink Creek. Fishing with hook and line is permitted.

The following is a list of the fish found in this territory: Carp, black and striped bass, pike, pickerel, perch, sunfish, croppies, catfish, red horse, buffalo, suckers, and dogfish. Formerly the muskellunge was rated as one of the finest game fish, but it has practically disappeared from the waters of the lake district.

Many handsome summer homes are scattered along the upper part of the valley. The State of Illinois also has located a State Hospital at Elgin, a School for Boys at St. Charles, a Training School for Girls at Geneva, and the State Fish Hatchery at Spring Grove.

The valley of the Fox River is steadily growing in usefulness to the people of the State for manufacturing and agriculture, and is becoming more and more an outing and recreation ground. The river itself is capable of extensive development for power purposes, and the lakes, with proper improvements, could be made into a permanent park.

To protect for the people of the State these natural advantages this survey and investigation of the valley was made in order to determine the extent of the public rights and what encroachments, if any, were being made on them. <sup>4</sup>

Chapter II presents results of the Commission's field surveys, primarily in the form of tables of streamflow measurements. Chapter III, "Stream Flow and Floods," says in part,

Although the records are not complete it seems to be pretty well established that there have been great floods on the Fox River in 1849, 1857, 1872, 1882 \* and 1902.

On Sunday night, March 11, 1849, and the Monday following, a great flood occurred on the Fox River caused by the sudden melting of immense quantities of snow and ice in the upper Fox River valley. The ice was very heavy and the damage was great. At Elgin the dam and bridge were washed out; at St. Charles the dam was badly injured and bridge destroyed; at Geneva a two hundred foot section of dam was removed and the bridge was damaged; at Batavia part of the upper bridge was washed out and the dam was injured; at Aurora McCarty's east dam and Hoyt's dam were injured; Hoyt's mill race was obliterated, the island was inundated, damaging Stolp's new raceway, <sup>†</sup> and a small building near Gates' Brewery was washed out; at Montgomery the embankment was washed away and the paper mills and machine shop threatened by the high water; at Bristol <sup>‡</sup> the dam was entirely swept away; at Ottawa the bridge was washed away and the aqueduct was damaged.

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\* The flood was in 1881.

<sup>†</sup> This was a millrace.

<sup>‡</sup> At the time of the flood, the north side of the river at Yorkville was incorporated as Bristol.

Of all the floods, however, the one of 1857 seems to have been the most pronounced. Hicks' History of Kendall County states that it was the largest flood in this valley before or since that date. It was very destructive, especially in the lower reaches of the river. Heavy rain on February 6, 1857, melted the accumulated snow and broke up the ice. All the bridges from Batavia to Ottawa were washed out and several dams upstream gave way. The only record of the height of the water is the statement that "the water was waist deep in Millington and many lives were lost."

... The flood of 1872 was not as destructive as that of 1857, and the water was lower. Several dams in the lower reaches of the river were washed out, but there is no present record of the height of the water.

In the Fox Lake region reference is still found of the flood of 1882. At McHenry residents state that boats went around the ends of the McHenry highway bridge. \*

... The high water of 1902 washed out some structures along the Fox River and did considerable damage, but there seems to be no authentic record of the height of the water.

There seems to have been many more floods in the days of the early settlement of the Fox River valley than in later years, although there were plenty of forested areas then while now there is practically no timber. In the early records frequent mention is found to washing out of dams and bridges year after year. The explanation for this is very likely due to the fact that originally the bridges were low wooden structures and the dams were crude affairs whose main reliance for stability consisted of logs across the channel. These were insecure affairs, and high water floated them away. Most of the early bridges were built by private subscription and at great sacrifice of time and money to the pioneer settlers. Often they were no sooner erected than a freshet would wash them away.

Then again the banks of the river have been raised through the towns and cities. Avaricious citizens, or the cities themselves, have dumped and filled in along the stream, widened and raised the banks, and so acquired valuable property areas. The later bridges and buildings along the streams have been built much higher and so are farther above the high-water elevation. Later construction has been of steel, brick, stone and concrete on rock foundations and is secure against floods that would originally have caused great damage and inconvenience. As the dams along the river were built, they withstood the floods and

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\* The great flood occurred in 1881, not 1882. The *Waukegan Gazette* pronounced on April 23, 1881, "The floods of 1881 are likely to prove memorable. The new bridge on the Fox at McHenry Village stood well. The bridge at Johnsburg above, and Burton's Bridge directly west of Wauconda were both carried off." <sup>127</sup> The flood is described on pages 288, 294, and 369.

themselves acted as breakers to the force of the flood. The pools above the dams act as buffers to the floods and tend to retain the water and allow it to discharge gradually. This not only keeps the height of water down but reduces the velocity which in turn spreads the flow over a longer period of time. This is probably the reason why, of later years, few floods are noted along the Fox River even though the cutting off of the timber, the cultivation of land, and the consequent increased facility for rapid run-off of heavy precipitation is now much better than when the valley was originally settled and when frequent damaging floods were recorded. This is particularly true of the so-called "spring freshets" and what might be termed the average flood.

However, in great floods and great depth of water, when the dams are overtopped and drowned out, their effect on the height of the water becomes nearly negligible. The amount that the dam will raise the water, obstruct the flow and act as a safety valve, decreases as the water rises over the dam crest, until finally a slight ripple on the surface is the only evidence of its existence. In such a case the waters will have risen far over the river banks, flooded over the valley, and the area of the total cross section of the stream is so far in excess of the area near the river bottom which the dam affects, that the water passes downstream practically unaffected by the comparatively small structure in its original channel. The frequency of these large floods is very hard to determine. Two may occur close together and again it may be a century between them. <sup>4</sup>

Chapter IV is titled "Dams and Water Power":

The Fox River valley was settled by the white race from 1830 to 1850. Pioneers looking for homesteads were impressed by the beauties of the valley, the abundance of clear water supplied by the river and the opportunities for securing water power from this stream. One of the first thoughts of the early settler was to start a saw or grist mill, the former to cut timber for buildings for family and cattle, and the latter in order to feed both himself and his stock. Otherwise long journeys over trackless forest and prairie were required before the early family could have flour or meal. The history of the early settlements in the Fox River valley shows that practically the first thing done in every case, after building a house, was to build a dam and put up a water-wheel-driven mill. These dams were very crude timber structures, built of logs and slabs, and generally washed out or were seriously damaged by high water. If we had a complete history of the river from 1821 to the present time, we would undoubtedly find records of many water-power plants, some of which were crude in construction but answering the requirements of the time, as local flour, saw and woolen mills were positively needed. Some of the pioneers of these plants have been succeeded by more modern structures and are to-day doing duty in various lines of manufacturing.

... Water power was formerly utilized more extensively in proportion to the population than at present. \*

... At Carpentersville a sawmill dam was originally built in 1837-38 by Thomas L. Shields. Walnut lumber was sawed at this mill and sent to Chicago in considerable quantity. A carding and cloth dressing concern had been built in Dundee in 1844 by William Dunton. This was purchased by J.A. Carpenter and removed to Carpentersville. It was later increased to include the manufacturing of flannel and of cotton yarn. In 1866 it was ... run to full capacity. In 1851 a grist-mill was erected at the east end of the dam. The Illinois Iron and Bolt Co. at Carpentersville, now using the water power, was originally a reaper concern and was opened in 1853 by George Marshall. In 1864 it ... was remodeled, enlarged and commenced the manufacture of many kinds of iron wares. A brick addition was built in 1871 and a foundry in 1875. The planing mill was built in 1864. The Star Manufacturing Company was built in 1873 by J.A. Carpenter.\*

At Elgin the first dam was built by Folsom Bean in 1836-37 and a sawmill was erected and began operations in 1837. James T. Gifford erected a grist-mill also in 1837 on the east side of the dam at the head of the race. This mill was destroyed by fire many years later. In 1845 Samuel J. Kimball built a stone mill on the west side of the dam, known as Waverly Mills.

... The dam at South Elgin was built in 1836 by Gilbert & Tefft about a quarter of a mile below the present site. This dam was washed out the next spring. In 1837-38 they rebuilt it higher up the stream and on rock bottom. A sawmill was built in 1838 on the east side of the dam. ... In 1848 G.M. Woodbury took over the dam and power rights and built a stone mill on the east side of the river 40' by 60' and three stories high. In 1850 a stone distillery was added, and about the same time H. Brown erected a mill on the west side.

At Batavia in 1834 Titus Howe built a dam and sawmill at the lower end of the island. In 1835 William Van Northwick and his son bought out Howe and moved this dam to the head of the island. † They operated a saw and grist mill. For some years their grist-mill chiefly supplied the young city of Chicago with flour and meal. William Van Northwick & Son in 1844 built a sawmill and also the lower dam at Batavia. The first bridge at Batavia was built by Howard

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\* The report lists dams on the river at Carpentersville, Elgin, South Elgin, St. Charles, Geneva, Batavia, North Aurora, Aurora, South Batavia, Montgomery, Yorkville, McHenry, and Algonquin. All but two of these dams provided water power for adjacent machinery. The dam at South Batavia supplied electricity. The dam at McHenry was used to improve navigation above the dam; it was the only dam with a lock to allow passage of boats.

† Howe sold out to Van Northwick because "after doing considerable work a freshet came and washed his labors away, and he was too much discouraged to make any further efforts in this direction." <sup>35</sup>



Brothers, of St. Charles. It washed out and another was erected in 1843. When this one was carried downstream a stone bridge was built in 1844 . . . .

Aurora dam was built originally by Joseph McCarty. He settled at Aurora in April, 1834, and shortly thereafter began work on a dam. His brother . . . joined him in November, 1834, and bought a one-half interest in the dam and mill property. The dam was begun at the head of the island in the summer of 1834, was three feet high and extended at first across the east channel only. This mill was operated from the dam and sawed the first lumber on June 8, 1835. This mill stood near the McCarty shanty and in the rear of the present City Mills and was swept away by the freshet of February 9, 1876. In 1841 Charles Hoyt purchased water rights on the Fox River and erected a dam and mill on the west bank of the river known as the Black Hawk Mills. . . . The first bridge at Aurora was built by Joseph and David McCarty in 1836 . . . , touching the north end of the island. It was washed out in the spring of 1837 but was rebuilt in 1838-39, and this was in turn washed out a couple of years later.

At North Aurora Peter Schneider built sawmills and dams in 1833-34 at the mouth of Blackberry Creek and at North Aurora. A flouring mill was operated at the west end of the North Aurora dam by him and this locality took the name of Schneider's Mill.

At Montgomery in 1836 Daniel Gray became a settler . . . . . Gray soon began extensive improvements, erecting a store, foundry, reaper and header manufacturing plant, etc. Later a second foundry and a large stone grist-mill were built. The mill was begun in 1851 and finished in 1853.

. . . At McHenry an association called the Fox River Navigable Waterway Association was formed to get through the project to raise the water level in the Fox Lake district. This association secured a federal permit in 1907 and built a dam about three miles below McHenry. This dam was built of wood and rotted out. It was rebuilt in permanent form of steel sheet piling three feet above the bottom, and is provided with flash boards that permit it being raised three feet higher. This dam is 230 feet long, and is provided with a lock. This is the only lock on the Fox River and is substantially built of concrete, is 15' by 70' and has the bottom of the lock on a level with the bottom of the river. This dam is not intended to develop power, but simply to regulate the level of water in the Fox Lake region and assure a sufficient depth at all times to permit motor boats to navigate these lakes.

In addition to the existing dams on the river there have been many one-time flourishing industrial and power plants that have been abandoned, and many of them exist now only in the memory of the old inhabitants or in early records, all present evidence of their existence having entirely disappeared.

. . . Of the abandoned water-power sites, that at Dayton would naturally have a greater interest than the ordinary on account of its use in diverting the water from the river to the feeder of the Illinois and Michigan canal, which connected the canal proper at Ottawa. The head of the feeder was located about half a mile north of Dayton, where the State constructed the dam. Edward B. Talcott, resident engineer, in his report of December 10, 1840, referring to the Fox River dam, lock and section of the feeder, says this work was finished in September, 1839. This improvement was maintained until 1902, when the dam was washed out, since which time the feeder has been abandoned as well as other interests dependent on this water power. In addition to its use as a feeder for the Illinois and Michigan Canal, a reservation was made between the Canal Commissioners and the owners of the mill property at Dayton that the latter were to have the use of one-fourth the supply created by the improvement, "the same shall be drawn out of said feeder within seven-eighths of a mile from the head of the guard lock" under direction of the Canal Commissioners. This gave the required power for manufacturing interests, but with the passing of the dam and power all else was abandoned, as shown by the large four-story stone building stripped of all machinery.

The first dam at Dayton was built in 1830 by John Green and was erected to furnish power for a grist-mill. It is claimed that this mill was the first one in the State to be operated by water power. \*

The second dam built by the State in 1839 was about fourteen feet high and was constructed of stone with a wooden crest. It developed about 2,000 horse-power † . . . .

One-fourth of the power was to be used on the east bank of the river and one-half the total developed power was to be used in Ottawa. The present stone mill building was built in 1864 . . . , and was operated as a woolen mill until 1882, when it was sold to a pressed brick company who operated it until 1901 . . . .

There was also a dam at Ottawa, all traces of which have disappeared. It was located near the present aqueduct crossing. The contract for this dam was awarded in 1869 . . . , and the structure was completed in 1871 . . . . This dam was 490 feet long and 15½ feet high, and was to be used in connection with a dam on the Illinois River built at the same time and connected with this dam by a large channel. The two dams were expected to develop 12,000 horse-power. Both these dams were wrecked by the high water of 1872 before the power could be developed.

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\* Several water mills in southern Illinois preceded the Dayton Mill on the Fox River. <sup>335</sup>

† A total of 474 horsepower was used at Dayton by a tannery, drainage tile factory, grist mill, horse collar factory, brick factory, and paper mills.

The surveys of 1837 and 1838 show that there was a dam across the river at Yorkville and one near the mouth of Blackberry Creek with a mill at each place. There were also dams and mills at Oswego, Aurora, North Aurora; two between these two points, also at Batavia, St. Charles, South Elgin, Elgin, and Carpentersville. At Yorkville the dam on the Fox River is in good repair, but the mill buildings were destroyed by fire and the local requirements are cared for by the mill on Blackberry Creek. This dam on Blackberry Creek was built in 1857 by Lane and Arnold and was operated extensively until 1910. Since that date it has been used very little.

The original Millhurst dam was finished in 1870 by Frederick Post. It was 12 feet thick and 8 feet high and laid up in cement. Brownell Wing bought a one-half interest in this dam and built the flour-mill with four turbine water wheels. On account of the C. B. & Q. R.R. going one-half mile away from this mill the business did not pay and it was sold out to the Valley Power Company.

At Millhurst, in 1911, Simpson Brothers, of Aurora, began the erection of a modern concrete dam which was intended to develop power for lighting nearby towns and for an electric line. \* They purchased the land along each bank of the Fox River as far up as Plano bridge. This dam was to have a 12-foot head. The water rights were purchased from Albert Sears who owned and at one time operated the mill at Millhurst, using power from an old dam on the site of the present structure. Simpson Brothers sold out to the Public Service Company of Northern Illinois, and since that time work has been abandoned. At present there is a fine large frame mill building standing on the west end of a partially constructed modern concrete dam.

At Millington a dam was built some time between 1845 and 1850 and furnished power to woolen mills, sawmills and grist-mill. The woolen mill was started in 1868 and later failed. This dam was 10 feet high and was washed out about 1870. In 1868 Hon. J.W. Eddy obtained a charter for the Valley Power Company. After a delay of six years they started work in August of 1872 to build a canal 250 feet wide and 8 feet deep. A route was surveyed to Pott's dam in 1867 . . . . The distance was 4½ miles with a fall of 21 feet. They had in prospect a plate glass factory to employ some 400 men, and also a grist-mill.

In 1836 John Van Fleet built a dam about one mile south of North Aurora to furnish power for a sawmill. In the early days there was a large amount of good standing timber. When the timber gave out the mill was moved. The dam was washed out in the flood of 1857.

There were also dams at Millbrook and at Oswego which were washed out some years ago and no effort has been made to replace them. There were doubtless many other dams, especially in the early days, record of which has been lost.

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\* This electric line was an inter-urban passenger railroad.

Many of the best sites on the river are abandoned or only partially used.

... There have been various projected water-power developments that for one reason or another have never materialized.<sup>4</sup>

Several previous studies had explored the possibility of developing hydroelectric power on the Fox River. Each of these investigations concluded that the river's flow is not steady enough to provide electric power throughout the year, unless flow could be augmented during dry seasons by water from impoundments on the main stem or tributaries.

The Rivers and Lakes Commission considered the McHenry Dam to be the most likely candidate for storing water for two purposes: to develop hydroelectric power, and to dilute pollution below the dam:

The present dam at McHenry raises the water level beyond the Illinois-Wisconsin State line. Inasmuch as this survey stops at the State line, it is impossible to say just what is the northern limit of this backwater. The area of the lakes tributary to the Fox and within this State is approximately seventeen square miles. If the river itself adds two square miles more, then there is nineteen square miles total water surface above the McHenry dam. That is, to store the excess run-off during the wet months will raise the level of the water surface about 2.6 feet. This is probably well on the safe side, because as the water rises in height the water surface itself increases, due to flooding the marshes.

... it would appear ... that by raising the height of the McHenry dam about three feet and providing flash boards or regulating gates of some kind, sufficient water could be stored in the lake region to provide a uniform average flow of over 700 cubic feet per second below the dam. This would give a minimum flow that would remove all danger of excess pollution, and would assure a larger minimum flow for power purposes farther downstream. This would also increase the size of the lakes and cover much of the swamps and marshes in the lake district and tend to improve this territory in appearance. By raising this dam McHenry would become a good location for water-power development. \*  
... if the McHenry dam is raised, ... the water's level is lifted only 3 feet and large portions of the low land that would be affected by this raise are now swampy and of very little value. In a general way, therefore, we may conclude that a great benefit could be secured to the inhabitants of the Fox River valley by increasing the height of either the McHenry or Algonquin dam so as to store the excess rainfall of the wet season and by means of regulating gates distribute it in the form of a more uniform flow during the dry months. Such a procedure would improve the appearance and value of the lake district for pleasure pur-

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\* The Commission considered the advantages of raising the dam at Algonquin to make it possible to generate electricity, but concluded that "damages to submerged property would likely make this prohibitive."<sup>4</sup>

poses, would remove the danger of overpollution from the towns and cities along the banks of this river, and would assure to the power users a more uniform flow and larger development at reduced expense.

The main objection to this procedure is the probable damage that would result from raising the water elevation throughout the lake region. At many points the banks are ample to accommodate this much increase in water level. At others swampy land would be flooded and the damage would be small. Undoubtedly some valuable land would be rendered useless. With such a small raise it would be possible in many places to build low levees where the value of the flooded property would justify it. In estimating the amount of possible damage it must also be borne in mind that there have been and will continue to be many times when the water will naturally rise to this height, and that without additional height at the McHenry dam there will be occasions when this property will be flooded. That such a project is feasible, and that the results in increasing the minimum flow of the river will be of immense value to the cities and the power-users downstream is very apparent. This is especially so in the case of those cities which are already polluting this river excessively at the present summer flow, and which must consider some method to purify their sewage. If the low-water flow is increased sufficiently, the dilution will become so great that there will be no danger of an epidemic, at least for many years. <sup>4</sup>

Chapter V is devoted to water pollution:

In its natural state the Fox River was a beautiful, clear stream, abounding in fish and flowing through a veritable garden of flowered and timbered land. Now it is in low summer flow a dirty, evil smelling waterway near the cities. Out in the less populated portions it still retains much of its natural beauty, but near the factories and denser populated spots it is foul and dirty. During periods of high water this condition is not so apparent, but during a hot dry summer it is quite pronounced. Most of the game fish have disappeared, although the State Game and Fish Conservation Commission has closed this river to any but hook and line fishing and is trying gradually to build up the stream for fishing purposes.

A large part of the cause of this deterioration of the Fox River is due to the increased use of this stream as a dumping ground for all manner of sewage and refuse. There has been a decided improvement in this respect during the past two years, due to the activities of this Commission, but as the population of the Fox River valley increases and more manufacturing plants and more people locate upon this drainage area additional precautions will have to be taken in order to prevent an overpollution of these waters and the consequent epidemic of disease sure to follow such a condition.

The pollution of the Fox River first came officially to the attention of the Rivers and Lakes Commission through a complaint from Edward F. Gorton et al. vs. the City of Elgin et al. . . . The testimony showed that in the summer the river

many times was "practically dry," that many cattle were of necessity watered from this stream, that it was used extensively for bathing in warm weather, that many thousand tons of ice were annually harvested all along the river. The witnesses also declared that there was very great pollution of the water, that it was often offensive in smell, that the ice in many places was not clear, that clots of sewage often floated on the surface, that at times cattle became sick from drinking river water, and at certain places stock got sore mouths from acid wastes discharged by factories. The City of Aurora admitted emptying raw sewage into the Fox River, but promised to coöperate to better the general condition. Witnesses declared that fish were killed by trade wastes from manufacturing plants. The city of Elgin also admitted dumping raw sewage into the river, but thought the expense of installing septic tanks or purifying the city sewage would be very heavy. The State Training School and Alms House also pleaded guilty of polluting the river, but expressed their willingness to purify their sewage. The city of Batavia also acknowledged it was polluting the river waters. In other words, at the first hearing it was generally acknowledged that the majority of the cities and manufacturing plants along the banks of the Fox River were discharging objectionable matter into this stream.

Mr. Ralph Hilscher made a detailed report of the pollution of the Fox River from its source. He concluded that the sewage from 75,000 people was being discharged into this river, and that there was a prospect of 15,000 more so discharging in the near future. He found that the river is practically clear on leaving Pistakee Lake, that the remaining sewage is discharged in a raw state into the river between Dundee and Aurora, in about thirty miles. The contributing population in this territory was 58,600 and including those towns immediately contemplating sewerage, would be 65,000. There were 36,000 people using the river above Batavia and 27,500 above Elgin.

John W. Alvord, Hydraulic Engineer, of Chicago, and Edward Bartow, Director of the State Water Survey, made a report on conditions at Geneva in November, 1911. They found that at times the flow in the river at North Aurora sometimes got as low as 80 cubic feet per second, and at Batavia was frequently 120 cubic feet per second, and at Geneva the minimum flow was about 90 cubic feet per second. As a conservative statement, they concluded the flow at Geneva was often less than 100 cubic feet per second, and sometimes for a week or so fell below 80 cubic feet per second. They concluded that there was only 2.8 cubic feet per second of water available at low-water periods during the summer season for each 1,000 persons tributary to that part of the river near Geneva. They also concluded that from 3 cubic feet per second to 7 cubic feet per second of fresh water is necessary to oxidize in an unobjectionable manner the sewage of each 1,000 persons tributary to the outlet, and that a limit of 4 cubic feet per second per 1,000 persons would be a wise minimum for the Fox River, if satisfactory conditions are to be maintained.

It being apparent to the Rivers and Lakes Commission that the Fox River was being excessively polluted, on June 9, 1914, the Commission entered an order against the cities of Elgin, Geneva, Batavia, Aurora, and St. Charles, and the Fox River Packing Company and the Kerber Packing Company, commanding them to discontinue and stop the discharging or permit the emptying into the Fox River, or any tributary thereof, at or near the said cities, from the several outfall sewers, pipes, or other outlets, sewage, industrial wastes and other injurious substances.

. . . the cities and packing companies affected by the order of the Commission have taken steps to comply therewith. <sup>4</sup>

The report of the Rivers and Lakes Commission continues with a discussion of the way in which organic pollution depletes oxygen in water. The Commission discussed two alternatives for ameliorating pollution in the river: (a) diluting the dirty water "by increasing the height of the McHenry dam and providing gates such that the excess wet season precipitation can be stored and allowed to discharge gradually during the dry months," and (b) "by the artificial treatment of the sewage before it enters the stream." <sup>4</sup>

Chapter VII addresses "Obstructions and Encroachments":

The examination of the Fox River valley at the time of this survey disclosed the fact that there are numerous obstructions and many encroachments along the channel. Especially have encroachments occurred in the larger cities, where the high value of land has caused many people to add to their property by filling within the flow lines. Obstructions, consisting of low bridges, wire and pipe crossings, dams, abandoned piers, etc., block the passage of this stream. In the first eighty miles above the mouth it would not be possible to go ten miles in the smallest motor boat without carrying the boat around some obstruction. Between the Wisconsin State line in the north and the mouth of the river at Ottawa there are fifty-six bridges \* and fourteen dams. All of the dams, except the one near McHenry, Illinois, were built without locks, and the only method of getting by them is to carry around. Some of the bridges are low concrete arches, and in times of high water it is doubtful whether even a rowboat could pass under them.

The river is used as a dumping-place for all kinds of refuse by nearly every town situated on it, and between towns the abutting land owners do the same. This is gradually transferring a beautiful stream into a sewer whose banks in places are lined with unsightly waste, and whose channel has been so restricted at some points until it will not accommodate the flood flow without doing serious damage. In places the river bank was filled and buildings erected on the fill, then more filling done and more buildings built. This is especially

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\* A table in the report lists 63 bridges.

noticeable in Aurora and Elgin. At Elgin a comparison of the present bank lines with the maps of 1850 shows the river to have been narrowed more than 150 feet, and the high-water cross section is less than one-half of what it was in its natural state. At Aurora also there has been extensive filling, and the postoffice, city hall and a number of business houses are located on ground formed by filling in an original chain of islands in the river. Numerous bridges in this same locality have further narrowed the channel until there is danger of a great flood doing immense damage. \*

. . . The fact that great floods generally occur at long separated intervals leads the occupants of river property to feel secure, and the desire for additional area urges them to fill in more and more and encroach on the river channel. During the long interval generally existing between great floods this flood channel may become overgrown, and all evidence that it was submerged will have disappeared except from the memory of the old residents. Additional filling is made, structures are erected where the flood waters once flowed, until another period of heavy precipitation and extraordinary run-off produces another great flood. Then the constriction in the flood channel acts as a dam to increase the height of the water and spread it over a greater area. Property is destroyed, bridges are washed out, transportation lines are crippled, lives are lost, and the whole population of the river valley pays heavily for the carelessness and shortsightedness of a few owners of river-bank property. The memory of the recent great floods in the Ohio River basin is an urgent warning to all who live along the Fox River that unless free passage for the flood waters is secured, all residents of the Fox River valley may be forced to pay for the faults of a few. Public opinion is the strongest factor in our government, and when the entire population of a river valley appreciate the importance of keeping an open-flood channel, the efforts of the Rivers and Lakes Commission to prevent further encroachments and remove the existing obstructions in the river channels will be backed strongly by public opinion, and this important phase of their work will be immensely facilitated. <sup>4</sup>

#### Chapter VII, "Navigation, Improvements and Conclusions":

That the Fox River was considered an important highway . . . is borne out by the movement in 1846 to connect the Fox River with Lake Michigan by a canal at the upper reaches in Wisconsin, and to open the Fox River itself by dredging, etc. Public meetings were held in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin to discuss the feasibility and importance of this project. The citizens of Kane County, Illinois, held a meeting at Geneva, June 6, 1846, and adopted a report that the interests of the people required better means of communication with

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\* When the river was dammed at Elgin, the impoundment resulted in a deeper and narrower channel downstream from the dam. This allowed more riverside property to be subdivided and incorporated into the town. <sup>312</sup>



Lake Michigan, and expressed their conviction that it was possible to make the Fox River navigable; that the cost of constructing locks and dams could be partly paid by the sale of water power and the balance easily made up by the citizens, and that if the river was opened the people of Wisconsin would connect the river and Lake Michigan by a canal.

. . . On June 27, 1846, a similar meeting was held by the citizens of McHenry County, and they also passed a resolution strongly endorsing this project. On August 10, 1846, the citizens in the Fox River valley in Wisconsin held a public meeting . . . and enthusiastically adopted a resolution favoring the scheme.

The history of these meetings shows that the river was held in high esteem as a highway as late as 1850, and probably some time thereafter. <sup>4</sup>

The report continues with a description of a passenger steamboat that operated between Aurora and Batavia beginning in the 1860s. The same boat plied the Fox Lake region in the 1870s and '80s. The Commission estimated that at least 5,000 to 6,000 boats were currently on the river. Recreational opportunities and development of summer cottages were limited along some reaches of the river by water pollution, marshy shores, shallow water, and dams that obstructed navigation.

*The Report of Survey and Proposed Improvement of the Fox River* concludes,

From this survey and examination of the Fox River valley several points of especial importance should be emphasized. They are:

- (a) That the Fox River is one of the best water-power sites in the State, and capable of extensive development.
- (b) That the safe limit for the natural dilution of raw sewage has been reached, and future sewer developments should provide artificial purification of the sewage before it is discharged into this river.
- (c) That the Federal and State jurisdiction over navigable waters should be clearly defined by a ruling from the Supreme Court of the United States so that more concerted action may be taken to prevent infringement of the public rights.
- (d) That numerous obstructions and encroachments have occurred along the Fox River, and are a menace to public safety in periods of high water. That many private interests have occupied ground belonging to the public, and that the efforts of the Rivers and Lakes Commission to remove the obstructions and secure the public title in these lands is an important work and deserving of public help and recognition.
- (e) That the Fox River can be made navigable for small boats for the majority of its length at reasonable cost, and that such an improvement would be of great value to those residing permanently within the valley, and to the large population who use this district as a summer recreation ground. <sup>4</sup>

## 1915: "Field Notes from the Chicago Area"

The *Wilson Bulletin* offers these ornithological observations from Gustave Eifrig:

On the 29th of March, when it was cold enough the night before to freeze over a bay in the Fox River, I saw a Coot stalking among the alders at the river's edge. On April 17th we flushed five Prairie Chickens in one of the brushy woods which cover some of the hills of glacial drift along the Fox River near Cary, Ill.

... On the 15th of the month \* I saw a pair of Lark Sparrows at Cary; this species must be classed as rare in this territory.

... At Cary our camp is within a few yards of the edge of a marsh. Here one can easily make notes on the voices of the marsh heard at night. Beside the clucking and cackling of coots, gallinules and rails the Prairie Marsh Wren (*Telmatodytes palustris iliaca*) † sings spasmodically at least till one o'clock. The Warbling Vireo nesting nearby also puts in a few notes from time to time . . . .<sup>90</sup>

## 1915: Recollections of James Moore

James Moore was the first white child born in Genoa, in 1835. Eighty years later he wrote a series of letters to the editor of the *Genoa Republican-Journal*, recalling the era of his boyhood. These letters mention water mills on the Fox River at St. Charles:

In 1837 three families . . . located at St. Charles.

One of them started a grist mill, using water power and for a long time this was the only mill between Genoa and Chicago.

... In about the year 1845 the majority of the farmers had a small flock of sheep . . . . A man living at St. Charles built a carding Mill ‡ on the Fox River, run by Water power.<sup>176</sup>

## 1916: *Duck Shooting and Hunting Sketches*

The author of this book, William Hazelton, was America's most prolific writer and editor of books about hunting waterfowl in the early 1900s. *Duck Shooting and Hunting Sketches* names ten outstanding locales for shooting canvasbacks in the eastern United States—including two along the Fox River in Lake County: "... Fox and Long Lakes in Illinois, are noted resorts of the canvasback."<sup>133</sup>

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\* The month was May.

† Prairie Marsh Wren (*Telmatodytes palustris iliaca*) = marsh wren.

‡ The carding mill processed fleece.

## 1917: "The Fox River of Illinois"

In this article John F. Steward reviewed three names that have been used for the Fox River. Steward explained that the river was long ago called the Pestecuoy, \* a local word for buffalo. The second name was *la Rivière du Rocher*, or Rock River. Steward said that the current name commemorates a siege in which many members of the Fox (Mesquakie) tribe were killed at a fort along the river in 1730. † A quotation from J.F. Steward's article is in a box on page 247.

Mr. Steward's essay concludes with this portrayal of the Fox River valley:

Where roamed the majestic herds, are fields of corn; at the stream, erstwhile so rich in the finny tribe, are now wheels of industry; our ponds that grew the beautiful lillies (the macoupine ‡ of the natives) have largely disappeared; and where wild ducks and wild geese were in unbelievable quantities, few are found. Wild pigeons, in the early days, clouded the sky . . . . In these regions are now happy homes, and cities border the stream; the erstwhile *chrystal* waters of our river are now a dream; and the shades of the giant trees, that bordered the stream, felled by the ruthless axman, are but a memory. <sup>291</sup>

## 1918: "History of Our Town"

Lake Villa lies at the center of the lake region on the east side of the Fox River in north-western Lake County. As a class project in 1918, four students wrote a history of their village. One of their topics is "Hunting, Fishing, and Trapping":

Being the proud possessor of almost ten small lakes, Lake Villa abounds in good fishing, and hunting. Some years previous many animals indeed were trapped alas, but of late years, partly on account of the close proximity and watchfulness of the people, the trapping has decreased. Mr. Douglas relates that when he was still a young boy living on the West bank of Sand Lake, he with his brothers were startled on seeing a wolf some rods away in the clearing. . . . it finally disappeared in the woods, and was not seen again, having probably been shot by some hunter. Outside these rare occasions, very few wolves were seen in

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\* This name survives in Pistakee Lake, a widening of the Fox River in McHenry and Lake Counties.

† Documents from the era verify that the Mesquakie were put under siege by the French and their Indian allies in 1730, but the location of the fight has long been under question. Researchers have discredited J.F. Steward's conclusion that the fort was along the Fox River (see page 315).

‡ The name "macoupin" (macoupine) has been applied to water lilies, but the identity of this plant is not certain. Some of the earliest written references to the macoupin indicate that it is arrow arum (*Peltandra virginica*). <sup>316</sup>

this part of the county. \* Wild deer were very plentiful here at one time, and had established a regular little trail which led from Fox Lake across country to the shores of Fourth Lake. Many and often small herds of from ten to fifteen were seen slowly walking along the trodden path to the Lake shore. From here the trail led off to the Des Plaines, following the lakes thence. Wild pigeons were also very plentiful here in the pioneer days, but there are none left at present. These birds appeared in huge flocks, and were shot unmercifully. . . . They often became rather tame, and fed from the chicken yards with the tame fowls. The lakes were always the scene of duck shooting, and fishing. Today, at certain seasons, the lakes have large flocks of wild geese floating on the waters, but they remain only for short lengths of time. But before the country became settled they stayed for weeks and even months at a time. Still the fish are almost as plentiful as before, and fishermen are seen early in the spring out in small boats seeking them. Many of the lakes are private and are seined for carp, the government putting in a stock every so often. In the woods and around the lake shores, many small animals are trapped during the winter. These consist of minks, skunk, weasels, opossum, musk-rats and occasionally an ermine. One of the boys of the school caught some seventy odd rats, † in 1916, also a skunk and one or two minks. The larger animals are vanishing rapidly, but their abundance now denotes their greater supply long ago.<sup>196</sup>

### 1955: *The Original Vegetation of Kane County, Illinois*

Paul Kilburn studied the U.S. Public Land Survey's field notes and plats of Kane County for his Master's thesis. ‡ Kane County was surveyed between 1837 and 1841, before the native vegetation was converted wholesale to farmland. Kilburn looked at the distribution of forest and prairie in relation to six physical factors: geology, soil parent materials, soil types, climate, topography, and fire. He found the strongest correlations between vegetation and the last two factors, topography and fire:

#### *Topography*

This geographical feature of the land exerts marked influence upon temperature, humidity and wind—and therefore climate—and also drainage, thereby affecting soils and soil moisture. Such features often radically influence the vegetation.

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\* Wolves (presumably coyotes rather than timber wolves) were once numerous in the neighborhood. A bounty was placed on wolves in four townships south of Lake Villa. This announcement was published in June of 1854: "In consideration of the many depredations recently committed by wolves, the following bounty is offered for all killed within the towns of Libertyville, Vernon, Elia and Fremont; eight dollars for each old one and one dollar for each young one."<sup>127</sup>

† Rat = muskrat.

‡ Kilburn revised and published his research in the *American Midland Naturalist*.<sup>174</sup>

Detailed study of the topography of the county . . . has not been attempted. Nevertheless, by plotting the vegetation upon detailed topographic maps . . . some interesting generalities are indicated.

1. The river bluffs, where gradients are steep, are almost invariably forested. Where these gradients lessen the prairie often extends to the river border.
2. The northern half of the county is more highly dissected by hills and ravines than the southern half. This pattern corresponds to the vegetation distribution pattern, the northern area being more heavily forested than the gently rolling southern portion.
3. The prairie patches in T42N Ranges 7 and 8 West prevail over flat areas. \*
4. Forest patches generally cling to stream beds. This is especially noticeable in the south. This phenomenon could be aided both by the protection from searing winds offered by ravines, and by the protection from fire thereby afforded.
5. The east side of the river is more heavily forested than the west side, although topographic differences are not perceivable.

These generalizations are by no means universal within the county. The prairie often extends over steep hills while the forest often occupies level terrain. Other anomalies can be found, but as a rule the above generalities hold true.

### *Fire*

The extent of the effect of prairie fires on the existence and maintenance of the prairie has been debated for some time. Presumably started by Indians or lightning, such fires, fanned by the hot and steady westerlies, swept rapidly eastward in the dry seasons. These fires certainly had some effect on the vegetation (Curtis and Partch, 1948<sup>83</sup>), but the extent of such influence is not clear (Shimek, 1948<sup>269</sup> and Transeau, 1935<sup>306</sup>).

Extensive prairie fires would tend to promote prairie vegetation on the western borders of such obstacles as streams, lakes, and rivers. Such a condition is found to be generally true in the southern part of the county where the forest is more abundant on the eastern banks of the streams. The same holds true with regard to the Fox River. Evidence in this county is favorable to the theory that fire exhibited some influence upon prairie distribution.

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\* Township 42 North, Range 7 West and Range 8 West are Rutland and Dundee Townships, in the northernmost tier of townships in Kane County. Most of this part of the county is rolling and was wooded, but Kilburn found that level areas among these hills were prairie.

The evidence is far from conclusive, however. First of all, the area is too small to dispute the claim of coincidence. Secondly, these streams and the river may have been acting as a wind break and not just a fire break. Such protection from the searing westerlies would favor forest establishment upon the leeward side more than on the windward. \*

One can see that I have forwarded no startling new explanations for prairie dominance in a region capable of forest growth. I do feel that no one reason will explain such dominance, for a network of many factors is acting upon the vegetation simultaneously. These factors overlap to varying degrees, so that deficiency of one, such as rainfall, can be counterbalanced by an abundance of another, such as clayey soil. The final determining factor may differ in each situation.<sup>173</sup>

### **1979: *South Elgin***

According to A.C. Alft's history of South Elgin, early immigrants from New York were familiar with cobblestone construction, and they set to work gathering glacial boulders: "They began building homes of cobblestones found in abundance in fields and along lake shores."<sup>6</sup>

In addition to water-powered mills, several other South Elgin businesses depended on the river or riverside springs. A large creamery was cooled by "three springs of unusual size and low temperature." This creamery and others were supplied by "two cheese box and butter tub factories"—one water-powered, the other steam-powered. Water was bottled and sold from Crystal Springs. Businesses suffered a setback in 1881: "A swollen Fox River tore out a portion of the dam in April, 1881 and weakened two of the five bridge piers."<sup>6</sup>

### **1979: *The Natural Character of the Nelson Lake Marsh Natural Area in Kane County, Illinois***

Nelson Lake Marsh occupies a natural basin in the headwaters of Lake Run, a few miles west of Batavia. The Kane County Forest Preserve District dedicated Nelson Lake Marsh as an Illinois Nature Preserve in 1981. Two years earlier Max Hutchison had completed a report about the area, subtitled "A Description of the Presettlement Features of Mud Lake (the Original Name for Nelson Lake) and Its Surrounding Townships." Hutchison introduced the area and his study:

A rather detailed picture of the presettlement character of this part of the original wilderness can be determined from a study of the historical records,

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\* Paul Kilburn explained in a footnote, "The leeward side is less subject to desiccation and seedling mortality."<sup>173</sup>

primarily the original notes and plats of the Public Land Survey. The survey of this part of the public domain was completed in 1840, just prior to significant disturbance by European settlers. The field notes provide standardized, relatively unbiased, eye-witness descriptions of the general area and the features the surveyors encountered along each section line.

... This PLS \* description provides a scientific basis for evaluating and incorporating additional items of information about the region's natural character collected from other sources. The Illinois State Geological Survey publications of studies of this area, the Kane County soils map and report, and the Department of Conservation Natural Areas Inventory data about the present character of the Nelson Lake Marsh Natural Area, were also useful in providing additional clues to the appearance of the region prior to the unnatural disturbances of the white man.

A knowledge of the area's unnatural disturbances affecting it during the last 150 years is a real help in determining what can and should be done to protect the area and its significant natural features, today.

... The Nelson Lake Marsh is a good quality natural area containing remnants of fen, marsh, and pond natural communities . . . .

... The earliest detailed description of the area is found in the field note books of the Public Land Survey surveyors. They described the region that they saw in 1839-40 while running the township and section lines and establishing section and quarter section corners. They located and described the water features crossed, trees cut by their lines, and trees used as witnesses to the corners. Other comments in the notes describe mile and half-mile segments of the section lines and generally include descriptions of the topography and soils and note dominant timber species and undergrowth. Witness tree diameters and bearings and distances from the corners are also given.<sup>152</sup>

The report includes a description of natural features in the two townships surrounding Nelson Lake:

The PLS notes locate and describe specific features encountered along the surveyed lines and at section and quarter section corners. General character comments are given for each mile or mile segment of the section lines crossed. The following . . . terms and phrases were used by the surveyors to describe sites and features in the Nelson Lake townships (T. 39 N., R. 7 E., and T. 39 N., R. 8 E.).

... *timber, timbered land, thinly timbered, a few scattering trees*—all considered and mapped as forest; there was probably little savanna in

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\* PLS = Public Land Survey.

this region; "thinly timbered" was mentioned only once in the two townships, and "a few scattering trees" was mentioned along the shore of Mud Lake,

*no timber near, no other tree near, no other tree in reasonable distance*—an occasional corner did not have more than one witness tree close by (one corner in the forest had none), but most corners had two and sometimes four witness trees given; such would indicate a sizeable opening in the forest, as they went as far as 561 feet to note a witness tree at one corner,

*prairie*—all that was called "prairie" by the surveyors and that had boundaries located along the section lines was considered to be true prairie; it had scattered trees, brushy areas, and wet places, but it was clearly distinguished from forest; one line just northeast of Mud Lake is described as "prairie with a few scattering trees"; one line is described as "wet prairie," and two other small areas are called "wet,"

*Mud Lake, Mudd Lake*—this was the only water feature in the two townships designated as "lake"; its size and location is described and it was declared "impassable"; this was the surveyor's name for what is now called Nelson Lake,

*marsh*—only one small "marsh" was noted in the two townships (in the southeast corner of T. 39 N., R. 8 E., east of Fox River),

*undergrowth, no undergrowth*—undergrowth was assumed to be the shrub layer in the forest; "no undergrowth" was a common comment in some areas, especially along forest edges near the prairie; these sites may have had a ground cover of prairie,

*Fox River*—the river was so designated by the surveyors,

*Blackberry Creek*—the creek was so designated by the surveyors,

*brook*—a small stream; smaller than a creek,

*outlet of Mud Lake*—this was specifically identified by the surveyors as the drain for Mud Lake,

*level \**—areas of even level terrain,

*rolling, gently rolling*—areas with low rises and small hills and ridges; usually well drained; uneven or irregular land,

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\* Hutchison added a footnote: "These comments were describing usually mile-long stretches, so local areas of relief did occur along miles described as 'level.'" <sup>152</sup>



*rich*—the best quality of soil for farming,

*fit for cultivation, unfit for cultivation*—an additional comment about the land, usually associated with a description of the quality of the soil; very few lines were described as “unfit for cultivation,” and those were considered to be too wet,

*oak*—one or more of several species of *Quercus*, commonly *macrocarpa*, *alba*, and *velutina*,

*bur oak, burr oak*—*Quercus macrocarpa*,

*white oak*—*Quercus alba*,

*oak bushes*—small *Quercus* shrubs of unknown species,

*red oak*—probably *Quercus rubra*,

*black oak*—*Quercus velutina*,

*ash*—any of two or three species of *Fraxinus*,

*ash bushes*—small *Fraxinus* shrubs of unknown species,

*elm*—probably *Ulmus americana*,

*hickory*—one or more of several species of *Carya*,

*walnut*—probably *Juglans nigra*,

*sugartree*—*Acer saccharum*,

*lyn, lynn*—probably *Tilia americana*,

*ironwood*—probably *Carpinus caroliniana*,

*hazel*—*Corylus americana*,

*field, in cultivation*—areas already being farmed and brought under cultivation were described and mapped by the surveyors,

*road*—roads that existed at the time of the survey were noted and mapped by the surveyors.

The following is a description of the natural communities based upon information contained in the PLS field notes:

1) timber—This is the forest community and is distinguished from prairie and from the water features. T. 39 N., R. 7 E. was 20% forested, and T. 39 N., R. 8 E. was 35% forested for an average of 28% for the two townships. Significant correlations between forest and topog-

raphy or between forest and soil moisture are not clear. There does appear to be a relationship between forest distribution and the large water features. The timber occurs and is most extensive on the east sides of Mud Lake and the Fox River. This has been commonly noted in many of the prairie-forest communities of the state and is usually explained by assuming that the forests were most protected from prairie fires on the east sides of water barriers. The forested areas were on dry-mesic and mesic sites, \* and several mesic tree species such as sugar maple and basswood were noted along and to the east of Fox River and Mud Lake. Ninety-seven percent of the forest land in both townships was described as rich and fit for cultivation. Ninety-seven percent of T. 39 N., R. 7 E. was described as level, while 49% of T. 39 N., R. 8 E. was level. Most of the rest was rolling and gently rolling. Less than 3% of the forest was unfit for cultivation. The large tracts and groves were relatively open, especially west of Mud Lake, but there was little savanna except for some forest-prairie border areas. The forest for sixteen lines (west of Mud Lake) was described as having "no undergrowth." Witness trees in T. 39 N., R. 7 E. averaged 136 links (90 feet) from the corners, with one tree given as 850 links (561 feet) away. Witness trees in T. 39 N., R. 8 E. averaged only 60 links (40 feet) from the corners. One comment said "thinly timbered," where the surveyors crossed a peninsula of forest in the southwest corner of T. 39 N., R. 7 E. There are "oak bushes" and "ash bushes" mentioned for each of two lines east of the Fox River. Bur oak and white oak were the dominant trees in T. 39 N., R. 7 E., and, in about equal numbers, made up 96% of the overstory. Red oak and black oak were occasional, with rare mentions of hickory, ash, walnut, and elm. Bur oaks in this township averaged 15 inches dbh <sup>†</sup> with the largest tree mentioned only 30 inches dbh. White oaks averaged 18 inches dbh. T. 39 N., R. 8 E. had a greater number and diversity of tree species with bur oak, white oak, black oak, and sugar maple of about equal numbers in the canopy. The largest witness trees and average sizes noted for each of these species was: bur oak—40 inches and 15 inches; white oak—40 inches and 21 inches; black oak—40 inches and 7 inches; and sugar maple—30 inches and 14 inches. Those four species made up 61% of the overstory. Other occasional trees in this township were hickory, ash, walnut, elm, red oak, basswood, and ironwood. Hazel was the most common understory shrub mentioned in both townships. Briers are mentioned for four lines,

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\* A *mesic* site has moist but well drained soil.

<sup>†</sup> Dbh = diameter at breast height (standardized by foresters as 4.5 feet or 1.37 meters above the ground).

vines are mentioned for one line, and spicewood was mentioned as occurring in the understory along one line.

2) prairie—Seventy-one percent of the two townships was prairie: 79% of T. 39 N., R. 7 E., and 64% of T. 39 N., R. 8 E. It occurred on dry mesic to wet sites and even bordered the west shores of Mud Lake and the Fox River. Most was good to fairly well drained with only three lines mentioned as having “wet prairie.” One small marsh was noted southeast of the Fox River. Ninety-eight percent of the prairie was rich and fit for cultivation with only about 2% unfit for cultivation, evidently because it was too wet. About half of the prairie in T. 39 N., R. 7 E. was level, the rest was described as rolling. About 20% of T. 39 N., R. 8 E. was described as level. One line west of Mud Lake mentions “scattered trees” in the prairie.

3) water features—The Fox River, Blackberry Creek, and Mud Lake are the only named water features noted by the surveyors. Others noted and mapped are creeks, brooks, and one small marsh. There were probably other small lakes and marshes in the vicinity that were not crossed by section lines and were not noted by the surveyors. Mud Lake was relatively deep, open, and had distinct edges. Timber bordered most of its edges, but there was prairie and scattered trees along its northwest edge. It drained slowly to the southwest by means of a small shallow stream. There appears to have been little change since settlement in the course of the streams, as most crossed the section lines in 1840 almost exactly where they do now. Fox River appears to have had a generally narrower channel in 1840 than now.<sup>152</sup>

Max Hutchison concluded with a summary description of the natural character of the Nelson Lake Marsh Natural Area (Sections 24 and 25, T. 39 N., R. 7 E., and Sections 19 and 30, T. 39 N., R. 8 E.):

Nelson Lake (called Mud Lake by the PLS surveyors) was primarily a pond community in 1840. It was deeper with a more extensive water cover than now and extended farther to the southwest than the marsh does now. Its edges were distinct, except at its southwest end, where it graded into a marsh and wet prairie. It was bordered by timber on all except its northwest shore where there was level prairie and scattered trees. It drained slowly to the southwest by means of a small stream, 10 to 15 feet wide. The bordering trees were white oaks and bur oaks with an occasional hickory and red oak. There was very little understory, except for occasional clumps of hazel, and the trees were generally large with widespread crowns.

Specifically, the PLS surveyors described Nelson Lake as follows:

Going north along the township line (east line of Section 25), the surveyors entered timber at 14 chains and raised a mound at 40 chains (quarter section

corner) because there were no trees near. At this point they "intersected the SE bank of an impassible lake (called mud lake)" and gave its width as 56.50 chains. They described the lake further as, "This lake lies mostly on the W side of the line and extends in a SW direction about 3/4 of a mile." They left the lake 16.50 chains north along the east line of Section 24 and went through a strip of timber to 35 chains, where they entered prairie. The land south of the lake is described as rich and level with bur oak and white oak timber. "No undergrowth" is mentioned. North of the lake the land is rich and rolling with white oak timber and an understory of hazel. Going east along the north line of Section 25, they struck the "NW bank of Mud Lake" at 71 chains and described it as "impassible." They are in prairie but note "a few scattering trees on the NW bank of lake." Going west along the north line of Section 30, the surveyors are in white oak-red oak-hickory timber with an undergrowth of hazel. The land is level and rich. They strike the east bank of "Mudd Lake" at 40 chains and describe it as "impassable." A further note says that, "this lake reaches in a North East direction about a half mile and in a southwesterly direction about a mile and is about 50 chains across in a westerly direction from this place."<sup>152</sup>

### 1980: *Historic Batavia, Illinois*

This book presents a year-by-year chronicle Batavia's development. Van Nortwick's saw-mill, constructed in 1844, was still in operation in the '50s. In the 1850's Batavia Mills produced as many as 500 barrels of flour each week. The Fox River Manufacturing Company was established on an island in the river in 1851. The company made box cars for railroads, but it was replaced by a paper mill in 1862.<sup>111</sup>

*Historic Batavia* portrays the region west of town in the 1850s through the experience of teen-aged Hugh Alexander. The Alexander farm was near Nelson's Grove and Nelson Lake, a few miles west of Batavia:

Young Alexander must have thought the Grove was an interesting place to live. It was an ideal roosting place for passenger pigeons, which settled there in great flocks. He used in get a full bag of these birds in a very short time. Nelson's Lake, just west of the Grove, was interesting, too. It was a peculiar body of water in that the ground around it was so loose and spongy that a pole twenty feet long could be shoved into the ground to its full depth. Cattle would sometimes approach too close to the lake, would start to sink in the soft slime, and unless rescued, soon disappeared from view. Fortunately, their pitiful moaning usually caught someone's attention before it was too late. The lake has since been drained, eliminating this hazard, but also eliminating a great deal of the wild life that once was so plentiful in the neighborhood.\*<sup>111</sup>

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\* Although the level of Nelson Lake has been lowered by a drainage ditch, an area of open water persists at its lower end. The upper end of the lake and the shore zone have extensive beds

## 1980: *The Natural Character of Spring Hill Farm Natural Area in McHenry County, Illinois*

Spring Hill Farm Natural Area has been protected as Lake-In-The-Hills Fen Nature Preserve. \* Ten years before it achieved this status, Max D. Hutchison and Maxine Johnson prepared a discussion of the past ecological characteristics of the surrounding township (Township 43 North, Range 8 East). † They explained their approach:

A rather detailed picture of the presettlement character of the Spring Hill Farm Natural Area and Algonquin Township ‡ in McHenry County was determined from a study of the historical records, primarily the original notes and plat of the Public Land Survey. The survey of this township was conducted during the summer and fall of 1837, just prior to significant disturbance by European settlers. ¶ The surveyor's field notes provide standardized, relatively unbiased, eye-witness descriptions of the general area and the features they encountered along each section line.

... The PLS § description provides a basis and framework for evaluating and incorporating the additional items of information about the region's natural character collected from other sources. Worthen's *Geological Survey of Illinois*,<sup>21</sup> the University of Illinois soils maps and reports for McHenry County, several Illinois State Geological Survey maps and reports, and the Illinois Department of Conservation Natural Areas Inventory data describing the Spring Hill Farm Natural Area were especially useful in the interpretation and evaluations of data.

... The earliest detailed description of the area is found in the field notebooks of the Public Land Survey surveyors. They described the region that they saw in 1837 while running the township and section lines and establishing section and quarter section corners. They located and described the water features crossed, trees cut by their lines, and trees used as witnesses to the corners. Other comments in the notes describe mile and half-mile segments of the section

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of muck and peat. Most of the lake basin is owned by the Kane County Forest Preserve District, and part has been dedicated as Nelson Lake Marsh Nature Preserve.

\* The preserve is two miles from the Fox River in the southeast corner of McHenry County.

† Footnotes from Hutchison and Johnson's report are enclosed in quotation marks.

‡ Algonquin Township includes all of Township 43 North, Range 8 East and the western third of Township 43 North, Range 9 East. Hutchison and Johnson's study was limited to Township 43 North, Range 8 East.

¶ "There were scattered evidences of settlement noted in 1837 by the surveyors: a few roads, four houses or cabins, a few small fields and site of plowed ground, and two ferries across the Fox River. According to the 'Bibliographical Directory of the Tax-payers and Voters of McHenry County,'<sup>61</sup> published in 1877, the first settler in the county came in 1834, and the first settler on Crystal Lake Prairie was in 1836. The first sawmill in the area was at Algonquin in 1842."<sup>153</sup>

§ PLS = Public Land Survey.

lines and generally include descriptions of the topography and soils and note timber species. Witness tree diameters and bearings and distances from the corners are also given.<sup>153</sup>

The report describes the natural communities and other features of the township:

The primary source for the following description of the presettlement character of Algonquin Township is the Public Land Survey field notes and plat of 1837. Details of natural types and character from other sources were considered and interpretations were made based upon significant correlations of factors. The soils and geologic maps and reports provided a great deal of helpful information as did the "Classification of Natural Communities in Illinois,"<sup>320</sup> by John White and Michael Madany.

1) *timber*—This is the forest community, distinguished by the PLS surveyors from prairie. Barrens were specifically noted, but were mapped as a forest type. \* About one-third of the township was considered forest, but most of that was described as "scattering timber." † Nowhere was the forest said to be dense or of a heavy growth. ‡ Small trees were specifically mentioned in the general comments for several lines. ¶ A thick undergrowth of black oak (*Quercus velutina*) was mentioned as occurring along three section lines. "Burr oak and white oak [of] small growth" occurred southeast of the Fox River. §

The forest along three section lines southeast of the Fox River was called "barrenz," and the surrounding timbered lines were described as "small, scattering timber" in this region. \*\* The modern soils in this barrens area are the only ones in the township described as being developed in a sandy loam till (McHenry-Lapeer soils). †† The trees in the barrens were generally small and scattered, but there must have been an overstory, as

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\* "Sometimes the surveyors distinguished the barrens from both forest and prairie; in this township, the 'barrenz' were referred to as a part of the 'timber.'" <sup>153</sup>

† "Most of the forest was probably savanna." <sup>153</sup>

‡ "Judging from the tree species, the heaviest timber was in the mesic ravines along the Fox River bluffs." <sup>153</sup>

¶ "Even the scattered trees in the open savanna were not large; there were obviously a lot of small trees available as witnesses to corners, and the largest dbh noted for witness or line trees by the surveyors (out of 119 trees) was 30 inches." <sup>153</sup> (dbh = diameter at breast height.)

§ "The presence of a lot of 'small growth,' a 'thick undergrowth,' and species such as 'briers' and 'vines' might indicate a savanna community influenced, if not maintained, by frequent fires." <sup>153</sup>

\*\* "This is the only place barrens are mentioned in Algonquin Township. 'Timber black oak, burr oak barrenz' is a typical comment." <sup>153</sup>

†† "Ray and Wascher, 1965. <sup>236</sup> This soil complex also occurs in a small area in sec. 3 and 10. The surveyors noted 'sandy' soil on several of the prairie ridges." <sup>153</sup>

"undergrowth" is mentioned for one line. \* Usually, the barrens were designated per species, and black oak, bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*), and white oak (*Quercus alba*) were the dominant trees. Undergrowth species . . . were bur oak and white oak. The topography was gently to moderately rolling, and the soil was good and "fit for cultivation." †

Most of the timbered land was rolling and well-drained although some low, level sites were forested. ‡ One line (through the west part of the present site of Algonquin) was a "bottom" with pin oak (*Quercus palustris*) along the base of the river bluff. There was no overall clear correlation between topography and the distribution of timber, but the river bluffs were mostly timbered. Eighty-five percent of the forest land was described as "fit for cultivation," and 11% was called "rich." ¶

Nearly 90% of the overstory was white oak, black oak, and bur oak. Other occasional trees were: linn (*Tilia americana*), red oak (*Quercus rubra*), quaking-asp (*Populus tremuloides*), hickory (*Carya* spp.), walnut (*Juglans nigra*), ash (*Fraxinus* sp.), sugartree (*Acer saccharum*), white walnut (*J. cinerea*), pin oak, Spanish oak (*Q. falcata* ?), § water oak (*Q. palustris* ?), and swamp willow (*Salix* sp.?)

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\* "Between sec. 25 and 26." 153

† "It is difficult to determine the factor(s) unique to the 'barrenz' type that would cause the surveyors to distinguish it from other areas of 'scattering timber' and 'small trees,' but these sites may have had a sparser cover of vegetation. It is interesting to note that the barrens in this township are east of a major river; they were commonly on the westerly sides of rivers in some other townships studied, with prairie bordering their west edge, and heavy timber east of the river (perhaps indicating that the river was a fire break from the fires pushed by westerly winds)." 153

‡ "A part of the level bottom in the timber grove in sec. 28 and 29 was evidently forest." 153

¶ "United States Public Land Survey, 1837." 153

§ In his study of the Public Land Survey of DeKalb, Kane, and Du Page Counties, Robbin Moran concluded that "Spanish oak" is most likely *Quercus ellipsoidalis* rather than *Q. falcata*:

The interpretation of "Spanish Oak" as *Quercus ellipsoidalis*, instead of *Q. falcata* which is the binomial applied to Spanish oak today, needs further explanation . . . . The early land surveyors coming into the relatively unsettled land of northeastern Illinois noticed an oak which was tardy in the natural pruning of its lower branches, and they observed that when the branches did break off it was usually at some distance from the trunk leaving persistent stumps penetrating to the center of the tree. The surveyors remembered an oak from their old homes farther east which did this very thing, and which was there called Spanish oak. The first edition of Gray's Manual (1848) listed Spanish oak as the common name for *Q. palustris*. Since *Q. falcata*, the oak that is today called Spanish oak, does not occur in the northern two thirds of Illinois . . . and *Q. palustris* is rare and local only in wet acid soils of the Chicago Region . . . , it would appear that the surveyors were referring to the Hill's oak, *Q. ellipsoidalis* which had not yet been described to science and is common in the uplands of the Chicago Region today. 203

The principal understory species was black oak with briars (*Rubus* spp.), vines (*Vitis* spp.?), and hazel (*Corylus americana*) rather common in the open woods. Bur oak, white oak, spice (*Lindera benzoin*), and quaking aspen were occasional in the understory. Thirteen percent of the forested section lines were described as having "no undergrowth." \*

... The forest edge appears to have been fairly well-defined between the timber and prairie but not between forest and barrens. Probably, the communities were not very stable, and boundaries changed with climate and fire frequency changes.

2) *prairie*—About two-thirds of the township was prairie, distinguished from the forest and barrens.

Almost all of the bottomland, the "swamps," and the level areas were prairie, as well as extensive rolling well-drained upland sites. Several prairie ridges were described as "dry" and "sandy," and the intervening swales were "wet" or "bottom prairie." † Several prairie sites were called "swamps" or described as "swampy."

Practically all of the prairie soil was "fit for cultivation" except for a site that was "too broken for cultivation." The soil was generally good; a few lines were described as having "rich" soil.

Evidently, the prairie has few trees. One corner mentions "timber in a neck of prairie." ‡ Traveling north along the east line of sec. 24, the surveyors mentioned entering "prairie bottom of Fox River, some few scattering trees in bottom." There were no groves noted by the surveyors. Woody shrubs were probably locally common in the bottomland sites, especially willows and dogwoods (*Cornus* spp.). ¶

It is interesting to note that prairie bordered the Fox River along the bottomland, most of its length through the township. §

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\* "Perhaps recent fires were a factor here, also." <sup>153</sup>

† "Hackett and Murray <sup>115</sup> describe the rolling prairie on ridges separated by narrow strips of marsh or slough between undulations." <sup>153</sup>

‡ "This may have been a small grove; located at the north end of the line between sec. 34 and 35." <sup>153</sup>

¶ "The surveyors didn't give much information about woody shrubs in the wetlands, because they indicated most of those sites as prairie. 'Swamp willow' is mentioned once. Based on the present occurrence of willows and dogwoods at the Spring Hill Farm Natural Area, it would seem likely that these species would have originally grown on those sites too wet to burn severely." <sup>153</sup>

§ "There evidently was timber on the bluffs and sometimes along the bluff base. Then there was prairie in the bottom to the river bank, where there probably was a line of trees along the natural levee." <sup>153</sup>



We know very little about the prairie species, but we can assume that the grasses were dominant. \* The surveyors made several references to the "grass" in the bottom prairies. † Probably, the wetter prairies had rushes and sedges. Bluestem grasses and dropseed (*Sporobolus* spp.) probably dominated the better drained prairie. There was probably a good diversity of forb species but few kinds that dominated more than local spots. ‡

3) *wetlands and water features*—The Fox River, flowing southwest across the southeast corner of the township, has changed its course very little since 1837. † Several small streams occurred as drainageways from the river bluffs across the narrow wet bottom into the river. Nowhere was the river floodplain very wide.

The largest stream flowing into the Fox River in this township was what the PLS surveyors called the "outlet of Crystal (Cristal) Lake." This stream left Crystal Lake, flowed southeast (through the Spring Hill Farm Natural Area), and entered the Fox River about where the same stream enters today, at Algonquin. The course of this waterway appears to have changed little since 1837 except in the vicinity of Crystal Lake, where it no longer has a definite channel leaving the lake spillway. § At most of its crossings, the surveyors said it had a "rapid current."

Two lakes (more properly, *ponds*) are mentioned in Algonquin Township in 1837, "Crystal (or Cristal) Lake" and "Lake Kilarney." Both were declared to be "not navigable." It is difficult to determine just how much the character of these water bodies has changed, but Lake Killarney (called "impassible") was evidently considerably larger and extended farther to the southeast in section 1 than it does today. Lake Killarney was in the forest, and Crystal Lake in the prairie in 1837, but Crystal Lake had trees around its edge, specifically: white oak, red oak, black oak, and Spanish oak, with an understory of black oak, briers, and vines. Probably, the lakes were originally shallower than at present. \*\*

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\* "This is the only PLS mention of a herbaceous species other than the term 'prairie.'" 153

† "The references were mostly along the Fox River." 153

‡ "See the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory data for a detailed description of the plant communities now at Spring Hill Farm Natural Area. Also, see the discussion of the natural communities represented in this area in J. White and M. Madany's 'Classification of Natural Communities in Illinois' . . . ." 153

† "Based on correlating section line crossings in 1837 with modern topo maps." 153

§ "Information about this stream's present connection with Crystal Lake is not clear at the writing of this report." 153

\*\* "It is suspected that 'improvements' to the lakes since settlement have raised the water levels." 153

Several "swamps," "swampy" sites, wet prairies, and wet bottoms were scattered in the township, mostly along the "Crystal Lake outlet" and the Fox River. These were more properly "marshes," as they were evidently treeless. Practically all of the poorly drained land was in the prairie. Even an isolated "swamp" (in sections 2, 3, 10, and 11) enclosed by timber was evidently treeless. Most of the "swamps" were linear and occurred in the low swales between higher, dry ridges. Almost all of the Fox River floodplain was "swampy" or subject to frequent overflow. These "swamps" were probably dominated by grasses as a common measure of the river flooding level was based on how high it appeared to have been on the grass, for ex., "overflows to the depth of 2 feet as appears by the grass." The Fox River generally had a "slow current."

Only one spring was mapped by the PLS surveyors (in sec. 23), but there was a spring branch crossed between sec. 27 and 28. There were probably several springs and spring seeps in the township. These may have commonly had indefinite channels, the flow possibly disappearing in the gravels or in the wet grassy marshes so that they would hardly be recognizable as distinct channels to the surveyors crossing those sites along the section lines. Spring water probably helped to maintain the marsh character of several of the wet prairie sites, and evidently helped provide the flow for the "Crystal Lake Outlet."

There were no ponds, sloughs, or marshes mentioned, but the "swamps" were probably "marshes," and the lakes more properly "ponds." \*

One wet site in the forest was called a "bottom" (west of the river where Algonquin is today).<sup>153</sup>

#### A summary of "settlement features and disturbances in 1837":

The PLS was completed at almost the very time settlement began in the township. Several sites were noted indicating small local disturbances including five "fields," † two sites of "ploughed ground," several "roads" (one called the "Big Foot Indian Trail from Rock River to Chicago"), a ford across the Fox River (Denny's Ferry and ford, west of the middle of sec. 26), and a ferry (Cornishes Ferry) across the Fox River (in sec. 36 at Algonquin). One road across sec. 17 and 21 was fairly close to the Spring Hill Farm Natural Area. About four residences were noted, and one seminary. ‡

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\* "Based on White and Madany's classification. Hackett and Murray mention 'sloughs' and 'marshes.' They also say that the '... small lakes, so characteristic a feature in Lake Co., scarcely occur west of Fox River.'" <sup>153</sup>

† "One 'field' was 80 acres." <sup>153</sup>

‡ "A foundation for a seminary for learning, the Fox River Seminary, was 10 chains north, between sec. 20 and 21, in 1837." <sup>153</sup>

Very little real change in the natural character of the area had occurred by the time of the PLS.<sup>153</sup>

**1980: *Presettlement (1830) Vegetation of De Kalb, Kane, and Du Page Counties, Illinois***

Robbin Moran studied the former vegetation of three counties that span the middle third of the Fox River valley. Following is part of the abstract from his Master's thesis:

The original Government Land Office survey records, made during the 1830's, were used to determine characteristics of the vegetation prior to major European settlement in De Kalb, Kane, and Du Page Counties, Illinois. A presettlement vegetation map of the counties is presented showing four general plant community types: prairie, savanna, forest, \* and wetland. The map also shows the original names of 24 different prairie groves. The most widespread arboreal community was savanna, dominated by bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*), black oak (*Quercus velutina*), and white oak (*Quercus alba*). Prairies tended to occupy the flat to gently rolling topography, whereas savannas predominated in areas of rugged topography. Forests were commonly restricted to fire protected sides of watercourses.

The origin and phytogeographic history of the plant communities is discussed. Climate was probably responsible for the gross distribution of the prairie peninsula † in the Midwest. However, in northeastern Illinois, fire and how it reacted with topography and fire barriers, appears responsible for the distribution patterns of prairie, savanna, and forest. The hypothesis is discussed and further developed that true prairie originated from the elimination of mature deciduous forests that existed during the early Holocene times, ‡ while brush prairies and savannas were derived from early Holocene forests that had a greater complement of oaks. This hypothesis is shown to account for the nature of savanna soil profiles, the origin and species composition of isolated prairie groves, and the relation between vegetation type and topography.<sup>203</sup>

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\* This study used a density of 28 trees per acre as the dividing point between savanna and forest. (Savanna is less dense than forest.)

† The Prairie Peninsula is the region where tall-grass prairie extended eastward across the Mississippi River as a broad wedge of grassland in a landscape that was otherwise predominantly wooded. The Prairie Peninsula covers much of Illinois, southern Wisconsin, and western Indiana, with outliers of former prairie farther east and south.

‡ The Holocene time period includes the most recent 10,000 years, since the Pleistocene (Ice Age).

### **1981: *Autobiographies of Fox Valley Pioneers***

A project of the Elgin Genealogical Society provides a chronicle of the life of Eliphalet K. Mann, who lived at Elgin in the early 1840s. Mr. Mann laid out a section of the original State highway from Chicago to Galena, which later became U.S. Route 20: "He plowed a furrow where the road now is through Udina to Pigeon Woods \* to mark the way towards where Rockford now stands, there being no wagon track more than 3 miles west of Elgin." <sup>295</sup>

### **1983: "Initial Field Location in Illinois"**

During the late 1830s and early '40s, the U.S. General Land Office surveyed northern Illinois and prepared maps of each township. William Walters and Floyd Mansberger reviewed the township plats for a region extending south from the Wisconsin line to points near Chicago, Wedron, and Rock Island. Although the vast majority of the landscape was uncultivated at this time, Walters and Mansberger learned that the surveyors had mapped more than a thousand fields in this region.

The Fox River valley was so attractive to farmers and so accessible that it was relatively well populated by the time it was surveyed by the Federal government:

The lower Fox River Valley . . . has a distinct concentration of early agricultural activity; this is only part of the study area where a substantial number of whole sections have been brought under cultivation and where fields have begun to squeeze out intervening prairie. It is perhaps also significant that the Lower Fox River has the largest concentrations of mills recorded by surveyors. <sup>313</sup>

### **1984: *Elgin***

The fortunes of Elgin and the Fox River have been closely linked. In *Elgin: An American History*, E.C. Alft reviewed the first 150 years of this relationship—beginning with the arrival of Hezekiah and James Gifford in April of 1835. Several members of the Kimball family arrived in 1836 and 1837, and then . . .

Within a year most of the land along the river had been claimed by hewing bark from trees or by plowing furrows in the prairie.

. . . In 1838–39 a dam was built across the Fox to provide power for the Kimball saw mill on the west side and within easy access to the timber which then covered much of the river banks. James Gifford erected a small grist mill at the head of the east side race about the same time.

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\* Udina is on Route 20 west of Elgin. After traversing Pingree Grove, the road reached the Pigeon Woods near present-day Starks.

... The river was wider and more shallow than it is today, and under normal weather conditions it was a simple matter to wade across. The first bridge, a rambling wooden structure, was erected in 1837-38.

... The Chicago Street hill was far more steep than it is now. From the end of the bridge eastward the street has been raised about eight feet and the slope correspondingly reduced. To the north and northeast was a great water-soaked bog. There were several deep depressions; in some of these water remained throughout the year. One of these crossed Chicago Street, just east of Geneva, and passed around it northward as far as an extended line of what is now Highland Avenue.

The flats along the river were low and swampy and often submerged. It was originally assumed they would be occupied by the river's seasonal flows, but the commercial section began moving toward the river about 1840 . . . .

The community now boasted of a flouring mill, three saw mills, a shingle mill, the beginnings of a woolen mill, a small plow factory, and a foundry—all powered by the dam. . . . The woolen mill was erected in 1843-44 by Raymond and Dexter along the east bank of the river just north of the bridge.

... Early in the '50s the yield of wheat, the main source of cash for Elgin area farmers, began to decline, and crop failures became frequent. The gentle cow came to the rescue. The growing urban giant, Chicago, required an ever increasing supply of fresh milk . . . .

... With the development of dairying, Kimball built a milk house and piped the spring water into vats where cans could be set to cool the milk. Neighboring farmers adopted the idea and had spring water piped to their vats. The springs were all on high ground so that the water flowed by gravity. Before long, spring water was also piped into homes in the vicinity to provide running water, and as service expanded, main trunk lines of wooden pipe were laid.

... the Fox powered Elgin mills, for a time furnished a water supply, received the city's wastes, and afforded the pleasures of boating and fishing.

... A spring freshet washed out the dam and bridge in 1849. Another major flood on the Fox came in 1857, but was destructive mainly in the lower reaches from Batavia south.

The heaviest snowfalls anyone could remember came in February and March, 1881. Beginning February 11 the rail lines and country roads were blocked by drifts as high as fifteen feet. . . . Snow on the level in the streets of the now isolated city was six feet deep, and business was at a standstill.

When the warm spring rains came, the Fox was still frozen solid, and the snow remained several feet deep in many places.

... On February 8, 1887 the Fox rose eight feet within a few hours. The recently erected Kimball Street bridge held the flow in check about the dam and probably prevented the Chicago Street bridge from going out again, although part of it washed away and downtown businesses suffered losses. Since this last major flood high waters on the Fox have caused little damage at Elgin. Later bridges—built much higher over the river and constructed of steel and concrete—are better able to withstand the pressures of high water. Extensive filling, which kept pace with rising land values, has raised the banks. A comparison of shore lines in 1914 with maps of 1850 showed the river to have been narrowed more than one hundred and fifty feet in the business district. More secure dams along the river have acted as breakers and tend to retain the water, allowing it to discharge gradually.<sup>7</sup>

### **1990: *The History of Montgomery, Illinois***

The town of Montgomery was platted in 1852 on the west bank of the Fox River in the southeast corner of Kane County. *The History of Montgomery* describes three early industries that depended on water power from the river: a large grist mill, a sash and blind factory, and a reaper factory.

The 1890s saw two mineral water businesses competing in Montgomery. The Montgomery Magnesia Mineral Water Company (later called Montgomery Lithia Springs) took its water from Montgomery Springs. The Montgomery Magnesia Spring and Water Company obtained its product from a well.<sup>105</sup>

### **1992: *La Salle County Lore***

This volume is a product of the La Salle County Historical Society. The following anecdote about Adams Township is among the many items of written and oral history gathered by the project:

In the early years, during the spring months, an unusual mode of travel was used by some people in this area. In the wet springs, before the land was tilled, they could cross the fields by boat from Shabbona Park, on the Big Indian Creek in Freedom Township, to the center of Leland in Adams Township. \* In winter, folks sometimes skated this distance across the smooth ice of the lowlands. By the late 1800s, however, drainage tiles were routinely put into the swampland. This improved the farming acreage but abruptly ended the easy cross-country transport system.<sup>235</sup>

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\* Shabbona Park is six miles south-southwest of Leland.

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