Early Accounts of
The Ecology of the
Vermilion River Area
EARLY ACCOUNTS OF THE ECOLOGY OF THE VERMILION RIVER AREA

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July 2002

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About This Report

The Early Accounts of the Ecology of the Vermilion River Area examines an area in east central Illinois along the Indiana/Illinois border. Because significant natural community and species diversity has been found in the Vermilion River watershed, a portion of the area has been designated a state “Resource Rich Area”.¹

This report is part of a series of reports on areas of Illinois where a public-private partnership has been formed to protect natural resources. The reports 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.² 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 that 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 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 six-year program to begin reversing 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. The Rock River and Cache River were designated as the first Ecosystem Partnership areas.

At the same time, CTAP identified 30 Resource Rich Areas (RRAs) throughout the state. In RRAs and other areas where Ecosystem Partnerships have been formed, CTAP is providing an assessment of the area, drawing from existing information to give an overview of the region’s resources — geologic, edaphic, hydrologic, biotic, and socio-economic.

The Vermilion River Area Assessment

The area discussed in this report coincides with the boundaries of the Illinois portion of the Vermilion River basin as determined by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency. This area, covering approximately 1,485 miles $^2$ (950,380 acres) along the Indiana/Illinois border, includes most of Vermilion County, large parts of Champaign and Ford Counties, and very small parts of Iroquois, Livingston, and Edgar counties. The land in two of the subbasins in the area — the Middle Fork Vermilion River and Vermilion River (lower) subbasins — totaling 132,252 acres, was designated a “Resource Rich Area” because it contains significant natural community diversity. The Vermilion River Ecosystem Partnership was subsequently formed around this core area of high quality ecological resources.

See Table 2.700000

Drainage basins from 1:24000 scale watershed boundaries as delineated by the U.S.G.S. Water Resources Division.

Major drainage basins of Illinois and location of the Vermilion River Assessment Area
Subbasins in the Vermilion River Assessment Area. Subbasin boundaries depicted are those determined by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency.
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INTRODUCTION

The Vermilion River Area consists of the region drained by the Vermilion River and the Little Vermilion River in east-central Illinois. The Vermilion River has three branches: the North Fork, Middle Fork, and Salt Fork. These streams join near Danville to form the main stem of the Vermilion River, which flows into the Wabash River about 13 miles southeast of Danville. The Little Vermilion River drains the first valley south of the Vermilion River basin, and it enters the Wabash River a few miles south of the mouth of the Vermilion River.

Six counties lie partly within the Vermilion River Area. The region covers most of Vermilion County, nearly half of Champaign County, about a third of Ford County, and small parts of Livingston, Iroquois, and Edgar Counties.

The earliest descriptions of the ecology of the Vermilion River Area have come to us from people who traveled across the region on their way to somewhere else. The region’s wilderness and its conversion to farmland and towns were later documented in a series of county histories, biographical records, and personal reminiscences that were published in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

A selection of these early narratives about the region is presented on the following pages. Eyewitness accounts are arranged in chronological order according to the year of the observation. Retrospective reports that look farther back on the past appear 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 162 to 164.

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

A few terms that have fallen into disuse may require explanation. Townships were commonly called towns. A stand of trees that extended out into the prairie was called a point. The process of selecting a tract of public land and entering into an agreement to purchase it from the Federal government was called “entering” the land. The word since was often used as we currently use “ago”: e.g. 170 years since, the Midwest was known as the West or Northwest.

Many well-known animals and plants were once given names that are no longer familiar. The coyote was called the prairie wolf during the 1800s; the great majority of wolves mentioned in the Vermilion River Area were coyotes rather than timber wolves. The greater prairie-chicken was called the prairie chicken, prairie fowl, or pinnated grouse. The name “brant” was formerly used to denote geese other than the Canada goose.

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* Illinois has two Vermilion Rivers. The two Vermilion River systems flow in opposite directions from high ground in the southeast corner of Livingston County. The Vermilion River discussed in this report drains south and east to the Wabash River in Indiana. The other Vermilion River flows north and west to join the Illinois River near La Salle.
If a quotation in the historical accounts 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 the name of an animal is likely to be unfamiliar, a newer name is provided in a footnote. Because present-day common names of mammals and birds are well standardized in identification guides and other references, common names serve to identify these species without resorting to scientific names.

The following pages describe how the Vermilion River Area was almost entirely converted to farmland during the 1800s. Prairies were plowed; wetlands were drained; woods were either cleared for cropland or used as pastures. Streams were dammed to provide power for grain mills and sawmills—turning swift, high-gradient stream reaches into quiet mill ponds.

**Acknowledgments**

Research for this report was conducted primarily at the Illinois Historical Survey at the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign. John Hoffmann, James Cornelius, and Robert Owens of the Illinois Historical Survey were a great help to the effort.

Beverly Miller, Lisa Bell, Carol Bullard, Chester Wolenski, Anne Adams, and Lindsay Black of Ecological Services took part in various stages of the project. Joyce Hipskind, Mary Schroer, and Suzanne Wagner typed parts of the quoted material.

Barbara Schuler helped proofread the quotations, and she reviewed a late draft of the manuscript.
HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS

1765: George Croghan’s journal

George Croghan, a British Indian agent, led an expedition down the Ohio River in the spring of 1765. While they were halted at the mouth of the Wabash River on June 8, Croghan’s party was attacked and taken prisoner by 80 Kickapoo and Mascouten warriors. The British captives were escorted up the Wabash valley to Vincennes and then to Ouiatanon, a village near present-day Lafayette, Indiana.

Their route took them north through the prairies on the Illinois side of the Wabash River above Vincennes. As the men neared the confluence of the Vermilion and Wabash Rivers, they probably entered the southeast corner of the Vermilion River Area or came within a few miles of it.

Even though George Croghan had been injured during the fight with the Kickapoo and Mascouten, he wrote a day-by-day account of his forced march to Ouiatanon. His journal provides the earliest detailed description of the vegetation and wildlife of the general region. Here is Croghan’s chronicle for the journey from Vincennes, beginning on June 17:

17th about Midday we set out travelling the first five Miles thro a fine clear wood. we traveled 18 miles this Day and encamped in a large beautiful well watered Meadow.

18th & 19th we traveled thro a prodigious large Meadow called the Pyankeshas hunting ground here is no wood to be seen and the country appears like an Ocean the ground is exceedingly rich and partly over grown with wild Hemp: The Land well watered and full of Buffuloes Deer Bears and all Kind of Wild Game.

* Vincennes, Indiana, is on the Wabash River, about 80 miles south of the Vermilion River Area.

† George Croghan’s journal has been published several times, and the various editions differ. The excerpt quoted here is from volume 11 of the Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, edited by C.W. Alvord and C.E. Carter. Another widely available version of Croghan’s journal appears in volume 1 of Early Western Travels by R.G. Thwaites. Alvord and Carter’s edition says that Croghan traveled through “a fine clear wood”—but according to Thwaites’ edition, it was “a fine thick wood.”

‡ Pyankesha = Piankashaw, a tribe closely related to the Miami.

¶ Although hemp (Cannabis sativa) is native to the Old World, it became established in the wild quite early in America. It was widely reported by French and British explorers of the Mississippi valley during the 1600s and 1700s. In his Botany of the Northern and Middle States (1833), L.C. Beck characterized Cannabis sativa as “apparently indigenous, but probably introduced.”
20th & 21st We passed thro some very large Meadows part of which belong to the Pyankeshaws on Vermillion River, the Country and Soil much the same as that we travelled over for these three Days’ past, wild Hemp grows here in Abundance, the Game very plenty at any Time in Halfe an Hour we could Kill as much as we wanted.

22nd We passed thro’ a part of the same Meadows as mentioned yesterday then came to a High Woodland and arrived at Vermillion River * so called from a Fine red Earth found here by the Indians with which they painted themselves. About halfe a Mile from the place where we crossed this this River there is a Village of Pyankeshaws distinguished by the Addition of the name of the River: We travelled then about three Hours thro a fine clear high woody Country † but a deep and rich soil then came to a Meadow where we encamped.

23d Earley in the Morning we sett out thro a fine Meadow then some clear Woods in the afternoon came into a very large Bottom on the Cuabache ‡ within about 6 Miles of Ouiatanon. ¹

Ouiatanon was on the north bank of the Wabash River, 29 miles east of the Vermilion River Area. Upon arriving at Ouiatanon, George Croghan recorded this impression of what he had seen during his journey up the Wabash valley:

It is surprising what false information we have had respecting this country: some mention these spacious and beautiful meadows as large and barren savannahs. ¹ I apprehend it has been the artifice of the French to keep us ignorant of the country. These meadows bear fine wild grass, and wild hemp ten or twelve feet high, which, if properly manufactured, would prove as good, and answer all the purposes of the hemp we cultivate. ¹

1778: Normand MacLeod’s journal

IN DECEMBER OF THE THIRD YEAR OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION, a combined force of British soldiers and their Indian allies moved down the Wabash River to capture the American-held fort at Vincennes, Indiana. Normand MacLeod, the captain in charge of an advance party, kept a journal during the expedition.

On the afternoon of December 7, 1778, MacLeod’s boats halted at the mouth of the Vermillion River, five miles east of the southeast corner of the Vermilion River Area:

* The point where Croghan crossed the Vermilion River is not known. The Vermilion flows into the Wabash River east of Georgetown, five miles east of the state line.
† Thwaites’ edition renders this phrase as “a clear high woody country.”
‡ Cuabache = Wabash River.
¹ During the 18th and 19th centuries, the British commonly referred to prairies as savannas or savannahs.
At one oClock Arrived at the River Vermillion, on the north Side of which Stands a Very Pretty Indian Village. But all the People belonging to it is at the Highlands at their winter hunting. Game of al Sorts is Very Plenty in this Country, the Deer in abundance . . . across the River, and Many large flocks of Turkeys and horn Pheasants. † At three oClock we Arrived at our encamping Ground Six miles below the River Vermillion. 31

On the next day, at the request of the Indians, the army moved only about six or seven miles down-river before encamping. There the Potawatomi, Ojibwe, Miami, Kickapoo, Huron, and Shawnee performed ceremonies. They continued down the Wabash on the 9th:

This morning at eight oClock embarked . . . and Passed the little Vermillion R. or as the Frenchmen call it the Yallow Vermillion about one oClock. As the Indians was firing at large flocks that was flying across the River, a ball Struck the Shawanou ‡ Cheif as he was Sitting in Captain Maghees Boat and Carryd away his Eye . . . . 31

1821: Survey of the state boundary line

JOHN TIPTON WAS PART OF A CREW that surveyed the boundary between Illinois and Indiana in June of 1821. General Tipton recorded notes for the survey as they laid out each mile of the boundary line. He recorded the location of streams, ponds, prairies, and groves in terms of their distance (in chains) ‡ north from the beginning of each mile. The survey crew erected a mound of earth to mark the end of every mile that ended in prairie. Wherever a mile ended in a wooded area, the men set a post in the ground, and Tipton recorded the direction and distance (in links) § from the post to two nearby witness trees. **

John Tipton employed the usual abbreviations for north, east, south, and west in his notes. He also used the following other abbreviations:

* A portion of the text is illegible.
† Horn pheasant = greater prairie-chicken.
‡ Shawanou = Shawnee.
§ A surveyor’s chain is 66 feet; 80 chains comprise a mile.
** Many points along this survey cannot be correlated with present-day landmarks. The landscape has changed substantially in the past 181 years, which helps explain why it is sometimes impossible to find a correspondence between modern features and the locations that Tipton noted. The survey also appears to be inaccurate in several places. For instance, the survey crew measured the distance along the state line between Sugar Creek and the Iroquois River as being a little short of 12 miles. Now the distance is about 11.4 miles, and this big difference cannot be explained by any possible shifting of the stream channels since the 1821 survey was done. The results of Tipton’s survey were not accepted, and the state line was later resurveyed.
B bears
B oak black oak (See the discussion below about the identity of oak species.)
C chains
D diameter
Do ditto (employed to indicate the same kind of tree as the previously listed tree)
hicky hickory
I inches
kt knight (Tipton’s spelling for “night”)
L links (or, rarely, “line”)
m mile (sometimes spelled “mil”)
o oak
p post
R runs (flows)
WO white oak
W oak white oak
& and
&c etcetera

General Tipton used these abbreviations in his shorthand notes about the species and diameter of each witness tree, as well as the compass direction and distance from the milepost to the witness tree. For instance at the end of mile 88, Tipton wrote,

Set cherry post from which a hicky 15 I D B S65W 40 L & Do 10 I D B S37W 65 L

This can be written fully as . . .

Set a cherry post from which a hickory 15 inches in diameter bears South 65 degrees West at a distance of 40 links (26.4 feet), and a hickory 10 inches in diameter bears South 37 degrees West at a distance of 65 links (42.9 feet).

Where the state line crossed a stream, Tipton sometimes recorded the stream’s width and direction of flow (e.g., “32 chain a Branch 20 L runs SW,” —in other words: at 32 chains from the beginning of the mile, the state line crosses a branch that is 20 links wide and runs southwest).

Except for one burr oak and one Spanish oak, Tipton listed only white oaks or black oaks along the state line as it crossed the Vermilion River valley. Most or all of the trees that he identified as white oak must have been true white oaks (Quercus alba), but he might have included related species such as chinkapin oak (Q. muehlenbergii) in his classification of “white oak.” Tipton’s “black oak” is likely to have included both the true black oak (Q. velutina) as well as the similar-appearing red oak (Q. rubra); Tipton is not likely to have encountered only black oaks and no red oaks when he selected witness trees.

Midwestern land surveyors during John Tipton’s time commonly recorded “B oak” or (“B O”) as an abbreviation for either the burr oak (Q. macrocarpa) or black oak. The editors
of Tipton's journal assumed that Tipton's "B oak" represents burr oak, but this conclusion must be largely or wholly in error. Tipton must have encountered many black oaks that he recorded as "B oak." It seems likely that he reserved this abbreviation for black oaks, and would not have also recorded burr oaks as "B oak."

With this introduction, we join John Tipton's crew on the morning of Tuesday, the 12th of June 1821. The men had spent "a very unpleasant knight" swatting mosquitoes in the woods at the headwaters of Brouilletts Creek, which is the watershed immediately south of the Vermilion River Area. They set forth to continue surveying due north through the woods as they laid out the state line. After nearly two miles they broke out of the trees and entered the Grand Prairie on the south edge of the Vermilion River Area. They surveyed for nearly five miles across this open expanse. Tipton described it as "first quality land."

At the end of mile 34, the crew erected a mound on the north side of the prairie. Fifty-two chains and 50 links north of this mound, they intersected the edge of a body of timber that ran east and west. John Tipton recorded this line of trees in his fieldbook:

52 C 50 L intersect timber E & W 63 C Hayworths Branch 15 L wide NE Set oak post from which B oak 20 I D B N85E 19 L & Do 18 I D B S65E 70 † one of our hands gave out in the prairie 39

The stream that Tipton called Hayworths Branch is now known as Jonathan Creek. This tributary of the Little Vermilion River is in the northeast corner of Edgar County, and it is the southernmost stream in the Vermilion River Area. The surveyors continued north on mile 36 and reentered the prairie after eight chains:

36 m 8 chain intersect Prairie SW & NE mound in Prairie 39

On Wednesday, June 13, Tipton continued his record:

37 m 20 chains intersect timber and encamped in a Prairie the musquitos very Troublesome rain last kt & this morning white oak p from which a w oak 30 I D B S55E 21 L Do 24 D N66W 33 L at 30 chain intersected small wet Prairie 10 chain wide land best quality timber walnut Lynn ‡ &c up to the edge of Prairie & the Soil best quality

38 B oak p from which a B oak 25 I D B S21W 46 L & Do 25 I D B N52W 41 L land Broken with deep ravine hills &c Timber w & B oak

---

* Tipton repeatedly recorded "B oak" as he crossed the sandy lowland and dune fields south of the Kankakee River. Sandy soil characteristically supports an abundance of black oaks but rarely provides habitat for burr oaks, so these B oaks must have been black oaks.

† John Tipton sometimes failed to record the unit of measurement (links) when recording the distance from a mile post to a witness tree.

‡ Lynn = American basswood (Tilia americana).
39 m  B oak p from which a W oak 30 I D B S50W 18 L & W o 12 I D B S53E 49 L  land interspersed with deep Ravines & high hills  Timber W & B oak cannot be cultivated

40 m  Set ash p from which a Bur oak 30 I D B N45W 20 L & Elm 18 I D B S54E 34 L  37 chain Little vermilion creek 100 L wide Runs SE land Broken  Timber W & B oak some Ash & walnut in the creek Bottoms killed a Turkey had a good Dinner  verry warm & rain

41 mile  Ash p  Beech 12 I D B S62E 28 L & spanish oak † 24 I D B N73W 32 L  S half Broken 2d ½ levil 2d quality good Timber

42  walnut p white oak 18 I D N65W 15 L & sugar ‡ 18 I D S30E 23 L  first ½ first rate land timber sugar Lynn walnut &c 2d ½ 2d rate land W & B oak &c

43 hicky p from which A hicky 12 I D B N57E 22 L & white oak 24 I D B N67W 32 L  land levil and Rich  timber sugar oak hicky &c

m 44  Elm p from which a Sugar 10 I D B S30W 16 & Buckey † 10 I D B N5W 12 L  land levil and good encamped

On Thursday the 14th of June, they reached the Vermilion River within less than a mile:

m 45 . . . † Sugar tree 8 I D for post 75 chain Big vermilion River ** a navigable stream  Runs east 3 chain wide  the land Rises on each side within a few chain of the River about 50 feet  the country then levil and soil good

m 46  Burr oak 15 I D for post †† land first rate Timber sugar oak hicky &c

m 47  Ash p  walnut 5 I D S86E 8 L & W o 18 I D N86W 36  good Land rode out to the W line rang 9 ‡‡

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* Little vermilion creek = Little Vermilion River.
† The identity of Spanish oak has long confounded readers of the U.S. Public Land Survey's records and other writings such as John Tipton's notes. The name "Spanish oak" has been applied to a number of oak species that have leaves with pointed, bristle-tipped lobes.
‡ Sugar (sugar tree) = sugar maple (Acer saccharum).
§ Buckey = Ohio buckeye (Aesculus glabra).
$ At this point in the manuscript, General Tipton wrote a word that the editors read as "mud."
** The river downstream from the confluence of the Middle Fork and Salt Fork of the Vermilion River has sometimes been called the Big Vermilion River.
†† This tree stood where the milepost would have otherwise been erected.
‡‡ The west line of Range 9 West is slightly more than two miles east of the state line.
The survey crew bivouacked on the prairie east of Danville. On Friday the 15th, General Tipton recorded the following notes:

morning cool & pleasant no muscheeters set out on mile 55 no timber to be seen to the N prairie opening to the West quiet extensive for the last 3 miles the timber appears from 2 to 3 miles from the line on the E and about 1 mile on the W

56 m mound in prairie the land somewhat Rolling Dry and first rate soil small Branch which we think is a spring in the prairie

57 m mound in prairie land best quality 2 small groves of Timber near the line on the W side

m 58 mound in prairie soil as above

*Tipton noted that Range 10 West is less than three miles wide on the north line of Township 19 North.

† That is, they intersected a prairie at 75 chains and raised a mound at the end of the mile.

‡ Slippery Elem = slippery elm (Ulmus rubra).

† Tipton recorded two consecutive miles as mile 54.
59 m mound in prairie soil good little rolling

60 m mound in prairie soil as above appears to 3 to 4 mil to timber E & 7 or 8 W

61 m mound in prairie the land Rolling very Rich stoped and made fire of Dry weeds to Broil Baken for our Dinner no timber to be seen to the N

m 62 mound in prairie The land Rolling some appearance of gravil & Rock

63 m mound in prairie the prairie levill with small ponds of water timber appears to be 8 or 9 mile W & as far E

m 64 mound in prairie Soil as above

65 m mound in prairie soil as above a small grove 1 ¼ mile west of line

66 m mound in prairie the country levill with ponds in the 2 last miles the country changing fast the Dry part getting poor and gravly to the NW no timber can be seen to E & NE 10 m to the W 8 encamped in the prairie without wood

Camp for the night of June 15 was east of Alvin. On Saturday the 16th, Tipton continued his log:

our horses all lost after hunting some time found them about 7 miles from camp some of our Buoys gathered Dry weeds and Roots to boil our coffee Set out some rain

... 67 m mound in prairie land levill with ponds verry Bad Soil not good water

68 m mound in prairie a point of Timbered land 2 mile W of the line the land levill second rate soil & Dry

69 m mound in prairie 23 chain a creek * 15 L runs SW Soil levill & good no Timber to be seen in the W nor N hard rain

m 70 mound in prairie on the north margin of a small pond 2 chain wide land levill with ponds soil wet & Rich a small grove 5 m east of line

m 71 mound in prairie 5 chain a pond 2 C wide 24 C 50 L pond 2.50 L wide † the land levill & Rich but wet

72 m mound in prairie Land levill and Rich

* This is Jordan Creek, a tributary of the North Fork of the Vermilion River. It flows across the state line east of Rossville.

† The pond was 2 chains and 50 links (or 2.50 chains) across.
73 mound in prairie Soil as above no timber to be seen except a small grove

74 m mound in prairie land rather Rolling some Rock that has the appearance of mill Stone grit hard rain

75 m made mound 7 feet high intending to take the variation but was prevented by the clouds had to dig for water and gather all the Dry weeds of acres of ground to make fire to Broil our Baken the land verry Rich & Dry

Sunday the 17. cool & clier no muscheeters set out

76 m mound in prairie land levil Rich & wet

Sixty-five chains north of the beginning of mile 77, the surveyors crossed the boundary of land ceded to the United States by Indians in 1818. This boundary intersects the state line in Prairie Green Township, north and east of Hoopeston:

77 m mound in prairie 65 chain crossed the Boundary line between the US & Indians according to the Treaty of St mary of 1818 the land levil and Rich with some small ponds post no 65 mile *

78 m mound in Prairie the land low wet prairie turned off the line 2 miles to E to a small grove of about ten acres mostly white hicky with some cherry and white thorn † the soil in the timber of the best quality a creek rises in the prairie runs round the NW side then turns E we think a Branch of pine creek ‡ encamped abt 10 oclock staid to take variation † hard rain had to dig for water & found good in 4 feet

Monday 18 hard rain could not assertain the variation to our satisfaction staid in camp one of our men killed a deer

Tuesday 19 hard rain and clouds prevented our asserting the variation & caused us to remain in our camp this day from this grove no timber is to be seen except a small grove NE to every point of the compass the cloud seems to close on the prairie which is levil Beautifull and of best soil and from the grove which rises a few feet above the common levil of the prairie the view is extensive and very

* The state line intersected the treaty line at milepost number 65 along the treaty line.
† White hicky = shagbark hickory (Carya ovata) or perhaps mockernut hickory (C. tomentosa); cherry = wild black cherry (Prunus serotina); white thorn = ? hawthorn (Crataegus) or ? crab (Malus).
‡ Pine Creek is a tributary of the Wabash River.
¶ The compass man, John McDonald, frequently checked the magnetic variation of his instrument. He sighted on the North Star to determine the difference between true north and magnetic north. By knowing this variation (magnetic declination), he was able to adjust the compass to set a course due north.
pleasant which added to the pleasant gale of wind from W & S is cool and comfortable the day dier with a fresh Breeze from SW

Wednesday 20
A fine clier & cool morning having took the variation find it to be 6.42 m early in the morning a prairie woolf came near our camp which I shot he was in size that of a small Dog between the size of a grey fox a woolf its colour grey on yallow like that of a grey Fox set out to our line

79 m mound in prairie 51 chain pond 2 C wide land low wet prairie Soil good

At mile 80 they were on the moraine that divides the Vermilion River system from the Kankakee River valley:

80 m mound in prairie Soil Beautifully Rolling dry and very good

81 m mound in prairie the land rises 30 or 40 feet above the levil of the country from which we can see several small groves of Timber to the NE & W, the first we have seen for some days

... on our north line soil good and Dry

The survey continued north across the watershed of Mud Creek, a small stream that joins Sugar Creek near Milford:

82 m mound should have been 25 L in a pond 3 chain wide made a mound on the S side call the pond Elk as we saw 2 near it the land again low and wet

83 m mound in prairie land low & wet

84 m mound prairie levil & wet land

85 mound land levil & wet

86 m mound in prairie 32 chain a Branch 20 L runs SW levil wet land

87 m mound in prairie land as above

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* McDonald determined that there was a difference of 6 degrees 42 minutes between true north and magnetic north.

† Prairie woolf = coyote.

‡ Standard procedure called for the crew to raise a mound of earth at the end of the mile, but this point fell 25 links into a pond that was 3 chains wide. They elected to make the mound on the south side of the pond.

§ The branch is Mud Creek, which generally flows to the northwest rather than southwest.
88 at 79 C 50 L intersect a smal grove of 7 hickory Trees. Set cherry post from which a hicky 15 I D B S65W 40 L & Do 10 I D B S37W 65 L soil levil and rather wet 39

The crew stopped for the evening of June 20 at Sugar Creek, a stream that joins the Iroquois River at Watseka.

1825: A Journey on Horseback through the Great West

CHESTER A. LOOMIS WAS A BUSINESSMAN AND ADVENTURER from Ontario County, New York. He made a western tour in 1825. The journal that he kept of this excursion was later published as a small book. On June 25, 1825, Mr. Loomis crossed the Wabash River at Attica, Indiana, 14 miles east of Vermilion County, Illinois:

After traveling about four miles through timbered plains, we reached the eastern border of the Grand Prairie. . . . The "Grand Prairie" appeared to the north and west boundless as the ocean. 29

Mr. Loomis' westward advance was stopped by a flooded creek. He found shelter for the night at a farmer's cabin, and set out on horseback in the morning:

June 26th, at an early hour we again entered the "Grand Prairie," and taking a westerly direction, were soon many miles from any timbered lands, and upon a tract of country apparently as level as the surface of a lake, without a single shrub or bush to intercept the view, either to the east, north or west, as far as the eye could reach. On the south a distant view is had of the forest, which is in that direction, is the boundary of this immense plaine. Occasionly a rock of some magnitude, is seen, but no small stone whatever is found. The soil is deep and rich, covered with grass and flowers, which grow up, blossom and decay, without affording even to the industrious Bee their sweets:

"Full many a gem of purest ray serene,  
"The dark unfathom'd caves of Ocean bear.  
"Full many a flower is born, to blush unseen,  
"And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

As the sun arose towards its meridian its rays were felt with the same power as from the smooth surface of a lake. Our horses were here assailed by a species of fly, different from any in the eastern or middle states. They are a size less than the common ox-fly in New York; have brilliant green heads, * and a quick and rapid motion. They rise from the grass before a horse as he travels along, dart upon his head, neck or breast and suck their fill of blood, almost instantly. 29

Chester Loomis had entered the prairie that stretched from the Wabash westward across the state line toward the Vermilion River. He continued west across this prairie in the gen-

* These green-headed flies are deer flies, in the family Tabanidae.
eral direction of the future site of Danville, and then entered the timber along the Vermillion River:

In the afternoon we rode a few miles through a tract of the finest timbered land I have ever seen. Here are some small, but durable streams of water. The land slopes gently to the south, sufficiently to produce a rapid current to its streams, which are clear and pure. Its timber is black walnut, black and white oak, maple, blue ash, buck eye and pawpaw. The richness, strength and fertility of soil, exceeds any I have ever seen. Here is a large body of land of the same description, entirely unsettled, and now is in market, at the Government Land Offices for $1.25 per acre. After passing this beautiful tract of timbered land, we again entered a prairie of some extent, and crossing the Vermillion river, at the forks. 29

Mr. Loomis toured Township 19 North, which is the tier of townships that includes the confluences of the three branches of the Vermillion River—the North Fork, Middle Fork, and Salt Fork:

June 26th, arrived at township Nineteen, in Edgar County, * Illinois. This is on the borders of the “Grand Prairie,” and is here a most delightful country. This township is well watered by the Vermillion River and its tributary streams, and is rolling and uneven for this country. Fine springs of durable water are common, even in the prairies. These open plains or prairies are too extensive for good settlements; yet that portion of the country which is wooded is valuable for the kind and quality of its timber as well as the surprising fertility of soil. The prairie lands however are generally deemed superior in richness and fertility to any other, and probably are so.

There are few inhabitants in this section. Occasionaly a cabin is found upon the borders of the plains, generally of some Southern emigrant, whose only society is his own family, his dogs and his gun. We have frequently seen fine fields of wheat and corn in open prairie, without any kind of fence or enclosure. It seems that the inhabitants often prefer sowing their grain and planting their corn at the distance of two or three miles from the timbered land, where domestic animals never range and where of course fences or walls are entirely unnecessary. 29

On the next day Chester Loomis visited salt springs near the juncture of the Salt Fork and Middle Fork:

On the 27th, of June I visited the salt manufactory on the banks of the Vermillion river. These works are situated about twelve miles west of the Wabash, and eighteen miles from the mouth of the Vermillion. The manufactory is yet conducted on a small scale; perhaps yielding 100 bushels per week. There is

* Vermilion County had not yet been formed from a part of Edgar County.
but one arch, of 20 kettles,—and the water is obtained from wells of 15 or 20 feet depth. Its saltiness, I should judge from taste, to be about the same as sea water. This water is found immediately below a layer of copperas stone and stone coal, * and is said to be obtained by digging for 20 miles along the banks of the river. An enterprising individual by the name of Whitcomb . . . has for some time been engaged in boring for water of greater strength than is now obtained from the wells. He informed me that he had penetrated about 400 feet in rock; that he has found that the water at that depth is much stronger than near the surface. . . . Several large wells and reservoirs have recently been sunk at a hundred rods † distance from the present works. In digging them, they found the same strata of coal about ten feet below the surface, as at the old works. In fact coal abounds in this region. It is found in the banks of rivers, and even in the immense prairies, I have noticed it. This will furnish the country with fuel when the small portion of timber which grows in this state, shall fail.

The Vermillion river is a beautiful stream of clear water. It takes its rise in the "Grand Prairie," and running a south-easterly course for 40 or 50 miles, falls into the Wabash. This stream is boatable to the salt works. Above the Saline it divides in three parts, and has some fine mill seats. Fish in great numbers are every where swimming in its waters. Some of them of 15 or 20 pounds weight. Along the banks of the Vermillion in many places, I saw ledges of excellent stone for building and other purposes, and banks of copperas stone, inexhaustible in quantity.

There are few inhabitants in this quarter. Many townships have not as yet a single family. The country for a great extent, seems to be new. Game is abundant. The forests are filled with deer, and the prairies with turkeys and prairie-hens; prairie wolves and opossums are numerous. Of reptiles, they have rattle-snares, of two kinds, large and small; black snakes, copper heads, and the glass snake. † The latter is a curiosity. Upon striking a slight blow with a small stick, it will generally break into several pieces.

The timbered lands here border the streams and water courses. Every creek is lined with valuable timber from half-a mile to two miles in width, and generally extending from its mouth to its source. An astonishing growth of vegetation is also every where prevalent, except in the dry prairie, where the wild grass holds the ascendancy. This wild grass in the dry prairie grows thick at the bottom, but not more than two feet high; but in the wet prairies the grass and weeds

* The salt springs were eventually destroyed when this coal was stripmined.
† A rod is 16.5 feet.
† The "glass snake" is the slender glass lizard, a species that lacks legs. It is known as the glass snake or joint snake because it looks like a snake and its tail tends to break off if the animal is handled roughly.
grow to the height of seven or eight feet, and so thick and close as to impede
the progress of a horse, and thus rendering traveling slow and disagreeable.
I have observed that on the western edges or borders of all the large prairies a
thick growth of young timber is springing up, whereas on their eastern borders
no under brush is found within many rods of the open lands. This is undoubted­ly
caused by fire divisions * by those westerly winds which prevail in October
and November, when these immense plains are annually burnt over. The heat
and fury of the flames driven by a westerly wind far into the timbered lands on
the opposite sides destroying the under-growth of timber, and every year in­
creasing the extent of prairie in that direction, has no doubt, for many centuries
added to the quanity of open land found throughout this part of America. 29

Loomis spent one more day in the Vermilion River valley of Vermilion County:

June 28th, I spent this day in exploring and examining the country near the
Vermillion. Prairies of unknown extent spread to the west. The plains, with
or without timber, are alike in the surprising richness and fertility of their soils.
. . . The extensive prairies here, covered with blossoms a great part of the year,
are peculiarly favorable for bees, and as might be expected, the timbered lands
are filled with them. Wild honey is of course abundant, and every inhabitant
easily obtains a supply. 29

During the next two days he traveled south through Vermilion and Edgar Counties toward
Paris:

June 29th, . . . . During this day I rode southwardly in the Grand Prairie
upwards of thirty miles. The heat was excessive, and prairie flies assailed my
horse as if they would destroy him. These flies are not found in timbered lands,
and I found it necessary to avoid the open country as much as possible. In the
course of the day one or two cabins were seen and I passed a few cultivated
fields of corn and wheat without any kind of fence or enclosure. Near the
borders of the timbered lands, immense numbers of wild turkeys, deer, &c.,
were feeding. 29

1832: Diaries of two soldiers during the Black Hawk War

Ninevah Shaw kept a diary while he was a soldier during the Black Hawk War in 1832.
An unnamed companion of Shaw also wrote in the journal-book; Shaw's entries are distin­
guished with italic type in the following paragraphs. The soldiers set out on their march
to war from Clark County on June 9, 1832; the passage of two days brought them to
Champaign County:

*Perhaps the word “driven” was intended rather than “divisions.”
June 11th. Marched to Hickory Grove* 12 mils. and took dinner and from thence to Lynn Grovge † 18 mils and encamped

_Prairie very rich but a great deal of it very wet and timber very scarce the dry part good farming land Lynn grove beautiful grove 100 acres in the grove good land_

June 12th Marched to big Grove, ‡ & 12 miles from thence to Newcomb’s § on the Sangamon. 16. miles, & encamped.

_Big grove a large grove inhabited with a good many Setlers Sangamon River timber on the rive tolerably plenty filthy looking "_53_"

At this point the soldiers had marched well beyond the Vermilion River Area. After taking part in the brief war in Wisconsin, Ninevah Shaw and several others headed south along the route that they had followed north in June. Much of their travel was in the early morning and in the evening, with a stop during the day to help avoid the biting flies. The following notes were recorded by Shaw, beginning on the 21st of August:

21 March from Sangamon river before day and go to big Grove 15 Miles and 3 miles in the grove and stop for the day and in the evening went 14 Miles on Vermilion

_The big grove is a beautiful grove rich land & well timberd beautiful farms all round here is the head of big Vermilion or the salt fork § the land and farms beatiful cross Vermilion timber in the night most all got lost in the course_

22d March from Vermilion to little vermilion 14 miles and stop till evening and march to cherry grove ** 10 1/2 miles

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* Hickory Grove was at the south edge of the Vermilion River Area, in Young America Township in the northwest corner of Edgar County.

† Lynn Grovge (Linn Grove) was north and west of Hickory Grove, in the southwest corner of Sidney Township. It occupied the crest of a high morainal ridge on the very edge of the Vermilion River Area.

‡ Big Grove was at the west edge of the Vermilion River valley. The grove extended north from Urbana.

§ Newcom’s Ford was on the Sangamon River east of Fischer, on the Fort Clark and Danville Road. (Fort Clark was on the Illinois River at Peoria.)

§ This is the Salt Fork of the Vermilion River. Ninevah Shaw wrote “big Vermilion” to distinguish this stream from the Little Vermilion, which he reached on the following day.

** Cherry Grove was south of the Vermilion River Area, along Brouillets Creek west of Chrisman.
Between Big Vermilion & little Vermilion is all Prairie and farms all along the woods the Prairie near cherry grove wet corn not good.

On the 23rd day of August the men passed through Paris, then continued south beyond the Grand Prairie.

1835–36: A Western Pioneer

The Reverend Alfred Brunson devoted a lifetime to Methodist missionary work. The waning days of 1835 found him at one of his quarterly church meetings beside the Mississippi River at Rock Island. On the 29th of December he set out to return to his family in Pennsylvania. He planned to head south to Springfield and then east through Indianapolis. One segment of this route would take him down the Salt Fork of the Vermilion River from recently founded Urbana to the young hamlet of Danville.

Dr. Brunson managed to cross his first hurdle—the Rock River—but he soon discovered that the trail south was blocked by a series of flooded rivers and creeks. He decided on an alternate route that took him eastward along a series of high watershed divides to the Illinois River. Near the village of La Salle he found a trail that led southward up the Vermilion River to the point where the headwaters of this “Vermilion of the Illinois” meet the headwaters of the “Vermilion of the Wabash.” From there Brunson would follow down the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River until he could cut cross-country to the Wabash River.

By the night of the fourth day of his homeward trek, Alfred Brunson had reached a cabin that was located two or three hours' ride up the Vermilion River from its confluence with the Illinois River. It was New Year’s Day 1836. We pick up Brunson’s story on page 48 of his autobiography, A Western Pioneer:

The next morning, starting about sunrise, I soon disturbed, what I judged to be, two thousand prairie chickens, which had reposed upon the open prairie for the night, which flew in four flocks into a corn field, where it was their habit to depredate through the day. Allowing each bird to consume one gill of corn each day, a farmer would lose in this way not less than thirty bushels daily. This was said to be a fair specimen of the ravages of these birds on the large prairies at this stage of the settlements, there being but a few farms in a vast extent of country.

After a ride of forty miles, without a house, rest, or food for myself or horse, I reached a house on the sight of the old Kickapoo village, and put up for the night. Here, for the first time, I noticed one of the mammoth prairie breaking

* See a footnote on page 1 for a discussion of the two Vermilion Rivers in Illinois.

† Mr. Brunson’s host probably was Franklin Oliver, who started a farm here at Oliver's Grove in 1832. This waypoint was south of present-day Chatsworth, about three miles from the far upper reaches of the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River.

18
plows. It was, among common plows, like an elephant among cows and oxen. The wooden mold-board was about four feet long, with a wind sufficient to turn the sod completely over; the steel share was some two and a half feet long, and would cut a width of two feet, the sod being turned flat, bottom upwards. It required from five to ten yoke of oxen to drag such a plow through the sod, the roots of the grass being very thick and tough. The share was thick, stiff, and sharp enough—kept so by filing—that if a root of a tree or bush of any size from four inches down, came in the way it was cut square off. The sod was usually cut from three to four inches deep, and being turned over smooth and even, each succeeding furrow exactly filled the space left by its predecessor, so that the whole field would be as level and smooth as before it was plowed. It usually required a year for this sod to rot sufficiently to admit of cross plowing. If turned over in May or June it rotted sooner than if done at any other time in the year. In planting sod corn, the pole of the ax was used instead of a hoe; a blow was struck in the seam between furrows, into which the seed was dropped, when a second blow would cover it.

As no weeds or grass grows upon this turned over sod, the corn gets no hoeing; the crop of course will not be large—about ten bushels on an average to the acre—but this, with the fodder, which the leaves and stalks afford, pays well for the trouble. If other seeds, say wheat, oats, or barley, are sown, after the sod has lain from six to twelve months, it is harrowed in by a heavy harrow, requiring the breaking team to move it. Such ground is harrowed, first, lengthways of the breaking furrow, and then crossed, leaving the surface as level as, and even smoother than, before breaking.

The dividing lands between the Vermilion of the Illinois and the Vermilion of the Wabash are nearly level, having numerous small ponds or lakes in which the grass grows. Some of them have, while others have not, any apparent inlet or outlet. The road, a dim trail, wound round there so as to keep on as dry ground as possible.

After leaving my resting place, where the Indian once reposed his weary limbs after the chase, a few miles brought me to where the waters shelved off towards the Wabash. The prairie was large, and but little timber in sight, and if the snow had covered the ground I could not have seen the trail, and, being without landmarks, could hardly have kept my way. After a ride or forty miles without house, food, or rest, I reached a cabin in a grove, by a little brook. * . . . I . . . had a good supper and bed; and on the first appearance of daybreak started on my journey.

About nine o'clock I reached a house where self and horse got refreshments; and this was the last we got till two o'clock next morning. About noon I

* Brunson had reached an outpost on the Middle Fork, perhaps Trickel's Grove in the southeast corner of Ford County.
reached the main fork of the Vermilion of the Wabash, \(^*\) at a point where three forks met, \(^t\) and where the road from Danville to Chicago crossed it, about ten miles from the former place. On the bank of this stream, while in sight of the house, I met two of the largest, tallest, and most savage looking prairie wolves \(I\) had ever seen. They were at least two feet high, and near four feet from the tip of the nose to the end of their tails. They were as white as sheep ordinarily are. They showed no fear, but rather a disposition to dispute the right to the road, showing their long white but savage looking teeth, and half turned to attack me. Being in no mood for a contest with them, I applied the whip and spur to my steed, who, though weary, soon left them in possession of the ground. It was this kind of wolves that attacked me the night following, while alone, in the dark.

I crossed the main fork of this stream on a bridge. But there were two more forks to cross that were swimming deep, and without bridges. I got a young man to show me some fords where the water was only up to the saddle skirts, and where I succeeded in fording without getting wet.

I was now to take a fourteen-mile prairie, without house, or road, except the remains of an old Indian trail, bearing towards Williamsport, on the Wabash. \(^\dagger\) At a house on the bank of the last stream I had crossed I inquired of a woman the distance, the road, such as it was, the landmarks, etc., and learned that eighteen months before a wagon had passed that way, but none since; that a few horsemen had traveled it since the wagon, but none very lately. The course for me was about east, and the first and only timber to be seen was that at which I was aiming, and in which was the first house I should see. When near the timber I was to strike a north and south road, and to take the south end of it, which led to the grove, and to the house.

I knew the gait of my horse, four miles an hour, and my watch said it was two o'clock, P.M. I, therefore, concluded that I could reach the timber by five o'clock, and the house before dark. But by some means I never knew how to account for, my watch had lost an hour, so that it was really three o'clock, instead of two. The woman of whom I inquired looked, and fairly said by her actions that I could not get through before dark; she probably knew the correct

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\(^*\) Brunson had crossed the prairie between the Middle Fork and the North Fork of the Vermilion River, which he called the main fork.

\(^\dagger\) Brunson was near present-day Alvin when he made the series of water crossings and counted three forks of the North Fork. One of the forks is the Middle Branch; another is the upstream continuation of the North Fork above the Middle Branch. The third fork is not obvious: perhaps Brunson was recalling Jordan Creek, a tributary of the Middle Branch, when he counted a total of three forks.

\(^\dagger\) Brunson's route approximated the current alignment of Illinois Route 119 and Indiana Route 28 to a crossing on the Wabash River near Attica, Indiana.
But being ignorant of this, I pressed on fearless of danger. If she had corrected me in this matter of time I should not have ventured out that night.

For about five miles the old trail in the high standing grass was sufficiently plain to follow by day-light, but not in the night. I then came to ground over which the Autumnal fires had run. * I now saw plainly the tracks of the wagon wheels, though made eighteen months previous, and could also see the trail, which, from Indian travel for ages, was depressed a little below the common surface of the ground. I followed this without difficulty while I had day-light; but when night set in, it being very dark and cloudy, I could see it no more. As daylight was fading, I thought I saw the timber I was aiming at, about five miles distant. Being later than I expected it to be at this point, I looked at my watch, when I discovered its loss of time. But there I was, too late to turn back as the timber ahead was nearer than that behind, so I took my course and went ahead. It soon became so dark that I could not see my horse's head, nor, of course, the timber. The thaw had softened the surface of the ground where it was burnt over so that my horse at every step sank into it to the depth of his hoofs. This, of course retarded my progress, from my usual gait of travel, and probably was one reason why I was belated in time.

A few nights previous, when dark set in before I reached a stopping place, I sung a hymn. This rallied the dogs whose barking told me where the house was. After traveling some time in the dark and hoping that I had got within hearing distance of the grove, I first halloed at the top of my voice, which at that time of life was strong and shrill; and from the slight rise of ground I was upon, and a light zephyr blowing towards the grove, I could probably be heard two miles. But I got no response. Then I tried the old experiment of singing, but with no better results; and being very weary I ceased singing and trudged along.

After a short silence I heard wolves call their fellows a little ahead, and to the left hand, and shortly after I heard the answer a short distance behind, and also to the left hand. I knew that this was their mode of calling together when they contemplated an attack, and if I had been in the woods inhabited by the large gray wolves, I should probably have taken the hint. But, supposing them to be of the common prairie tribe, and never having heard of their attacking travelers, I had no apprehensions of a visit from them. †

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* At this point Brunson was close to the state line.
† Brunson was making a distinction between the prairie wolf (coyote) and the gray wolf (timber wolf).
Soon after hearing this call and answer I came to a large granite bowlder, called in that region "a lost rock;" it being white, and on the black burnt ground, I could see it. 12

The rock served as a brief rest stop. As soon as Brunson remounted, his horse “showed signs of uneasiness, never before seen in him.” Something in the dark was worrying the steed, both front and rear.

I now leaned forward upon the neck of my horse, and straining my eyes as I never did before nor since, I could see six or eight of the largest kind of prairie wolves I had ever seen, except in the previous day as above described. They were playing up, on both sides, as dogs do when about to attack any thing . . . 12

Brunson fought off the coyotes with his whip and considered whether he could kill them one-by-one with a dirk. Then he “thought of the fact that music will charm the wild beast when nothing else fails.”

. . . when I began to sing, the wolves gave back say ten or fifteen feet, and lay down on either side of me, with their heads towards me, and between their fore feet, dog fashion, as if ready to renew the attack as soon as the charm should cease. At this my horse moved ahead without any urging. I continued singing, not knowing whether the wolves would soon follow or not. But this question was soon answered. I came to a swale in the ground covered with water. This I could see by the reflection from the clouds, which, though very dark, was not as dark as the burnt prairie under me. 12

The Reverend Dr. Brunson looked back and could see no coyotes; nor could he hear any animals stalking about in the water. At that he “thanked God and took courage.”

In a short time I came to the unburnt grass, and having observed in the daytime that the fires had ran with the wind, and that the prevalence of the westerly winds had not only given the grass a lean to the east, but the line between the burnt and unburnt grass run in the same direction, and as that was my course, I followed this line. In the grass the surface of the ground had not thawed as it had where it was burnt over, and, of course, it was better traveling. I, therefore, kept along just within the grass, which being lighter than the burnt ground I could see better where to go.

But I soon found another difficulty. All over these slightly rolling plains there are occasionally small ponds of water, with neither inlet or outlet, and in which a rank grass grows sometimes so thick that the running fires will cross them.

* This boulder had been brought down from the far north and deposited here by a glacier. Such boulders consist of hard, igneous or metamorphic rock—unlike the relatively weak sedimentary rock that crops out locally. Since these glacial boulders seemed to be out of place in the lower Midwest, they were commonly called “lost rocks.”
Some of them cover acres and are deep, others are small and shallow. These I could ride over—being frozen—but the others I had to go round.

I came to one of these large ponds; but as it was dark I could not see its breadth, and venture on. The ice soon cracked, indicating some depth of water. . . . By this time I began to reflect that possibly this was a large and deep pond, and if so, and my horse should break through, as the grass would hold the ice together, it might be difficult if not impossible for either him or me to get to shore. So I concluded to go round. I soon found it was large, and probably deep, and felt as if providence had saved me again. After traveling perhaps forty rods, to a point where I expected to find the line again between the burnt and unburnt grass, I could find none. This showed that the pond was too large for the fires to run across, and made me feel thankful that I had gone round. But having made quite a circle, I could not tell what course to pursue. 12

"The lean of the grass to the east was very visible," so Brunson looked to the grass to point the way east. Well past midnight on January 5, he struck a trail that brought him to a house on the edge of the prairie. At that point he was about five miles beyond the Vermilion River Area and seven miles short of the Wabash.

1838: "Journal of an Emigrating Party of Pottawatomie Indians"

In August of 1838, more than 700 Potawatomi "were taken unawares and herded together" at Twin Lakes in Marshall County, Indiana. They were to be taken to a reservation in Kansas. A daily journal of the trip was kept by one of the men who helped carry out the Potawatomi's removal.*

The group departed northern Indiana on September 4 and moved slowly down the Wabash River valley. Ten days later they reached Williamsport, Indiana, on the Wabash River about 12 miles east of the state line and the Vermilion River Area. On that evening the journal-keeper wrote,

As we advance farther into the country of the prairies water becomes more scarce—the streams are literally dried up, and we have reason to fear that unless soon refreshed with rain, our future marches will be attended with much pain, and suffering. To-day we made 18 miles. Two deaths took place this evening. 19

On Saturday, September 15, the group traveled 10 miles and halted at noon:

. . . we arrived at an unhealthy and filthy looking stream, at which, from the reports of the citizens of the country, we were forced to encamp. The young men among the Indians during the afternoon, to the number of twenty-five, were

* The identity of the author is not clear.
permitted to go on a hunting excursion . . . . Two small children died along the road. 19

Sunday, the 16th of September:

At 8 o'clock we were loaded and in our saddles. Seven persons were left sick in camp . . . . A few minutes travel brought us to the Grand Prairie, a portion of which we passed over, arriving at our present Encampment at Danville, Ill., at about 3 o'clock P.M. The heat along with the dust is daily rendering our marches more distressing. The horses are jaded the Indians sickly and many of the persons engaged in the emigration more or less sick. The whole country through which we pass appears to be afflicted—every town, village, and hamlet has its invalids. We travelled to-day fifteen miles, passing the dividing line between the two states at about 11 1/2 o'clock. We find provisions and forage, the further we advance, demanding most enormous prices. It is worthy of remark, perhaps, that such a season for sickness in this country is almost unparalleled.

In the little town, adjoining which we are now encamped, containing a population of from eight hundred to a thousand four persons died yesterday. 19

On the 17th the Potawatomi were moved six miles up the Vermilion River valley to Sandusky's Point. They remained there until the 20th, during which time seven Indians died and one was born.

On the morning of the 20th, a chief died. The group then marched for about four and a half hours. A child died on horseback. Another person died after they halted for the day at Davis' Point on the Salt Fork.

On September 21 they advanced to a camp near Sidney. A child died after arriving there. The diarist wrote, "The farther we get into the prairie the scarcer becomes water. Our present encampment is very poorly watered, and we are yet in the vicinity of timber." 19

September 22nd was "exceedingly cold" and rainy. The emigrants passed beyond the Vermilion River valley and reached Sadorus Grove on the Embarras River. That evening's record shows,

Our journey was immediately across the Prairie, which at this point is entirely divested of timber for sixteen miles. . . . not a death has occurred to-day . . . . . . . . . . . . We are at present encamped at Sidoris's Grove, sixteen miles distant from Sidney. Water quite scarce. 19

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* The severe drought and widespread sickness in the region during 1838 are further described on page 110.
1853: Diary of William Marsh

In 1853 Mordecai Marsh’s family moved from Ohio to Mercer County, Illinois. Their route approximated the current alignment of Interstate 74 from Indianapolis to Danville and across Illinois to Galesburg.

By the night of September 13 the Marshes had nearly reached Homer, on the State Road that followed the edge of the woods on the south side of the Salt Fork. One of the sons, William, wrote the following in his diary for September 14:

... rain and mud. A.M. Struck out this morning on an arm of the Grand Prairie. Passed through Homer, Champaign County. The Prairies here are high, Rolling, and Beautiful. The vast Sea of prairie Grass, being Stirred by the wind, rolls and Sways, backward and forward like the waves of the mighty ocean. It looks very beautiful. Crossed the little Sangamon River, passed through Mahemet, turned out and fed. P.M. are now on the Grand Prairie, out of Sight of timber, nothing to be Seen but tall Prairie Grass, it is a beautiful Sight. See lots of Prairie fowls, and Some little Prairie Squirrels. At night we Stopped and put up at the house of Mr. Stephen Boyd’s. Here we fed the first Prairie hay. This family freely admitted that they had the Milk Sickness in this Section. Cant Say I like the Country here. We made 30 miles ... .

1855: America by River and Rail

William Ferguson rode the newly opened Illinois Central Railroad from Chicago to Urbana on June 4, 1855. In America by River and Rail, Mr. Ferguson told his British readership about the excursion:

Until this railway was made, this part of the state was quite inaccessible; and still tracks, miles in extent, are without a house. Stations are put down every ten miles or so; and already little villages are clustering around them, and the lands are being rapidly settled. The early settlements are all on the banks of streams.

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* Mahemet = Mahomet.
† Prairie fowl = greater prairie-chicken.
‡ Franklin’s ground squirrel was commonly known as the prairie squirrel, but William Marsh might also have been referring to thirteen-lined ground squirrels.
§ Milk sickness was called the “trembles” or “stagers” when it affected cattle, and “puking fever” when it afflicted humans. The source of the disease was a common woodland herb, white snakeroot (Eupatorium rugosum). If a human consumes meat or dairy products from a cow that has grazed on white snakeroot, the result can be fatal for the person. The cause of milk sickness was not known for certain until the 20th century.
... At Loda, we saw a farmer breaking up a large tract of prairie, himself meanwhile abiding in two white tents, pitched on a slight eminence; not having had time, as yet, to build even the quickly-erected house of boards. At Pera † was perhaps the finest expanse of prairie we saw all day. The whole field of vision was one unbroken meadow of fine undulating grass-land. At Minkgrove, ‡ there is a patch of timber, or grove, in the midst of a perfect sea of prairie, just like an island; we saw it for miles after we had passed it, between us and the sky.

The thirteenth station is Urbana—128½ miles from Chicago. Here we stopped—there remaining 122 miles to be finished before this branch joins the main line at Centralia. There is a patch of wood close to Urbana, of 15,000 acres, and an old and a new town; the latter at the railway station, and about two miles from the former. In 1853, the old town contained about 400 inhabitants, and the new town did not exist. It is calculated that the old town now contains 1200 or 1500 inhabitants, and the new town about 800—so rapidly does the building up of towns go on in these new countries.

... There is a hotel close to the station, where we got a tolerable tea (our kind cicerone, Mr. Johnson, had brought a basket of sandwiches, and we dined on them in the train), and then we got into a waggon with a pair of horses, and drove through the old town of Urbana, and out upon the great prairie. I do not fancy there exists in the whole world such a sight as we beheld. From an eminence, as far as the eye could comprehend the scene, it traversed the richest undulating fields of grass, almost unbroken by fence, plough, or house. We walked some distance up to the knees in the luxuriant herbage. It is said that this is the character of the country nearly all the distance from this to the junction with the main line, 122 miles; except that as you get further south there are more streams, and consequently more timber. The agricultural resources of this country are incredible. We made a detour from this edge of the grand prairie, by cultivated fields, till we reached the timber; and skirting it, returned to Urbana. 20

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* Perhaps this prairie-breaker pitched his tents on the eminence that later became known as Pine Ridge, where four acres of virgin prairie still survive in Pine Ridge Cemetery Prairie Nature Preserve.

† Pera = Ludlow.

‡ Minkgrove = Rantoul.

† The old town was Urbana. The new town was West Urbana, later to be named Champaign.
1871: Champaign County Directory

The full title of this book is J.S. Lothrop’s Champaign County Directory, 1870-1, with History of the Same, and of Each Township Therein. The directory provides information about the environment and natural resources of several townships that lie wholly or partly within the Vermilion River valley. Champaign Township is described first:

It is wholly a prairie town, there being nowhere within its border any growth of forest trees of nature’s planting.

... The entire tract of land within the town is susceptible of cultivation ... 30

Compromise Township:

This is a prairie town, having but one small body of wood land within its borders. ... While forest trees are not formed there naturally, yet when planted they grow rapidly ... 30

Kerr Township:

The prairies are rich, beautifully undulating, and rank with rich grasses, while Middle Fork, a never-failing stream of water, divides the town in twain ... 30

Ludlow and Harwood Townships:

The two townships ... are a splendid body of rich prairie, undulating, and susceptible of the most perfect drainage. ... There is no native forest in either of these townships except a few acres in the north-east corner of Harwood township, where the Middle Fork of the Vermilion touches that township. 30

Rantoul Township:

The land, with the exception of Mink Grove, which lies just west of the village of Rantoul, is entirely destitute of forest trees, save those planted by man.

... The first settlement in the town was at Mink Grove, which by the Indians was called “Nieps-wah,” their name for Mink.

Mr. Archa Campbell ... was the first settler. * He ... did not settle in Rantoul until 1849. The next year after Mr. C. settled at the grove, he broke up a large tract of prairie, and planted the same in sod corn. At this time his nearest neighbor was one Adkins, at the head of Big Grove, † about nine miles distant,

* White immigrants who came to the Vermilion River valley during the 1800s have been called settlers, but the region had long been settled by the resident Piankashaw, Kickapoo, and other tribes. The so-called “first settlers” often chose to live at recently abandoned Indian villages and camps.

† Adkins Point was at the northern extremity of Big Grove, north of Urbana.
and one Dodson, about the same distance to the west, on the Sangamon river . . . .

. . . The farming operations of Mr. C. consisted mainly in providing food for his stock, of which he had a large number, and so confident was he that he would never be troubled with near neighbors, that he only entered 40 acres, expecting to cultivate the domain of "Uncle Sam" to any extent he might desire, which illustrates the prevailing opinion of but twenty years ago in regard to the improvement of our prairies. Game, at this date, was oppressively abundant. Wild fowl of all kinds, deer, muskrat, wolves and hogs. * 30

St. Joseph Township:

The Salt Fork enters the township from the west . . . . Along the whole length of this stream is a rich growth of timber, principally of oak, ash and black walnut, exceedingly valuable. The prairie lands are gently undulating, exceedingly fertile . . . . 30

South Homer Township:

The Salt Fork runs through the town from west to east, along which there is a splendid growth of valuable timber.

. . . The first settler . . . settled just north of the Salt Fork timber, in 1827.
. . . In 1829, Moses Thomas . . . located on the site of old Homer village . . . . In 1835 he built a grist mill and the first saw mill in the county † . . . . 30

Somer Township:

The Salt Fork rises in the northern part of the town, and runs south through the town, giving ample supply of water for stock purposes; and ample drainage to the lands to the east and north-east. 30

Stanton Township:

An important tributary of the Salt Fork passes through this town, and in the course is joined by another from the north-east, which gives ample drainage and water privileges, to aid the farmer in the prosecution of his work. 30

Sidney Township:

Within this town is a magnificent body of timber, a woodland, lying on the Salt Fork . . . ; the space in the huge bend being covered with stately trees of

* Mr. Campbell's first cornfield was rooted up by wild hogs.
† Lothrop's volume states elsewhere that an ox-driven grist mill was set in operation at Sadorus in 1830 or '31; soon afterward a water mill was installed on the Salt Fork near Sidney; and Moses Thomas built a sawmill on the river north of Homer in 1834.

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oak, ash and black walnut; invaluable for fencing material, and manufacturing purposes. 30

Urbana Township:

The Big Grove, which lies mainly within this township, is one of the finest bodies of woodland in the West . . . . Through this grove, and through the town from west to east, runs the Salt Fork . . . . 30

1871: “Farming in the Great West”

MICHAEL SULLIVANT OWNED A FARM of about 40,000 acres in the headwaters of the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River and adjacent drainages in Ford and Livingston Counties. His headquarters, Burr Oaks Farm, was at Sibley in Sullivan Township.

On September 23, 1871, Harper’s Weekly issued a supplement titled “Farming in the Great West,” which enumerates some of the assets of Burr Oaks Farm: 150 steel plows, 75 breaking plows, 142 cultivators, 45 corn planters, 25 gang harrows, 300 miles of hedges, 150 miles of ditches, 350 mules, 50 horses, 100 cattle, and perhaps 1,000 to 1,200 hogs. The farm’s ditching plow was 18 feet long and was pulled by 68 oxen; it could make “three to three and a half miles of excellent ditch each day of work.” The farm had 2,500 acres of “tame grass” (Eurasian species), and “besides this much wild grass is cut.” 43

The Harper’s article describes efforts to limit the loss of grain to waterfowl at Burr Oaks Farm:

In the fall of the year Mr. Sullivant finds it necessary to detail a certain number of men as gunners to kill or drive away the innumerable flocks of wild geese and ducks which would otherwise destroy thousands of bushels of grain. In speaking of this, he says: “I tried at first to equalize the thing by planting a few hundred more acres, but my feathered boarders forced me to drain some of the lakes and ponds before I could get them to come in more reasonable force.” 43

1874: Field, Cover, and Trap Shooting

MARKET HUNTER ADAM BOGARDUS VISITED BURR OAKS FARM in the upper reaches of the Middle Fork about 1873. He recounted the visit in his autobiography:

On Mr. Sullivant’s great farm in Ford County there are many ponds and many extensive corn-fields, and I found last spring that the shooting of geese, ducks, and crane there was very good—so good that I mentally resolved to go there again next season. In two days’ shooting, mornings and evenings, not over decoys, but as the wild fowl came to and went out of the corn-fields, I killed sixty-five mallards and pintails, mostly mallards, five brant geese, * twenty

* Geese other than Canada geese were known as brants.
sand-hill crane, and three large white crane. Yet I was told that the ducks and brant had mostly all gone north before I was there, and that they had been much more abundant than they were in the two days I shot. Mr. Sullivant's foreman saw my ducks and cranes at the station, and made his remarks to this effect: "They said that as you were a pigeon-shooter, you would not be successful in the field. I have, however, seen no such lot as that at any time this season, and yet the ducks are now scarce to what they have been."

This farm of Mr. Michael Sullivant's is the largest in Illinois, I think, and I am convinced that it is one of the best neighborhoods in the State for game. From what I saw, pinnated grouse † abound, there are lots of quail, and in the migratory seasons great flocks of ducks, geese, brant, and cranes. The estate was purchased by Mr. Sullivant some years ago, when it was mostly unbroken prairie. It is eight miles square, contains about forty-four thousand acres, and twenty-six thousand acres of it have already been brought under cultivation. Twenty thousand acres of it were in corn last year, and I dare say more will be this year, while three thousand acres were in smaller grain, and three thousand in meadow-grass.

... Upon this Illinois farm there are three hundred miles of Osage orange hedges, which are yet young. Let the sportsmen remember what has been said of the hedges as affording nesting-places for game-birds, protection against hawks, and facilities for shooters, and they may conceive what these three hundred miles of hedges will do when they have grown tall and thick.

... On Mr. Sullivant's tract, in Ford County, before they are much shot at, the wild geese roost about the ponds in the prairie; but when they have been disturbed there a few times, they go further off to wild places in the extensive swamps. 9

1878: *The History of Livingston County*

The uppermost reaches of the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River extend into the southern part of Germantown Township, in the southeast corner of Livingston County. *The History of Livingston County* portrays this township as "almost entirely prairie, with but very little native timber, and a small quantity of what was in the earlier days of settlement, termed 'swamp lands.'" 55

The Middle Fork also drains a small part of the adjacent township of Fayette:

It is mostly rolling prairie, but with a few sections that are low and flat, and is wholly devoid of native timber. The latter defect, however, has been supplied

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* Large white crane = whooping crane.
† Pinnated grouse = greater prairie-chicken.
by the planting and cultivation of trees; and many beautiful groves are to be seen in every part of the township. 55

1879: History of Vermilion County

HIRAM W. BECKWITH'S BOOK ABOUT VERMILION COUNTY is one the finest historical records for any county in Illinois. Mr. Beckwith's family was intimately involved with the early development of Vermilion County, and he demonstrated an absorbing personal interest in the past.

More than 300 pages at the beginning of this volume are under the title "Historic Notes on the Northwest." On these pages Hiram Beckwith provides a history of the old Northwest Territory with a focus on the Wabash River valley. The title of Chapter IV of his "Historic Notes" is RAINFALL:

An interesting topic connected with our rivers is the question of rainfall. The streams of the west, unlike those of mountainous districts, which are fed largely by springs and brooks issuing from the rocks, are supplied mostly from the clouds. It is within the observation of persons who lived long in the valleys of the Wabash and Illinois, or along their tributaries, that these streams apparently carry a less volume of water than formerly. Indeed, the water-courses seem to be gradually drying up, and the whole surface of the country drained by them has undergone the same change. In early days almost every land-owner on the prairies had upon his farm a pond that furnished an unfailing supply of water for his live stock the year around. These never went dry, even in the driest seasons.

Formerly the Wabash afforded reliable steamboat navigation as high up as La Fayette. In 1831, between the 5th of March and the 16th of April, fifty-four steamboats arrived and departed from Vincennes. In the months of February, March and April of the same year, there were sixty arrivals and departures from La Fayette, then a village of only three or four hundred houses; many of these boats were large side-wheel steamers, built for navigating the Ohio and Mississippi, and known as New Orleans or lower river boats. The writer has the concurrent evidence of scores of early settlers with whom he has conversed that formerly the Vermilion, at Danville, had to be ferried on an average six months during the year, and the river was considered low when it could be forded at

\* Danville was named in honor of Hiram Beckwith's father, Dan.
\* Lafayette, Indiana, is about 45 miles northeast of Danville.
\* The region's rivers were swollen in the spring of 1831 because they were carrying snowmelt from the Winter of the Deep Snow.
\* In a footnote Mr. Beckwith cited "Tanner's View of the Mississippi, published in 1832, p. 154."
this place without water running into the wagon bed. Now it is fordable at all
times, except when swollen with freshets, which now subside in a very few
days, and often within as many hours. Doubtless, the same facts can be
affirmed of the many other tributaries of the Illinois and Wabash . . . .

The early statutes of Illinois and Indiana are replete with special laws, passed
between the years 1825 and 1840, when the people of these two states were
crazed over the question of internal navigation, providing enactments and
charters for the slack-water improvement of hundreds of streams whose insigni-
ficance have now only a dry bed, most of the year, to indicate that they were
ever dignified with such legislation and invested with the promise of bearing
upon their bosoms a portion of the future internal commerce of the country.

It will not do to assume that the seeming decrease of water in the streams is
caused by a diminution of rain. The probabilities are that the annual rainfall
is greater in Indiana and Illinois than before their settlement with a permanent
population. The "settling up" of a country, tilling its soil, planting trees,
constructing railroads, and erecting telegraph lines, all tend to induce moisture
and produce changes in the electric and atmospheric currents that invite the
clouds to precipitate their showers. Such has been the effect produced by the
hand of man upon the hitherto arid plains of Kansas and Nebraska.

. . . The apparent decrease in the volume of water carried by the Wabash and its
tributaries is easily reconciled with the theory of an increased rainfall since the
settlement of the country. These streams for the most part have their sources in
ponds, marshes and low grounds. These basins, covering a great extent of the
surface of the country, served as reservoirs; the earth was covered with a thick
turf that prevented the water penetrating the ground; tall grasses in the valleys
and about the margin of the ponds impeded the flow of water, and fed it out
gradually to the rivers. In the timber the marshes were likewise protected from
a rapid discharge of their contents by the trunks of fallen trees, limbs and leaves.

Since the lands have been reduced to cultivation, millions of acres of sod have
been broken by the plow, a spongy surface has been turned to the heavens and
much of the rainfall is at once soaked into the ground. The ponds and low
grounds have been drained. The tall grasses with their mat of penetrating roots
have disappeared from the swales. The brooks and drains, from causes partially
natural, or artificially aided by man, have cut through the ancient turf and made
well defined ditches. The rivers themselves have worn a deeper passage in their
beds. By these means the water is now soon collected from the earth's surface
and carried off with increased velocity. Formerly the streams would sustain
their volume continuously for weeks. Hence much of the rainfall is directly
taken into the ground, and only a portion of it now finds its way to the rivers,
and that which does has a speedier exit. Besides this, settlement of and particu-
larly the growing of trees on the prairies and the clearing out of the excess of
forests in the timbered districts, tends to distribute the rainfall more evenly

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throughout the year, and in a large degree prevents the recurrence of those extremes of drouth and flood with which this country was formerly visited. * 

Chapter V of Beckwith's "Historic Notes" is titled ORIGIN OF THE PRAIRIES:

The prairies have ever been a wonder, and their origin the theme of much curious speculation. The vast extent of these natural meadows would naturally excite curiosity, and invite the many theories which, from time to time, have been advanced by writers holding conflicting opinions as to the manner in which they were formed. Major Stoddard, H.M. Brackenridge and Governor Reynolds, † whose personal acquaintance with the prairies, eastward of the Mississippi, extended back prior to the year 1800, and whose observations were supported by the experience of other contemporaneous residents of the west, held that the prairies were caused by fire. The prairies are covered with grass, and were probably occasioned by the ravages of fire; because wherever copses of trees were found on them, the grounds about them are low and too moist to admit the fire to pass over it; and because it is a common practice among the Indians and other hunters to set the woods and prairies on fire, by means of which they are able to kill an abundance of game. They take secure stations to the leeward, and the fire drives the game to them.

... The plains of Indiana and Illinois have been mostly produced by the same cause. ... In the prairies of Indiana I have been assured that the woods in places have been known to recede, and in others to increase, within the recollection of the old inhabitants. In moist places, the woods are still standing, the fire meeting here with obstruction. Trees, if planted in these prairies, would doubtless grow. In the islands, ‡ preserved by accidental causes, the progress of the fire can be traced; the first burning would only scorch the outer bark of the tree; this would render it more susceptible to the next, the third would completely kill. I have seen in places, at present completely prairie, pieces of burnt trees, proving that the prairie had been caused by fire. 7

Beckwith continued his discourse by quoting Governor John Reynolds, who said in part,

... any attentive observer will come to the conclusion that it is fire burning the strong, high grass that caused the prairies. ... This is likewise the reason the prairies are generally the most fertile soil. The vegetation in them was the

* Historic changes in the flow of the region's streams are examined in detail in another report in this series, Early Accounts of the Ecology of the Headwaters Area. 50

† Beckwith was referring to Amos Stoddard (author of Sketches, Historical and Descriptive, of Louisiana), 44 Henry Brackenridge (author of Views of Louisiana), 50 and former Illinois Governor John Reynolds (author of My Own Times, an autobiographical history of Illinois). 58 During the time of Stoddard and Brackenridge, "Louisiana" included the entire Louisiana Territory, which bordered the west side of the Mississippi River as far north as Minnesota.

‡ These islands were groves in the prairie.
strongest and the fires there burnt with the most power. The timber was destroyed more rapidly in the fertile soil than in the barren lands. 7

Notwithstanding the assertions of Governor Reynolds and other proponents of the “fire theory,” Mr. Beckwith averred, “The later and more satisfactory theory is, that the prairies were formed by the action of water instead of fire.” Beckwith then quoted from the work of Leo Lesquereux, who argued that the mid-continental prairies had become established upon the recession of a vast expanse of water. In 1866 the State of Illinois published Professor Lesquereux’s 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.  

Beckwith’s chapter about the origin of prairies continues by examining the writings of John Dean Caton, retired Chief Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court. Beckwith reproduced part of Caton’s monograph, “Origin of the Prairies,” 1 and he summed up Caton’s views: “The learned judge holds to the popular theory that the most potent cause in keeping the prairies as such, and retarding and often destroying forest growth on them, is the agency of fire.” 7

After discussing Judge Caton’s ideas, Hiram Beckwith offered his own observations—emphasizing the tremendous fuel load of the tall-grass prairie:

* Leo Lesquereux was one of the most prominent American scientists of his time. In the first volume of the Geological Survey of Illinois (1866), he 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. 28

Lesquereux’s ideas attracted many adamant adherents as well as decided detractors. Nineteenth-century literary debate about the possible causes of prairie is immense. The commentary is peppered with 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. 31

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. 54

Among the best examinations of Leo Lesquereux’s theory are John D. Caton’s missive (discussed in the next footnote) and an article in the May 1878 issue of the American Naturalist. 22

† John Dean Caton’s essay “Origin of the Prairies” was published in 1869 as one of the Transactions of the Ottawa Academy of Natural Sciences. 14 His monograph can also be consulted in Number 3 of Fergus’ Historical Series. 15 Excerpts are quoted on pages 173 to 179 of Early Accounts of the Ecology of the Fox River Area. 32
There were many ponds and sloughs which aided in producing a humid atmosphere, all which induced a rank growth of grasses. All early writers, referring to the vegetation of our prairies, . . . bear uniform testimony to the fact of an unusually luxuriant growth of grasses.

Early settlers, in the neighborhood of the author, * all bear witness to the rank growth of vegetation on the prairies before it was grazed by live stock, and supplanted with shorter grasses, that set in as the country improved. Since . . . 1823 . . . on the level prairie between the present sites of Danville and Georgetown, the grass grew so high that it was a source of amusement to tie the tops over the withers of a horse, and in places the height of the grass would nearly obscure both horse and rider from view. This was not a slough, † but on arable land, where some of the first farms in Vermillion county were broken out. On the high rolling prairies the vegetation was very much shorter, though thick and compact; its average height being about two feet. ‡

The prairie fires have been represented in exaggerated pictures of men and wild animals retreating at full speed, with every mark of terror, before the devouring element. Such pictures are overdrawn. † Instances of loss of human life, or animals, may have sometimes occurred. The advance of the fire is rapid or slow, as the wind may be strong or light; the flames leaping high in the air in their progress over level ground, or burning lower over the uplands. When a fire starts under favorable causes, the horizon gleams brighter and brighter until a fiery redness rises above its dark outline, while heavy, slow-moving masses

* Hiram Beckwith was a Danville resident.

† Prairie cordgrass (*Spartina pectinata*) is one of the tallest of prairie grasses. It grows on wet ground, and was once commonly called slough grass.

‡ The lower stature of prairie on some areas of high ground may have stemmed from two principal reasons: (a) lower productivity on some relatively dry or infertile upland sites, or (b) dominance by low-growing species such as prairie dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*).

† In December of 1839 Solon Robinson, who lived several miles east of the state line in the Kankakee River valley of Indiana, wrote to a New York magazine to protest the overly dramatized image of prairie fires that was being promoted by the Eastern press:

I have just read an account in the “Christian Keepsake, Philadelphia,” of the “burning of a prairie, and a whole family that perished in the conflagration,” that is going the round of papers that delight in the marvellous, and which is calculated to create a very erroneous impression in regard to a prairie country. 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. ⁴⁰
of dark clouds curve upward above it. In another moment the blaze itself shoots up, first at one spot then at another, advancing until the whole horizon extending across a wide prairie is clothed with flames, that roll and curve and dash onward and upward like waves of a burning ocean, lighting up the landscape with the brilliancy of noon-day. A roaring, crackling sound is heard like the rushing of a hurricane. The flame, which in general rises to the height of twenty feet, is seen rolling its waves against each other as the liquid, fiery mass moves forward, leaving behind it a blackened surface on the ground, and long trails of murky smoke floating above. A more terrific sight than the burning prairies in early days can scarcely be conceived. Woe to the farmer whose fields extended into the prairie, and who had suffered the tall grass to grow near his fences; the labor of the year would be swept away in a few hours. Such accidents occasionally occurred, although the preventive was simple. The usual remedy was to set fire against fire, or to burn off a strip of grass in the vicinity of the improved ground, a beaten road, the treading of domestic animals about the inclosure of the farmer, would generally afford protection. In other cases a few furrows would be plowed around the field, or the grass closely mowed between the outside of the fence and the open prairie.

... Of the twenty-seven counties in Indiana, lying wholly or partially west and north of the Wabash, twelve of them are prairie; seven are mixed prairies, barrens* and timber, the barrens and prairie predominating. In five, the barrens, with the prairies, are nearly equal to the timber, while only three of the counties can be characterized as heavily timbered. And wherever timber does occur in these twenty-seven counties, it is found in localities favorable to its protection against the ravages of fire, by the proximity of intervening lakes, marshes or water-courses. 7

Hiram Beckwith’s personal conclusion: “The prairies of Illinois and Indiana were born of water and preserved by fire for the children of civilized men, who have come and taken possession of them.” 7

Continuing with the theme of fire, Beckwith explained the basis for the name of the Vermillion River:

The red earth or red chalk, known under the provincial name of red keel, is abundant everywhere along the bluffs of the Vermilion, in the shales that overlay the outcropping coal. The annual fires frequently ignited the coal thus

* The term barrens was applied in various ways to land that was intermediate in character between forest and prairie. Brushy areas as well as grasslands with plenty of shrubs were most often termed barrens. Grassy, park-like areas with widely spaced, open-grown trees were most often called oak openings—but they were sometimes called barrens. For in-depth discussions of the manner in which “barrens” was defined in the 1800s, see “How the Terms Savanna, Barrens, and Oak Openings Were Used in Early Illinois” 49 and Early Accounts of the Ecology of the Big Rivers Area. 51
exposed, and would burn the shale above, turn it red and render it friable.

... Those acquainted with the passion of the Indian for paint, particularly red, will understand the importance which the Indians would attach to it. Hence, as noted by Croghan, they called the river after the name of this red earth. 7

One of the tribes living along the Vermilion River was the Piankashaw, which knew the river itself by the name Piankashaw. By the time of Illinois's statehood in 1818, the Piankashaw people had been greatly reduced and were scattered far from the Vermilion River. In 1818 and 1819, the United States entered into a series of treaties to complete the purchase of the region from native tribes.

American citizens immediately thereafter began exploring the Vermilion River valley: “The inducement was the hope of discovering salt.” A group of salt springs along the Salt Fork had long been known to local residents and French colonists. 6 An American soldier named Joseph Barron claimed to have visited the springs as early as 1801. The Vermilion Salines were “about one and a half miles above the old ‘Kickapoo town’” and not far upstream from the Salt Fork’s junction with the Middle Fork.

Hiram Beckwith described the site as Captain Truman Blackman found it on October 31, 1819:

Capt. Blackman pointed out a smooth spot of low ground from twenty to thirty rods across where he said there was salt water. 6 There was no vegetation growing upon the surface, and no traces of people ever having been there, “except,”—says Peter Allen in his affidavit,—“in some few places where the Indians had sunk curbs of bark into the soil for the purpose of procuring salt water.” 7

The spot had long served as a salt lick for grazing animals. The History of Vermilion County provides this word-picture:

The well-worn trails of buffalo and other wild animals were found converging to this brakish ooze from many directions, and the abundance of game that collected there to eat the salty earth is proven by the quantity of broken arrow-heads which have been found in this locality ever since the settlement of the country. 7

* See George Croghan’s remarks about the Vermilion River on page 4.

† “The Indians told Maj. Vance that they and the French traders had made salt at these springs for at least seventy or eighty years before they were developed by the white people; and the old Indians said they had no recollection of the time, it was so long ago since their people first commenced making salt there.” 7

‡ A rectangular area 20 by 30 rods would cover 3.75 acres. In a lecture at the Old Settlers’ meeting in Danville in 1878, Judge Beckwith described the bare area as covering two or three acres. 18
Salt was an important commodity in early Illinois because it was used to preserve meat—but salt was scarce and expensive so far from the ocean. A business was set up at the Vermilion Salines to manufacture salt by boiling the spring water in kettles. Wells were dug at the springs to obtain a good supply of strong brine. In the spring of 1824 John Vance brought 24 big iron kettles by boat up the Vermilion River as far as the mouth of Stony Creek, south of Danville. At this point, “The water being low and the channel obstructed by a sand-bar at the mouth of the creek, the boat was abandoned, and the kettles hauled from thence to the salt works by ox teams.”

A total of 80 huge kettles were installed at the saltworks' furnaces. A hundred gallons of saltwater made a bushel of salt, and 60 to 80 bushels was a good week's production. Eventually the operation was closed because improvements in transportation made it cheaper to import salt than to manufacture it locally.

When Hiram Beckwith published his history of Vermilion County in 1879, he observed, “Nothing now remains of the old salt works except the furrowed hillside, where some of the furnace stones point above the overlying grass, and a few depressions in the ground that mark the position of several of the wells.” All traces of the salt springs and saltworks have since been obliterated by a coal stripmine.

One of the first white settlements in Vermilion County grew up less than three miles south of the Vermilion Salines, along Butler's Branch. The timber that jutted into the prairie along this creek was named Butler's Point in recognition of James Butler, who “took up a claim” there in 1820. One tree stood out beyond all the rest along Butler's Branch:

Near Butler's house stood a large oak tree, all alone, out well beyond the line of timber skirting the branch, where for years it had bid defiance to the annual prairie fire. It was called “Butler's lone tree,” and was a landmark and sentinel that served as a guide to travelers crossing the prairies from the south and west.

The settlement at Butler's Point grew to become the village of Catlin. Late in her life, one of James Butler's children, Annis Butler Douglas, told Hiram Beckwith about the early days of Catlin and vicinity. One of her early recollections concerned the sickness and death of two or three children at the saltworks:

One by one the children, wasting away, day after day, died. No plank or lumber was to be had, and coffins were made out of rough boards, split from a walnut tree that grew a short distance from Butler's branch.

* "Not even a single stone from the furnace remains to mark the location of the once thriving settlement. All is desolation, for the historic acres have been invaded by the greedy coal magnate, with his monster shovel, and once the black diamonds had been wrested from their hiding place, the evidences of the vandalism were left for Nature to cover with wildwood and tares. True it is that Sentiment seldom is allowed to retard Progress or stand between Greed and the Dollar.”

† A body of woodland that extended into the prairie was called a point.
The walnut tree, says Mrs. Douglas, was called the "coffin tree." Neighbors came from a long distance and rived boards from this tree. It was straight-grained, and slabs could be split off of it with little difficulty. From such material as this were formed the burial-cases of a number of the early settlers. 7

Annis Butler married Marquis Snow in January of 1825. She told Beckwith of an incident that occurred before their marriage:

One spring, some two years before Mr. Snow's marriage, he was making sugar at the camp near the salt works, and as he was hauling sugar water from the trees to the camp on a "bob-sled," a panther came near him. 7

According to the story, this mountain lion stalked Mr. Snow as he sought refuge on a fallen tree. The cat was scared away before anyone was hurt, but "No more sugar was made at that camp until the next year." 7

Mrs. Douglas recalled how wild swine became established in the neighborhood:

The Blackmans and Treat brought up a lot of hogs from Terre Haute to the salt works in 1820 or 1821, and turned them loose in the woods, where they throve and multiplied astonishingly. The animals lived upon grass and the abundance of mast found in the timber. In time the hogs grew wild, and the males were dangerous. 7 They spread their numbers many miles up the Middle Fork and Salt Fork, and down the Vermilion below Danville. . . . the animals bred back to a wild condition, and . . . they looked very little like civilized hogs. They became common property in the woods, and were killed off as wild game. 7

In 1823 James Butler made the first "corn cracker" mill to be used in Vermilion and Champaign Counties:

It consisted of a "gum," or section of a hollow tree, some four feet long by two feet in diameter. . . . The revolving burr, like the stationary stone, consisted of a granite boulder . . . which are distributed freely over the ground everywhere. 7

Mrs. Douglas' neighborhood around Catlin continued to play a key role in the development of the region as plans were made to split Vermilion County from Edgar County. About 1825 or '26 John Boyd and two others were commissioned to select a site for the county seat. They recommended a tract near present-day Catlin:

Boyd and his associates, after a casual examination of the country, . . . located the county seat some six miles west of Danville and back a distance from the south side of the Salt Fork. A more unfavorable place could hardly have been

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*A contemporary of Mrs. Douglas attested that "these hogs were so wild it was impossible to domesticate them." 7
selected; the surface was cold, flat, clay ground. It is doubtful if ordinary wells could have been secured, to say nothing of cellars or drainage . . . .

Plans for a county seat near Catlin fell through, so a second trio of commissioners concluded that a site “near the mouth of the North Fork of the Vermilion River, was the most suitable place in the county for such county seat.” Guy Smith and Dan Beckwith donated land to the county to support the establishment of the seat of justice there. According to Dan’s son Hiram, “A better site could not have been selected.”

In the whole state there is not a spot of ground where Nature herself has combined so many advantages of drainage, surface soil, water, coal, timber, stone, gravel and all else that is required for the successful growth of an inland city . . . .

The thought of making a town at Danville was not original with Messrs. Morgan, Peter and Kirkpatrick. The chiefs and head men of the “Miami-Piankeshaws” had, about a hundred years before, selected it as the place of one of their principal villages, giving it the name of Piankeshaw. It is highly probable—indeed, the writer has but little doubt, after consulting many authorities, and making a personal examination of the country on the Vermilion River below and above Danville—that the old village of Piankeshaw, referred to in French documents as far back as 1719, and in the subsequent accounts of English and early American writers, was strung along the north fork from the northwestern city limits to Main street, thence along the Vermilion River as far as the extreme of east Danville, and extending back, in an irregular line a half a mile or more, from the bluffs of the two streams. The old corn hills, grown over with blue-grass, heaps of stone where fires had been made, the absence of forest, excepting a few large oak trees, and other appearances scattered over the area of ground we have described, clearly indicated its former occupation to the early white visitants. In fact, the Pottawatomie Indians told Col. Guerdon S. Hubbard in 1819 or 1820 that it used to be “the big Piankashaw town.” We will summarize a description of the locality at the time it was determined to establish the county seat here. . . . You see a line of stalwart oaks upon the river bluffs, and others, like solitary sentinels, scattered at wide intervals over an open plain. Westward of Stony Creek, and extending from east Danville northwest, in the direction of the woollen factory, are patches of hazel and jack oak, both of

* Another assessment of the unsuitability of this site can be read on page 52.

† The term jack oak was applied to brushy growths of oak sprouts that grew up after the landscape was no longer burned often. Here is another example of the use of the term—from a story about finding a cache of 116 ancient stone artifacts near Rossville in 1878:

Mr. Pogue had cleared off a piece of ground formerly prairie, on which a growth of jack oak trees and underbrush had encroached since the early settlement of the county. This land had never been cultivated, and as it was being broken up, the plow-share ran into the “nest,” and turned the implements to view.
recent growth. In the vicinity of the high school, extending north and west well toward the bluffs, and embracing nearly all of Tinchertown, is a broad meadow, set in with blue-grass, and having the marks of old corn hills plainly visible over many acres of it. Under the hill, west of Mill street, and in the other bottom extending from the mouth of the North Fork below the red bridge, are other ancient corn fields, also overrun with blue-grass. Along the bluffs of the North Fork and Vermilion, at a convenient distance from some of the numerous springs that bubble out of the hillsides, are scattering wigwams formed of bark, or the naked lodge poles of other huts. These are only the temporary abode of roving bands of Kickapoos or Pottawatomies while on their hunting rounds. Eastward of Vermilion street is, seemingly, a prairie, with a few stunted bushes that grow for a single season, only to be burned to the ground by the autumnal fires.

The first lots in the town of Danville were auctioned on April 10, 1827:

The day of the sale was pleasant, and the warm sun invited a large number of rattlesnakes out of their den in the limestone crevices on the river side at the foot of Clark street. In the afternoon the bidders at the sale amused themselves with a “snake hunt,” killing seventy-five or eighty, some of them over six feet long, in the course of a short time. In this connection the writer will state that for years after the settlement at Danville the neighborhood was infested with great numbers of these serpents, not to mention black snakes, racers, moccasins, and like repulsive, though harmless, reptiles. The rattlesnakes would rendezvous in their dens on the hillside through the winter, and spread themselves over the adjacent country during the summer months. Before the state quarried the stone with which the old abutments at the Wabash railway bridge are built, the rock ledges from which this material was taken stood out in bold relief along the river bluffs at and near Danville. The open seams in the ledges afforded a comfortable lodgment for the rattlesnakes.

At this point in his book, Mr. Beckwith digressed to muse about the manner in which “early settlers clung to the timber”:

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* The Red Bridge was a covered bridge near the confluence of the Vermilion River and the North Fork on the southwest side of Danville.

† Some of the whites who replaced the Indians at Danville also chose to live next to springs. Hiram Beckwith wrote of one such residence: “... following the bluffs around, and near the several springs, after the fashion of the old Indian town, was a house near the foot of Walnut street...”

‡ Beckwith related an incident that occurred “one evening subsequent to 1830,” when a man went a-courting along Vermilion Street south of the public square in Danville. When he arrived at the lady’s home, he found “the shining skin of a rattlesnake coiled up on the doorstep at his feet.”
They did not expect or believe the prairies ever would or could be settled. Indeed they did not wish it; and many of the early comers were dissatisfied, and sold out their improvements and moved to newer counties, when they saw their “cattle range” encroached upon by the advance of farms from the timber line into the open prairie. Gradually, however, the prejudice against the open prairie was overcome; people learned that they could live entirely away from the timber. Settlements were extended progressively from the timber lines, until now the whole intervening space is covered with blooming fields. The monotony of the former waste, prairie landscape is relieved with school-houses, churches, villages, groves, orchards and cheerful farm buildings. Public roads and railways, lined in with fence or hedge, have supplanted the trails of the Indian and the paths of wild animals. The prairie fires no longer light up the evening sky, as in the days of yore. 

Back to nascent Danville: one of the first items of business was the establishment of a public school—

From Vermilion street a little way south of the square, a trail led off southeast across lots to the school-house. It was obscured by thick hazel bushes, whose branches interlocked overhead. The teachers and scholars (as Mr. Davis... and others have told the writer) would have to part the bushes in some places with their hands to effect a passage.

The temporary first school-house was burned up. A Mr. Henry Blunt had collected some two hundred venison hams and stored them in Haworth’s smoke-house, where he was smoking and drying them, intending to ship them to New Orleans by flat-boat. Some of the mischievous men about the town... fired the building. Although his anticipated speculation was spoiled, yet venison half roasted or otherwise was quite cheap in Danville. The market was fairly glutted with it.

Gurdon Hubbard was one of the most prominent of early businessmen in both Danville and Chicago. He laid out Hubbard’s Trace between these two cities. This road, which later became Illinois Route 1, supported Hubbard’s commerce in furs:

In 1827 he... constructed the first frame building... ever erected in Danville or the county. This became the headquarters of the Indian fur trade in this part of the country.

... The Indians would file into town on their ponies, sometimes fifty or a hundred, with their furs,... when trade at Hubbard’s corner would be unusually lively for a few days. The Indians would camp on the bluff east of Walnut street or farther down toward the railway bridge.

* Hazel Street was one of the first streets laid out in downtown Danville. Hiram Beckwith alluded to the brushy character of early Danville when he wrote of “houses scattered around, without any apparent order, some of them hidden in clumps of bushes.”

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... In 1832, the fur trade having declined on account of the scarcity of fur-bearing animals in, and the dispersion of the Indians from, this section of country, Col. Hubbard converted his stock into ... merchandise suitable for white people...

THE REGION’S STREAMS AND COAL DEPOSITS BOTH PROVIDED ENERGY for early industries. The North Fork of the Vermilion River was dammed early in Danville’s history to provide hydropower:

The first mill ... was commenced ... on the North Fork, near the lower end of Main street. ... the stones were cut out of such as could be found in the stream nearby. ... The date of the building ... must have been about 1828, and about two years later a saw-mill was attached.

Amos Williams built the next water mill at Danville, about 1836 or perhaps earlier. The dam had a fall of about six feet (“sufficient head for the modern wheels”), and it was eventually converted to a wool-carding mill. The mill was shut down about 1867, but the dam was still being maintained as late as 1879 so that the mill pond could be used as a commercial supply of ice for refrigeration.

More water-powered mills:

Robert Kirkpatrick built a water-mill on Stoney Creek, † in 1835—a saw-mill—and run it some years.

Hale & Galusha built a saw-mill in 1836.

... Mr. William Sheets ... of Georgetown ... and Mr. Thomas Morgan built the first mill there in 1835. ... There was a corn-cracker and distillery on Brady’s Branch, built as early as 1833. ... Mr. Froman owned the distillery ... Froman built the first flat-boat that ever ran out of this county, in 1834, to carry his produce to New Orleans. ... The trip proved a successful one ... As is well known to the general reader, this flat-boating was a very important industry in those early days. ... The boats upon which the produce of the country was borne to market were made on the streams here, and when unloaded were sold there ... Leonard’s mill was built about 1834, and Jenkins had one farther down stream, near the state line ... .

The first steam-powered sawmill was in place in the North Fork bottomland by 1836. Danville’s first steam grist mill was built in 1854. The earliest steam flouring mill in town

† The Vermilion River basin has two Stony Creeks. This one flows through Danville before entering the Vermilion River south of Interstate 74. The other Stony Creek joins the Salt Fork southeast of Muncie.

* The founders of Danville used boulders from the North Fork as foundation stones as well as millstones. When the first jail was constructed, “Large river stones were put on the ground and a floor of hewn logs placed on that.” 7
was running by 1856. Steam power eventually replaced water power, and the watermills were abandoned. In 1879 Hiram Beckwith made note of a relic of the bygone era of water power:

A few feet above the wagon bridge over the Vermilion between Danville and South Danville, lies a mill-stone which at stages of low water can be readily seen. . . . It was one of the first run of stones ever used for milling here, and was cut out of the boulders . . . to be put into the first mill built here. 7

This volume pays tribute to “one of the old landmarks of Vermilion county,” a woolen mill that was built in 1844 at Danville:

It has been operated by hand, water, and the present method of driving the machinery—steam power. . . . It is located on the bank of the north fork of the Vermilion, just above the bridge, and is supplied with an abundance of water for all purposes by a series of fine springs located farther up the bluff. 7

Coal has long played a role in the economy of Vermilion County, and coal mining has had a big impact on the ecology of the Vermilion River valley. Hiram Beckwith introduced the topic thus:

It is a singular arrangement of nature, of which no very satisfactory explanation has yet been given, that coal is generally only found along timber belts, or in close proximity to the streams which are an accompaniment of these belts. As a rule, no coal has been found in this state five miles away from these streams and forests. It is no part of the duty of the historian to advance theories in explanation of this seemingly strange coincident. * 7

Coal was taken from the Vermilion River valley with vertical shaft mines, horizontal slope mines, and open-pit stripmines. Many of the early mines were small diggings wherever coal cropped out on the side of a valley.

In 1855 the general assembly . . . incorporated the Danville Coal Mining Company. . . . Before this date, however, coal was being mined or stripped in small quantities. . . . W. Carruthers and Ball commenced mining as early as 1853 . . . . . . Michael Kelley has for more than twenty years carried on an extensive business in stripping along the North Fork . . . . Charles Dobbins has for some years carried on the same business, as have also Wm. Shaw and B. Bensel. In the Grape Creek region Wm. Kirkland, Hugh Blakney and Graves and Lofferty have carried on the business; while still farther south, along the

* Both coal and trees were found close to streams because of the steep topography and deeply dissected terrain associated with stream valleys. Coal crops out wherever a river or its tributaries have cut down through coal-bearing formations. Woodland was associated with streams because the water and steep slopes along stream valleys helped protect trees from fires that regularly spread across the prairies and into the woods.
streams which flow through Georgetown and Elwood, numerous parties have from time to time opened up small mines, and some continue to operate them.

... The fine body of coal lands lying just west of the city, and known as Moss Bank, was opened up and worked by J.C. Short & Co., and became the property of the Paris & Danville railroad.

... Various parties have worked small mines or banks all over the coal tract.

... the Moss Bank and South Danville mines ... will give to Danville a permanent prominence of which nothing can deprive her.

In addition to the Moss Bank coal mine, John Short operated a park:

The Moss Bank park was laid out by Hon. John C. Short, when he was proprietor of the property west of town. About eighty acres was laid out in drives and walks, the proprietor intending to make it a pleasant place for spending a shady hour, or a retreat from the dusty streets of Danville. It abounds in shade, and by nature is beautifully situated for such a purpose.

HIRAM BECKWITH PREPARED BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES about several Danville Township residents. These biographies contain snippets of information about the former ecology of the area. For instance, the leather tanning industry, which relied on bark stripped from oak trees, is mentioned in the story of the life of Thomas O'Neal. He established a farm near present-day Westville in 1821:

He first entered eighty acres of land and set out in farming; here he erected a tan-yard which consisted of a large shed, 30 x 30, and ground his tan-bark with a large round stone by horse-power. This tannery was the first in Vermilion county.

Abraham Draper moved to Danville Township in 1830. When he was interviewed for the History of Vermilion County in 1879, he mentioned a tree standing on his farm "that he remembers of noticing in 1830." Evidently Mr. Draper thought it was remarkable for a tree to survive 49 years on his farm.

Dennis Olehy arrived in Danville Township about 1830:

Here he set out in farming, first building a place out of rails in which they might live. This served until they could find better quarters, which he afterward built with a linn tree, making a puncheon floor, a door and a table for the cabin.

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*Moss Bank is a steep, north-facing bluff on the North Fork of the Vermilion River, one mile northwest of the mouth of the river. Moss Bank Park was on the upland immediately south of Moss Park, at Vermilion Heights. The site of the former park is bisected by U.S. Route 150.

† Linn = American basswood (*Tilia americana*).
His first clearing and farming was done with one horse, on a forty-acre farm very thick with timber and hazel-brush.  

Daniel Kyger was heavily involved in milling operations at both Danville and Georgetown. In 1850 he and two partners finished building a steam-powered flour mill at Georgetown—the first in the county. By 1856 he had helped start the first steam-powered flour mill in Danville. In 1865 he began operating Kyger’s Mill at Danville:

This mill was first built by William Sheets and Thomas Morgan in about 1833, and commenced grinding in 1834. . . . In connection with their grist-mill they erected a saw-mill. This was one of the first water mills in this neighborhood, and drew custom for forty miles around. They first commenced with one run of stone, but soon after had two run of stone.  

R.H. McMillen’s family came to Danville Township in 1832. They built and operated “about the first saw and flour-mill in Denmark,” a hamlet on the North Fork of the Vermilion River north of Danville.

M. Ganor of Danville was an avid sportsman. “Mr. Ganor tells us that he and his dogs have spent many hours of lively sport chasing rabbits over what is now the eastern part of the city, and is yet known as Rabbittown.”  

Mr. A.C. Garland of Danville manufactured drainage tiles that were used to convert the region’s wetlands to farmland:

Recently Mr. Garland has established a tile factory, size 210 x 20, where he is able to turn out the finest quality of tile at from two to eight inches in size. His capacity in the manufacture of tile is six thousand per day. He has all the latest improvements, and when in full blast employs ten men.  

In 1873 Gottlieb Maier immigrated to Danville and started a business that depended in part on the harvest of wild fur-bearers: “He pays out annually about twenty thousand dollars for hides, furs, tallow, ‘sheeps,’ etc., shipping most of these goods to Boston, Mass.”  

GEORGETOWN TOWNSHIP IS FEATURED NEXT in the History of Vermilion County. * Hiram Beckwith introduced the township by describing its natural resources:

The Vermilion River runs across its northeastern corner for about five miles, and so deep down is its bed that the surrounding country is easily and perfectly drained into it. The Little Vermilion makes a short turn into its southern border . . . .

. . . The township was originally nearly all timber, there being only about one-third of it along its western border and in its center, which was prairie. Some of the earliest settlements in the county were made within its borders, and

* When this book was published in 1879, Georgetown Township encompassed the area of present-day Georgetown Township as well as McKendree Township.
considerable farms were cleared before people learned that they could live on
the prairie. . . . It was one of the first to be generally settled; the abundance of
its timber, the water supply, the general make of the land, and its proximity to
the salt-works,—which was the center of settlement at that day,—drew to it
those who first came to the county to make their pioneer homes.

. . . The timber of Georgetown was composed principally of sycamore, cotton-
wood, maple, hackberry, beech, buckeye, black-walnut, butternut, elm, ash,
hickory and oak. The oak is being largely used yet as building and fence
lumber, and the black-walnut is being rapidly cut off and shipped east, by
parties who are largely engaged in the business, sending it by rail to all parts
of the country. 7

Mr. and Mrs. Absalom Starr moved to Johnson's Point, two miles west of Georgetown,
in December of 1821:

During that first winter, while Mr. Starr was out on a coon hunt, his shoe hurt
his heel, and after trying ineffectually for some time to cure the troubled spot,
to their great sorrow they learned that a cancer was working rapidly on him.

. . . Mrs. Starr heard of an old Indian doctor whose reputation was above cutting
off a man's best leg to cure his heel, and hunted him up. He . . . went off to the
Vermilion River, about seven miles away, and collected some herbs, which soon
had the effect to cure the troublesome disease. * The Indian called himself "Old
Bonaparte's Indian" . . . . 7

Isaac Sandusky selected a home at a point of timber about two miles east of Westville:

Isaac had been in the war of 1812, and . . . he made his way back to Kentucky
through this region of the country. He decided then, standing on the mound at
Catlin village and viewing the landscape o'er, to some day own an eighty, or at
least a forty, on that beautiful prairie. In 1828, in pursuance of this decision, he
came here and made his home first at Brooks' Point. 7

Andy Reynolds came to Vermilion County as an orphan boy in the 1820s:

One of the earliest of his recollections is standing on the mound in Catlin a cold
winter day to see a wolf hunt on the surrounding prairie. He had grubbed roots
in the timber so long that he thought a prairie could only be of value as a place
to have grand wolf hunts on. 7

* Later in his chapter about Georgetown Township, Mr. Beckwith mentioned that "the
Indian practice of doctoring with herbs and roots, found in profusion at an early day, was quite
common." 7
Aaron Howard first chose to live north of Danville, but "milk sickness" drove him out, and he moved to a farm along Big Branch southeast of Westville.

The History of Vermilion County informs us about early mills in Georgetown Township:

In the earliest times citizens here went to Indiana to get grinding done. The first effort made in this township to emancipate the people from paying toll to the Hoosiers was by Jacob Brazelton, who put up a horse-mill at his place over near the Vermilion.

... William Milikan built a carding-mill about 1830. This was the first mill of the kind in the county. It was run by a tread-power, and the time required to get up steam depended largely on his ability to find the oxen which usually ran in the bush. If they happened to wander over to the Vermilion river in quest of water, he might find them in two days, and then again, a week might ensue before he could card up a job...

William Jenkins built the water-mill on the Vermilion about 1840. This was a good mill and did good work; but high water carried it away.

... Henderson, Kyger & Morgan built the large steam mill at Georgetown in 1850. Mr. Hall had a mill on the Little Vermilion; but the water decreased with advancing civilization, and the mill is among the things that were.

A toll road was built between Georgetown and Perrysville, Indiana. It was paved with boards:

The Perrysville & Georgetown plank-road was among the institutions of the pre-railroad days. It was thirteen miles long, and run very nearly in a straight course, cutting diagonally across sections. The capital stock was $30,000, which proved a dead loss to stockholders, never having paid a dividend. Not only was it a loss as a speculation, but the business men here found that it injured their trade. People would go to Perrysville to trade, as it was a pleasant ride; and the Georgetown folks were glad to let it go down. It was only kept up about four years, and the only evidences left of it are the pieces of diagonal roads still kept up running in that direction.

The village of Georgetown was platted by a Mr. Haworth, whose neighbor was Nelson Moore:

... one day Moore started out with his son W.M. to hunt for a deer in the bushes which grew where the village now stands, and found Haworth and his son measuring off town lots with a mammoth grapevine which he had cut a rod long. In laying off the lots his "vine" needed some stretching, and a little

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* See a footnote on page 25 for a discussion of milk sickness.

† Plank roads enjoyed brief popularity in the early 1850s.
variation in the force employed to do this stretching, will account for the variation which still exists in the size of the lots, some of which are six feet longer than others.

... The log tavern stood near where the post-office is now kept, just north of it, and a log house farther south. This was made of huge sassafras logs, as large as a small barrel. He had to go to Butler's Point to get men to come to the raising. 7

ELWOOD TOWNSHIP IS IN THE SOUTHEAST CORNER of Vermilion County, where a high moraine forms the southern border of the Vermilion River Area: *

The high ridge which runs along the southern boundary of the county extends partially along the southern boundary of this township also, until it is lost in the valley of the Vermilion River. ... Originally, nearly one third of it was covered with timber, the timber land being along its northern and eastern boundary. ... The land of Elwood township, which was covered with timber, is like all other which is thus covered in its nature, and the prairie very similar to other prairie lands, deep and rich, and sufficiently rolling to make it easy to cultivate and drain. ... All along its northern and eastern border the early settlers found the necessary conditions for their pioneer homes, and soon spread over all that portion; but it was twenty-five years before the splendid farms along the ridge came into cultivation. To the resident of the present day, ... that people did not believe these prairies would ever be settled up, must ever be incomprehensible; but the truth of it cannot be doubted in the face of so many witnesses.

... The points of early settlement were, Vermilion Grove, Elwood, Yankee Point and Bethel, or Quaker Point. ... The names given to these different points of early settlement were, in the absence of any villages, a matter of convenience or necessity. Some of them took their names from the first settler; others from the little log churches or meeting-houses, and they from some association connected with them. ... Yankee Point derived its name from Mr. Squires, who was the only eastern man in "this neck of timber," and who came here very early. Bethel and Liberty are from favorite names of the churches there. 7

A salient feature of Elwood Township consists of a triangular area of about four square miles, most of which extends south of the rest of Vermilion County as a wedge into Edgar County. The east and west sides of this triangle form the apex of "Harrison's Purchase," which was sold to the United States by native Americans as the result of negotiations with William Henry Harrison:

* When Hiram Beckwith prepared his history of Elwood Township, it included both present-day Elwood Township and Love Township.

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Harrison ... purchased a piece of land which may be described as triangular at its northern end, but having the Wabash River for its third side. The apex of this triangle is a rock which was out on the prairie a mile north of the grove, the northeast side being a line run from that rock toward the sun at ten o'clock on a certain day of the year, and reaching the Wabash River .... The western line is a line run from the rock directly through a huge elm tree which did stand and now lies in the fence a few rods from John Fletcher's house, extending south through Edgar and Clark counties, and terminating in the northern part of Crawford, thence east to the Wabash River. 7

Pilot Grove lay immediately south of the big boulder that marked the north point of Harrison's Purchase:

Pilot Grove, if unrecorded rumor and unwritten history is to be credited, is from its high ground, when compared with the surrounding timber, and acted unconsciously in directing the party here who came to make the survey of Harrison's Purchase, the two lines of which run through it.

... The land lying between the timber and Ridge Farm was called the "Texas country," because for a long time it was so wild. It began to fill up about 1845, and now embraces some of the finest farms in the township.

... This is the highest timber-land anywhere in this vicinity, and can be seen a great distance.

... The prairie land north and west of Pilot Grove was the last to be brought into general cultivation. For twenty years after good farms existed along the "Points" and groves this beautiful prairie lay open, being entirely destitute of cultivation. When Abraham Smith and his brother William concluded to ... bring the Ridge farm into cultivation, they were cautioned against the folly of going there to live. They were told that no one yet was ever known to live out on the prairie; that he would never have any neighbors .... He thought, however, that the land was better for farming purposes than that in the timber, and that he could better afford to haul his rails and wood out to his prairie home than to try to bring the timber land into cultivation. ... Mr. Smith commenced improving this farm in 1839, and built a house on the east side of the state road ....... The wolves were so troublesome that they would chase the chickens into the yard. 7

The Canaday family came to live in this corner of the Vermilion River Area in 1821. The Canadays brought a few swine with them, but they abandoned the hogs when they decided to go back to Tennessee in the spring of 1822. By the following autumn the Canadays returned to settle permanently in Vermilion County, but—

The hogs they brought first had become wild by the time they got back here, and for years they and their progeny furnished hunting in connection with the
other "game" here. On their return they brought a few cattle with them, and hunted in a few hogs to give them a start.

... farmers all kept a few sheep, being careful to put them in a close pen at night.

... Benjamin Canaday had a small house . . . , and during the winter of the deep snow, "the snow so nearly covered it that one could not see the house till he got right to it. That winter the deer, and pretty much all the game, were destroyed by the snow."

Eli Thornton "was here at a very early day":

He had a water-mill on the Little Vermilion at the Wright Cook Ford. He built it the year after the frost killed the trees in June (probably 1837). The frost which appeared in that month was severe enough to kill the leaves, which had the effect to kill the trees themselves in many localities. The mill was both a saw-mill and grist-mill. He run it until 1857 . . . . . . The Hall mill, on the state road south of Georgetown, has been long gone. Jonathan Haworth built a mill . . . at Cook's Ford, about 1830. . . . The water dried up with the advancing civilization, and the mill went down.

**Catlin Township is featured in the next chapter of the History of Vermilion County:**

Catlin occupies the center of the southern half of the county . . . . . . The Salt Fork runs along its northern border, having along its banks a belt of excellent timber, varying from a mile to a mile and a half in width. The "points" made by these elbows of timber extending out into the prairie, chief among which was Butler's Point, were a principal attraction to the early settlers. The old salt works . . . drew in the first settlers, which, though not really lying in its present territory, was so close by, that that portion of Catlin township was known first of any locality in the county, and long before Danville was dreamed of.

. . . The state road, from Crawfordsville, Indiana, to Decatur, runs through the town, keeping along where the prairie line broke away from the timber, midway between the railroad and the stream. Along this road on either side are situated some of the finest farms in the town, and which have few superiors in the county. These were of course the first to be brought into cultivation, and it was many years after that those on the prairie south of the railroad were settled.

. . . As early as 1850 all the portion north of the railroad had been brought into cultivation; the Sandusky farm had been improved, and the large brick house at the mound south of the village of Catlin had been built. Following the building of the road, all the land along its line was taken up by eastern speculators, and settlers found it to their advantage to go farther south to get cheaper lands. By 1858 all this land southwest of the station was taken and made into farms.

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*The Winter of the Deep Snow was in 1830-31.*

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The point of timber running out into the prairie west of the present village of Catlin was the place of the first settlement, and is historic. It was called Butler's, from James Butler, who was the first settler, and in the course of time the whole settlement came to be known by that name, and continued to be so called until the railroad officials called the name of their station here Catlin.  

A Mrs. Stansbury, the oldest resident of Catlin Township, provided Hiram Beckwith with information about the manner in which the location for the county seat was chosen:

... the commission which had been appointed by the legislature to locate the county seat made its report to the county commissioners, wherein they reported in favor of locating it on the high bluff south of the salt works. Some persons, who thought the commissioners did not know their business, reported around that folks could never get water up there, and a new commission was appointed, which decided on Danville.  

Ephraim and Joel Acree arrived in Catlin Township in 1830, just in time for the Winter of the Deep Snow:

There had been a short corn crop that year, and when the deep snow followed they were just able to hive up for the winter like the bees. At this time game of all kinds was plenty, but that winter made it very scarce. The snow was so deep that there was nothing for the game to live on. The wolves seemed to prosper.  

Henry Jones came to Catlin Township in 1849:

He bought ... land ... until he had about three thousand acres. He provided himself with fourteen yoke of cattle to break prairie with, and stocked up pretty heavily with cattle. ... He engaged ... in the tanning business, and did a pretty fair business; but they were never able to get enough bark, the people all being too busy with their farm work when bark-peeling was in its prime.  

Nothing is left of the old tan-yard but a fine spring of water.  

John Brady came in 1832. “Being one of the early pioneers, he had the choice of location, and being from a timbered country, he located in the timber near where the county farm now is. † Here he improved a large farm . . . .”  

J.C. Clayton was Catlin’s first blacksmith. “He had a large establishment, and engaged in making mole-ditchers ‡ for B. Stockton, who had the right for several counties.”  

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* Bark for tanning could be stripped from trees only during the growing season, the same time when farmers were busy with tending their fields (see page 72).

† Vermilion County’s “poor farm” was in section 24 of Catlin Township, west of Tilton.

‡ A mole ditching machine made a tunnel in the earth that served to drain off water in a manner similar to modern drainage tile lines. But instead of making a ditch for installing tiles, a mole ditcher simply pulled a heavy, bullet-shaped piece of iron through the soil a few feet below the surface. This metal mole forced earth aside and compacted it to form a hollow tube in the
ROSS TOWNSHIP SPANS THE NORTH FORK VALLEY in northeastern Vermilion County:

The north fork of the Vermilion river runs nearly through its center, from north to south . . . , with an eastern branch, which is joined by another branch called the Jordan . . . . Bean creek, a tributary to the middle fork, runs through the northwestern portion of the town in a westerly direction. Numerous small streams and rivulets, fed by living springs, feed these streams, making Ross one of the best watered regions in the county. Along all these streams a splendid growth of native forests grew, a portion of which has, of course, been cut off, the land being made into farms; while in many places where there was only a scant growth, kept down by frequent fires, now a strong, heavy growth shows the rapid increase of western forests.

"Hubbard's Trace," the original highway of travel between this southern country and Chicago, ran through the town, and in time gave place to the old "Chicago road," which was known farther north as "State road," and in Chicago itself became known as State street, a name it yet bears. Along this timber and near this road the first settlements were made, very soon after the county was organized; and its prairies early became the homes, first of the great herds which pioneered these natural fields, and later of the thrifty men and women who brought its broad acres into use.

. . . As early as 1836 Elihu, Isaac, and Nathaniel Chauncey entered a large part of the land in township 21 north, range 11 east, in this and the adjoining town. † The same parties entered a large amount of land in other townships. They were Philadelphians, and never came west to live. . . . These parties are all dead, and the lands have been divided among their descendants. This land has mostly been sold, but some still remains unsold and uncultivated.

The town took its name from Jacob T. Ross, who owned a tract of land in section 9 (21-11), ‡ from which the timbers for the old mill which was built by Clauss on section 5, about 1835, were cut and hewn. † . . . For a long time it was known as Ross' Mill . . . .

ground. This earthen pipe was prone to collapsing and losing its effectiveness as an underground drainageway, so mole drains soon fell out of favor after the advent of drainage tiles.

* In 1879 Ross Township included the area now covered by both Ross Township and South Ross Township.

† Township 21 North, Range 11 West (not Range 11 East) extends across the north part of Newell Township, most of South Ross Township (formerly part of Ross Township), and a small part of Blount Township.

‡ Section 9 of Township 21 North, Range 11 West is immediately south of Alvin.

¶ This mill appears to be the same as one described on page 54 as being built by a Mr. Clawson in 1838.
... Albert Comstock ... entered land in 25 (22-12), * in 1837; a few years later he ... established himself at “Bicknell’s Point,” which was the point of timber north of Rossville, and the most northern of any timber on the Chicago road until you reached the waters of the Iroquois. The beautiful farms which spread over this delightful “divide” hardly suggest the scenes, the trials, the suffering consequent upon the droughts of summer and the severe cold of winter, crossing this wide stretch between the Vermilion and the Iroquois. “Extremes meet,” the philosophers tell us. Those who have crossed this arm of the “Grand Prairie” can testify to the rugged truth of this in their experience. No roads were ever nicer than these prairie roads when the weather was favorable. The smooth even surfaces where the wheels run, divided evenly by the strip of turf a few inches wide in the middle, were perfection itself. Not a jolt or jar marred the even tenor of the teamster’s wagon; no load was too heavy for the ordinary team; and when during the long pleasant falls which were common in this state, the fresh prairie breezes fanned the fatigue from faint teams and drivers, no labor was pleasanter than this. When long-continued rains had swelled the sloughs to swimming rivers, and ruts had been worked into the “black stick” of the prairies deep enough to sink a horse, and black night had overtaken worn out nature, and the terrible storms which swept these great prairies held sway where so recently all was lovely, the change may be partially imagined by the reader of to-day, but never realized. The extremes of pleasurable travel and disastrous suffering met where now the finest farms, the most pleasant villages, and comfortable railroads rule.

The old mill, still in good running order, standing a little northwest of Alvin, is historic. Mr. Clawson put up a saw-mill in 1838, and a year or two later added a grist-mill.

... All settlers hugged the timber line, for the protection which that natural barrier presented. Wild game was plenty. You could shoot prairie chickens from the roofs of the houses. Wild geese were plenty on the prairies, staying here awhile spring and fall. Deer were so plenty as hardly to attract much comment, and wolves would hardly keep away from the dooryard. Sheep could hardly be protected from them day or night. The farmers used to make the trip to Chicago with a drove of hogs, and return in about ten days. Hogs could travel in those days. They used to run in the timber till corn harvest, and then they were collected and fed until they were in “light marching order,”—fat enough that they would not actually run away from the herd,—and then start Chicagoward. Of course the large hogs we have now, well fatted, could never make the trip as they did then. Sometimes when they “got their hogs up” to commence feeding, they were so wild, having run in the timber all the year,

* Section 25 of Township 22 North, Range 12 West is in the center of a triangle formed by Rossville, Alvin, and Henning. Illinois Route 1 crosses the North Fork of the Vermilion River here in section 25.
that they were afraid to eat, and as a precautionary measure, the corn was put into the pen on the sly, so that the stubborn fellows would not get the hint that they were expected to eat it; and again, it sometimes became necessary to hunt them down with dogs and bring them in one at a time . . . .

The next chapter in the History of Vermilion County is about Grant Township:

It was almost entirely prairie, having but a few acres of timber near the center of its southern line, known as Bicknell’s Point, and formed the great treeless “divide” between the head waters of the Vermilion and of the Iroquois. As late as 1860 but little of its land had been brought into cultivation, although the great highway of travel from the south to Chicago ran directly across its center twenty-five years before that time. When in 1872 the railroad was built through it but few farms were intersected. The great prairie from Bicknell’s Point stretching north was the dread of the early settler when he became benighted on his return from Chicago after a ten days’ trip to that their only market. The dark, stormy, wintry nights carried terror to many a household when it was feared that the father or husband or son was trying to find his way home over the treeless waste of the great divide.

A single incident of such tragic nature as to be told over and over again at every fireside in the west forty years ago (which the writer well remembers to have frequently heard told when the wintry winds were whistling their threats at the few obstructions which the early settlers had erected against their unobstructed sweep), will serve to show the terrors which in those days were consequent upon winter travel. In December, 1836, on a mild warm day in which rain and snow mingled until the ground was covered with slush, and everything which travelers wore was wet through, the thermometer ranging above forty degrees, two travelers, Frame and Hildreth, were making their way back toward the settlements on the Vermilion, and, just after night overtook them, when not far from where Hoopeston now stands, the “sudden change” so often alluded to by old settlers struck them. The weather, from ranging above freezing, suddenly dropped to twenty degrees below zero, accompanied by a wind which was severe enough to freeze every article of wet clothing in an instant. The ground, full of water, became frozen in a very few minutes, and no man could stand it for even a short time on horseback. The men walked for a while, until they became numb and lost. To be lost on this great prairie at any time, and under any circumstances of weather, is one of the most painful conditions, mentally, one can be placed in; but lost in a storm, conscious that one is gradually and surely becoming less and less able every moment to care for himself, is as near like enduring the torments of the damned as one cant well imagine. On, on they went, vainly hoping to reach some place where they might at least be protected from the fearful blasts. They had given up the hope of getting what King James asked in somewhat similar circumstances—“rest and a guide, and food and fire”; but they still hoped to find the friendly shelter of Bicknell’s Point. But finally that hope also abandoned them, and, with almost the certainly of death,
they decided to kill their horses and disembowel them, hoping that the friendly shelter of the stiffening carcass and the warmth of the animal heat might save them from certain death. Unreasonable as their hope seems, they actually carried their plan into partial execution, by killing one of the horses, and pushing him over as he fell so that the back would lie toward the west, and protect them in a measure from the terrible blast. The other horse for some reason was not killed, and the two half-frozen men made themselves as comfortable as possible in the shelter which they had thus prepared. In the morning Frame was dead, and Mr. Hildreth so badly frozen that he suffered partial amputation. He died in Carroll township some three years since, living to see almost forty anniversaries of that dreadful night.

... The earliest settlements were made along the Chicago road extending from the present Rossville north. As early as 1835, George and William Bicknell took up the land at Bicknell's Point, which was the last piece of timber on the route to Chicago until the valley of the Iroquois was reached.

... Col. Abel Woolverton, one of the best known of the early settlers in this township, settled in 1849 on section 18, two miles northeast of the Point. His was probably the first settlement out on the prairie, and as others came in his name was given to the neighborhood, and is so called yet. ... He was only able to enter a quarter section at first, but afterward took land in sections 17 and 8. He engaged in farming, enduring the hardships consequent on early settlement on the prairie, raising cattle, fighting rattlesnakes and wolves with the same bravery he had the Indians. There was no market for anything but at Chicago, and there he had to go, over bleak prairies, through rain and mud, which latter was often one of the worst hardships the early settler had to endure.

... James Holmes ... settled on section 16 (21-11), † in the south part of Ross, where his son John was born forty-three years ago, so that he is one of the oldest natives of the northern part of the county. ... He died in January, 1864, at the time of the terrible cold which prevailed all over the country ‡ . . . .

... All the northeast part of the township was open prairie and uncultivated until the railroad was built. William Allen, Esq., was the pioneer in the northern part of the township. ... In May, 1850, he took up a farm on the high land northeast of Hoopeston, where a beautiful spring had attracted attention, and afterward bought more. This was believed to be one of the finest farms, or at

* A more detailed narrative of this ordeal is presented on pages 345-348 (first series) of the History of Iroquois County. † This other account places the site of Mr. Frame's death in or near section 1 of Fountain Creek Township in Iroquois County, about six miles beyond the northern limit of the Vermilion River Area.

† Section 16 of Township 21 North, Range 11 West is between Bismarck and Alvin.

‡ January 1, 1864, was the infamous Cold New Year's Day.
least would become one of the finest farms, in the county; and so old Thomas Hoopes considered it for three years after he bought this land for ten dollars an acre. . . . Mr. Allen has seen this part of the county blossom into fruitful farms. When he first struck plow on his farm here, for miles in all directions, nothing met the eye but prairie-grass; even the great herds of cattle, which afterward were seen in these parts, were absent then.

Amos Thompson entered four hundred acres of land here in 1853, but never resided on it after the railroad was built. His sons came here and turned the raw prairie into city lots.  

Frederick Tilton and his brother made good use of a snowy winter to cross and re-cross the northern part of the Vermilion River Area and the headwaters of the Iroquois River:

In the winter of 1839-40 he and his brother David carried the mails between Danville and the “Buckhorn” tavern, five miles north of Bunkum, in Iroquois county. There was unusually good sledding at that time, and they drove a sleigh sixty miles a day for six weeks—

Thomas Williams followed his uncle, Thomas Hoopes, to Grant Township:

In the fall of 1853 he came to this county; wintered four hundred sheep; the next spring added four hundred more; rented a farm of his uncle Hoopes . . . . This he continued two years; then preempted one hundred and sixty acres two miles west of Buckley, in Iroquois county; ran an ox-breaking team three years; in 1859 . . . returned to Vermilion county to live. 

His brother John came after him:

In the spring of 1854 he came to this county; broke prairie and farmed, and the third year entered three hundred and twenty acres in section 12, in the present limits of Prairie Green township, Iroquois county. . . . On the 1st of January, 1864, memorable as a cold day, he froze his right foot while feeding stock, and all the toes had to be amputated. 

William Thomas arrived in the area in 1862 . . .

. . . and settled on a piece of wild prairie,—one hundred and twenty acres,—five miles west of Rossville, which he still owns, and has brought under a good state

* The activities of Thomas Hoopes, the namesake of Hoopeston, are discussed on page 58.
† These lots were in Hoopeston.
‡ Bunkum was a trading post on the Iroquois River, at the site of the present-day village of Iroquois.
§ That is, he hired out with a team of oxen to plow virgin prairie.
of cultivation. The past two years he has been living in Rossville, where he owns and is operating an extensive factory for the manufacture of drain tile. 7

Hoopeston is in the upper reaches of the North Fork of the Vermilion River, close to the ridge that separates the valley of the Vermilion River from the drainage of the Iroquois River. Thomas Hoopes owned much of the land where Hoopeston would be founded:

Thomas Hoopes, for whom Hoopeston was named, is a good sample of the better class of those fortunate people who have greatness thrust on them without ever praying for it or entertaining any strong faith its coming. . . . He came on here in 1855 and commenced work as best he could. He bought some land . . . and undertook to get it into shape to get a living from it. He brought eight hundred sheep with him, and by taking in a herd of cattle to tend each year, he managed to keep inside of his expenses. There was no place for stopping on the Chicago road from Bicknell's Point to the “red pump,” near Milford, when he made his home on the big prairie. . . . Within three years he got about three hundred acres into good cultivation, having over one thousand acres in prairie grass to keep a herd on. Wool was his principal crop, which was more reliable than now. The vast range was suitable to the health of his sheep, the absence of neighborly dogs was favorable, and, by keeping up in a close pen at night, they were safe from the attack of wolves. Wolves, though apparently bold when they have a free field for escape, are cowards when hemmed in by a high fence. They would not climb into an inclosure where the sheep were in a crowd; they seemed to fear being penned in. He did not raise many hogs, but kept his flock of sheep and herd of cattle increasing. . . . In 1859 he sold a thousand sheep, and during the war he sold off the remainder . . . .

. . . Hoopeston is at the crossing of the Chicago & Eastern Illinois and the Lafayette, Bloomington & Muncie railroads; is situated on the high rolling prairie which forms the dividing ridge between the waters of the Wabash and the Illinois rivers . . . . When the railroads were built through here, in 1871, the entire country, for miles around, with the exception of the Hoopes farm, was an unbroken prairie . . . .

The region around Hoopeston was one of the last big prairie areas in Illinois to be converted to farmland. When railroads finally reached the area, the transformation was swift. As Hiram Beckwith stated, “The history of Illinois may be searched in vain for a parallel to the sudden growth and development of the wild prairie.”

On the 1st of January, 1872, five months after the surveyor’s stakes had been driven in the wild prairie, seventy buildings had been erected and the population was two hundred and forty-five, and by the 1st of January, 1873,—less than one year and a half,—one hundred and eighty buildings were up, the population had increased to eight hundred, and seventeen miles of streets had been graded, three hotels built, a bank started, the principal streets provided with sidewalks, an elevator built, and over forty business houses in full operation. 7
HIRAM BECKWITH'S NEXT CHAPTER IS ABOUT CARROLL TOWNSHIP, which spans the Little Vermilion valley in the south part of the county:

The Little Vermilion runs across its southern end, which, with its numerous branches, gives free watering to nearly all its territory, making it one of the most desirable for stock farms in the county. Originally the water in this stream was sufficient for mills during a considerable portion of the year, now, however, it has materially lessened. The timber along this stream was magnificent, and covered about sixteen sections, or about one-quarter of its territory. There is quite a high ridge along its southern boundary which marks the southern line of the valley of the Little Vermilion. Water and timber, the two prime necessities for early settlements, were here found in such quantities and of such good quality, that it early afforded a home for those coming into the new country.

... As in all new places, a majority of those who first came were of that roving, uncertain class of people, who sell out and move on the slightest provocation; who never know when they are well off; or who, on the other hand, never know how to make a home anywhere,—squatters, who stay in one “neck of timber” one winter, and then go on to the next.

Michael Sullivant was once the biggest landowner in this part of the Vermilion River Area. He added to his holdings by buying 160 acres from Joseph Frazier in 1853:

It had on it the most beautiful growth of black walnut timber in this section. The Sullivants cut it off and made it into rails to fence “broad lands.” The timber, if standing there now, would be worth a fortune at the rates now given.

* In Hiram Beckwith’s time, Carroll Township covered the area now known as Carroll Township plus the eastern part of present-day Jamaica Township.

† The name of Sullivant’s farm is commemorated by the village of Broadlands in the southeast corner of Champaign County. According to the 1882 History of Champaign County, “For many years this section went by the name of the ‘Red-root’ district, but was changed by Sullivant to ‘Broad-land,’ which name it still retains.” The name “red root” referred to the prairie plant now known as New Jersey tea (Ceanothus americanus). Early farmers were especially familiar with the redroot plant because it has a large, woody root that made it difficult to plow virgin prairie.

‡ “Uncle Joe” Cannon of Danville, former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, had this to say about the value of walnut trees in his 1927 autobiography:

A great newspaper of the East, a few years ago, criticised me for saying that Lincoln made fence rails from walnut trees. Why, walnut was the principal hard wood timber of the Wabash valley. I have seen thousands and thousands of walnut logs split into fence rails, and I have seen millions of feet of walnut timber burned to get rid of it. The early settlers were looking for a place to plant corn and wheat, oats and rye, potatoes and turnips, and they burned as fine walnut timber as ever grew anywhere, to clear the ground and make farms. It is all very well to bewail this sacrifice now when walnut is rare and valuable, but
Moses Bradshaw arrived in 1821 and tried to start a farm in the timber:

He had several sons, two of whom ... were able to help him in making a farm in the timber-land; but it was sickly here, and he took the first opportunity to sell out, and went back to Virginia. ... Simon Cox came in 1822 and took up land. He and Myers commenced to build a mill. * First they tried a water-mill, and then put in steam; but neither were practical millwrights, and did not succeed in their enterprise. Peter Summe assisted in building the mill. It was both a grist and saw mill, and, like all these old ones, the stones were cut out of boulders found here. 7

One early resident was killed during an unusual hunting accident:

The first person buried in the Frazier grave-yard was Mr. Helvenston ... He went over to Hickory Grove † on a hunting excursion; he treed the game and cut down the tree, and while the tree was falling, his dog, who had a habit of running for the falling game, made for the tree. In trying to get the dog away the tree fell on him and killed him. 7

George Barnett came from the Bluegrass Country of Bourbon County, Kentucky, in 1828:

He commenced farming operations, and soon engaged in raising stock, having bought the farm with especial reference to that business. He bought some "prairie rooters" ‡ of Mr. Bradshaw ... . As fast as he could he got his land into blue-grass pasture. 7

Those people seventy years ago were making the country fit for civilization and the walnut and butternut trees were in the way of civilization. They were a part of the wilderness.

The last of the walnut forests of the Wabash was a few miles from Danville. It was preserved for many years and was the most valuable piece of walnut timber to be found in this country. It was sold recently for half a million dollars to be cut and sent to market. It may represent one idea of conservation, but I doubt if it added anything to that part of the country, even in its present great commercial value. The surrounding sections were cleared half a century ago, and they have been producing valuable crops and helping to develop a great agricultural State. They have produced enough from the soil to pay for the walnut timber even at the present price several times over. The man who saved that section of walnut timber merely buried his talent and his heirs have dug it up to put on the market. 13

* The mill was along the Little Vermilion River, about a mile southeast of Indianola.

† Hickory Grove was not far away in northern Edgar County.

‡ Free-ranging swine were called prairie rooters, hazel splitters, land pikes, and worse. Solon Robinson declared in 1840, "When I settled in this new country a few years ago, I determined that I never would be the owner of any of that vile race of animals which infest the country, and which, before the discovery of the name of 'land sharks,' used to be known by the name of hogs." 41
Robert Barnett worked as a clerk and invested his earnings in land along the Little Vermilion River:

He has here, running along south of the stream, fifteen hundred acres of as good land as one need wish. For forty years those portions which are intended for pasture have been in blue-grass. The theory in regard to pastures is, that they grow better with age. More particularly is this true of blue-grass. Its roots penetrate farther into the ground, thicken up the growth, and make two blades of grass grow where only one grew before. When white folks came to live in those points of timber where the Indians had made their little villages, and had, by killing out the prairie grass, caused nature to supply its place with the more nutritious and valuable blue-grass, they found a rich and luxuriant growth, which spread all through the edge of the scattering timber. In their ignorance, they did not know that these patches of pasture were the richest legacy left us by the aborigines, but went to work and plowed it up, thereby destroying at least half its value. 7

Abraham Sandusky was living about three miles northeast of Indianola in 1879. "He has a fine farm of seven hundred and seventy acres, and an elegant house, which stands just outside of a fine grove of second-growth native timber." 7

W.H. Adams was a tile-maker in Indianola. "In 1878 he erected a kiln and a 200 x 20 shed and 40-foot drain mill, and engaged in the manufacture of tile, and has now facilities for making five thousand 4-inch per day." 7

**MIDDLEFORK TOWNSHIP IS TREATED NEXT** in the *History of Vermilion County*:

The town of Middle Fork, as its name indicates, lies in that part of the county where the three main branches unite and form the stream of that name. 7

... At the time of township organization it included not only all of Butler township, but all of what is now Ford county, running up to the Kankakee River, and was more than sixty miles long. At that time (1851) there was not an inhabitant north of what is known as Blue Grass Grove, until you reached the vicinity of the Kankakee River, where a few families had collected around Horse Creek 4 . . . .

... The township contained, originally, about twelve sections of timber land, which was more in the form of pretty well defined groves, with little of under-growth, and hazel-brush patches which have since grown into timber land, than of what is generally called timber. The main branch of the Middle Fork, which

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* The tiles were four inches in diameter and probably were a foot long.
*† The three branches of the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River are Bluegrass Creek, Bean Creek, and the upstream continuation of the main stem of the Middle Fork.
† Horse Creek enters the Kankakee River downstream from Kankakee at Custer Park.
comes into the township from the direction of Oliver's Grove, * passes nearly through the town till its junction with Bean Creek, when it turns southwest and passes out. Along this, after leaving the main body of timber on the south, were Collison's Point, † Colwell Timber, ‡ Partlow's Timber, Douglass Moore Timber § and Buck Grove. † The Blue Grass branch, which comes from the north, joining the main branch near Marysville, ** had on it Bob Courtney's Grove and Blue Grass Grove. †† Bean Creek, which, so far as its name is concerned, has a history. It had Merritt's Point, and numerous clumps, †† which were early the homes of those who . . . wanted the advantages which shade and shelter gave to growing herds and fatting cattle. Of all the localities in northern Vermilion none offered a finer opportunity than the town of Middle Fork for early settlement and comfortable homes. In truth of this, the fine farms, the nice residences, the general prosperity, and the uncommon prosperity of a few, all show the town in the best possible light. There were drawbacks, however, that some other localities did not have. Many of the first settlers made their homes along the creek bottoms, seeking protection from the real or imaginary prairie blasts, and trying to use the water of the streams. Without one known exception, such families were the subjects of frequent, severe and fatal sickness. In the light of the present it seems strange that they should have selected such places for their homes. The families which made their homes on the edge of the prairies were not more troubled by sickness than others in new countries. An early settler, when asked why the rich prairies were so long left vacant, replied: “Why! if we had known that anybody could live out there, we would have saved ourselves a great deal of trouble.” It was really believed that they would only be of use as pastures for the great herds of cattle that would roam over them, as the herds do over the vast pampas of South America.

* Oliver's Grove was south of Chatsworth in Livingston County, about three miles beyond the upper reaches of the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River. This Grove was in the headwaters of the state's other Vermilion River, which flows northward to the Illinois River.

† Collison's Point was along Collison Branch at the village of Collison.

‡ Colwell's Timber was along the Middle Fork in the vicinity of Potomac.

§ Partlow's Timber and the Douglass (or Douglas) Moore Timber were along the Middle Fork near Armstrong.

$ Buck Grove bordered Buck Creek, which joins the Middle Fork near Penfield.

** Marysville = Potomac.

†† Bluegrass Creek is north and west of Potomac. The village of Blue Grass was about two and one-half miles north and one mile west of Potomac.

†† In addition to "clump," another local expression for a small grove was "bunch." For instance, a 1908 history of Martin Township in McLean County says, “Another small grove, known as Bray's Bunch, lies about one and a half miles south of Funk's Bunch.” 3

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The streams through the pieces of timber were peculiar in one respect. When first found they seemed to have worn no channels for the water-courses. Every little rain spread them out into great ponds. Whether it was owing to the peculiar nature of the soil, or whatever may have been the cause or causes, they did not wear channels deep in the soil. Wherever there was an obstruction, as a fallen tree, the water poured over and made a deep pond-hole, which remained deep the year around. In these deep places large fish were caught. A gentleman, whose word is entitled to the utmost credit, says that he has known of the catching of a pike in the township fully four feet long. This might be set down by some as a “fish story,” but the writer believes it to be true.

The Blue Grass tract, which lay around and through the Blue Grass Grove, covered several thousand acres, and has been the subject of much speculation. It was originally supposed by some to have been the growth of seeds brought here in some way by the Indians. This view, however, has been pretty generally abandoned, as the history and phenomena of grasses have become better known.

One of the most singular things about these great prairies is, that the native grass which was found growing everywhere when man came here, and which for ages has maintained itself against all the natural elements of extinction, has neither seed nor any other organs of propagation. When once killed or circumscribed in any way, it could not by any process again spread. It was not merely comparatively, but positively impossible to spread it. So far as the writer’s knowledge goes, it was in this respect anomalous. Nature does not seem to have furnished another case of actual absence of the quality of propagation. Wherever this was destroyed nature supplied its place with another grass, and in this part of the state that natural growth was blue-grass, which was, and is, just as much a natural growth as was the prairie grass. The Pottawatomie and Kickapoo Indians had long had a home in this grove. They had cultivated in their own rude way a small patch of corn, which had destroyed the prairie grass not only where they had actually planted, but all around where they lived and where their horses stayed. Blue-grass “run in,” as the saying is, or more correctly, was furnished by nature according to a not well understood natural law. And this is all the mystery there is in regard to the great blue-grass pasture that was found here.

The first settlers found corn growing here. Their method of planting and cultivating differed somewhat from that in vogue since Brown invented his cornplanter, and can be easily described. No plow was known to Indian farming. The corn was planted in hills, little less distant than now, and was hoed by the women, and hilled up about as we do potatoes. The next year the hills were planted between the rows of last year’s stalks, and the earth which had been hilled up around the former was removed, as needed, to the growing hills, to

* Beckwith’s theory is based on the incorrect premise that native prairie grasses have no means of reproduction.
“hill them up.” The only variety of corn they were known to use here was the peculiarly spotted ears, red and white. When the corn was harvested ... caves were dug in the dry knolls, in which it was buried until it was wanted.

The earliest settlements were made in what is now Middle Fork, in 1828. Mr. Partlow and wife came from Kentucky in 1829 . . . . They made a cabin at Merrill’s Point, and the sons took claims in sections 5, 6, 7 and 8 (21-13), * south of where Armstrong now is. ... the first year was followed by the memorable winter of the deep snow, the like of which has never been seen here since. It was to the new-comers a most unexpected and disastrous winter. The depth of the snow prevented getting around to do anything. They had to live on what they could pound up in their mortars. Deer, the principal meat-producing game, were easily captured, but they soon became so poor that their meat was not fit to eat. There was no such thing as going to market, and their cattle died from lack of food and care. The winter filled up the measure of their disappointment, and the next year they took the back track and went to Kentucky, all but Asa Brown, who said he had nothing to go to there, and he “could but perish if he staid.” They afterward returned and settled on the land they had taken up . . . .

... Charles Bennett settled at Collison’s Point in 1828, and was one of the first settlers in here. ... He entered land on Sullivan’s Branch (called so till 1851), eighty acres at first, and afterward forty more, and was really the first settler on the now famous Bean Creek. ... His son Caleb ... is believed to be the “oldest inhabitant” now residing in the town, having lived here continuously for fifty-one years . . . . Caleb says, in speaking of those “good old times,” (?) “We did not fail, under any circumstances or provocation, to have the ague every summer as regularly as that solar season came around. People had not got to living out on the prairies then, and those who lived on the creek bottoms nearly all died. We thought it a ‘severe dispensation of Divine Providence,’ but now the general opinion, after a half century of additional light on the subject, is, that it was the ‘milk-sick,’ whatever that may be.” They raised their own flax, corn, wheat and hogs, the real “hazel splitters,” called so from a very general belief that they were so thin, and had such sharp noses, that they could go through a hazel bush or any like substance which stood in their way. A great many ludicrous stories have been told about this much-abused breed of “prairie-rooters,” which were in many respects a very valuable, probably the most profitable, “farming implement” the early settlers had. ... In the then condition of the fields and farms; they were the only kind that could be kept; they did not require any grain or grass pasture; they lived in the woods till corn was ripe . . . . . they were about the only crop the farmer raised which would always bring cash. Caleb Bennett went out on the prairie and took up the fine farm now owned by Zack Putnam, and improved it. He sunk three artesian
wells, one of which is the finest in the county." By boring thirty feet he got a
permanent three-inch stream, which is carried up high enough to furnish a good
water-power to drive a churn.

... Richard Courtney was born and grew up to early manhood in Franklin
county, Ohio. The family came on here in 1835, and it was so rainy, and the
streams so swollen, that they could not get farther, so they concluded to enter
land here on the famous blue-grass tract, which the Indians had just abandoned.
There were then standing, where his pasture now is, the stalks of a former
year's crop of corn. The untouched grass of thousands of acres grew rank
around and through the grove. The underbrush of young trees had been kept
down by prairie fires, and where now forest trees stand, as fine winter pasture
as ever was known furnished feed enough for thousands of cattle. The few cows
that the settlers kept came in at night loaded down with milk, and almost every
hollow tree in the grove was the home of bees. There never was a land which,
to the immigrant seeking new homes, flowed more literally with milk and honey
than this. The Courtney family at once went to breaking prairie, and hired a
hundred acres turned and planted to sod corn. They got a good crop, but did
not know what to do with it. It was only worth six cents a bushel, and no
market for it at that price. They did not raise much wheat... Deer, geese,
turkeys and prairie chickens were numerous. They kept a few sheep, but the
wolves were so troublesome that it was almost impossible to protect them.

... Mr. Courtney was once on a trip to Chicago, and having in his wagon some
corn of the large white variety, such as he was in the habit of raising, to feed on
the road, a couple of Yankees, who were looking for the first time at the prairie
wonders of Illinois, ... commenced asking questions, Yankee-like. They asked
Courtney what it cost to raise such corn. He told them that he did not calculate
that it cost him anything to raise it, and explained that the land had to be broken
before it was fit for any crop. Then, while the prairie sod was rotting for the
next year's crop, one of the boys who had nothing else to do dropped the corn
in the crevices between the sods, and they went on about their business, allow­
ing the corn to have its own way until it was ripe; then they picked what corn

* An artesian well is one in which water rises in the shaft of the well because it is under
pressure. If the water ascends so high that it spills onto the ground, it is called a flowing well.
The History of Iroquois County discusses artesian wells in the region:

Wells are obtained at a depth varying from twenty-five to 150 feet. ... Until 1854 none
but surface wells were made. These customarily failed in the summer season, and the
deprivation suffered was always serious, especially as cattle had to drink from stagnant
pools, and, swallowing leeches, were attacked with what people called "bloody murrain,"
a disease which popularly covers a multitude of disorders. Much stock was lost every year;
and more than this, the health of the country was greatly affected. ... Probably there are
now not fewer than two thousand of these wells in the county. The artesian region is about
twenty miles wide, and not far from forty miles long. Its direction is northwest and
southeast, and extends from Ford county across Iroquois into Indiana.
they wanted, say twenty to forty bushels to the acre, and left the rest for the cattle to live on during the winter.

... There were no settlements on the prairies until 1849, when the rush of immigration came in in anticipation of the passage through congress of Douglas' Illinois Central Railroad bill, by the discussion of which attention was directed to the great fertility of the prairies, which only needed the aid of railroads to bring their products into market. The people here had supposed that the prairies back of them were their heritage for "range" as long as they should want them, but waked up suddenly to the fact that all this land was being taken up, and had to buy at increased rates to secure themselves against being hemmed in.

... None of the other members of the Courtney family reside in Middle Fork. Robert Courtney, who was not a relative of the family heretofore spoken of, came here before they did some four years. ... He claimed all the land that joined him, and when Mr. Cross came up from Danville and staked out a piece of blue-grass pasture to put his cattle on to feed, Robert undertook to drive him off. ... He never gave much attention to farming, but hunted and watched a few cattle.

... Mr. Meneley, who was himself a millwright, built a saw-mill a little way down stream from Marysville in 1837. ... In 1872 a run of stone was put in. This is the only water-mill ever built in town.

Bean Creek, the eastern branch of the Middle Fork, was first known as it "Sullivan's branch," but it afterward came to be known by its present name, from certain yarns that Albright spun in regard to the peculiarities of the people who lived along its banks and the qualities of the stream itself. ... He said that the stream run bean-soup, and the banks were supplied with a natural growth of this nutritious vegetable, ready baked to a beautiful brown for the table ... .

... Marysville is a pleasant little village of four or five hundred inhabitants, built on the prairie, but pretty nearly surrounded by the timber ... . The land is pleasantly rolling, and capable of easy drainage to the creek. ... Where main street now is was timber, but north of there was open prairie. 7

When the History of Vermilion County was published in 1879, John Wright was the "oldest living settler of Middle Fork Township." He was born in 1808 in Kentucky and came to Vermilion County at the age of 21. His biography states, "He distinctly recollects seeing deer, wolves and Indians." 7

OAKWOOD IS THE NEXT TOWNSHIP treated in the History of Vermilion County:

* Although this story is related as if it might be tongue-in-cheek, see page 99 for corroborating testimony.

† Marysville = Potomac.
The history of Oakwood township is important, not only on account of its early settlement, but because of its natural advantages as well. Its prairies are rich and extensive, its timber land fully sufficient, while the wealth of its coal banks is incalculable.

... In surface and soil the township is diversified. There is little of the soil, however, that cannot be said to be very deep, rich and productive. On the eastern end of the township the broken surface is not quite so attractive to the eye, nor perhaps as remunerative to the laborer; but it furnishes timber for those who dwell in the prairies. On the east end of the south side the same remark would apply. The western border is particularly flat in some places, so that the music of the cheerless frog may often be heard as he boasts of his broad domain. Beside the flat surface, there is little else to complain of in regard to Nature's gifts to Oakwood. This defect is largely overcome by draining. In fact, the level land is said to be superior to any other, when well drained. The farmers of Oakwood are draining, within the last few years, as rapidly as they can. All kinds of ditching is done, but tile draining is the most certain and successful, although we were told of a mole ditch which had been in successful operation for more than twenty years. Oakwood is prairie land, with the exception of a band of timber on the east and southeast, and a belt which follows Stony Creek about half way across the township, from the south. These furnish all the timber necessary for the improvement of the prairie portions. There is plenty of water in most parts. On the eastern border is the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River; on the south side is the Salt Fork; through the center we find Stony Creek... 7

Hiram Beckwith's treatment of Oakwood Township discusses individuals and families who immigrated to Oakwood Township between 1818 and about 1822. His discussion then continues,

It is quite probable that the next family that came in here after those already mentioned was that of the man who built the old water-mill on the Salt Fork where the present steam and water mill is located. † This mill was in operation as early as 1826; how long it had been running previously we are not quite sure.

... Henry Sallee came ... in 1834. He soon ... located on the east side of Stony Creek, in the edge of the timber ... .

... When the salt works began to be operated quite extensively, settlements were made up the Middle Fork. In the timber there were a number of settlers and "squatters," many of whom went away as the country began to be settled up. But a number of the earlier ones remained, and their descendants may still

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* Mole ditches are discussed in a footnote on page 52
† This mill is further described on page 69.
be found, some on the prairie and some still clinging to the woods, indulging
the delusion that residence on the prairie requires a hardihood, either enforced
by poverty or prompted by a recklessness that abandons all ideas of home. 7

After telling the stories of many more people who moved to the area, Mr. Beckwith wrote,

These are the principal settlers of the township in the timber. A few of those
already mentioned got out short distances from the timber. Mr. William Parris
claims to be the first man that ventured out into the prairie in Oakwood town-
ship. He moved from the state road, where he had been since 1834, to the edge
of the prairie northwest of Muncie, in 1842. He then went farther out and
moved a house into the prairie where J.M. Havard now lives. This house was
brought all the way from the Salt Fork and put up where it still stands, in
1844 . . . . But this was only a short distance from the timber. At that time,
even, large tracts of land lay unoccupied and almost unfrequented within the
present limits of Oakwood township; all the western part of the township was
open and much of it afterward sold at very low figures: such as was denom­i-
inated swamp land was sold as low as twelve and a half cents per acre. The first
to settle in the prairie northwest of where the village of Fithian now is, was
James H. Black. His residence was beyond the settlements entirely; he was
deemed crazy, almost. The first settlers had thought that if they secured the
prairie adjoining the timber no one would ever go beyond them, and they would
thus have perpetual range on the prairie. Mr. Black made his home where he
now lives in 1856; here he bought two hundred and forty acres of land and
improved it . . . . These pioneers of the prairie have enjoyed a remarkable
degree of good luck. They bought their land for a trifle; they were not under
the necessity of clearing it before they could cultivate. They were not compelled
to fence for some time, and all they required to become independent was a
determination to stay right there. Their land has increased in value more than
tenfold in many cases, and what could have been bought for a few hundreds then
is worth as many thousands now.

In following up Stony Creek the early settlers began to get out into the prairie
somewhat. At the "Crab Apple Grove" * we find Joseph L. Shepherd, in 1849.
. . . A little farther up, and more decidedly in the prairie, we find James Gor-
man as early as 1853. From about this time the active occupation of the prairie
may be dated. When we look over this broad area of productive farm-land, and
see the immense crops of corn, oats, wheat and potatoes that are annually pro-
duced, and the herds of cattle and droves of hogs that go to feed the hungry
multitudes of our large cities, and then remember that twenty-five years ago all
of this was unknown; that croaking frogs and creeping serpents occupied these
rich fields, the progress of a quarter century provokes our wonder as well as
challenges our admiration. 7

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* Crab Apple Grove was on Stony Creek near Fithian.
Under the heading of EARLY INDUSTRIES, Beckwith first discussed the saltworks on the Salt Fork. Then he described the early mills in Oakwood Township:

In point of time, the old water-mill on the Salt Fork came in next after the industry above mentioned. It was put up at a very early date; in 1826 it was in active operation; it continued for a number of years. At that time people would come all the way from McLean county in order to get their grinding done. The mill stood out in the middle of the stream just north of the present mill; it was built of logs, and ran, as all other mills did at that time, by water-power. It was succeeded in about the year 1837 by a mill put up by Aaron Dalbey . . . . . . In 1873 C.M. Berkley bought the mill and has been running it since that time . . . . It is 30 x 42½ feet; it has both water and steam power. The supply of water is so constant that the steam is seldom used. The mill is situated just north of the south line of Oakwood township.

The first mill on Middle Fork is in dispute. . . . One old settler tells us that Mr. Whitsill built the first mill on Middle Fork about 1832 or '33 . . . ; this was a grist-mill with a saw-mill added; it finally went down on account of age. Another man, who has been in this country more than fifty years, tells us that James Howell built the first mill on Middle Fork; . . . and next James Cunningham ran it till it went down. This was first a saw-mill, but it finally had a corn-cracker attached before it closed. About forty years ago James George built a grist-mill on the Middle Fork and operated it eight or ten years . . . . . . Done & Byerly rebuilt the mill and set it to going with new energy, but it soon passed into the hands of Swift, of Danville, who owns and runs it at the present time. 

Under the heading of COAL:

Aside from the fertility of the soil, the most valuable natural endowment of Oakwood township is her coal. It is of good quality and very abundant; there have been such quantities taken from the banks that the farmers could almost get it for hauling away. . . . The first use made of this coal was probably by Mr. Vance in boiling salt-water; he began using coal about 1830.

A paragraph from RAILROADS AND HIGHWAYS:

The oldest wagon-road in this township, or anywhere in the western part of the county, is the old State Road, which dates back to pioneer days. It runs obliquely through the south part of the township, passing out at the south side about two and one-half miles from the county line. On this road the early settlements on the south and west side of the township were made. It is still much traveled. There were roads along the timber in various places at quite remote dates, but we found it impossible to trace their origin. At present nearly every section line in the township is a laid-out road, while there are many that do not follow lines. The level character of the country makes it necessary that these be either graded or drained. In some places we find thoroughfares that must be well nigh impassable in rainy weather, but generally the roads are in
good condition. This is more especially true of those that lead east to Danville, and there are several. 7

The biographical section for Oakwood Township has this entry about Henry J. Oakwood:

He came to this county with his father, Henry Oakwood, in 1833. . . . Henry J. grew to manhood on his father's farm, and began for himself by working around. He bought his first eighty acres of land on the north side of his father's farm. It was low prairie, and some of the early settlers were sorry that he should take hold of such a bad piece of property. But his land, when drained, proved to be a good investment. 7

John McCarty came to live along the Salt Fork in 1836:

He staid there one year, and then came to where the widow now lives. . . . Mrs. McCarty is one of the few remaining persons who settled in this neighborhood when the prairies were yet undeveloped wastes, and Stony Creek had no inhabitants but Indians. 7

The next chapter in the History of Vermilion County is about Blount Township:

Its surface is higher in the middle and north, where the prairie lies, and was principally covered in its southern half and along its eastern and western boundaries with a stalwart growth of forest trees of oak, walnut, maples, and here and there a beech, which is, so far as the writer knows, the most northerly appearance of this forest tree in this state. 6 The timber line has been very materially increased since the earlier settlements by the protection which civilization has thrown around it. Where originally only a few scattering trees stood, like sentinels on an advanced picket, is now found a full growth of beautiful timber. A few farms have been made, of course, where timber originally grew, but an old resident says there is much more forest in the township now than when white men first came into it.

The Indians were still here along the banks of the Middle Fork when the early settlers came. For four or five years they were here irregularly, remaining a part of the year near the famous spring, which attracted their attention, on the present farm of Cyrus Crawford, on or near section 8 (20-13). 7 . . . At this time the Indians were not permanently located here, but spent a portion of their time here, while getting ready to move across the Mississippi River. They numbered fifteen hundred at that time.

* Except for a few small stands along Lake Michigan, the American beech (Fagus grandifolia) reaches its northern limit in Illinois in the Vermilion River valley.

† The farm was in section 8 of Township 20 North, Range 12 West (not Range 13 West), near the confluence of Windfall Creek and the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River.
Samuel Copeland was among the first to settle here, if not the very first, in Blount township. He settled in a bay of the prairie, on section 14, and resides at the same place yet, within a few rods of the place where he stuck stakes fifty-one years ago. He was led to settle here because he thought it was healthy and would soon settle up.

... The same year, 1828, the Fairchild family, a family which has, perhaps, exerted as wide an influence as any one in the township, came here to reside, and formed the nucleus of what was known as the Fairchild neighborhood, nearly two miles northwest of Mr. Copeland.

... Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Fairchild lived here on the place he first entered, on section 4, bringing up their large family to honest industry....

Hiram Beckwith interviewed Hannah Fairchild, the daughter-in-law of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Fairchild:

They went to Paris for their grinding, until Mr. Treat built his mill at Denmark, and after high water carried that away Alex. Bailey began a mill which Wyatt completed and used. ... Snakes were the chief causes of fear. At one time, just as she had finished getting breakfast by her fireplace, she ... saw a snake crawling out of the hollow fire-log. She called her husband to kill it, and, by the time that was done, another came out of the same cavity. At another time she saw one hanging down from the unlathed floor-timbers over her bed....

Beckwith portrayed conditions around the year 1835:

About one-half of this township was then timber; some of it has been made into farms, and timber has grown up where before it was comparatively open. Hunting was the principal business followed. There was not in these parts much of such enterprise as we have since seen. Sickness was terrible. Whole families would be down with sickness at the same time. The ague, the milk sickness, and other diseases that were consequent upon early settlement, were so common that people were broken in spirit, and their energy was sapped.

* Samuel Copeland selected a site on the divide between the North Fork and the Middle Fork, near what was to become the crossroads of Snider. Later in his volume, Beckwith wrote that Copeland initially bought land immediately north of section 14: “He first entered the southeast quarter of section 11, town 20, range 12.” At that time, “there was not a single residence of a white man between his place and Chicago.” At first the Copeland family constructed a shanty of rails. When it came time to erect a log cabin, “He was obliged to go from seven to ten miles to get men enough to help him raise the structure.”

† Several times later in this volume, Hiram Beckwith stated that the Fairchilds came to Vermilion County in 1829.

‡ The Fairchild Cemetery in section 10 of Blount Township is protected as an Illinois Nature Preserve because it harbors an exceedingly rare remnant of native savanna vegetation.
The Higginsville neighborhood was an early focus of white immigration:

Mr. Oxley, about the year 1832, made a tannery east of Higginsville. * He had about eighteen vats, using the oak bark, which was very plenty on the trees, but difficult to obtain. This may seem strange, but the reasons for it are plain. Bark will peel only during the summer months, commencing about the time of corn-planting, and sticking fast by about the middle of September. A sudden change in the temperature, such as occurs in September, will stop bark peeling in an hour. The months of the year in which nature allows bark-peeling were the only ones that laboring men here had enough to do, and it was an industrious man who could find time between corn-plowing and harvest, or between harvest and threshing, to peel a few cords of bark. Tanners had in those times not sufficient capital to buy sections of timber land, cut off the oak for the bark, and let the land go back.

... In 1836 Amando D. Higgins ... and Marcus C. Stearnes entered the east half of the northwest quarter of 36 (21–13), and bought sixteen acres off the south end of the east quarter of the southwest quarter of section 25, to bring them out to the road, and laid it out in town lots, platting and recording it in January, 1837, and called it “Vermilion Rapids.” The plat was on both sides of the stream, and showed the “river” to be about ten rods wide, and large enough to float a steamer. The “rapids” were the main feature of this speculation, as no boat could pass up stream any farther than here. Along the river front of this “town,” boats could take on the products of the rich farming lands for miles around, and discharge the merchandise brought from foreign climes in rich profuseness. Direct communication would be kept up all the year with New Orleans, Rio, Cuba and Europe, except a couple of winter months, when the people would be in constant anticipation of the opening of spring, and the revival of business activity along her wharves and in her great warehouses. The rapids, unless removed by government authority and appropriation, must ever remain a bar to extending navigation farther up stream, and this city could not help being the grand mart of trade for a hundred miles around. ... He never sold a lot. Morgan Rees now farms the land which Higgins intended for a mart of trade. The writer of this waded across the “rapids” of this paper city in May, 1879, without wetting his feet, although there was water enough there to have wet his feet if he had been shoeless. The property ... came to be known as Higginsville. Amando had a store and commenced to build a mill half a mile west of where the Higginsville store now is, and Ebenezer finished it after it came into his possession, and ran it a few years, when the high water swept it away.

* Higginsville was originally platted along the Middle Fork on a direct line between Collison and Jamestown. Present-day maps locate Higginsville at a fork in the road on the upland about a mile east of original townsite.
Naffer & Smalley built a saw-mill three-fourths of a mile southeast of H. in 1832. It did very good work and sawed up a good deal of stuff, for hardwood lumber was in demand for fencing, building, furniture and other such purposes. A grist-mill was afterward added to it, and did pretty good custom-work. It run till about 1860. Not a vestige of it remains now.

Henry Harpaugh . . . came . . . in 1836 . . . . He built a shop right in the road east of Higginsville . . . .

. . . Cyrus Crawford settled the same year, 1836, southeast of him, on the Danville road, and still lives there. . . . Mr. Elliott lived a half mile out on the prairie east of them, which was the farthest extent anyone had then tried.

. . . Peter Cosat came here in 1830 and commenced a farm on section 11 . . . . . .
. . . When he first came here he could ride anywhere through the timber without encountering so much as an ox-goad, † and it was not until the fire had been kept out several years that the undergrowth began to fill up the timber.

. . . Old Abram Blount came here to live in 1830, and took up land in section 28 (20-12) ‡ in the timber . . . . . . He became dissatisfied with the country, however. He had lost seventeen horses, and thought their death was caused by milk sickness, and offered to sell out; he sold to Mr. Snyder, and went away. 7

Lewis Swisher came to live about two miles north of Danville in 1828. "The subject of this sketch left there on account of milk-sickness, of which disease he had a slight attack . . . ." 7

A Baptist church-house was built at Higginsville in 1837: "The siding was made of black-walnut, quite common before the days of pine lumber; the floor they made of ash." Another church was erected nearby in 1846: "Old James Magee, who had a saw-mill up in Middle Fork, sawed the lumber and gave the black-walnut boards for the seats as his part of the work." 7

Enoch Vansickle was married in 1837:

Mr. Vansickle had only forty acres when he married. He tried hard for years to open up a farm in the timber, but as long as he worked at that he gained but little. Finally he went on the prairie, where he soon prospered. He now owns two hundred and ninety-six acres of land. . . . Mr. Vansickle was . . . one of the

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* Cosat's farm was in the vicinity of Johnsonville, on a tributary to the North Fork of the Vermilion River.
† The driver of a team of oxen used a slender but stout pole such as a hickory sapling to goad the animals.
‡ Section 28 of Township 20 North, Range 12 West includes the northeast corner of Kickapoo State Park.
early settlers of the county, helping to change it from a barren wilderness to its present prosperous condition. 7

Here are two of Hiram Beckwith's "OTHER ITEMS" about Blount Township:

In 1859 Henry and Andrew Wood built a saw-mill and grist-mill on North Fork, near the northeast corner of the township. It was a good mill with two run of stones, and had sufficient water to run nearly all the time. They did it good custom business and some merchant work.

Allen Anderson came here from Michigan in 1866, and put up a steam saw-mill on section 26 (20-12). * He bought sixty acres of timber land and cut it off for lumber. It was a splendid piece of timber. The mill ran here about eight years, and he then sold it to William and John Lee, who moved it to section 36. † 7

PILOT TOWNSHIP IS THE NEXT ONE discussed in the History of Vermilion County:

No section of country in this part of Illinois presents a more attractive view than that occupied by Pilot township.

... The surface of this township is undulating, or gently rolling, in the central part. In the south and southwest portions the tendency is to flatten out and become too level. Along the eastern edge we have the brakes of the Middle Fork. There is a high portion of the township which is known as California Ridge. It is the water-shed between the waters of the Salt and Middle Forks. It is exceptionally high ground for this country, and has on it some of the most desirable farms in the state of Illinois. Nearly all of the land is prairie. There is some timber on the eastern side along the Middle Fork, though not much of the Middle Fork timber extends into Pilot township, and there is a small grove near the center of the township known as Pilot Grove. This point of timber, away out in the prairie, away from any stream, and on the highest portions of land in the country, very naturally attracted the attention of early settlers. It was called Pilot on account of its peculiar situation, this rendering it a kind of guide,—a kind of beacon-light to the explorers of the prairie. The township derived its name from this grove. There are no streams in Pilot of importance, with the exception of Middle Fork, which skirts the edge on the east, now in and now without the limits of the township. The head waters of Stony Creek take their rise in the western part, and there is a small stream flowing into Middle Fork from the northeastern part, called Knight's Branch. But water is furnished by good wells in sufficient quantity for man and beast, and is elevated to the surface by the power of the wind, which in this country has free scope, and is almost constantly blowing.

* Section 26 of Township 20 North, Range 12 West is on the divide between the North Fork and the Middle Fork, west of Lake Vermilion.

† Section 36 is immediately west of the dam for Lake Vermilion.

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There is no village within the borders of Pilot. ... It is entirely devoted to agricultural interests, and these are well represented. The soil is black, deep and fertile. In some places it is necessary to drain in order to secure good results, but there is a greater portion of this township that will yield good crops without draining than of any other, perhaps, in the county. Corn, wheat, oats, flax and grass, are the principal products. Cattle and hogs are grown in vast numbers. There is more than the usual amount of grazing and cattle-growing. Sheep are kept quite extensively by a few, and they report the business successful. It is said to be the best paying business that can be followed in this country. Very little of the vast acres of corn are shipped. It is generally bought up by the cattle-feeders in the neighborhood. A good thing in Pilot is the herd law. People fence in their stock instead of their grain. This they found easier and less expensive. Vast areas of corn and other grain may be seen growing by the roadside, with nothing in the shape of a fence anywhere in sight. Pilot, like some other portions of West Vermilion, suffers socially from a number of large land-owners. When this country began to settle up, men who realized the importance of the movement strove to get possession of large areas, that they might have the advantage of the rise in value. The prairies of Pilot offered as attractive farms as any in the country, and accordingly we find here a number of farms, each of which includes vast areas. These would not have been as detrimental to the best interests of the community, had the owners been able, in every case, to improve them and keep them up with the progress of the times.

... The points for early settlement were two,—the timber of Middle Fork and Pilot Grove. Accordingly, we find settlements made at the places at quite an early date. The first white settler within the limits of this township is not now positively known. ... It is probable that James McGee was the first man in here. He came, as near as can now be ascertained, in 1824 or 1825. ... Mr. Griffith, we are told by some, came before this man. Griffith was in what is now Oakwood township, but just on the edge, and in the same neighborhood. In 1827 Morgan Rees and the Juvinalls came into the township and settled on the Middle Fork, above where the others had stopped.

... The first settler at Pilot Grove is in dispute. ... Certain it is that Mr. Allcorn was there in 1830. ... The grove, and quite a large scope of land around it, is now occupied by W.H. Fowler. For some time this has been the seat of a large farm. It certainly is a good place to excite the energy of an ambitious man. The first settler in the western part of the township, in the prairie, was Robert Butz; but this was recent as compared with the settlements on the Middle Fork. His son, J.K. Butz, has one of the best improved farms in the county. He began on it as wild prairie in 1859.

... A TILE FACTORY

Is in successful operation in this township. The surface of the country here is not particularly level, but it soon runs into that kind of surface as we go out
from the "California Ridge." This factory was built in the fall of 1877. It is located in the northeastern part of the township. The kiln is 15 x 17 feet, the shed 24 x 100 feet, and the round-house forty-two feet in diameter. It is capable of turning out two thousand six-inch tiles per day. They are selling quite a large number of tiles. This country when thoroughly drained will be unsurpassed in fertility, as it is now in soil, in the United States. It is certainly commendable that an effort be made to manufacture so necessary an article in the community in which it is needed.

HIGHWAYS.

As Pilot lies principally on a prairie ridge, there were few public thoroughfares in early days. Persons traveled across the prairies in those days without roads, or even paths. For many years after settlements were made along the timber, the traveling over the prairie was done by direction. The traveler would ascertain the direction he must take to reach his desired destination, and then keep to his course, over pathless waste, crossing streams and swamps as best he could. A few roads along the Middle Fork date back to the days of early settlement; more recently nearly all the section lines have been made public highways. As the herd law is operative here, all that is necessary for a road in many places is a space left between the cultivated portions of adjoining farms. There are few streams, and consequently few bridges are required. In many places the roads present a pleasing appearance on account of the clover and timothy that grow beside them.

Andrew J. Michael was born in Pilot Township in December 1834:

In 1856 he began for himself. In 1859 he went to Colorado. He broke prairie previously with ox-teams for five years. Mr. Michael has made all his wealth since 1856. He owns two hundred and fifteen acres of land, which is clear of encumbrances of all kinds.

J.K. Butz was considered "the elegant man of the township":

They moved to the place where they now live in 1861. They have four hundred acres there. They began on wild prairie, and now have one of the finest farms in the state of Illinois. He keeps his place mostly in grass, and raises stock. He has a great number of trees of different kinds on his place, both fruit and forest trees.

NEWELL TOWNSHIP LIES BETWEEN THE NORTH FORK of the Vermilion River and the state line, and it includes the north part of Danville:

The pioneers were early attracted to this section of country. Its rich soil, pure water, abundant timber, and picturesque configuration, afforded strong inducements to them to accept with cheerfulness the deprivations of the border. To the Le Neves must be accorded the honor of making the first beginning
in Newell township. In the fall of 1823, Obadiah Le Neve journeyed on horseback from Vincennes to St. Louis, and thence into Northeast Missouri, and on his homeward trip made a circuit in northern Illinois. With very correct judgment he pronounced the region enclosed in the present limits of Newell township the best that he had seen. Obtaining the numbers of the following tracts—W. ½ N.W. ¼ Sec. 23, and E. ½ N.E. ¼ Sec. 24, town 20 N., range 11 W., 3d principal meridian—he purchased those pieces. Just prior to Christmas, in the year 1824, Obadiah and John Le Neve set out for their future home.

On arriving at their destination, they rived a few rails and laid up a square, chinking and filling the interstices with pulled grass, and covering one half of the rude structure with puncheons. The Indians were numerous, and came to their camp with freedom, and behaved in the most friendly manner. The immigrants had other neighbors far less companionable. These were the wolves that came about in great numbers, making the woods resonant with their hideous nocturnal serenade.

Toward the latter part of February they began to prepare for their departure. They first erected a cabin on section 14, town 20. This was for occupation by Ben. Butterfield. The actual settlement of Newell township was thus begun by Butterfield, in February, 1825. In the course of the summer and fall quite numerous additions were made to the number of inhabitants.

Among the early white immigrants to Newell Township was a man named Moss. He built a tannery in section 26, but he sold his property in 1834 and moved his business to Danville Township.

The activities of other newcomers offer further glimpses of the ecology of the region:

Henry Wood came about 1829, arriving in October. He split rails and laid up a square, covering it with clapboards, which he also rived, and this he occupied for a house. The wolves and Indians abounded in the neighborhood, seemingly in equal numbers. Making rails became the staple employment for those who could spare any time from home.

In the summer and fall of 1832 John Johnson worked on the Wabash, rafting logs. He came home on foot Saturday nights, a distance of thirty miles.

Sickness added more, perhaps, to the discouragements of those who were heart-sick in their new homes than any other thing. The prevalent diseases were ague, typhoid fever, milk sickness and congestive chills. Usually in summer

* These parcels are in the Stony Creek valley northeast of Danville.

† Section 14 of Township 20 North, Range 11 West is along Stony Creek, two miles west of Illiana.

‡ Section 26 is midway between Illiana and downtown Danville.
and fall, sickness prevailed to a melancholy extent throughout the country; very often, whole families were down together.

... William Current, though not a shoemaker by trade, began doing such work as soon as he came. Richard Brewer, who came a little later, was a regular tradesman. Customers bought leather at Moss' and Taylor's tanneries, and employed the shoemakers to manufacture it into boots and shoes. The tanneries furnished a considerable business to the people in peeling and hauling bark, which increased either their available funds or their stock of leather.

... The "hard winters," universally mentioned as such, were in 1830-1 and 1831-2. Deep snows covered the ground all winter. The first was the more remarkable for the depth of snow and the severity of the weather. The snow began falling on the 27th of December, 1830, and lay on until March. Fences were buried out of sight. First a thaw and a rain came, and afterward a freeze, forming a crust, when stock roamed about at will, and teams were driven over fences and fields. The eaves of the houses did not drip for forty-one days. Game of all kinds perished in great numbers. Deer became a prey to the wolves who pursued them to the woods, where they slumped so as to be unable to escape, and were devoured. Wild turkeys totally disappeared.

At the time of which we write, the inhabitants of this region, lacking the agents of locomotion which annihilate time and space, were removed from the markets of the world by toilsome distances.

Flat-boating soon became general. Boats built on the Wabash were commonly about one hundred and twenty feet long and fourteen feet wide, but those constructed on the Vermilion were about sixty feet long. A Vermilion boat was manned by a steersman and two oarsmen. These boats were laden for New Orleans, and the freight comprised hogs, staves, poultry, produce, hoop-poles, baled hay, barreled pork, etc. The hogs and poultry were not fully fattened when put aboard, but became so on the trip, which lasted about six weeks.

The site of the village of Denmark now lies beneath the waters of Lake Vermilion:

This ancient town, situated on the left bank of the North Fork, two miles above Danville, was settled by Seymour Treat, probably in 1826. ... Treat's mill was a "corn cracker" and saw-mill combined.

Myersville was on the North Fork of the Vermilion River west of Bismarck:

The first improvement in Myersville was the Chrisman mill, which formed a nucleus for this once thriving and important village. ... In 1838 Peter Chrisman ... bought the mill site and commenced work on the building. He designed erecting a combined saw and grist mill, but ... he left it unfinished. ... Chrisman sold the property to a man named Koontz ... He employed John and Samuel Myers, who were millwrights ... They arrived in the spring of 1840 ...
These brothers, besides running the saw-mill, at once put in a run of stones, and also set a carding-mill in operation. In June, 1843, they raised the grist-mill. This last is the only one remaining. They owned and operated it nearly twenty years. It has been a paying property. . . . People came here for distances of seventy miles to trade and to get milling done. . . . The pretty location of the place upon the North Fork, the adjoining wood, and the public spirit of the citizens, have contributed to recommend it to everybody. 7

At this point in his treatment of Newell Township, Hiram Beckwith digressed to a description of the township's landscape and natural resources:

It presents a boldly undulating surface of prairie and timber land, the latter embracing the three southernmost tiers of sections, and the remaining space west of the Chicago & Eastern Illinois railroad. The more valuable timber-growth is found in the southern portion, and consists of the common varieties, including some beech. Great quantities of black walnut abound. Stony and Lick Creeks are the principal streams. The North Fork of the Vermilion winds along the western border, crossing it half a dozen or more times. 7

A final note from the chapter about Newell Township:

In 1849 cholera raged with great mortality in many northern cities. In July it appeared in Danville township where its ravages were mostly confined. The disease was at its height in August, and the last cases occurred in September. The former month was very rainy, and with every shower it seized other victims. . . . The number of deaths was thirty-four. 7

VANCE TOWNSHIP IS IN THE SOUTHWESTERN QUARTER of Vermilion County:

The Salt Fork of the Vermilion river runs through its northern part nearly the whole length, which is skirted by timber on an average of about one mile on either bank. . . . The State Road from Danville to Decatur runs through, * keeping as nearly as possible about one and one half miles away from the Salt Fork . . . . Abundance of building-stone is found along and in the bed of the stream, and ledges of calcareo-silicious stone crop out on the prairie near the center of the town, which is the best known material for making roads, and makes an excellent quality of lime for building purposes, and for dressing for wheat lands. This stone is hard enough to withstand natural destruction from the elements, and soft enough to wear smooth under wagon-wheels, giving just the quality suitable for McAdam roads. It is being sparingly used here as yet, but in other places in this state where it has been used for years its value has been thoroughly tested and abundantly proved. There is a mine of wealth in these ledges of stone, such as crop out on the Big Spring farm of J.C. Sandusky. The ridge, or divide, between the Salt Fork and the Little Vermilion runs along

* This section of the old State Road connected Catlin with Homer.
the southern border of Vance and the prairie land all sheds toward the north, being freely supplied with streams and small branches, which beautifully water the farms and afford fine drainage. The surface is neither flat nor hilly, having sufficient undulation to make it capable of tillage all seasons, with here and there small mounds or easily rising hills, which add variegated beauty to the scene no less than real value to its worth. Originally about twelve square miles of its territory was timber land, being about one third of its present surface. This proportion is not much varied, for few farms have been made on that portion which was timber, although, of course, some of it was cut off by early settlers. It is as fine a tract of farming land as can be found in this or any other state. Let any one who has an eye to that which is both beautiful and useful in nature and in rural life drive along the State Road in May or June in the cool evening, and see, where only a few short years ago all was as nature had prepared it for man, the wealth which has sprung from well directed toil and the frugal lives of those who rescued these acres from wild nature, the substantial farm-houses, with their surroundings of groves, orchards, herds and buildings, well-tilled land and thrifty crops, and his doubting will be turned into conviction of the strongest type. Here one sees farm-life arrayed in its goodliest adornments. The small farms that have come down from father to son show the qualities which time lends. The tiresome appearance of newness which everywhere in the prairie country confronts us is wanting. Everything which adds to comfort is here found.

The earlier settlements were made along this State Road; or, to state it more correctly, they were made along the border of the timber, and the State Road was made here because of this fact. At first the road wound in and out wherever clearings were made; and, through the influence of Col. Vance, who was then a member of the legislature, the road was straightened and adopted as a state road.

The railroad was graded through this town in 1836.

... As soon as the railroad was located, Ellsworth & Co. entered all the land along its line, from Danville to Decatur, that had not previously been taken, and held it for speculation. Owing to the revulsion which, in due course of nature's law, must, and did, follow the flush times of 1836, * the speculators did not get an opportunity to sell their land for twenty years.

... The first settler known to make a home within the bounds of Vance was Thomas Osborne, who made a little cabin in section 32, a mile or two northwest of Fairmount, in 1825. He did not do any large amount of clearing or farming, but spent his time in fishing and hunting, which latter was by far the most profitable business of that day and age. The skins and furs of a winter's crop were worth more than a corn crop. Osborne did not stay here long after the

* The economic boom of 1836 was followed by a financial panic and crash in 1837.
game began to grow scarce, but went on west. . . . In the same neighborhood . . . Samuel Beaver commenced a year or two later. . . . Beaver was a tanner, and kept and worked a small tan-yard, the material for which business was plenty here at that time.

. . . That portion of the township which lies south of the railroad did not come into general cultivation until about 1855 or 1860. About 1850 it became known that the railroad which had been graded fourteen years before, would be built. . . . This called attention to land lying within a few miles of these lines, and soon every acre of it was taken up. Josiah Sandusky, who lived at Catlin, a prosperous and driving man, took the occasion to enter the land which he had long had his eye upon, for his son Jacob, just south of where Fairmount now is, and known as the “Big Spring” farm. The springs, bubbling up out of the ledge of lime-stone, way out on the prairie, was so noticeable that it had long attracted attention. Everybody in this part of the county knew the “big spring,” and everybody thought “what a nice place that would be for a milk-house if this prairie ever gets settled up,” and everybody thought they would like to own that farm sometime. What others thought, Josiah Sandusky, with his eye as usual on the main chance, did. Putting $450 into his pockets, he went to Danville and entered nine “forties” around this famous spring, making a square farm three-fourths of a mile each way, which thirty times that amount of money could not buy to-day. He soon brought it into cultivation, and put on it the old Butler house, which stood so long the monument of the pioneer of Butler’s Point. This was, aside from its associations, a famous house. The logs were of black walnut, hewn, and so large that they would now, if sawed into inch boards, bring almost enough, at market rates, to build a good-sized farm residence. * While everything about is good, the chief attraction is the magnificent spring, or really a series of springs, which furnish water enough for the stock, and has been utilized at the milk-house, and can be in many other ways. . . . They are a remarkable family. In the history of Vermilion county no family has cut so important a figure in its business, social and agricultural concerns.

. . . Fairmount was platted and recorded December, 1856 . . . . . . The station house was first put up on Main street in 1857 . . . . Mr. Dunn, who is the pioneer, . . . was by far the most important personage in the business. He had great difficulty at first in getting a supply of water. . . . There was not a tree or a bush growing on the present site of the village, and young mothers who moved there to live had to provide themselves with switches for family use, and bring them along with the household goods. 7

John R. Witherspoon came to Fairmount in the spring of 1869:

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* In 1885 Hiram Beckwith reported what happened to this log house: “A very few years ago it was bought by the Danville Lumber Company. They had it sawed up into walnut lumber, and it made a very fine quality of lumber.” 35
Mr. Witherspoon occupied the house for a residence which Wm. Woods resides in for one year. . . . This residence had no fence around it, and, during "fly-time," the cattle and sheep from a thousand acres used to collect around to find the grateful shade, and pick up whatever they could find. 7

John P. Mills ended up a resident of Vance Township, but first he came to Blount Township in 1836:

He bought a piece of land on what was then called the barrens, and proceeded to make a farm. This land was not in any sense barren, but it was destitute of timber. 7 He thought at that day that he could make a farm easier on such land than on the prairie—a very common opinion then. He made a farm there, and remained on it fifteen years, and then went to Bean Creek, farther north, and made a farm there, and remained there fourteen years. 7

Hiram Hickman came to Illinois in 1828:

He went to Old Town timber, in McLean county, and bought a piece of land, but returned to this county the next season. There were no settlements between the Vermilion timber and the Kickapoo at that time. In traveling, he had to go on horse-back, and was nearly eaten up by the fierce prairie-flies of that day. In trying to make the Georgetown timber on his way back, he found the big spring on Jacob Sandusky's farm, and believes he is the first white man who ever tasted its waters . . . . . . . He was early drawn into political life . . . . . . . In addition to all the court business, he had the county revenue to collect . . . . In traveling over the state in those days by stage, he frequently had to walk, and deemed it fortunate if he did not have to carry a rail to help pry the old wagons—which by courtesy were called stages—out of the sloughs. 7

The northwest corner of Vermilion County is comprised of Butler Township:

The land was originally entirely prairie, and, although embracing some of the finest land in the county, did not come into cultivation till 1855, and as late as 1872 broad strips of its rich prairie had not been vexed with the plow; indeed, as late as this present writing some of the beautiful high rolling prairie along the line separating towns 23 and 22 is yet in prairie-grass, and scores of the farms

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* The annual summertime plague of biting flies was known as fly time.

† See a footnote on page 36 for a discussion of the term barrens.

‡ The Old Town Timber stretched for about 18 miles along the glacial moraine south and east of Bloomington. A remnant of this grove is in Moraine View State Park.

§ The headwaters of Kickapoo Creek embraced the Old Town Timber.

¶ Sandusky's Big Spring Farm is described on page 81.

** The east-west line separating Township 22 North and Township 23 North in Butler Township is a mile south of Reilly.
south and southeast of Rankin are guiltless of either fence or hedge to mark their boundary lines. No considerable stream crosses the town. From its southern side the little streams and rivulets stretch away toward the middle fork of the Vermilion, from its eastern border they run into the North Fork, while from its northern half the water sheds to the head-waters of the Illinois River. High, rolling, rich and healthy, it can but seem wonderful, and must ever remain in a great measure mysterious, how the land of such eligible portions of the county were left uninhabited until long after the western half of the state, and Missouri, Iowa, and portions of Kansas and Nebraska, were largely filling up with settlers. People living along the Middle Fork, not twenty miles away, pulled up and moved to Missouri, on poorer land than could be found within half a day's ride of their homes, and this, after it had been demonstrated that people could live on the open prairie with less labor, just as much comfort, more health, and surer returns for their labor, than on timber farms. It cannot be pleaded in this case that these prairies were unknown. The Chicago road, the great highway of travel before railroads were built, passed directly over this beautiful tract, and the road leading from Danville to Ottawa, along which thousands of men went from the Illinois River country to Danville to enter land, and the road from Attica to Bloomington, along which hundreds of people passed each year, visiting their old homes in Indiana and Ohio, both crossed this arm of the Grand Prairie. The old scholars had an adage which, being liberally translated, runs, "In matters of taste there is no use in disputing." Just so; there is no law against a man's crossing through the woods and picking up a crooked stick beyond.

... The first farming done in the township was probably in the year 1854....

In the year 1854 Mr. J.H. Schwartz... came from Ohio.... The year he came here to live followed close on the years in which the large wheat crops were so general through the state. Cases were numerous where a single crop of wheat had paid the cost of purchasing the land, tilling, fencing, harvesting and marketing the crop, leaving a balance to the credit side of the account. The crop, of course, was an exceptional one; but that such did really grow is beyond dispute. This was sent to Ohio and other eastern states, and many came here in 1855 expecting to get rich on wheat raising alone. Cases were plenty where farmers who were well-to-do ran in debt for additional land, intending to pay for it out of the next wheat crop. Men, in the height of their excitement over wheat, sowed it on the last year's stubble, and harrowed it in without even plowing the ground. Of course the subsequent successive failures of the crop ruined many farmers, crippled others, sent some to the asylum, and convinced all that this was not in the "wheat belt."

... Thomas Towe commenced about 1856 to improve a farm on section 7 (23-13). * Along in the fall sometime, Towe and McCune had gone to Middle

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* Section 7 of Township 23 North, Range 13 West is a mile east of Rankin.
Fork,—McCune to get wood and Towe for a load of sand. This timber, twelve miles away, was the nearest fuel they could obtain. . . . McCune had a good team of horses and his partner was driving three yoke of cattle—of course he had to go on foot. Night overtaking them they became completely lost. To be lost on the prairie at night is the nearest thing to being “finally lost” that one experiences in this life. There is absolutely no clue by which the most skillful detective could work out. Especially is this so when the wind does not blow. Teams are liable to walk around in a circle, and in the absence of any light, which can be seen on such occasions many miles, the wanderers not unfrequently find it necessary to spend the night on the prairie. In this case the benighted travelers set to halloowing with all their might, and after an hour of such exercise they were heard by Mr. Stamp, who fired a gun to attract their attention. As soon as they could ascertain the direction of this first “gun at daybreak” they started for it at double-quick; Towe ahead leading the van with his steers, and McCune following like a general officer on dress parade, glad to ride where Towe should lead. They came to one of those ponds which at that time were numerous on these prairies, and the leader, fearing to turn to the right or the left lest he should lose his direction, plunged in knee deep, yelling at the top of his voice to keep his courage up, and to keep their gunner acquainted with their whereabouts. McCune rode out the storm like a major, and never looked on that pond after that without almost fancying he could see Towe knee-deep in the flood. . . . 'Squire Bowers, in returning from Loda one night, got lost and became mired in a pond. He took off the horses and walked around all night to keep from being numbed with the cold. It was customary when the father of the family was belated, to place a candle in the window which looked in the direction he was to come, and many a man has been saved a night on the prairie by "keeping the lower light burning."

The nearest mill for a time was at Myersville, until Persons purchased and refitted the Ross Mill. The nearest trading point was at Loda, twelve miles north . . . .

. . . In the early days the people here did not raise many cattle for some reason. As previously stated, all tried wheat for a time, until continued failures used up all they had kept for seed, without any return. Still they bought seed and sowed again. Corn and hogs were the staple. Hogs almost always brought a paying price, and it was before cholera had been invented. Stock and corn are the

* Myersville was on the banks of the North Fork west of Bismarck.

† The Ross Mill was on the North Fork west of Alvin.

‡ Loda is about 11 miles west and three miles north of the location of Thomas Towe's farm. The surrounding region was opened up to farming when the Illinois Central Railroad reached the area in 1854 and established a station at Loda.

¶ Hog cholera is a highly infectious disease, often fatal to swine.
principal staples of the farmer yet. Flax has been raised some, and is considered a fair crop.

... Land was worth from $2.50 to $5 per acre. Some sold as high as $9 before the railroad was built, and some sold in anticipation of that building as high as $12. Eight dollars was probably a fair average for land two years before the railroad was built. Twenty can hardly be called an exorbitant price now.

McCune says that as late as 1857 he has seen here on this prairie as many as twenty deer at a time, and at one time he saw on section 7 fifty-four in one lot going in a northwesterly direction, and wolves were as thick as rabbits. As late as 1858, of a flock of sheep, which had got away from a man living north of here, eighty were killed in a single night. Badgers were also plenty. They were as large as a dog and stronger, with a thick neck, and too strong for any dog to master. Rattlesnakes were so plenty that on a single farm a hundred were killed in a single season. It is a wonder that more people were not killed by them.

Dogs that were bitten by them seemed to know how to cure themselves. Prairie mud was a very certain cure. They were really a dangerous neighbor, yet the children went barefooted to school or hunting strawberries as now. They seem as adverse to civilization as any of their wild neighbors, and as the prairie-grass was killed out by being plowed and cultivated they disappeared. The last seen of them here was about 1870. It is doubted whether any survived the shriek of the locomotive or the high taxes of modern civilization. We used to have squirrels here, red and gray, not unlike those in the timber but smaller, and with shorter tails. * Prairie chickens were of course very plenty, and the reverberating “boom” of their matins, ushering in an October morning, will never be forgotten by the old settlers, and probably never heard in its fullness by the new. Sand-hill cranes were very numerous, as they nested here in the ponds on this divide, and, if undisturbed, would make havoc of the corn in the spring, taking two rows at a time, as clean as any man could root it up, and in the fall would congregate in great numbers if not driven away.

... Before the building of the railroad through this town its open prairie attracted the attention of a gentleman whose large experience, business capacity and ready means well qualified him to make a large venture in farming operations here, which has proved of the utmost importance to the interests of this prairie town. Mr. David Rankin had been largely engaged in cattle-farming and feeding in Henderson county, in this state, and had amassed a comfortable fortune before he commenced his operations here. He was a gentleman of broad views, wide acquaintance, and the strictest business habits. Associating with him his relative, W.A. Rankin, he purchased eight sections of land lying near together

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* McCune was describing the red squirrel, a species that is about half the size of the common fox squirrel. At present the range of the red squirrel in Illinois is restricted or nearly restricted to the Kankakee-Iroquois River basin.
here, and commenced improving it, in 1867. They built a fine residence on section 2, which has been beautifully surrounded by trees, changing the bleak prairie of only a few years ago into one of the most delightful shady resorts to be found in this part of the country, which has been the home of the junior partner since then. They put the land into cultivation as fast as possible, and secured the location of a depot at Rankin.

... At the town meeting in 1866, the ordinance forbidding stock to run at large was passed, and has been strictly enforced, to the great saving of those who were trying to make new farms on the prairie.

... The grain trade has been, and continues to be, one of considerable importance here. It is the center of one of the finest corn-raising districts in the county, and as there are few cattle-feeders among the new farmers in this vicinity, most of the corn must go to market.

SIDELL TOWNSHIP OCCUPIES THE SOUTHWEST CORNER of the county: *

The valley of the Little Vermilion, here an inconsiderable stream, runs nearly through its center, having the ridges or strips of high land which bound this valley on the northern and southern boundaries of the township. This beautiful valley, more of a basin in appearance here, because so nearly destitute of trees, encloses within its pale some of the richest farming lands of Vermilion county. It was all originally prairie, except six small groves, aggregating less than two square miles of timber land. For this reason alone it failed to attract attention for the first twenty years of the county's history. The little groves had been taken, but the broad expanse of prairie, which forms the real wealth of this prairie township, was inhabited only by those pestiferous things which are disastrous alike to the peace of man and beast. Perhaps there never was, in the same range of country, so many inhuman flies as only a few years ago lived and made day noxious in the limits of this prairie basin of the Little Vermilion, now known as Sidell. "Flies till you couldn't rest" is a mild way of putting it. During the month of August people found it necessary to travel by night to save their horses from being almost eaten up.

There were a few scattering residents in the township before 1850, but it was not until 1855 to 1860 that anything like general cultivation can be said to have taken place. In 1853 Michael Sullivant . . . began making his large entries of land in this and the adjoining counties. He entered forty-seven thousand acres lying in a body in Sidell township and in Champaign county. About the same time he entered over fifty thousand acres in Ford and Livingston counties. The portion which was in Sidell came into possession of his son Joseph, and he has from that time been managing it as a stock farm until last year. The Sullivant

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* Since the History of Vermilion County was written, Jamaica Township has been carved out of the northeast part of Sidell Township and much of northern Carroll Township.
land in Champaign county, after having been brought into cultivation, was sold to Mr. Alexander, when Mr. Sullivant concluded to bring his large farm, lying in Ford and Livingston counties, into cultivation. His ambition was to have a large farm and work it by hired help. No portion of his land was leased, and he depended entirely on the grain that he raised and the sale of it.

The farming operations of Joseph, in Sidell, were of a different nature. He went largely into cattle feeding with very fair results and flattering prospects. About 1867 the attention of farmers here was first called to the cheap cattle in Texas and the Indian Nation, where upon the large prairies they were raised cheaply until three or four years old, and then collected and driven across the country to be grass-fed, and then grain-fed. The increasing demand for cattle, the reduced range in Illinois, and the other circumstances consequent upon Illinois emerging from a "state of nature," had so restricted the supply of "stockers" that cattle-men began looking elsewhere for them. The "Texan steers" could be bought for about thirty or forty per centum less than the high grades which were raised here. . . . Here then was a sufficient inducement for men who, like Mr. Sullivant, had large tracts like this Sidell farm, to take cattle where they could buy them cheapest. It looked like a very sure road to fortune. Mr. Sullivant put seven hundred Texans on his farm about this time. These cattle, before becoming acclimated, were liable to what was familiarly called the "Texan fever," a disease which prevailed among them during the first summer of their life north, and which was so contagious that the natives here contracted it, and great numbers died. It was more fatal to the natives than to the Texans. This disease, like most of the other prevailing contagions, seems to have lost, with time, a portion of its virulence, and is hardly known now, or owing to the different treatment of the Texan herds, it has so nearly ceased to exist that the present generation hears nothing of it. It was a terrible blow to cattle men in this state. Instances occurred where train loads of cattle were unloaded in consequence of an accident on the road, and were left to wander over the prairies for a day or two, thus carrying the infection, which proved fatal to all cattle in the vicinity.

. . . From this disaster Mr. Sullivant was never able to recover, and after years of heroic trials he saw his splendid farm sold out, and nothing was saved out of the wreck of a magnificent fortune.

. . . A few only had found homes in this township before the advent of Mr. Sullivant. A man by the name of Boose, about whom little is known, beyond that he was one of those uneasy, roving specimens who never do much but hunt places and game, made a settlement at Jackson's Grove in 1828, but did not stay long. Bob Cruisan settled at Sidell's Grove a year or two later . . . . . Josephus Collett . . . about 1844, entered the lands which covered the small groves along the Little Vermilion, knowing that they would first be in demand
by actual settlers. These tracts entered by him included Sidell Grove, Jackson Grove, Garrett Grove, Rowan Grove, and probably Twin Grove. Frank Foos is supposed to have made the first permanent improvement in this township in 1851. He...had heard of the wonderful fertility of the valley of the Little Vermilion. When he made his improvement there, he was four miles "out from land"—or from neighbors, which is the same thing.

... A cheap kind of a character by the name of Tole commenced farming operations about the same time at Garrett's Grove, a mile up stream from Jackson's Grove. He was in some respects a sample of the then existing fault-finders, who never saw any good in their present condition, but are always "hoping for better things." With thousands of acres of the best land lying around that needed only to be plowed to produce the most luxurious crops without further work, he spent his time during all the early spring, cutting off the fine timber in that grove, and when planting time came he went off several miles to get men to come and help him roll up the logs which he was unable to handle, so that he could burn them up. By the time he had his logs nicely burned up it was too late to plant; the frost caught his crop when it was nicely in "roasting ears"; and he made up his mind that this country was not adapted to farming, and went off to Missouri or some other haven for the disappointed, where he could find logs to roll at all seasons of the year, and where they were small enough for him to "skid" them.

At that time people supposed it took six or eight yoke of oxen to break prairie, and did not know that the red root could be destroyed by hitting it with the sharp edge of a plow, even without cutting it off. A person who could not command a "breaking team," or pay two dollars and a half per acre for "breaking," must get along without. A gentleman who decided in his own mind that he could break prairie with a horse team, by dodging around the "red roots" as he would around stumps or stones, aroused so much ridicule (this was about 1853) that men went miles to see the trial, and to laugh at the new-fangled notions of a book-farmer. This was Hon. W.T. Stackpole, who has recently

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* Sidell's Grove was at the junction of Swank Creek and the Little Vermilion River, about one mile east of Indianola.
† Jackson's Grove was at the west edge of Indianola.
‡ Garrett's Grove was on Swank Creek about one mile northwest of Indianola.
§ The Twin Groves were on the Little Vermilion River immediately east of the Vermilion County line. According to the Portrait and Biographical Album of Vermilion County, "Two groves of about 100 acres each on this tract of land looked so much alike" that the surrounding farm was named Twin Grove. 17

Red root = New Jersey tea (*Ceanothus americanus*), a diminutive shrub that is common in virgin prairie.
given to the world a system for the permanent improvement of rivers, which is destined to work a revolution in the navigation of the western rivers.

... Hon. John Sidell, after whom the town was named, ... owns a beautiful farm of about three thousand acres, on both sides of the Little Vermilion. He commenced life as a carpenter, in Ohio, and ... he found himself in 1861 in possession of sufficient means to carry on a more extensive business in a newer country. He had been up and down the river a good deal, had been nine times to Iowa, and had looked over the country pretty thoroughly, until he found here just the place which would suit him. Alexander Rowan had some years before this purchased the Collett Grove property—about thirteen hundred acres—of Josephus Collett, and was improving it, when Mr. Sidell bought him out, and added to it by the purchase of nearly six thousand acres more. ... In 1873 he sold off a portion of his land to the amount of one hundred and fifteen thousand dollars' worth, and with the bounds thus reduced, he has carried on one of the largest, if not the largest, cattle business in Vermilion county.

1880: History of Iroquois County

The Vermilion River area barely extends into the two south corners of Iroquois County. The Middle Fork of the Vermilion River drains less than a square mile in the southwest corner of the county in Loda Township. The North Fork of the Vermilion drains about 12 square miles of Lovejoy and Prairie Green Townships in the southeast corner.

Hiram Beckwith, who published the History of Vermilion County in 1879, finished the History of Iroquois County one year later. The following paragraphs are from the chapter about Loda Township:

The farming country is as fine as any in the county, the land being without exception good and gently rolling, making it susceptible of easy tillage. The farms throughout the township present the appearance of thrift and prosperity ....

... So far as can be ascertained, Alexander Henry made the first permanent settlement in the township .... This was in the year 1843. ... The following year was the famous rainy season, the first one which was known after the settlement of this county, but which returned with remarkable regularity each seventh year; the years 1851 and 1858 being each so rainy as to render it nearly impossible to raise any crops. During the entire summer of 1844 the rains poured in torrents, so that there was no opportunity to plant, or cultivate what little was planted. In the frequency and duration of its rains there has been

* Professor Merrimian elaborated in his "History of McLean County": "Mr. S. has, of late years, given much attention to the study of opening the water-ways of the country, and has invented a plan by which the bars which accumulate at the mouths of our great rivers can be removed and communication kept open for the largest class of vessels." 34
nothing equal to it since, the year 1869 coming the nearest to it. . . . There
were few bridges at that day, and those few that were, with hardly an exception,
swept away. *8

The North Fork of the Vermilion River cuts across the southeast corner of Prairie Green
Township:

The township is all prairie; its surface gently undulating, except in the south­
east, where it is high and rolling. † The soil is very rich, and every foot within
its boundaries is capable of being tilled with but very little artificial draining.

. . . A quarter of a century ago the people who lived along the belts of timber,
and the few pioneers who were brave enough to squat out on the prairie, thought
that these prairie townships would never be completely settled. Deer were then
numerous. The early settlers need never be out of venison. Wolves were
numerous, and the few settlers who lived here then, would often mount a horse
bareback, and indulge in the invigorating sport of chasing a wolf or running
down a deer.

Robert Finch settled on a fine tract in the southeast part of the township in 1853.

. . . In 1857 John Greer began to break the sod in the southwest corner, but did
not reside here until some years after. Breaking sod in those days was a good
business for the favored few who owned breaking-teams and a “breaker.” The
breaker was a large plow, cutting a furrow from twenty inches to two feet,
designed for five or six yoke of oxen. The beam was mounted on trucks; the
depth was regulated by a lever, and as the wheels in front held the plow in
position it required no holding; but considerable skill in driving was necessary
when starting the first furrow, often a half mile or more in length. The season
for breaking began as soon as the grass had got a good start in the spring, and
did not end until near the first of July. . . . The teams were allowed to feed on
the natural grasses they were plowing under at morning, noon and night,
commonly being “corralled” after dark to prevent straying. No one at this time
had any idea that prairie sod could be plowed with horses. This was one reason
why the prairies did not settle more rapidly at first. As soon as it was dis-

* Charles Marsh, a keen weather-watcher from De Kalb County, remarked about this
seventh-year wet cycle in an 1885 article 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. 32

† This high ground is the glacial moraine that forms the northern edge of the Vermilion
River basin.
covered that two or three horses, with a ten or twelve-inch plow, could turn nearly as much sod as an ox team, the prairie was soon dotted with little shanties or neat cottages, and the era of real improvement set in.

From the organization of the township there has been a law restraining stock from running at large. This was quite an inducement to the poor settler to start a home in this township. He could take care of his own stock with but little expense; to fence against his neighbors’ was very expensive.

... No creek nor river traverses this township. The north fork of the Vermilion cuts off a little of the southeast corner. Good water for stock and household purposes is easily obtained by digging and boring from twenty to sixty feet.  

The History of Iroquois County preserves a humorous story about a Mr. Pixley, who attempted to improve a roadway in Prairie Green Township by paving it with flax tow, a fibrous waste byproduct of linen processing. “But it all ended in smoke, for the annual prairie fire swept that way soon after, and left not a trace of Pixley’s road behind.”

Less than a square mile of neighboring Lovejoy Township is in the Vermilion River Area. The History of Iroquois County says of this township,

Like its sister, Prairie Green, it was treeless in its wild state, save, perhaps, the “Lone Tree,” which is still standing near the big spring on the farm of M.C. Dawson. ... Artesian water is found almost anywhere within the boundaries of Lovejoy by boring a short distance, but flowing wells are found only in the northwest part of the township.  

After Lovejoy Township was formed by splitting from Milford Township in 1868, one of the first actions of the township government was adoption of “a resolution restraining stock from running at large.”

1884: Historical Atlas of Ford County

This book features a “History of Ford County, Illinois” by Merton Dunlap. A wide range of topics are covered under the heading of “Reminiscences”:

William R. Trickel, came to Trickel Grove ... about 1836 ... . Land was $1.25 per acre, and could be had in abundance.

... Game was abundant in those days. Wild deer could be readily obtained, and prairie chickens were so numerous that there was no market for them. “Saddle”

* See a footnote on page 65 for a discussion of artesian wells and flowing wells.

† Trickel’s Grove was the first stand of timber encountered along the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River as one proceeded upstream from Champaign County into Ford County. It was the first locality to be occupied in Ford County as farmers migrated farther and farther up the Middle Fork.
venison was taken by the load to Danville, and was slow sale at 50 cents each. Prairie wolves made night ring with their yells. On one occasion, in a two weeks' hunt, two of the Trickel boys killed twenty-two wild turkeys in addition to other game secured. Wild turkeys came in flocks or droves only occasionally, being far more numerous nearer Danville.

Harmon Strayer came to Ford County in 1851 and settled near Sugar Grove. Mr. Strayer relates that when he first came to this county, deer were frequently seen on the prairies; one of their watering places was at a slough on the Strayer farm.

During their early settlement at Sugar Grove, the farmers found it necessary to have persons care for the growing crops to prevent depredation from the herds of deer.

Dr. J.E. Davis located at Drummer Grove in 1854, and at that time there was no house to be seen as far as the eye could reach across the prairie. Wild ducks and geese were numerous. Prairie wolves infested this locality in great numbers. This part of the county being sparsely timbered was settled slowly, and remained as a herding ground for many years. Dr. Davis says: "I have with the aid of my field-glass counted herds which aggregated 17,000 head of cattle."

The winter he came to this locality, he could count herds of deer of from twenty to seventy-five quite often. His first crop of sixty acres was eaten by them, assisted by the ducks, brants and geese. A choice fat saddle of venison, weighing thirty to thirty-five pounds, would sell for 75 cents.

In the winter of 1865, there came a heavy sleet. A hunting party was organized, and secured fourteen deer the first day and seven the day following.

The spring of 1858 opened beautifully, and thus remained until April 16, when it began raining, and rained, more or less, every day until June 10. This was known as the "wet year." The year 1860 was remarkably favorable from early spring until winter. The winter of 1862-63 was remarkably warm and open. There were only four days during the winter when the ground was frozen hard enough to bear up a team. Frost killed the corn on the 28th of August, 1863, and the next winter many hogs died from starvation. On New Year's Day, 1864, we had a notable snow storm and blizzard, which caused great suffering.

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* A pair of deer hams make up a saddle of venison.

† Sugar Grove was along the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River on the Ford-Champaign County line, extending down-river to the mouth of Sugar Creek.

‡ Drummer Grove was immediately north of Gibson City, about three miles west of the Vermilion River Area.
to the people of Central Illinois and to the live stock. Railroad trains were snow blockaded for many days.

The only remarkable seasons since then were those of 1869 and 1876, which were very wet.

... The winter of 1854–55 occurred the “snow blockade,” when B.F. Stites hauled passengers from the train (which had become snowbound in the “cut” just north of Ottawa street) to his house. He says seven locomotive engines were at this time “snowed up” in the cut as stated.

James Sheldon... relates that, February 14, 1866, there was a very severe storm of snow. Sheep and hogs were smothered and frozen to death in great numbers. On the day after the storm, Mr. Sheldon, assisted by Mr. Conrow and Mr. Hobbis, took 200 head of live sheep from under the snow and thirty-six dead ones. He also states that Mr. Bennett, just over the line in Livingston County, lost 900 sheep during this storm.

George H. Thompson... writes: “The years of 1857–58–59 were hard times for the new settlers on the Illinois Central Railroad lands. Crops were short, and the people all pretty poor. by economizing in all things, using... red root for tea, ... they bridged over these bad years.”

... Samuel L. Day came with his father’s family to Ford County... in 1853. At the time of their arrival, there were no houses between Trickel Grove and Ten Mile Grove, and none between the latter and Oliver’s Grove. At one time (1854) he joined a party of neighbors to search for a man who had set out to drive some cattle from Ten Mile to Oliver’s Grove. He was found some two weeks afterward about midway between the two groves frozen to death. The wind at that time had full sweep, and came sharp end foremost over the prairies.

Mr. Day relates that he has had many an exciting deer and wolf chase. He has seen as many as one hundred deer in one herd in this vicinity.

... N.B. Day relates that while out on the search for the man mentioned by his brother Samuel, that an eagle of great size was discovered. It had been injured in some manner, and after a spirited chase was captured.

... John R. Lewis, in his “History of the Pan-Handle” of Ford County, has recorded much of interest, and we make room for several extracts:

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* The Illinois Central Railroad lies in a deep cut through a moraine in downtown Paxton.

† Red root = New Jersey tea (Ceanothus americanus).

‡ The Panhandle is the northern part of Ford County, six miles wide and 26 miles from south to north.

93
On or about the 1st of September, 1856, a prairie fire was started in the south part of what is now known as Ford County, and the wind being from the south drove the fire over the country at a frightful speed, burning all the prairie lying west of the Illinois Central Railroad * track to what was known as Indian Timber, † and as far north as the Kankakee River before it could be stopped. As I said, the season was very dry, and the low sloughs that grew a very fair quality of grass that year, continued to burn for fully three months, or until the ground froze up in the fall. The lands that were so badly burnt still show the effects of the fire. Some of these places came directly under the writer's observation, and were he in the northern part of the county now, he could show places in swamps on the north half of Section 7, south half of Section 6, in Township 25 north, Range 9 east, ‡ and in a small slough in the south half of southwest quarter of Section 21, Township 26 north, † also in sloughs, that lie south and west of Oliver's Grove, § and near what was called Corn Grove, *** which before the fire were smooth, even sloughs, but are now ponds and lakes of water. The cause of this is that the tall grass, that at that time grew in the sloughs, took fire, and having so much body, burnt into the ground in such a manner that it settled into basins. Among these may be mentioned Turtle Pond, lying south of Oliver's Grove, and Corn Grove Pond, lying west of Turtle Pond. †† The timber in Oliver's Grove, especially the down timber, was nearly all destroyed, and it was considered that the loss in wood that Mr. Oliver sustained must have run into the thousands of cords. Going further north to what is now known as the Vermilion Swamp, ‡‡ the effects of the fire may still be found. Before the fire, all that country from the county line of Ford and Iroquois Counties, in Township 28 north, Ranges 9 and 10 east, ‡§ was a large

* This line of the Illinois Central Railroad runs north through Paxton to Chicago.
† The Indian Timber was along Indian Creek in southern Livingston County, immediately northwest of the headwaters of the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River.
‡ This locale is about three miles northwest of Roberts, in the very upper end of the Middle Fork drainage.
† This spot is about three miles south of Piper City, three miles beyond the limits of the Middle Fork watershed.
§ Oliver's Grove was south of Chatsworth, about three miles northwest of the upper limits of the Middle Fork valley.
*** Corn Grove was a small stand of trees west of Oliver's Grove.
†† Turtle Pond and Corn Grove Pond are in the headwaters of the South Fork of the Vermilion River that flows north to the Illinois River.
‡‡ The Vermilion Swamp covered more than 50 square miles north of Piper City, in the headwaters of the North Fork of the Vermilion River that drains to the Illinois River.
‡§ Township 28 North, Range 9 East is Mona Township in Ford County. Township 28 North, Range 10 East makes up part of Danforth and Milks Grove Townships in Iroquois County.
slough, which grew coarse but good grass, not canebrake as it does now. In this place the fire burnt holes in the ground fully three feet deep and for several years after no grass or anything green grew there.

Before the fire, large herds of deer could be seen grazing quietly on the prairies, but these beautiful animals were now driven to other localities, and deer meat was scarce.

... The winter of 1857–58 was rather unsteady. There was not much frost, and the snow that occasionally fell in great quantities soon thawed off. The roads were about half frozen, which made hauling wood for fuel an impossibility, and many of the settlers got badly discouraged.

... The Pan Handle was at this time infested with wolves and badgers. They abounded mostly in Township 27, where they seemed to make their headquarters. The badgers were most frequently found on Section 11, where there is a long sand ridge known as "Mount Thunder," and to this point hunters frequently went, and a number of these animals were killed.

The winter of 1859–60 was dry and cold, not much snow fell, and the corn which was light, was gathered before the ground froze, and a quantity of fall plowing was done.

... We have now come to one of the most uneventful years in the early settlement of the Pan Handle, and of 1860 there is little to record.

Spring commenced early, and the small grain was mostly in by the end of March. Fine rains set in in April, and everything was lovely. It will be remembered by the first settlers that the ground squirrels were very annoying this year.

* Perhaps the "good grass" is bluejoint grass (Calamagrostis canadensis), and the "canebrake" is prairie cordgrass (Spartina pectinata).

† The region suffered extreme drought during the year of this fire. One Kankakee valley resident called 1856 "the dryest season ever known." John Lewis' description indicates that peaty wetlands had dried up so much that the normally water-saturated peat could ignite. Peat fires can burn for months, which is in accord with Lewis' statement that sloughs burned for three months. Lewis reported that as much as three feet of peat was consumed by fire; the resulting depressions filled with water and became the new lakes and ponds that Lewis reported after the blaze. Other people observed the same phenomenon at various times in the Kankakee River valley. Solon Robinson observed that fires "burnt off all the sod" after an extreme drought in the summer of 1838. Lorenzo Werich noted that fires in peaty wetlands along the Kankakee "burned everything down to the sub-soil" during the great drought of 1871. During the extreme drought of 1894–95, drained peatlands in the Kankakee valley burned as deep as 15 feet. 26

‡ Township 27 North, Range 9 East is Pella Township, north of Piper City.

† Mount Thunder was in the middle of Vermilion Swamp.
They would follow the planter, and root the corn out of the hills from one end of the field to the other.

... The first seven days of May, 1868, will long be remembered on account of the unprecedented amount of rain. The meteorological report shows that amount was 3.57 inches, almost as much as for any month during the preceding four months. The storms were accompanied by thunder and lightning, the pyrotechnic display being most beautiful and magnificent.

... A destructive storm of sleet visited Paxton and vicinity from the 12th to the 14th of January, 1871. Every building, fence and tree was encased in an icy coat of mail nearly an inch in thickness. ... The greatest loss sustained was to fruit and shade trees, some of those from four to five inches in diameter being either broken off entirely or stripped of their limbs. 25

The Historical Atlas describes a woodland in Button Township, the easternmost township in the county:

"Trickel's Grove," ... is beyond doubt the first settled locality in Button Township and in Ford County. A few squatters, who never became permanent settlers, built log houses and lived in or near the "grove" prior to 1835. In 1836 ... Joshua and Robert Trickel, located at the "grove," ... and bought out these squatters' claims, and we have every reason to believe the Trickels were the first permanent settlers of what is now Ford County .... 25

Patton Township is immediately to the west of Button:

The Middle Fork of the South Vermilion River † enters the township in the northwest corner, and flows diagonally across it, passing out into Button near the southeast corner of the township. Along the line of this stream in this township is found about all of the timber there is in the county. At Ten Mile Grove ‡ the earliest settlers first located. 25

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* Trickel's Grove was along the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River, about three miles southeast of Paxton.
† Ford County is drained by two Vermilion Rivers. One drains northwest to the Illinois River, and the other flows southeast to the Wabash. The Historical Atlas of Ford County distinguishes the streams by calling them the North Vermilion River and the South Vermilion River.
‡ Ten Mile Grove was along the Middle Fork west of Paxton. It stood 10 miles from Trickel's Grove on the old road from Danville to Ottawa. The 1884 atlas of Ford County describes this route:

The line of travel, at the earliest date of which we have any account, was from Danville, Vermilion County, ... thence to Sugar Grove, on the south line of the present Button Township; thence to Trickel Grove, in the same township; thence to Ten Mile Grove, in Patton Township, crossing the present line of the Illinois Central Railroad in the southern limits of Paxton, a short distance south of Ottawa street, ... thence from Ten Mile Grove,
1885: Old Settlers’ Association of Vermilion County

"MANY OLD GRAY HEADED MEN AND WOMEN" gathered in Catlin on the last weekend in September 1885 to become founding members of the Old Settlers’ Association of Vermilion County, Illinois. The welcoming address was presented by Hiram W. Beckwith, author of the History of Vermilion County.

The afternoon session was filled with heartfelt personal reminiscences interspersed with sentimental songs by long-time residents. William M. Payne told the assembled crowd,

I came here in 1830 . . . . The prairie then had no improvements between here and Urbana, except . . . at Butler’s Point; * and no improvements from Danville to Georgetown till you got to Georgetown.

We used to have wolf hunts in those days; would send out notice to different parts of the timber, and would stick a pole up at Blue Mound with a flag upon it, and every man would turn out and drive to that pole. We would kill, sometimes, ten or fifteen at a time. All those things have passed away. 35

Noah Hubbard, who came to Vermilion County as a six-year-old in 1820, recalled, “The country was grown up with plum brush, and hazel brush, and sumach, and grapes, and prairie grass.” 35

Henry Salle reported, “Came to this State in 1834 . . . . . . It used to be necessary to fight fire, which could often be seen coming across the prairies; the neighbors would join, move along the cow paths, around fields and back-fire; would often be all night at the work.” 35

The Proceedings of the Old Settlers’ Meeting preserves an extensive set of reflections by J.H. Oakwood:

My father, Henry Oakwood, with a family of nine children, settled in this County in the fall of 1833; and . . . I have a very distinct recollection . . . of the general appearance of the country at that time . . . .†

Coming from a heavily timbered country, as all early settlers did, the vast stretch of treeless prairie seemed as unbounded as the sky above our heads. Not a tree nor house nor fence to break the monotony of the vast expanse. The gentle swells and ridges of the prairie, covered with its mantle of green, or of passing south of where Henderson Station now stands; . . . thence in a northerly direction past the home of Mr. Wall in the present Wall Township; thence to Oliver’s Grove, Livingston County; thence to Pontiac and Ottawa. From the latter place communication was had with Chicago. Latterly the route to Chicago from Ford County was more direct, crossing the Kankakee River near the present city of the same name. 25

* The village of Catlin grew up at Butler’s Point.

† The Oakwoods were among the first white residents of Oakwood Township.
brown grass, according to season; together with the roving herds of wild deer, the prowling wolf, the vast number of wild geese, ducks, cranes, and prairie chickens, and the troupe of the no less wild Indians on horseback and on foot, was all there was to break the monotony or add animation to the scene.

... The Indians, previous to 1834, annually set fire to the tall prairie grass, and burned off the whole face of the country, timber and prairie, thus killing most of the brush and young growth of timber. Most of the wood land was thus left open, so that the hunter could see a gang of deer or flock of wild turkeys as far as the eye could reach. The timbered land was covered with a rank growth of grass. The flat prairies were full of sloughs and ponds, and in the spring of the year were almost half covered with water. These ponds were a resort for wild geese, cranes and ducks, and were numbered almost by the million. They were so numerous that whole fields of corn, left standing during the winter, were almost entirely consumed by them and the millions of prairie chickens, and deer which roamed over the country in large herds. The streams were full of fish, and these and the wild game furnished meat for the Indians and early settlers in great abundance.

The Indians were very numerous up to 1834. In 1826, the Chief Wampanum and his band were encamped on the Middle Fork, at what is now known as Johnson's Ford. It was then and for years after known as Wampanum's Ford. ... The Indians afterward removed to near where the town of Oakwood now stands, and remained there until the fall of 1834. ... The old Indian town east of the Salt Works and extending on to Danville, was settled by other bands, but perhaps by the same tribe.

... The Government had made arrangements for the removal of the Indians to the West ... in the fall of 1834 ...

... After the Indians had removed from the country, and after a few farms had been improved in various localities, the prairie grass was not so universally burned off, and much of it was left to decay upon the ground. This, with the rotting sod of the fresh plowed land, and the numerous ponds and sloughs of stagnant water, created a vast amount of malaria. * Attacks of bilious fever, and chills and fever in the autumn months, were expected by every one, and in their expectations were seldom disappointed. Whole families and sometimes all the families in whole neighborhoods were down sick at the same time, and often not enough well ones left to take care of the sick ones. ... it was customary with farmers to hurry their work through harvest and haying, in order to be ready for their periodical sickness in the fall. This sickness usually continued until cold weather, which destroyed the malaria ... .

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* In Mr. Oakwood’s time, malaria was thought to be an ill effect of decaying vegetation, stagnant water, and a poisonous atmosphere.
... This universal sickness prevented the farmers from gathering their corn until winter, and much of it remained in the field until spring, when they would gather in what was left by the deer and fowls ... This annual period of sickness continued with decreasing effect until about 1850, when 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 trampling 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.

... The deep, tough prairie sod was broken or plowed with a very large plow, with a beam ten feet long, and very heavy; the bar of the plow was about four feet long, and turned a furrow twenty to twenty-four inches wide. The iron portion of this immense plow was made by the country blacksmith, and the wood work was made by the farmer himself, or by some more ingenious neighbor. The mould-board was of wood, and made from a twisting tree, to give the mould-board the proper shape to turn the sod. * This immense plow was drawn by six or eight yoke of oxen. Most of the ditches first made to drain the ponds and sloughs were made by these plows and teams. A few furrows were thrown out each way, making a ditch four or five feet wide, and six or eight inches deep, thus killing the grass, and carrying off a vast amount of water.

The prairie thus broken in May and June was planted in corn, ... most of the corn would grow up through the seams of the sod. This corn would grow luxuriantly in the latter part of the season, after the sod began to rot, and often yielded thirty or forty bushels of corn per acre; but twenty to twenty-five bushels was considered a good crop of sod corn. The sod broken after the first of July was usually sown in wheat. ... Wheat thus sown never failed to make a good crop. The roots of grass in the sod prevented the frost from heaving the plants out of the ground. The greatest enemy of the wheat plant at that time, was the innumerable number of wild geese, ducks and cranes, that would often eat off every green blade during the winter and early spring.

... The cattle that were brought by the pioneers were mostly common or scrub stock .... These cattle were greatly improved when kept for a few generations on our rich grasses and winter feed.

... I never did know where the first hogs introduced came from, but I do know they were a hard lot—'Elm-peelers' and 'Hazel-splitters.' *

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* "The forests were searched to find trees that had the right shape for this portion of the plow." 17

† Hogs would tear the inner bark from elm trees and eat it. Mr. Oakwood's colleague Hiram Beckwith explained the basis for the name "hazel splitters" in his History of Vermilion County (see page 64).
The sheep brought into the County were mostly of the common wooled breeds. My father brought two or three hundred head from Ohio in 1833. These were scattered all over the County, and was the foundation stock of a very great many flocks.

For winter wear, caps were made of 'possum and rabbit skins. 'Coon skins were considered too valuable to be used for this purpose.

The wool was usually colored with oak or walnut bark, a brown or 'butternut' color.

wool, being so indispensable to the early settlers, it will be seen at once that the rearing of sheep was of the greatest importance, and yet most difficult to do, on account of the vast number of wolves that infested the country. The sheep had to be kept at night in pens, near the house, and guarded by dogs to prevent them from being killed. Frequently they were killed in broad daylight, in sight of the settler's cabin. Wolves were so detrimental to wool growing that the State offered a liberal premium for their scalps. Large wolf hunts were organized. A flag pole would be erected on some high ridge, for a center and meeting point. A circle of eight or ten miles in diameter formed, and all drove the wolves toward the flag pole, running them down with horses, and killing them when exhausted with clubs. Sometimes the wolf would run eight or ten miles. At these organized hunts, fifteen or twenty wolves were often killed in a day.

In the winter and spring of 1831 the Fromans built the first flatboat at Danville, and loaded it with corn and hay, and floated it down the river to New Orleans, to a market. In years following other boats were built and loaded with produce, and in some cases fat cattle were thus sent to a southern market. Fat hogs were slaughtered in great numbers, and sent in a similar way to the same market.

A few years later Chicago became a market for oats, wheat, corn, and some other produce. These were hauled in wagons. Two weeks usually being

* Raccoon pelts were so valuable that they were traded for goods or sold for cash rather than being kept and made into hats. As Hiram Beckwith put it, "Corn had no market price, but hides and pelts were always cash." C.W. Cowan of Georgetown Township related, "These men of early day wagoned to Chicago with produce of all kinds, meal, apples, oats, chickens, and 'coon skins." See Mr. Cowan's story on page 101 about the priority one man gave to coon hunting.

† Brown dye can be made from the bark of both the black walnut (Juglans nigra) and white walnut (J. cinerea, also known as butternut). William Sandusky, who came to Shelby County as an infant in 1829, recalled that "during his mother's time" (no later than 1840), "the only way of coloring cloth was with black walnut bark." 42

‡ On page 15 the date is given as 1834 instead of 1831.
required to make a trip; the teamsters camping out going and returning, and grazing their teams on the wild prairie grass. 35

W.C. Cowan spoke about Georgetown Township:

We open what we have to say by relating a circumstance which we learned when a boy: Daniel Lane settled in an early day on what is called North Arm, * in Edgar County . . . . He started one morning from that place on horseback, in the fall of the year, to come to the white settlement in this section, perhaps to what is now called Quaker Point. † . . . In some way he missed his bearings and was lost. . . . Thus he wandered for nine days, but on the morning of the ninth he struck a cow track some place near the Embarras River, which took him to his own settlement . . . . The skin was worn from his horse's legs up to the knees, by the continued traveling through the rough prairie grass.

. . . Henry Johnson, who settled west of Georgetown, came in 1820, and was, no doubt, the first settler within the bounds of the Township . . . . Absolem Starr came in 1821. . . . during the winter of 1821, Mr. Starr, while out 'coon hunting, skinned his heel, and from the fact that the 'coon crop was on and must be gathered when ripe, (for their pelts entered largely into the commercial exchange of that day), ‡ he could give his heel no rest, and the consequence was, it became an eating sore and was pronounced a cancer. After considerable doctoring the cancer was cured by a root-and-herb Indian doctor. ¶

. . . Within the next ten years, or up to 1830, we find this part of the country pretty densely populated. . . . Nelson Moore was among the first settlers, and, it is said, killed a deer near where the Public Square of the village now is. It was then in its wilderness beauty, and but a few years before there could only be heard in the twilight, reverberating through the ravines of the Vermilion, the war whoop of the Indian, the howl of the wolf, the hoot of the owl, and the hiss of the adder. 35

1887: Portrait and Biographical Album of Champaign County

This volume devotes nearly 800 pages to the life stories of more than 800 prominent Champaign County residents and their families. A two-page introductory discusses the

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* The south tip of the Vermilion River Area extends into the former North Arm Prairie, in Prairie Township of Edgar County.
† Quaker Point was at the north end of North Arm Prairie.
‡ Hiram Beckwith: "The skins and furs of a winter's crop were worth more than a corn crop."
¶ See page 47 for another version of this story.

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natural landscape, the era of white immigration, and the subsequent development of Cham­
paign County:

... a few lines regarding its location, advantages, and the wonderful transfor­
mation made from the wilderness of forty years ago, will not, we deem, be inap­
propriate. ... In area, Champaign County is among the largest in the State, and
for the value of its products, it is excelled by few. It is ... an oblong square, ... hav­ing an acreage of 645,120, with a population in round numbers of about 42,000. This entire area is under good cultivation, having good roads, elegant farms, fine houses and excellent schools.

The county is traversed by four different lines of railroads, giving it ample trans­por­tation facilities. Its topography is very favorable. The land forms a watershed which carries the water off in every direction. ... The drainage is good, and there are very few sloughs now in the county. The soil is a rich, black vegetable loam, varying from one to two feet in depth, and very produc­tive. The county is covered mostly with undulating prairies with occasional groves, and some slightly broken lands. It is well watered by numerous streams. ... The climate is ... very favorable to agricultural interests as well as stock­raising.

Though settlers came into the county at a very early date, the commencement of its rapid growth may be dated from the construction of the Illinois Central Railroad in 1854–55. This was the turning point in the history of the county. The settlements at first were confined to groves and timber belts, and the cabins were built of logs. The first white men to come into the county, as far as is known, were the United States surveyors, who divided the county into town­ships. This was in the summer of 1821. Prior to this, it is supposed, there were hunters and trappers here, but they left no name or sign behind them of their coming or going. The first settler or squatter, was Runnel Fielder, who came in 1822, and located in the northeast corner of section 11, Urbana Township. Fielder, however, made no entry of land until 1828, which was on section 12, Urbana Township. This pioneer has also the credit of planting the first orchard in the county. Permanent settlement was not begun until the year 1828.

Champaign, like all new counties in this State, until brought under cultivation, was the home and nursery of malarial diseases. They were a great hindrance to the settlement of the county. Sometimes there were not well persons enough in a neighborhood to take care of the sick. Physicians were few, or entirely wanting.

... The county was organized ... by an act of the Legislature, approved Feb. 28, 1833. ... Commissioners ... were appointed to locate the county seat. Urbana received this honor ... . As soon as the county seat was determin­ed upon, settlers began to gather in. They located at first on the south side of
... The population of the county at that time was about 800. In 1835 it had increased to 1,250, and in 1850 to 2,649, not quite 100 a year.

From the advent of the railroads, Champaign County has had a steady and healthy growth, until now she is one of the foremost counties in the State.

... In the growth and development of her vast resources, in her agriculture and stock-raising, in all the departments of labor in which busy man is engaged; in her churches and schools, in civilization and culture, Champaign County has taken a front rank. Well may her people be proud of their product; well may her pioneers turn with pride to their achievements. Within a half century a wilderness has been subdued and converted into beautiful farms and thriving, populous cities, and a community established commanding the admiration of the country. 16

The Portrait and Biographical Album celebrates the privations faced newcomers to Champaign County during the 19th century. Some of the biggest challenges for the earliest immigrants stemmed from the sparse human population and lack of commercial facilities. For instance when Mathew Busey’s family came to Big Grove at the west edge of the Vermilion River basin in 1829, “there were five log cabins at the grove... These contained the only settlers for many miles. The nearest mills and depot for supplies were over the line in Indiana and the journey occupied sixteen days to go and return.” 16

When Lewis Kruder started a farm along the Middle Fork near Penfield in 1845, “there were but three cabins within five miles of his farm.” William Fischer chose to live in the northwest corner of Hensley Township in 1849, when “there were but three or four persons who had remained here.” Only one house stood along eight miles of the State Road between the Fischer farm and Champaign. 1 When Henry West settled near the Fishers in 1855, “There was little then but open prairie on all sides, especially the eastern part of the township.” 1 When Joatham Thompson came to live on the divide between the Salt Fork and the Middle Fork north of Dillsburg about 1858, when “there were but three families in the neighborhood, the chief part of the population consisting of deer and wolves.” 16

Few people and plenty of wildland made for an abundance of wildlife. When William Fischer came to Hensley Township in 1849, “the greater part of the soil was uncultivated. ... Deer and wolves were plenty, and the family were kept supplied with all the wild meat they could consume.” Around Daniel Nisewander’s place in 1850, “The great part of the prairie around was untenanted save by wild animals, and deer roamed at will over the long

* Urbana was founded at the edge of Big Grove.

† Mr. Fischer’s farm was in sections 7 and 18 of Hensley Township, about a mile beyond the western limits of the Vermilion River Area.

‡ The eastern part of Hensley Township extended across the vast wet prairie in the headwaters of the Saline Branch of the Salt Fork of the Vermilion River.
grass.” When Philip Humel arrived in 1859, “Deer and wolves still roamed over the prairie, which was unsettled, save here and there, where a lonely cabin would be seen.”

In 1845 when Lewis Kruder came to live along the Middle Fork in northeastern Champaign County, “Deer and wolves roamed over the prairie and the grass was as high as his little cabin.” Some time after 1851, James W. Stonestreet purchased 120 acres near the Kruder farm:

All around his primitive home stretched the bare, unimproved prairie covered with tough, tall grass and wild flowers. . . . Many times during the night the little band of pioneers was startled by the howling of the wolves, which sometimes made friends with the dogs, partaking of their food and robbing the family of all the fowls which they attempted to raise. In this desolate wilderness Mr. Stonestreet first engaged in farming, and struggled with the crude elements of nature until his efforts were finally crowned with success, and he succeeded in bringing his land to a high state of cultivation.

Mr. and Mrs. Henry Leigh settled along the Salt Fork north of St. Joseph in 1832: “The country at that time abounded in wolves, and their cries, together with those of the wild geese, often aroused the settlers to pursue them.” But this abundance waned: “Gradually as the country became settled up these creatures disappeared, and the settlers’ guns hung idle for weeks upon the wooden peg in the cabin.”

Some of the wildlife bounty consisted of descendants of free-ranging domestic swine. When Mathew Busey brought his family to a site near Urbana in 1829,

They camped in the timber and meeting a man who had a “squatter’s” claim and who offered to sell it for $600, Mr. B. offered him $500 if he would throw in what meat he had on hand to carry him through the winter. This consisted of bacon from the wild hogs which abounded here at that time.

The first white immigrants chose to build their homes either inside the woods or at the very edge—where they could exploit the resources of both woodland and grassland. For instance, when Samuel and Sarah Mapes came to Champaign County in the autumn of 1833, they “settled on a tract of land in St. Joseph Township, near what was called ‘the bend,’ on the edge of a timber tract.” Jacob Bartley, who arrived in 1831 or ’32, first bought 160 acres of wooded land along the Salt Fork south of St. Joseph, but he later added 80 acres of prairie to his holdings.

This strategy of owning a piece of timber to go with the farm ground was popular among landowners featured in the Portrait and Biographical Album of Champaign County. For example Thomas Harmeson’s farm of 360 acres near Royal was “laid out in pasture and grain fields” except for 17 acres of timber. Richard Towner lived on 80 acres of prairie land south of Sidney, but he also owned a 10-acre woodlot on a tributary of the Salt Fork.

* This name may refer to the gigantic bend formed by the Salt Fork abruptly changing its course at St. Joseph and Sidney.
about a mile or two from his house. David Stayton’s land in St. Joseph Township was 300 acres, “all improved with the exception of a valuable timber tract of eighty acres.” Joseph Coddington’s farm along the Salt Fork between Sidney and Homer was “a fine estate containing eighty acres of valuable land, all of which is under cultivation, with the exception of five acres of timber.” And John Trick’s place near Sidney was comprised of “120 acres of finely improved land on the home farm, besides about eight acres of timber.”

Much of the region’s woodland was kept in trees to ensure a continued supply of building materials and fuel for the family farm, but some timber was sold and harvested commercially. In the early 1860s William Park erected a steam-powered sawmill at Sidney. During the next nine years he sawed logs from 700 acres; each 80 acres yielded 1,250,000 board feet of lumber. At about the same time as Mr. Park’s milling business, Abraham Thompson operated a sawmill in neighboring St. Joseph Township. Over an eight-year period, Thompson cut trees from his own land and “shipped large quantities of walnut lumber to different points North and South.”

People chose to live in or next to timber land not only for the trees—but also because woodlands were usually associated with rivers and creeks. These streams supplied water for domestic use and for raising livestock. A description of Joseph Headrick’s place points this out: “A living stream of water runs through the farm, except in exceedingly dry times, which makes it excellent for stock purposes.” Although a streamside farm was convenient, it was not always without risk: Lewis Kruder started a farm along the Middle Fork in Kerr Township in 1845, but within a few years “a freshet . . . swept away many of his valuable horses, cattle, and hogs.” Mr. Kruder subsequently dug five artesian wells “which supply his stock with an abundance of the best water.”

Early 19th-century residents relied on streams to power mills. The Portrait and Biographical Album mentions one such enterprise:

The pioneer flouring-mill in the southeastern part of Champaign County, in Homer Township, was erected in about 1832 . . . . This is located on the south fork of the Vermilion River, * and is one of the old landmarks, so many of which are fast passing away and being lost, on account of the settling up of the land, and the prairie giving place to modern farms.

Flowing water was a valuable resource, but standing water was not so generally valued. James Flatt bought 357 acres north of Champaign in 1883, but his farm lay within the poorly drained basin that gathers waters at the head of the Saline Branch of the Salt Fork of the Vermilion River:

At the time of coming to this vicinity, much of the land adjacent was considered absolutely worthless. After the advent, however, of a few intelligent men, who understood drainage and the benefits arising from it, the Beaver Lake Drainage Association was formed, and Mr. Flatt became prominently identified with this.

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* The Salt Fork was sometimes called the South Fork.
the result being that through the efforts of himself and others as persevering, a tract of territory was redeemed from the swamps and brought to a tillable condition. * 16

In the early 1880s steam-powered dredge-boats began digging the big ditches that were a necessary step for draining the extensive wet prairie lands in the Vermilion River basin. † These main ditches provided an outlet for a branching network of feeder ditches. Underground lines of clay drainage tiles were laid to bleed the wetlands and discharge their water into the ditches. The Portrait and Biographical Album of Champaign County describes several businesses that manufactured drain tiles. The earliest such factory was the Ream & Woodin mill, founded in 1880 near St. Joseph and “one of the most important industries in that section.” The Rantoul Tile Works, established in 1882, was putting out a million tiles per year by 1887. Ezra Compton laid more than four miles of drain tile beneath his mile-square farm amid the wet prairie near Flatville; he decided to start his own tile factory in 1884. John Voss began making drain tiles at Thomasboro about the same time. The Portrait and Biographical Album also mentions tile factories that operated at Mahomet and Urbana during the 1880s.

Champaign County farmers made good use of these locally made tiles. George Smith of Scott Township put seven miles of tile beneath his 240 acres to make “one of the finest farms in this section of the county.” The 380-acre Skinner farm in Ayers Township was “thoroughly drained with eleven and one-half miles of tiling, from three to twelve inches in diameter, and the present year (1887) they have 210 acres of corn.” 16

Tens of thousands of immigrant farmers and their descendants devoted their lifetimes to converting the region’s wildlands to farmland. The efforts of the earliest workers received special notice in the Portrait and Biographical Album. Samuel Hyde became one of the first white residents of Hensley Township in 1850: “He lived to see the county well developed, and where once had been the wild prairie watched with keenest satisfaction the establishment of beautiful homesteads and the cultivation of fields of yellow grain.” Henry Clay West arrived in Hensley Township in 1855: “Mr. West is now the oldest settler in this part of the township, and is tacitly accorded that reverence and respect due to one who looked upon the prairie in its virgin state and assisted in its transformation.” 16

William Elliott of Homer came to neighboring Vermilion County as a six-year-old in 1822:

Our subject remembers, even to this day, many interesting incidents of that time, and the contrast between the face of the country sixty years ago and its appearance at the present. The unbroken prairie, with its waving grass, and the intermediate forests through which deer and other wild animals roamed with freedom, have now given place to cultivated fields and beautiful homesteads,

* The Beaver Lake Drainage District still maintains the Saline Branch Drainage Ditch, which was constructed by dredging a deep channel for the upper reaches of the Saline Branch.

† See History of Drainage Channel Improvement in the Vermilion River Watershed, Wabash Basin. 25

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From the biography of Robert Hewerdine of Rantoul Township:

*What was once a tract of land given to the growth of wild grass, and swept each year with destructive prairie fires, now yields in abundance the choicest products cultivated by the farmers of Illinois.*  

From the biography of Benjamin Coddington of Sidney Township:

*Time has wrought marvelous changes, and the prairies, once desolate wastes covered with coarse, matted grass, now wave with harvests of golden grain and form rich pasture lands for vast herds of cattle and sheep, and to-day the children of the pioneers are reaping the harvest which their fathers planted at the costly price of suffering and privation.*  

From the biography of David Michener of South Homer Township:

*There is no fairer picture in the world during the summer season than the broad stretches of cultivated prairie which beautify the landscape of Central Illinois, and which is divided between grain fields and pasture lands, the yellow corn embellishing the one and the fine cattle roaming in contentment over the other.*  

...and had he not seen the gradual march of progress and civilization, thus becoming accustomed to the change, the transformation would seem like a dream.  

The product of unceasing labor is exemplified by this description of Edward T. Telling’s farm near Broadlands:

*His estate embraces 326 acres of the most highly cultivated land . . ., where of late years he has given his attention principally to the breeding of fine stock . . . of the best grades. The entire farm is finely located, well watered and neatly fenced, and the buildings, tastefully and substantially constructed, are as convenient in their arrangement as they are ornamental in their appearance . . . . The entire premises indicates the supervision of a man more than ordinarily intelligent, who lays his plans with deliberation and executes them with decision.*  

Another example of a lifetime of labor was the farm of Leonidas and Emma Howser in the Salt Fork watershed near Deers station. The farm was “200 acres of highly cultivated land, thoroughly drained with tile, provided with neat and substantial fencing, and all the necessary machinery required by the progressive modern farmer.” Their home was “a handsome frame structure, finely located, and with attractive surroundings, including good out-buildings, shade trees, shrubbery and ample grounds.”  

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The Portrait and Biographical Album heaps especial praise on farmers who left none of their land idle. Charles A. Bengston's farm in the Middle Fork valley near Ludlow was described as "a comfortable homestead" of 80 acres, "every foot of which he has made available for some purpose, and upon which the work has been well done." At Willison Haworth's 120-acre farm in Salt Fork valley near Royal, "None of the land is allowed to run to waste, being utilized either in pasturage or the growing of grain and other crops, either for market or the use of the household." 16

A table on pages 154 to 161 contains extracts from the Portrait and Biographical Album of Champaign County that summarize the condition of land at the time it was purchased, and its subsequent condition in or before 1887, when the volume was published. The great majority of these purchases consisted of wild, unimproved land—but almost every parcel was quickly converted into improved farmland.

1889: Portrait and Biographical Album of Vermilion County

The Publishing House of Chapman Brothers in Chicago produced this handsome tome, containing Full Page Portraits and Biographical Sketches of Prominent and Representative Citizens of the County.

Among the county's representative citizens was Edmund P. Jones, whose parents moved to a "heavily timbered" tract in section 11 of Danville Township * in 1828. Edmund was born two years later:

The subject of this sketch remembers well the wildness of the country around him as it first appeared to him when he became old enough to observe his surroundings, and the beautiful scene presented by the virgin prairie and primeval forest before civilization had wrought its marvelous changes, is indelibly impressed on his mind. Deer, wild turkeys and other game were plentiful and roamed at will . . . . 17

In 1861 Edmund bought 40 acres in section 13 of Danville Township, † "It was partly fenced and a few acres had been broken, but aside from that no improvements had been made, not even any buildings had been erected." 17

Frank Baldwin came to Danville in the spring of 1838. "The country around was comparatively unsettled, the cabins of the pioneers being few and far between. There was only one or two wagon roads and wild animals were plentiful." 17

The family of William Bandy moved to Danville in December of 1828. The father and sons "made a contract to get out 10,000 black walnut rails at 25 cents per 100." William

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* Section 11 is immediately northeast of the Vermilion County Airport.
† Section 13 is about a mile west of Illiana.
also "assisted in breaking the first timber land in this region." He then "put up a house on what was called Sulphur Spring Place, about one mile southeast of the present courthouse." In the spring of 1834 he and others "built a flat boat, 75 x 16 feet in dimensions." They loaded "great quantities of pork" aboard and shipped it to New Orleans. Mr. Bandy "carried on this business for several years, conveying wheat and pork to New Orleans, and building a new boat each year." In 1836 he was appointed to a commission that examined the feasibility of damming the Vermilion River for slack-water navigation, but he "did not see it practical." 17

William Current came to live on the "wild prairie" of Newell Township in 1827. He soon learned that "deer and other kinds of wild game were plentiful and often troublesome in the wheat fields of the pioneers." When William Cast arrived in Danville Township in 1843, "Deer, turkeys and other game were plentiful." 17

Henry Oakwood moved to Oakwood Township in 1833:

The people around him were few and far between, and located mostly along the borders of the timber that skirted the streams. The broad prairies were occupied by deer, wolves and other wild animals in abundance. A village of Indians was located about a mile from the Oakwood residence . . . . 17

When the Portrait and Biographical Album was published in 1889, John J. Partlow lived on 26 acres "in a high state of cultivation" near Danville. But when his father had arrived in 1831, "Indians were still to be seen prowling over the country, while deer, wild turkey and wolves were also plentiful." The elder Mr. Partlow chose to live on a tract that was "part timber and part prairie." 17

Hugh Wright's father came to Vermilion County in 1828:

The first settlement made here by the father was some three miles north of Danville. At the time of his location here there were but three white families in the village, this part of the county being chiefly occupied by Indians. The land had not yet come into market: he, however, ventured to settle in the timber, and reckoned that the prairies would never become populated. 17

John Leemon moved to a 444-acre tract of "wild land" in western Grant Township in 1856. By the time he was interviewed for the Portrait and Biographical Album, his formerly wet ground had been "thoroughly drained with tiling." According to his biographer, "When Mr. Leemon settled here wild animals of all kinds were plentiful, especially deer and wolves. He has seen as many as seventy-five deer in one herd, while men frequently got together to hunt the wolves . . . ." 17

John R. Thompson drove 1,300 sheep from Pennsylvania to Oakwood Township in 1851. He brought another 1,500 head in the spring of 1852. He then worked as a shepherd on the open prairie for six years: "He watched his flocks on the wild prairie when the settlers were few and far between and occupying farms within a mile of the timber." 17
William and Elizabeth Davis came to Vance Township in 1834. "Two hours after reaching their destination they were visited by prairie wolves which were frequent callers for many years afterward." 17

George Hoagland came to western Grant Township in the autumn of 1860. "Few men had settled at that time in township 23, range 12 . . . ." It was "raw prairie": "Little of the land around them had been fenced or cultivated, while deer, wolves and other wild animals had scarcely learned to be afraid at the approach of man." 17

William H. Price was "one of the foremost farmers and stock raisers in Pilot Township." He arrived in 1830:

> When our subject was brought to this county, a child of three years, it was a wild waste of prairie, and the settlers at the time thought that the land away from the streams where the timber grew was worthless for settlement, so they confined themselves to the banks of the creeks and rivers. 17

Fifty-nine years later . . .

> He has a large farm of over 700 acres of well-improved land, comprising sections 8, 9 and 10, whose broad fields are under high cultivation, and which is amply supplied with roomy, conveniently arranged, well made buildings, and all the appliances for facilitating farm work, while everything about the place betokens order and superior management. 17

John Cole immigrated to Danville Township in 1837:

> The summer of 1838, was noted among the early settlers as the sickly season, * and almost everybody was ill . . . . Our subject found here the virgin prairie and primeval forest scarcely disturbed by the few pioneers that had preceded him; and there were still traces of the aboriginal settlers of the country, and deer, wolves, and other wild animals had not fled before the advancing step of civilization. . . . He was one of the first wool growers in the county, but experienced much difficulty in raising sheep in the early days here on account of the wolves that would frequently kill some of his flock in sight of his house. . . . Mr. Cole pursued the wolves and killed many of them. He commenced with forty-nine sheep and finally had a large flock, numbering 2,200 of a fine breed. 17

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* H.S. Bloom, who lived along the Kankakee River northwest of Kankakee, recalled of 1838, "... sickness set in; bilious and intermittent fevers in every house; not a family in the whole country that escaped. In some instances every member of the family was down. . . . The pestilence claimed victims in every household." 36 Up the Kankakee River in Indiana, Solon Robinson reported, "The summer of 1838 was one of severe drouth & great sickness & probably more deaths in proportion to the population than in any other year up to this time, since the commencement of the settlement." 26
When William Judy was interviewed for the Portrait and Biographical Album, he was living in Middlefork Township on a farm of “420 broad acres, the greater part of which is enclosed with beautiful hedge fencing, neatly trimmed, and the land all in a high state of cultivation.” But he told his biographer that he could distinctly remember “the time when this section of the country was a wild prairie, thinly settled, when deer and wolves were numerous, mill and market far away . . . .”

In 1870 Timothy Park moved to one of the last areas in east-central Illinois to be converted to farmland. He bought land in section 25 of Grant Township, southeast of Hoopeston:

It was then but a tract of uncultivated prairie, without a building, fence or tree, in fact, being wholly destitute of the work of man. Now he has all the improvements necessary for a well regulated farm . . . . Mr. Park has always been an ardent advocate of thorough drainage, and was one of the first to build tile drains in this part of the county, and he now has his entire farm tiled in the most thorough manner. On the northern half of his farm he has the biggest and deepest ditch in the northeast corner of the county, and the results of this careful attention to proper drainage and tillage of the soil are apparent in the splendid condition of his land and his usual good crops.

Although not one of the original settlers of the county, Mr. Park located here when the land was new and sparsely settled. The presence of large sloughs and much low land in the neighborhood had retarded the progress of this section of the county, and he has witnessed its development from its wild state to its present prosperous condition . . . . The nearest market for the product was at Lafayette, Ind., and no regular and direct roads having been laid out, the wagons had to go the best way they could around the numerous sloughs and across the prairies, making the distance between here and there from forty-five to fifty miles. Often Mr. Park has started long before daylight, sometimes as early as two o’clock in the morning, in order to get to Lafayette by sundown, which could only be accomplished by hard driving. The next day was occupied by the return trip. . . . All honor, then, to those brave and sturdy men who from the wild and bleak prairies have made this country one of prosperous farms, dotted with groves, among which nestle thousands of comfortable homes.

Thomas Keplinger moved to section 29 of Grant Township, south of Hoopeston:

This, when he took possession of it in 1870 was but slightly improved, only a little breaking having been done and not a shrub, post or tree upon it, being all open prairie.

. . . At the time of his coming to Illinois, Mr. Keplinger found deer, wolves and all kinds of wild animals in abundance.

Alfred M. Dixon arrived in Grant Township in 1872. His farm was “nothing but a tract of raw prairie land, with neighbors few and far between”:
Wild game was in that day plentiful in this region, and Mr. Dixon mentions that he counted at one time seven deer at a small creek near his house. Wild fowl were also plenty; ducks, geese and prairie chickens being constant and not always welcome visitors to the farmers' grain fields. Prairie wolves were unpleasantly numerous, the farmers' pig pens often suffering by their depredations. 17

The family of William Canaday moved from Tennessee to Elwood Township in the early spring of 1821, "when there was but one cabin within its limits." They made maple sugar during that first spring. Late in life Mr. Canaday recalled that "Indians were numerous" when his family arrived. According to his biography, the Indians "camped on the banks of the Little Vermilion in the spring of the year to hunt and fish." 17 Here are some further notes about the fauna around the Canaday farm in southeastern Vermilion County:

Wild game was plentiful—deer, turkey and a few buffalo. In the fall they filled the smoke-house with deer hams and also had plenty of pork.

When returning to Tennessee * the Canaday family left thirty hogs . . . which they could not well take with them upon going back South. So the animals ran wild, and for years thereafter their progeny roamed through the woods and became so ferocious that a boar would sometimes kill a cow. 17

Amos Jackson was "one of the largest land-owners in the township of Sidell." He first bought a 640-acre section and then added 492 acres:

Beside all that he made many valuable improvements, among which may be mentioned 5,400 rods of drain tile, and there is not five acres of waste land on this immense tract. . . . He has 450 head of cattle and is feeding a large number of hogs. 17

James Clifton was born in 1832 in Georgetown Township, and he was a life-long resident of the township. "He remembers the time when wild animals abounded in this region and killed deer within the limits of this township as late as twenty-five years ago." 17

Benjamin Ziegler moved to section 15 of Grant Township (southeast of Hoopeston) in 1858:

. . . the following year he broke forty acres of his own land with a team of four yoke of cattle and a twenty-four inch plow.

. . . When he first bought this land it was all bare open prairie, not a tree or shrub was on the ground. . . . The country when he first came here was wild and unsettled, and his nearest neighbor for some time was two miles away, and from the rising ground near his house, as far as the eye could see, there were less than a dozen houses. Prairie wolves were numerous, compelling the settler to house his stock at night, wild game was plentiful, and deer, ducks, geese and

* The Canaday clan returned briefly to Tennessee in 1821.
prairie chickens were in such abundance that dogs were kept and trained to keep them from the farmer's grain fields, and the pioneer's table was well supplied with delicacies, the fruit of his gun. But one road was then laid out hereabouts . . . . Not a fence was up, and to leave the beaten path was to run the risk of being lost on the prairie. Trading was done mostly at Attica, Ind., thirty miles away, the trip to store and back consuming two days. 17

The family of William Burroughs came to reside in the neighborhood of Catlin in 1839. "There were very few settlers in this region at the time of the arrival of the Burroughs family, there being a few Indians and French on the Salt fork of the Vermilion River." 17 In 1849 or '50 he paid $80 cash for 20 acres of timber, and he went $400 into debt to purchase 80 acres of prairie.

John Brady was born in 1837 and grew up in Danville Township. His boyhood home was one of the oldest frame houses in the county. "The sideboard, casings, window frames, in fact, all the finishing, was made of black walnut." As soon as Brady was old enough to go hunting, "he often went hunting and killed many a deer, wild turkeys and other game that were a welcome addition to the home larder." 17

George W. Miller moved to Vermilion County in 1845:

At this time there was only one house in sight of his cabin, that being another log house about three miles north of his, and where the thriving village of Rossville now stands was another cabin. . . . Breaking prairie was the first thing in order, and to the struggling, poor pioneer was no easy task. Gradually it was accomplished and he soon had his forty acres under cultivation. Fencing it was a necessity, but it had to be delayed for some time. . . . it was imperative that the pioneer guard against danger from wild animals, the wolves, especially being very numerous and daring, compelling him to shelter his live stock and poultry every night. 17

Nancy Hessey came to Pilot Township in 1853. "Being a prairie, this region had not been settled as early as some other parts, and was still but partially reclaimed from the wilderness; deer yet roamed at will." 17

Dennis Olehy arrived in Danville Township in 1830:

The greater part of the land in this State was then in the hands of the Government. Indians still lingered around their old haunts, deer and other wild game were plentiful in the then sparsely settled country which showed but few signs of the coming civilization. 17

John Mills brought his family to the Quaker settlement in the southeast corner of Vermilion County in 1822:

There were various swamps along the route, and when four or five miles south of Quaker Point the teams were unable to proceed.
... John Mills settled among the Indians and wild animals . . . . . . Deer were numerous, the settlers being enabled to kill them almost at their own door. The wolves made night dismal with their howling, and the chickens, pigs and sheep had to be securely housed in order to save them. The woods were full of bee trees and there was an abundance of wild fruit. This section of the country at that time was almost literally a land flowing with milk and honey, but there was much sickness. 17

Henry Cotton was a newborn when his parents moved to the Vermilion River valley in 1822:

He . . . grew up . . . at a time when wild animals abounded in this region, deer being especially plentiful, and wolves howled around their cabin door at night. Frequently the broad and unhabited prairie covered with wild dry grass, was lighted up by a conflagration, started perhaps by some unwary traveler dropping a spark from his pipe, when the smoke and flames would sweep perhaps for miles destroying animal life to a great extent and threatening that of human beings. Every level-headed settler made it his first business to protect himself from this catastrophe by plowing around his dwelling and thus destroying the food for the flames which could be forestalled in no other way. 17

Ira G. Jones was yet an infant in 1827, when his family moved to Quaker Point in the southeast corner of the county. According to his biography, young Ira received his education in a log cabin called “Hazel Brush College.” 17

Levi Henry Graves came to Georgetown Township in 1828:

Levi H., our subject, was brought here an infant at a time when deer and other wild game were plentiful and when the settlers still felt insecure from the Indians. On the prairie the grass grew higher than the back of an ordinary horse. Fever and ague added to the other discouragements encountering the pioneers . . . . . . It was the popular opinion at that time that prairie land was of little value so the people settled in the timber from which they cleared the trees and cultivated the soil. Very little wheat was used during the first few years . . . . 17

David Dickson of Carroll Township was betrothed about 1828:

Mr. Dickson often recalls to his mind the appearance of the country in Central Illinois at this time and prior to it. He describes it as exceedingly beautiful, diversified with prairie and timber, the meadows and marshes thriving, with a luxurious growth of prairie grass and wild flowers. At intervals some careless traveler or thoughtless settler would accidentally set fire to the dry vegetation, and then would ensue a conflagration terrible to behold, and frightful to those who did not know how to protect themselves from it. Wild animals of all kinds abounded, deer, wolves, etc., while poisonous reptiles—the rattlesnake, the blue racer, the black and the garter snake—kept the traveler on the look-out. There
were also great quantities of wild birds—geese, ducks and pheasants, besides turkeys and pigeons. The Kickapoo and Pottawatomie Indians had not yet left the country—prowling around until 1835, when they were removed west of the Mississippi.

... Mr. Dickson made his first trip to the little town of Chicago in 1835, taking with him a load of produce drawn by oxen. Later, in 1839, he began feeding cattle, and was the first man to engage in this industry on the Little Vermilion. In 1844 he drove 100 head of hogs to Chicago, and during 1848, 1849 and 1850 transported in this manner several herds of fat cattle to Philadelphia and New York City. In connection with this fact it may be noted, that Carroll Township has produced more and finer cattle than any other township in the State of Illinois, and Mr. Dickson in his palmy days was recognized as one of the leaders in this business. 17

The year 1830 brought William Rees to Elwood Township. "In the following winter occurred the deep snow which fell two feet on the level and when nearly all the deer and wolves were frozen to death." 17

Luther A. Riggs of Carroll Township bought his first land in 1864—"eighty acres of uncultivated prairie which was destitute of any kind of vegetation except a luxuriant growth of grass." 17

Elisha C.B. Fithian began farming in Oakwood Township in 1854. By 1879 he was owner of 2,700 acres in Oakland and Vance Townships, "400 acres being in timber and the balance under a good state of cultivation." 17

William H. Roderick was born in Newell Township in 1833:

As soon as he was large enough, the active lad began to hunt deer, wild turkeys and other game that abounded at that time, and he supplied the family larder with delicious venison, etc. ... Our subject remained all inmate of his father's house until he married and established a home of his own, settling at that time on the farm he still owns and occupies. It was heavily timbered, with the exception of six acres, and his has been the task of the pioneer to develop it from the hand of nature to a well-cultivated estate, all but thirty acres cleared and under tillage, neatly fenced, and provided with a substantial, roomy set of frame buildings . . . . 17

Samuel Dougherty married Jane Dalby in 1835. After a year or so, the couple set up a household north of Fairmount:

* During Mr. Dickson's time, ruffed grouse were known as pheasants.

† Pigeon = passenger pigeon.
... our subject commenced life in true pioneer style upon a tract of raw prairie about sixty rods from the timber, quite isolated and being the farthest from the timber of any other settler. ... Their slumbers were often disturbed by the howling of wolves (frequently poking their noses in the cracks of the house) which often lasted the greater part of the night. There was then nothing to mark the present site of Danville as a town, and nothing but tall grass and a vast prairie between Salt Fork and Little Vermilion timber.

... Upon this farm of 120 acres Samuel Dougherty lived and labored until March, 1852, effected good improvements ... He finally, ... that year, removed to another farm of 120 acres, located on section 16, one and three-fourth miles south of Fairmount. Here he proceeded as before, opening up a farm from the raw prairie ...

On the 20th of November, 1856, Samuel Dougherty once more took up his line of march to another farm of 120 acres, three miles south of Fairmount, to which he later added 160 acres, scarcely any of which was under cultivation at the time of purchase.

Casper James Langley was born in Danville Township in 1835. "When he was young, deer and other wild game were plentiful, and our subject used to find pleasure in hunting and supplying the table with the delicacies of the chase."

William I. Allen moved to Danville in 1844, and he purchased some land at the future site of Hoopeston ...

... at that time a tract of uncultivated ground, over which deer, wolves, prairie chickens and other wild creatures had up to this time wandered undisturbed by man. There was not a tree or shrub in sight and the pioneer, after erecting his cabin, frequently stood in his door and counted numbers of deer, sometimes as high as sixty in one herd.

After Dennis H. Rouse was orphaned in 1832, he was taken in by his uncle's family in Danville Township. "He distinctly remembers being sent out frequently in early spring to drive deer from the wheat field. Wild turkeys were common, so that the tables of our pioneers can hardly have lacked for game."

Dr. William Fithian moved to Danville in 1830:

Indians still lingered here, while deer and other wild game was plentiful. The surrounding country was very thinly settled, the land being mostly owned by the Government and for sale at $1.25 per acre.

Newell Township became W.R. Chandler's home in 1828. "Indians, prairie wolves and other dangerous creatures were plentiful, also deer and wild game of all kinds."

The William Patterson family arrived in Elwood Township in 1827:
They settled at Yankee Point... among Indians and wild animals, such as deer, wolves, wild hogs, and an abundance of turkeys, pheasants, \(^t\) prairie chickens, and other wild fowl. The pioneers settled in and along the timber, thinking the prairie could never be utilized for anything except grazing. \(^{17}\)

Albert G. Olmsted’s family was prominent in the early development of the Danville area. The Olmsted Mill on the Salt Fork at Batestown, “besides manufacturing lumber, engaged in building flatboats, that being the only mill where such boats were built, and the most of those that were made in this section of the country were built there.” Alfred Olmsted’s father-in-law passed away in 1872 “on the homestead that he had eliminated from the wild prairies.” \(^{17}\)

1892: Portrait and Biographical Record of Ford County

Among the “Biographical Sketches of Prominent and Representative Citizens” of Ford County is one written about Nicholas Balfour Day. In August of 1854 Mr. Day “settled near the site of the present city of Paxton, then a wild prairie.”

An incident illustrating the primitive condition of the situation is given by our subject, who relates the story of his one day running a prairie wolf down while out on horseback, and his killing the animal at a point that is now the center of the city of Paxton. The killing was accomplished by the common method in pioneer days. The rider having tired the wolf out, took off one of the stirrups with the strap attached and struck the wolf over the head without dismounting. \(^{27}\)

Levi Miller moved to Ford County in 1864. His farm was about four miles north of the courthouse square:

At that time the country was so thinly settled that he could get on his horse and ride straight to the court-house in Paxton without turning either to the right or left. \(^{27}\)

1903: The Past and Present of Vermilion County

Gustavus Pearson’s introduction to The Past and Present portrays the site of Danville at the time of its founding in 1827:

It was a fortunate as well as an ideal location. As the plainsmen have it, “there was an abundance of wood, water and grass” all easily obtainable. No danger of floods, matters not if a repetition of Noah’s time occurred; excellent and economical drainage, yet easily accessible from all directions. Evidences of the Indian’s appreciation of the beauty and advantages of this site was to be seen by

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\(^t\) Yankee Branch flows into the Little Vermilion River near the state line.

\(^t\) Pheasant = ruffed grouse.
the pioneer, their camping grounds and former village sites extending from the
crecent banks of the main Vermilion river on the south, along the billowy
 shaped bluffs on the west, which defined the course of the North Fork to the
abrupt Denmark Hills. Eastward Stone Creek, which was a rapidly flowing
stream of clear cold water, was the boundary. Remember, too, that this plateau,
level as a floor, was free from underbrush until long after the advent of the
whites. A beautiful forest of sugar maple was in the southeastern part, while
oaks, walnuts, elms and other varieties of deciduous trees clothed the northern
portion. It would be useless to attempt a pen photograph as it would in nowise
furnish a picture of the natural beauties of the original landscape before it was
marred and destroyed by the ruthless hand of man; ready to sacrifice any and
everything for gain. I doubt if there exists a nature so barren of sentiment, so
lacking in all that elevates mankind above the brute that has not some fondness
and love of the beautiful. Can imagination, poetically inspired though it be,
present and form any type of beauty compared with spring, clothed in her
varied shades of the bursting buds of trees and shrubs trimmed with garlands
of flowers of every color; the summer of hope and anticipation; followed then
by the season of fruition; succeeded by grim visaged winter which was, how­
ever, a time of warm-hearted hospitality in pioneer days. 42

Mr. Pearson counseled, “With bright prospects for the future let us hope that all tending
to detract from Danville’s fair name is forever buried and will be forgotten.” Yet he docu­
mented one blemish in Danville’s reputation as a friendly natural environment:

A matter which may be forgotten if not noted is this: there was a time in
Danville’s history when . . . beef was killed on the square after having been
thoroughly tested for milk sickness; if affected it was shown by violent trembl­
ing which gave the disease the name it was generally known by (trembles) it was
the cause of many deaths among the early settlers. Milk, butter or beef from
towns or country northeast of the city was regarded with suspicion. An English
family of seven who had recently settled in Danville, on the southeast corner of
Hazel and North streets died in a week from eating butter coming a mile or so
northeast from the junction. . . . This milk sickness is something which has
eluded investigation; that it is the result of poison taken into the system from
beef, butter or milk is accepted by medical men † . . . . Danville’s fair name
was clouded for years by the reported milk sickness . . . . A reputation smirch­
ed is like a name with a bar sinister, ‡ difficult to put aside or overcome. 42

* The Denmark Hills now form the banks of Lake Vermilion.

† Scientists eventually determined that people are afflicted by milk sickness if they consume
meat or dairy products from cattle that have eaten a native woodland herb, white snakeroot (Eu­
patorium rugosum).

‡ In the symbolism of British heraldry, the bar sinister has sometimes been interpreted as an
indication of illegitimate birth.
This volume provides sketches of the lives of more than 500 citizens of Vermilion County, past and present. Many of these biographies afford insights into the ecology of the region during the period when it was being transformed from wildland to farmland. For instance the following information is from the review of the life of Norbourn Neville, who came to the county as a child:

It was in the year 1854 that the father of this family came to Vermilion county accompanied by his wife and children. Upon arriving here he purchased the north half of section 10, Vance township, finding that everything around was new and wild, the land unbroken and the grass so high that when a boy our subject climbed upon a cabin in order to see where the cattle were. . . . Mr. Neville . . . has witnessed the development of the country from a wild condition when there was not a fence for miles upon the prairie, to its present state of progress and improvement. 42

The biography of John W. Fisher relates that he was born in Carroll Township in 1840. His father had bought land there in 1832, “when the prairies were largely uncultivated and when there was still much wild game; wolves and other wild animals were also frequently seen.” Mr. Fisher had retired and was living in Indianola when he was interviewed for The Past and Present:

The county as he views it to-day little resembles the district in which he was reared, for turkeys, prairie chickens and other wild game were abundant and deer were still seen, wolves were often killed by the settlers . . . . 42

Joseph Cunningham was less than two years old in 1829, when his parents brought him to Vermilion County:

They settled on the prairie in Newell township at what was known as the Cunningham grove. †

. . . The country was filled with prairie wolves and there were also many black timber wolves and wild games of all kinds, including deer. It was necessary to pen up the domestic animals at night for their protection. 42

Seymer G. Wilson wrote his own biography for The Past and Present of Vermilion County. Among his remarks:

I came with my parents in October, 1864, to this county, and settled on the Eight Mile prairie, ‡ in what is known as “The Fairchild settlement.” Father

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† The Neville farm was in the Olive Branch drainage of the Salt Fork, on the Vermilion County line immediately east of Homer.

‡ The site of the Cunningham farm is in section 11 of Newell Township, immediately northeast of Vermilion County Airport.

‡ Eight Mile Prairie lay between the North Fork and the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River in Blount Township.
was a farmer, and here he followed that calling, until the year 1876, when he moved to a farm five miles northeast of Rossville, in this county. The farm was raw prairie, and here I broke, that spring, with one three-horse plow ninety acres of prairie sod, and killed twenty-seven rattlesnakes. 42

The parents of Almond Norton Le Neve came to Newell Township in 1823, “when the country was wild and unimproved and Indians were numerous.” Almond, who was born in 1837, recalled of his childhood era, “Part of the neighborhood could not farm until the hickory bark would peel, * from which they made tugs, hames † and shoe strings.” 42

Isaac Smith arrived about 1840. His farm appears to have been in Blount Township:

He found here an unbroken prairie tract over which ran prairie wolves, while wild turkeys, prairie chickens, cranes and ducks could be had in abundance. The Indians had just left the district. . . . He entered eighty acres of wild land for one dollar and twenty-five cents per acre and immediately began breaking and improving his farm. He hired some one to make rails with which to fence his land and in true pioneer style he began the raising of grain and stock on the western prairies, his market being Chicago, which was then but a village. 42

Michael Weaver arrived in Carroll Township in 1828:

Indians were still numerous in this part of the country, but gave no trouble to the settlers. . . . Game of all kinds was plentiful, venison was a frequent dish upon the pioneer table and prairie chickens and turkeys furnished many a meal. Wolves were often seen and frequently killed by the settlers . . . . 42

From the sketch of the life of Samuel W. Baum:

Mr. Baum was born February 15, 1842, on the old family homestead in Carroll township ‡ . . . . . . . . . He would break prairie with his six yoke of oxen, turning a twenty-two inch furrow. After his father’s death he left home and was employed for a time as a farm hand . . . .

. . . When the estate was settled Samuel W. Baum received his share—eighty acres of raw prairie, and after the fourth year he broke this. The timber with which he fenced it, he hauled seven miles. His uncle said he would not fence it for the land—such was the estimate placed on prairie at that time. The next year Mr. Baum bought another eighty-acre tract, fenced the entire amount and placed it under the plow. 42

* In the springtime as buds begin to burst into leaf, young hickories can be stripped of their fibrous inner bark.
† Tugs and hames attach draft animals to farm implements.
‡ The farm was at present-day Indianola.
Thomas Williams drove 400 sheep from Ohio to the future site of Hoopeston in 1853, finishing the journey on October 20:

... through the succeeding winter he made his home with "Uncle Samuel" Gilbert. His attention was given to caring for his sheep which he fed in the timber south of Rossville, and in the spring he located upon a farm owned by Mr. Hoopes on section 11, Grant township, northwest of the present site of Hoopeston. At that time his nearest neighbor lived two and one-half miles to the south and his nearest neighbor on the north was eight miles distant, so that there was no one but Mr. Williams and his hired hand to keep the wolves away from the sheep. The dogs would chase the wolves for a short distance and then the latter would turn upon the dogs driving them back to the house. Therefore Mr. Williams had to be on guard all through the day and at night he says he "slept with one eye open," although he had a wolf-proof pound in which the sheep were driven when evening fell. For two years he continued in this business and the second winter his flock was increased by an additional four hundred head, but the inclement weather and the rattlesnakes made sad havoc among livestock and he was obliged to turn his attention in another direction. He then purchased five yoke of oxen and a breaking plow and for three years was engaged in breaking prairie, being usually able to make one hundred dollars per month in the summer time. When the weather was suitable he could turn an eighteen to twenty inch furrow. 

Many early immigrants chose to establish a farm with both grassland and woodland, and they kept some of their land in trees. The parents of Elmer E. Cunningham were different:

... the father of our subject here purchased eighty acres of prairie land and forty acres of timber land, clearing the latter and breaking the entire tract, which he placed under a high state of cultivation, the mother assisting her husband in improving the place. ... the lady was born in this county September 3, 1840, her parents being ... among the earliest settlers of the county, taking up their abode here when the Indians were far more numerous than the white people.

William Sandusky was three years old when his family came to live along the Little Vermilion River in Carroll Township in 1830 or '31. William worked on the farm while he was growing up:

He would break prairie using an old wooden mold board plow and later with a rod mold-board which would turn up a twenty-four inch furrow and to which was hitched five or six yoke of oxen. ... When he was twenty-one years of age he started out in life for himself ... There was not a thing but prairie grasses around him, but he possessed the determination necessary for the development of a good farm.

... In the early days he would ride for miles in any direction without coming across fences to impede his progress. He frequently enjoyed a hunt for deer and lesser game and often killed wolves which frequently awakened the settlers from
their sleep by their howling. There were geese, ducks, wild turkeys and prairie chickens and many of these fowls furnished a meal for the early settlers. 42

James Cook "came from Ohio to Vermilion county in the year 1835, casting his lot with the first settlers":

He took up his abode two and one-half miles east of Westville, on section 10, Georgetown township. The land bought by him was wild and unimproved and the work of progress and improvement seemed scarcely begun. Deer and other wild game was to be found in this portion of the state and much of the land was swampy and full of sloughs, but there came to this portion of Illinois a progressive, courageous class of pioneers, who in due course of time wrought a great transformation in the county and placed it with the leading counties of the state. 42

John Leemon farmed near the northern edge of the Vermilion River valley, starting a few miles west of where Hoopeston now stands:

When for miles the broad prairies stretched away wild and unimproved, when the land was still in possession of the government and the most far-sighted could not have dreamed that a few years would make a wonderful change here, John Leemon came to Vermilion county and upon its broad prairie he took up his abode far from any home, save the one settlement which was the residence of Thomas Hoopes. He assisted in the arduous task of reclaiming the wild land for the purposes of civilization . . . . 42

Mr. Leemon had begun laboring as a tenant farmer in Jersey County, but he held higher aspirations:

In the meantime he visited Vermilion county and purchased four hundred and forty acres of wild land. . . . In the fall of 1857 he erected a small house upon his own farm . . . . . . His labors wrought a wonderful transformation in the appearance of his place and its value. . . . The wet land was tiled and thus made cultivable . . . . . . Gradually the settlements increased, . . . the deer and wolves which were once so numerous were driven out. Mr. Leemon often remarked that he saw as many as seventy-five head of deer in a single herd and the early settlers were frequently called for a wolf hunt when hunger had made the wolves so venturesome that they would steal to the very doors of the cabins in order to get the venison found hanging by the side of the house. Many winters he killed from fifteen to twenty head of deer and it was he that killed the last deer known to have been slain upon the prairies. 42

The Past and Present of Vermilion County preserves a record of the accomplishments of Dean Tomlinson:

F.D. Tomlinson is a well known representative of the farming interests of Vermilion county. He has five hundred acres of rich and arable land in Ross
township and is accounted one of the successful and progressive agriculturists and also one of the early settlers of this locality, for since 1856 he has made his home in the county. *

. . . He secured a tract of raw prairie which he broke and fenced, continuing its cultivation as the years passed until its rich productive fields constituted one of the valuable farms of the community. . . . The place is well tiled so that the land has become arable, and fences divide the farm into fields of convenient sizes. He raises good stock in addition to the cultivation of his crops and his is one of the modern and model farms of the county. 42

Thomas Hughes made his home in section 15 of Vance Township:

In 1864, Mr. Hughes brought his family to Vermilion county, Illinois, where he purchased eighty acres of land at eight dollars per acre. This was prairie land, unimproved and wild. But few settlers were in the county at the time and wild game was plentiful, including prairie-chickens, geese, ducks and deer. The prairie wolves were also numerous and often howled at night near the pioneer home. Fairmount was then a town consisting of one-half dozen houses and three stores. 42

Albert G. Olmsted came to live along the Salt Fork of the Vermilion River at Batestown in 1839:

For some time he operated what was known as the Olmsted sawmill and in addition to manufacturing lumber he engaged in building flatboats. That was the only mill where such boats were built and he turned out more than any other man in this section of the country. † 42

Elisha C.B. Fithian was born in Danville in 1837. A year after he finished his schooling at a seminary, he took up farming in Oakland Township:

He took charge of his father’s farm of thirty-seven hundred acres, very little of which was at that time under cultivation. Mr. Fithian began breaking the prairie, using five or six yoke of oxen to a breaking plow which would turn a furrow of twenty-two inches. He broke a thousand acres in this way, but much of it had to be gone over again, often as many as three or four times, for there had been no ditching done and the warm water would again start the prairie.

* Tomlinson Cemetery is a one-acre plot of never-plowed ground along the Middle Fork in Kerr Township. The cemetery provides refuge for a rich variety of native prairie and savanna vegetation, and it is protected as an Illinois Nature Preserve.

† These flatboats were used to float farm products to New Orleans. The above excerpt about Albert Olmsted says that his mill at Batestown was the only one where such boats were built, but the introduction to The Past and Present of Vermilion County says that boats to ship produce were built in Danville “at the foot of Vermilion street with gunwales and plank from trees cut on the flat east and adjoining.” 42
grasses. Finally Mr. Fithian gave up the attempt to transform into cultivable fields the low land and used it as pasture. He turned his attention to the stock business on an extensive scale. ... When the railroads were built through this portion of the state he made shipments of his cattle to Chicago. He remembers distinctively, however, the early conditions of the county when there was much game, including prairie chickens, ducks, brant and geese. There were also large numbers of prairie wolves that might be heard howling at night or seen skirring over the country in the day-time. Mr. Fithian has seen as many as sixteen deer in a single herd pass through his orchard. At night, if the corn was not well fenced, the deer would enter the fields and eat and tramp down the crop. 42

George T. Ray bought 320 acres in sections 29 and 30 of Ross Township * in 1835:

He at once began to break this, fenced it and in course of time developed a good farm. The entire country around, too, was an almost unbroken wilderness ....

... He came here when much of the land appeared just as it did when nature completed her work. It was the haunt of deer and other wild animals and venison furnished many a meal for the early settlers, while wild fowls were frequently seen on the pioneer board. A number of years have passed ere the wild prairie grasses had entirely been replaced by the fields of waving grain .... 42

From the biography of Abel Woolverton:

In the year 1850 ... Colonel Woolverton ... located in Grant township, Vermilion county, settling on government land on the North Fork. He became one of the early settlers of the community. ... There were many wild animals here, including wolves, and among the wild game there numbered deer, geese, brant and ducks. 42

Colonel Woolverton's son Thomas was born in Grant Township in 1851. At the age of 13 he "started out in life on his own account" as a farm laborer. About 1877 he gave up farming and moved to Hoopeston:

He was a resident of this place when the entire locality was covered with rosin-weed and milk-weed and prairie grasses grew in abundance. He herded cattle on the present site of Hoopeston, but as the years have passed he has witnessed great changes .... 42

Mr. A. Ward farmed 80 acres of the Little Vermilion valley southwest of Georgetown. "In 1875 he bought his present farm on section 1, Georgetown township. ... When he located here the land was all covered with timber, but he cleared this and has placed his fields under a high rate of cultivation." 42

* Mr. Ray's farm was at the junction of Jordan Creek and the Middle Branch of the North Fork of the Vermilion River, southeast of Rossville.
Sarah E. Dougherty was born in Vermilion County in 1833. "The country was full of deer and all kinds of game and during her childhood days Indians were very numerous in this portion of the state." * 42

Zachariah Robertson, Sr., brought his family to Newell Township in 1834 or '35:

When they arrived here deer was plentiful and there were many prairie chickens, cranes, ducks and wild turkeys. Hunting and fishing were sports in which the settlers might easily indulge and find good reward for their expenditure of time. . . . Mr. Robertson entered forty acres of land and upon this he built a log cabin. He was numbered among the pioneers who felled the forests and broke the prairie, thus paving the way for civilization and laying the foundation for the present progress and prosperity of the county. 42

Zachariah Robertson, Jr., was 12 years old when he came with his family to Newell Township. As a young man he bought "fifty-two and one-half acres of wild prairie for which he had to pay one dollar and a half per acre." Sometimes he went to great lengths to dispose of his crops:

In early days he made several trips to Chicago, taking produce with him and it required twelve days to go and come. He would sleep out upon the ground at night by the side of his wagon. There were many sloughs and ponds, creeks and rivers to be forded. 42

A.H. Clutter arrived in Vermilion County in 1855:

Forty-seven years ago he came to Illinois, casting his lot among the early settlers of Vermilion county at a time when the work of progress and improvement had scarcely been begun here. There were large herds of deer and venison was no rare dish upon the board of the early settlers. There were also wild geese and other wild game, and wolves were frequently killed, but all these have disappeared and the swamps and sloughs have been drained, the prairies broken and fenced and the work of cultivation carried on until now this is one of the garden spots of the great state of Illinois, famed throughout the nation as an agricultural district. 42

John Thomas Mann immigrated to the county about 1861. He lived for three years in Rossville, then 13 years along the Salt Fork near Danville, and finally in Homer:

Living in Vermilion county in pioneer days Mr. Mann could remember seeing large herds of deer running over the farm, while wolves were frequently killed and other kinds of wild animals were hunted. Various kinds of wild game were also to be had in abundance and pioneer conditions everywhere existed.

. . . He always kept a pack of grey hounds and deer dogs and at different times killed a large number of deer. 42

* Indians were forcibly removed from the region in 1834.
James and Nancy White lived in Blount Township. They arrived some time in the 1820s (or no later than March 1830):

They took up their abode in Vermilion county, Illinois, when many red men still lived in this section of the state, the prairies were covered with the native grasses and in the forests the trees stood in their primeval strength. Deer roamed among the trees or over the prairies and there were many prairie wolves. . . . He entered government land and erected a log cabin . . . . The wolves often gathered around this pioneer home making the night hideous with their howling. Indians often visited them but were friendly. James White was a great hunter and shot many deer and even after game began to get scarce in this locality he would go miles to hunt. He saw Chicago when it was but a mere hamlet and many times drove his ox team to that market, fording rivers and traveling over the sloughs which cut up the country, making the land of little value until it had been drained. . . . James White cut down many a forest tree in preparing his land for cultivation and he broke the prairie with oxen, using six to nine yoke to a breaking plow. He lived to see the whole country developed from an unsettled wilderness to one of the most highly cultivated farming districts in this great state . . . . He was often heard to say that he and a friend swam nearly every stream between old Denmark and Chicago. At the birth of each of his children he would go on a hunt for a deer and when his son William was born he brought home both a deer and a wild goose. Many times he trampled upon rattlesnakes, never knowing that they were dangerous. 42

The Past and Present of Vermilion County informs the reader,

James O’Neal has the distinction and honor of being the first white child born in Vermilion county. . . . It was in the year 1821 that the father came to this county, settling near Brooks Point . . . . There he resided for three years and then entered eighty acres of land near the Big Vermilion creek. After moving on the Vermilion river he established a tannery . . . . He made Indian moccasins for the use of himself and family and to sell to the Indians. These Indians were principally of the Pottawattamie and Kickapoo tribes. Most of the winter was spent in making rails and clearing up ground, thus adding about ten acres every season to the tillable land. 42

Noah E. Hubbard bought land in section 36 of Georgetown Township in 1846:

When Mr. Hubbard first purchased land in Georgetown township the tract was all covered with timber, but soon the woodman’s ax gave evidence that the trees were falling beneath his sturdy stokes. 42

Daniel Fairchild and four brothers moved to Vermilion County in 1828:

* Brooks Point was along a small tributary of the Little Vermilion River that flows past the east side of Georgetown.
Daniel Fairchild settled in Blount township, among its first residents. He began making improvements upon a tract of wild prairie and timber land and built the first brick house in that part of the county . . . .

Tilghman A. Bratton arrived about 1856:

... within the memory of Mr. Bratton this district of the state was largely a wild and unimproved region crossed with sloughs, while much of the land therefore was swampy. He has seen deer and wolves in the county and has ridden over the wild prairie unimpeded by a fence . . . .

C.E. Loring’s story:

With one hundred dollars of his money he purchased eighty acres of land . . . in 1833, . . . which at that time was all wild and unimproved. There was not even a rail upon the place. The country was then over-run with prairie wolves and sloughs were on every hand. Nothing daunted, Mr. Loring in 1834 began to break his land with a yoke of oxen . . . . . . . By capable management and hard labor he became an extensive land owner, having in his possession five hundred and ninety-five acres of the richest farm land. Nearly all of this was under a high state of cultivation at the time of his death. . . . When C. E. Loring settled in Vermilion county wolves roamed over the prairie and hunting was fine, deer, ducks, wild turkeys and prairie chickens being very plentiful.

In 1844 David Johnston “came on horse-back to Vermilion county, Illinois, settling in the edge of the prairie a mile and a half from the present site of Oakwood.” He purchased three yoke of oxen in 1850 so that he could earn a living by breaking prairie. His biographer wrote,

In the early days, when riding horseback, he run prairie wolves down and knocked them on the head and he has seen as many as twenty-five deer at a time, while wild turkeys were to be shot in vast numbers and other wild game was plentiful.

Thomas Douglass brought his family to Vermilion County in the spring of 1830:

Here he entered two hundred and forty acres of land upon the section where the county farm is now located. * The tents of the Indians were still pitched in the forests and the redmen roamed over the prairies. The wolves then were more numerous than rabbits at the present day and there were many kinds of wild game, including turkeys, geese, prairie chickens and deer.

Mr. Douglass often hauled pork to Chicago to exchange for salt and other provisions: “Chicago was the main trading point and often trips were made to New Orleans in flatboats with cattle and hogs, business being conducted at various river points along the way.” His son John began making trips in 1830: “Mr. Douglass . . . hauled wheat to Chicago when

* The county farm was in section 24 of Catlin Township, west of Tilton.
in his seventeenth year and at that time he camped out at night, forded the rivers . . . Such a trip consumed seven days . . . .” 42

Stephen Brothers arrived in a covered wagon during the 1850s:

There were no fences for miles and the homes of the early settlers were widely scattered, much of the land being still in its primitive condition. There were many prairie wolves and deer were to be seen in large numbers. 42

The biographical record of Robert Terrell states,

In the fall of 1858 he arrived in Vermilion county, finding here broad stretches of prairie over which the plow had never made its way. Wolves were killed in great numbers during the winter and there were many deer, so that the tables of the early settlers were largely supplied with venison. Mr. Terrell settled in Ross township, a mile east of the town of Rossville . . . . As early as 1867 he bought land in Grant township . . . . In those days there were few fences over the prairie, and the women . . . oftentimes had to . . . drive the stock from the fields. Dogs were efficient in this way and in a measure did away with the necessity of fences. When Mr. Terrell purchased his Ross township property he found it partially improved, but since that time he has laid many rods of tiling and has developed a model farm . . . . 42

“The Fairchild family is a prominent one in Vermilion county”—as the editors of The Past and Present pointed out. One of the first Fairchilds in the area was Nathaniel:

He came to this county in 1829, when it was a wild unbroken district, and here aided in cutting away the trees and preparing the land for cultivation. . . . the Indians were numerous. The rivers and the woods were also the haunts of many kinds of wild game, and there were large numbers of prairie wolves in the county.

. . . He can well remember the open prairie upon which cattle were herded, over which one could drive for miles, his progress unimpeded by house or fence. The land was unbroken, having never been placed under the plow. Mr. Fairchild cleared and broke most of the land upon his own place and has made it a splendidly improved property. The wet condition of the fields has been done away with through tiling and all modern equipments have been added . . . . His property is now one of the best improved farms on Eight Mile Prairie.” 42

James Goodwine was born in Blount Township in May 1851. He bought a farm in section 30 of the township † about 1872:

* Eight Mile Prairie spread across the broad plain that separates the Middle Fork and the North Fork.

† Goodwine’s land was along a small tributary of the Middle Fork south of Jamesburg.
When he took possession of this property it was largely covered with timber, but he cleared away the trees, improved his land, drained and tiled it. In the early days he saw many deer, and lesser game of all kinds was to be had in abundance. He engaged in hunting and has shot many wild turkeys, prairie chickens, geese and ducks on his own place. 42

Samuel Adams brought his family to live in Vermilion County in 1825, "settling among the Indians, who outnumbered the white men ten to one." The Adamses built a cabin next to the state line in section 22 of Newell Township. The life of one son, Lemuel, is chronicled in *The Past and Present of Vermilion County*:

Mr. Adams has aided quite largely in clearing timber land and in developing the agricultural resources of this part of the state. . . . He can remember when Danville was but a mere village and when the greater part of the land was wild and unbroken. There were many timber wolves, turkeys and other wild game which could be had in abundance, while deer were also frequently seen. His father often told of seeing as many as eighteen and twenty deer in a herd upon his farm but he never cared for hunting. 42

A colony of Quakers came to live in the Vermilion Grove and Quaker's Point neighborhoods of southeastern Vermilion County in 1822. The setting is described under the title of "Friends in Vermilion County":

The country was wild prairie and timber lands at that time. Foxes and wolves were plentiful and wild turkeys and prairie chickens furnished much of the food for the settlers. Indians wild and fierce, still roamed over the prairie and timber lands and hunted the bison and deer and fished unmolested along the little streams. . . . Ague and fever proved dreadful foes and pestilence made havoc amongst the little band, but push and perseverance . . . soon made the wild and barren lands "to blossom like the rose" and produce abundant crops. Ponds were drained, the land was cleared, roads were laid out and soon the country assumed the appearance of civilization. 42

Aaron Jones brought his family to live at Quaker's Point in 1827:

Wild game of all kinds was to be had in abundance, such as turkeys, pigeons and prairie chickens, much larger game was also killed, for deer still roamed over the prairies and venison furnished many a meal for the early settler. Wolves frequently made the night hideous with their howling . . . 42

Jesse Lane was a toddler when his parents took him to Blount Township in 1835:

In early life he began to farm on his own account. His father gave him ninety-five acres of raw land in what is now Middlefork township. Upon this he turned the first furrows and also made the rails to fence his tract.

. . . Through almost seven decades Mr. Lane has resided in Vermilion county and is therefore to-day one of its honored pioneers and has witnessed almost its
entire growth and development as it has emerged from primitive conditions to take its place among the best counties of this great state. The deer and wolves which lived in the forest and roamed over the prairies have all disappeared and in their place are seen fine grades of stock. 42

Augustine Clapp's family moved to section 9 of Newell Township * in the spring of 1841:

Like many of the early settlers he found the country new and wild. Prairie wolves were numerous and wild game of all kinds was plentiful. Hunting in those days was, to use his own expression, "a treat." The deer ran through the cornfields of the place and geese, brant, ducks, prairie chickens and plover were within easy reach of the marksman. 42

Dorman B. Douglass was born in Danville Township in 1827, and he was still living to be interviewed for *The Past and Present of Vermilion County*:

Mr. Douglass has indeed seen many changes in Vermilion county. He himself has made trips down the Mississippi river to New Orleans, going upon a flatboat made at Olmsted Mill. . . . He owns three hundred and sixty acres of the best farm land in the county and his home farm, all of which is well tiled and fenced and under a very high state of cultivation, is the visible evidence of his life of industry and toil. 42

The Reverend William H. Webster moved to Danville in 1848:

The history of the changes in Danville and Vermilion county since Mr. Webster came here, if written, would read like a romance. . . . In the county the few settlers lived mostly either in the timber or along the edge of the prairie and usually in log cabins. The prairies were covered to a large extent by sloughs and tall grasses and were inhabited by rattle snakes, deer and wolves and cranes. The woods abounded with wild turkeys and game. Land that now is worth more than one hundred dollars per acre could then be bought at less than a dollar an acre, and was thought by many to be worthless. 42

The biographical sketch of William F. Keeney states,

In the year 1831 they came to Vermilion county. At that time the country was new and unbroken and full of game.

. . . Mr. Keeney can remember when West Main street in Danville was overgrown with jack oaks † and hazel brush. The incoming settlers, however, soon wrought a change in all this . . . . 42

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* The Clapp homestead was about a mile northwest of the location of the Vermilion County Airport.

† Brushy sprouts and young growths of oaks were called "blackjack" or "jack oak."
The story of George W. Hoskins' family:

The country was all in a wild state when the father purchased a tract of land in 1831, and settled on what is known as Walnut Grove, where the prosperous village of Rossville now stands. When he took up his abode at that place there was only one family living in the entire grove and only one white family resided between that place and Chicago. ... Azariah Hoskins hauled wheat to Chicago .... It was nothing then to have both horses stuck in the mud, for there were many sloughs and the district was very wet. The Kankakee and Iroquois rivers had to be forded and from the Kankakee across the prairie for eighteen miles there was not a single house.

... On the 7th of June, 1867, George W. Hoskins purchased his father's farm .... He has also added to his landed possessions and he now owns three hundred and forty acres of the best improved land of the county, all fenced and supplied with modern equipments. He broke one hundred and twenty-three acres of prairie and made the rails with which to fence his place, going from eight to ten miles in order to secure the timber and then hauling the rails to his home. 42

"Uncle George" Henry lived in the Stony Creek valley in section 28 of Newell Township:

He came Vermilion county, Illinois, in 1853, and settled on his present farm .... With ... what he had accumulated he paid for his present farm, which was fenced and partly under cultivation, a portion being plowed, but all around was wild prairie .... In this primitive period there was no kerosene and he has read by the light of the prairie fires. They burned hickory bark and dip candles for lighting .... When Mr. Henry and his wife settled on their present place wild game of all kinds was very plentiful. Deer, turkeys, cranes, ducks, geese and prairie chickens were to be had in abundance, and the tables of the pioneers were loaded with delectable food, such as would delight the epicure of the present day. 42

From the life of Andrew J. Wray:

In 1853 he came to Vermilion county and here preempted land, purchasing his first quarter section for one dollar and twenty-five cents per acre. He afterward bought a forty acre tract at twelve and one-half cents per acre, it being entered as swamp land. It is situated on section 26, Oakwood township, * and is now under cultivation .... Its value has greatly increased, for it is to-day worth one hundred and twenty-five dollars per acre. When Andrew J. Wray arrived in Vermilion county, Danville, then a little village, was surrounded by tracts of unbroken prairie .... The country was full of wild game, including deer, and wolves were frequently killed. Mr. Wray was a great hunter and often returned to his home with his horse covered with furs and pelts of animals he

* This tract is the headwaters of Stony Creek, south of Hope.
had captured, many of which were mink. . . . He put in the first tiling used in
the neighborhood and thus reclaimed land that had hitherto been uncultivable. 42

One of Andrew Wray’s sons was known as J.M.:

In the summer months he had to herd cattle upon the prairie and in the winter
season cared for the stock in the field, being thus engaged between the ages of
seven sixteen years. He . . . was engaged in contracting . . . until July, 1902,
when he returned to the old homestead farm and is now actively engaged in
agricultural work upon the land which he plowed when but eight years of age.
. . . He has witnessed the entire development and growth of the county from
an uncultivated prairie to its splendid condition of the present time. 42

In the fall of 1859 Byron E. Cronkhite came to Vermilion County:

Here he spent a short time but did not locate permanently until the spring of
1860. He first leased a tract of land, broke the fields and further improved the
property. Later he purchased land and added to his original purchase from time
to time . . . . He has . . . planted orchards, has laid many rods of tiling and has
thus made substantial improvements upon his land, which he has converted into
valuable farms. . . . He established a tile factory in Grant township in 1883 and
was engaged in its operation until 1888, making tile in order to transform the
swampy land into productive fields. 42

The Past and Present devotes four pages to the life of Samuel Waters Allerton:

One of the largest landowners in Vermilion county and founder of the town
bearing his name . . . is Samuel W. Allerton . . . .

. . . He always had the desire to own a farm when he succeeded in accumulating
enough money. His desire has certainly been gratified, and he is to-day one of
the largest farmers in the country who cultivates his own land, cultivating about
forty thousand acres in the very best manner. He is said to have a hobby for
purchasing poorly productive lands and by cultivation “makes them blossom as
a rose.” 42

Mr. and Mrs. W. Vinton Lane were living in retirement on their farm in Blount Township
when their biography was published in 1903:

This worthy couple have long resided in Vermilion county, witnessing its devel-
opment from pioneer times when the prairie was covered with wild grasses, and
when there were also many prairie wolves, while the less harmful prairie chick-
ens, cranes, turkeys, ducks and geese were to be had in abundance. It was
necessary at night, however, to fasten all of their stock up for protection, and
the young corn had to be guarded from the crows. 42

Eli S. Sperry was two years old when his parents moved to the Higginsville neighborhood
in the Middle Fork valley. As a young man . . .
... he acquired one hundred and sixty acres of land on section 20, and by thrift and good management he acquired five hundred and nine acres of valuable land which through his untiring industry became a most excellent farm well tiled and improved, with good substantial buildings although the county was a veritable wilderness when he arrived here. The surface of the land was cut up with sloughs and ponds. He lived to see a wonderful transformation. The prairie wolves, wild turkeys, geese, cranes and prairie chickens as well as deer were all driven westward, to be replaced by the domestic animals of the farm.

... When he located on his present farm on section 29, Blount township, it was little cultivated. He has tiled the place, comprising two hundred and forty acres, and has made it a very rich and productive tract ...

“For half a century Jackson Cromwell has been a resident of Vermilion county...”:

On the 9th of September, 1852, he came to Vance township, Vermilion county, Illinois. This township at that time also included Oakwood township. The nearest trading point was Danville, which was then a town of three or four stores. Hazel-brush grew where the Aetna now stands. The prairies were wild and uncultivated and sloughs abounded, requiring much draining of the land before it would yield returns to those who labored on it. In those early days hogs and cattle were raised and driven to Chicago and even over the mountains to Pennsylvania.

Thomas Perry immigrated from England about 1852:

When he arrived in this county all was new and wild, much of the prairie being still unsettled, not a furrow having been turned upon many an acre. He first assisted in breaking the prairie and cutting down the forest trees, clearing the land for cultivation. He first took up his abode near the present site of Ross-ville. He next purchased his present farm when it was covered with timber and hazel-brush. He cleared this, placing it under a high state of cultivation.

... He has been in the county for fifty years and has therefore lived to see it developed from primitive conditions to its present prosperity, has seen the wild lands transformed into splendid farms, while good homes have been built and all evidences of a modern civilization have been introduced.

James Juvinall was born in Pilot Township in 1835:

* Section 20 of Blount Township is immediately east of Jamesburg.
† Section 29 is immediately southeast of Jamesburg.
‡ The Aetna House was the ritziest hotel in downtown Danville.
Mr. Juvinall remembers how the Indians held meetings at the foot of the hill upon which they lived. * His father had entered land from the government at one dollar and twenty-five cents per acre. He felled the forest trees and broke the prairie. Our subject also assisted in breaking prairie until he reached his twenty-third year. There were many prairie wolves in the county in these early days and they would often come to the very door-yard of the pioneer homes and their howling would scare the dogs away. Mr. Juvinall frequently set traps to catch these wolves. Deer roamed over the prairies while turkeys and other game were very plentiful, furnishing many a meal for early settlers.

... Driving an ox team in an early day he frequently visited Chicago with a load of apples and returned with provisions, camping along the wayside at night—such a trip often required ten days. 42

Harvey and Catherine McMillan migrated from Ohio to Illinois in 1827:

They settled in Newell township, Vermilion county, casting in their lot with its early pioneers when much of the land was still in the possession of the government, when the Indians were yet frequent visitors of the neighborhood and when deer and other kinds of wild game abounded. 42

A lumberman is featured on pages 1083-1084 of The Past and Present:

J.M. Dougherty has long and actively been connected with business affairs in Vermilion county and is now engaged in dealing lumber and in the manufacture and sale of native timber.

... He purchased one hundred and twenty acres of timber land near Danville, cleared this, built upon it a good residence and opened up an excellent farm.... He has always continued his operations in timber and in the manufacture of native lumber, this proving to him a good source of income throughout all the years.

... For forty-eight years he has been a resident of Vermilion county and has witnessed much of its growth and development. He has seen the prairies broken and fenced, the timber and brush cleared away, roads constructed and towns and cities built. 42

Benjamin Peterson farmed near Potomac:

... in 1840 he sought a home in Illinois, settling in Vermilion county, near Higginsville. Here he... broke a tract of land, building upon it a good house and barn and developing his farm until it was a rich and productive tract. Subsequently, however, he sold that land and purchased a farm in Butler township.

* The Federal government permanently removed the remaining Indians from the Vermilion County region in the year before James Juvinall was born. Perhaps Mr. Juvinall was recalling experiences that had been related to him by his parents.
In 1859 again he turned the first furrows in his fields, carrying on the work of improvement and cultivation until his land was made to yield golden harvests for the labor he bestowed upon it.

... In 1869 he purchased forty acres of land where he now resides. This was raw and unimproved but the breaking plow had soon turned the surface and in course of time the land was placed under a high state of cultivation. Subsequently he purchased eighty acres additional ... This was also destitute of improvements when it came into his possession, being still in its primitive condition. ... He has tiled and fenced his land ... now he has four hundred and nine acres in one body. It is very valuable and each year a splendid harvest adds materially to the capital which he has already acquired.

... The people of the twentieth century can scarcely realize what privations and hardships were endured by the early settlers. It was not uncommon to see a herd of deer making their way over the prairies and wolves were frequently shot and many kinds of wild game were here in great numbers, but all have disappeared before the approach of the white men, who have claimed the land for the purpose of cultivation and have made the district to bloom and blossom as the rose. 42

D.M. Shankland spent part of his boyhood near Hoopeston:

In 1863 Mr. Shankland ... accompanied his parents on their removal to Iroquois county, a settlement being made along its southern border. There he was reared, living in that locality when it was still a pioneer district and when deer roamed over the prairies. He remembers seeing as many as thirty-two head in a single drove cross his father’s farm. 42

John Snider moved to Blount Township in 1824 and “established his home in the midst of the forest”:

The country was then the haunt of the Indians who held their meetings and also made sugar near the log cabin home of the Snider family. The entire district was scarcely fit for the habitation of white men, for the land was full of sloughs and ponds. There were large herds of deer and many kinds of smaller game which furnished the early settlers with meat. ... John Snider assisted in felling the trees, in clearing the land and aided in organizing the township. 42

John Snider’s son Charles, who was born in 1843, did his part too: “He helped to clear about one hundred acres of land and has witnessed many changes in the county ...” 42

In 1870 Daniel Brown bought land near East Lynn for $13 per acre. “It was covered with wild prairie grass and the unbroken prairie extended from his place to Hoopeston.” 42

A covered wagon brought William M. McMillin to Blount Township in 1831. “Few roads had been made and the country was new and unbroken. The forests were still the haunt of deer and prairie wolves and there were many wild turkeys and prairie chickens.” 42
Thomas J. George became a Vermilion County resident in 1856. "Arriving here he found plenty of deer, turkeys and other wild game and there were also many prairie and timber wolves, which he would frequently chase down on horseback." 42

Peter Larson labored to become a prominent stock-raiser in Butler Township. But first he lived in Champaign County, arriving in 1870:

... he purchased one hundred and eighty acres of land in Ayers township, Champaign county. This was raw and unimproved, but he broke and fenced it, built thereon substantial buildings and made a very valuable farm. Later he bought sixty-five acres in Homer township, conducting both places, and he erected a fair set of buildings on it. There he carried on his agricultural pursuits until 1897. In the previous year he purchased his present farm of three hundred and twenty acres, upon which good improvements are found. He has erected a large and attractive farm residence, has laid many rods of tiling and has divided his place into fields of convenient size by well kept fences. He has also planted fruit trees and made other valuable improvements . . . . 42

Sylvester Parle:

On the 19th of May, 1857, he arrived in Vermilion county, Illinois, and located on what was known as the old Sullivan place near the village of Homer, which was all wild land covered with tall prairie grass. Our subject broke the first soil and made the first improvements upon that farm . . . . 42

John Hart purchased part of section 33 of Oakwood Township* from the Federal government in the 1820s:

The Indians were far more numerous than the white settlers in this portion of the state at that time and the most far-sighted could not have dreamed that this wild region would soon be transformed into a rich agricultural district. 42

Henry and Sarah Hilleary brought their family to Blount Township in 1830. Like many of the earliest white immigrants, they chose to live in the woods:

Here the father entered eighty acres of land from the government and he also purchased from a settler a tract of timberland, all of which he cleared with the aid of his sons. . . . he bought a tract of land on section 3. † He afterward entered eighty acres of timberland and in the midst of the forest he built his home. 42

George Hilleary was born to Sarah and Henry in 1840. Among his recollections:

* Section 33 is in the Feather Creek watershed north of Muncie.
† Section 3 of Blount Township is in the watershed of Windfall Creek, an eastern tributary of the Middle Fork.
Prairie wolves were many times killed and there were large herds of deer roaming at will over the prairies, while prairie chickens, turkeys and other wild game were to be had in abundance. . . . Mr. Hilleary can remember when the hazel brush grew upon the site of Danville. . . . There was not a house or a fence for miles around and the country was full of prairie wolves, deer, wild turkeys and prairie chickens. He has shot wild turkeys upon his own place. . . . he hauled grain and apples to Chicago across a country which was broken up by many sloughs and ponds. It was necessary to ford the river for no bridges had been built, and to camp out at night. 42

John Smith moved to Middlefork Township in 1843:

. . . he . . . purchased forty acres of land for which he paid one dollar and a half per acre. It was all raw land, not a furrow having been turned or an improvement made upon it, but he at once began to break it and placed it under cultivation and from time to time he added to his farm . . . until he owned more than five thousand acres. He was instrumental in placing under cultivation and improving as much, if not more, land than any other one man in this part of the county . . . . He brought the first plow to the locality and he used oxen in breaking prairie. . . . The county certainly owes to him a debt of gratitude for what he accomplished in its behalf in the way of reclaiming the wild land for purposes of civilization and in opening up this district to development, progress and improvement. 42

In 1828 or '29 Otho Allison entered a claim of 120 acres in Newell Township, five miles from Danville:

This comprised eighty acres of prairie land and forty acres of timber land and it was still in the condition in which it came from the hand of nature, for not a furrow had been turned or an improvement made upon the place. 42

Mr. and Mrs. Allison's son Alfred was three years old when they arrived in the Vermilion River Area. He grew up to be a farmer:

He has seen as many as sixteen yoke of oxen hauling one wagon across the swamps. Then the land was crossed and re-crossed by sloughs which made the roads almost impassable.

. . . He drove oxen to the breaking plow, felled the forest trees and cleared away the brush, this work largely occupying his attention for about eleven years. 42

1904: Remembrances of a Pioneer

In 1854 Jane Patton moved to the Middle Fork Valley in Button Township of Ford County. Half a century later in her autobiography, "Grandma" Patton recollected, "Deer were plenty then, for you could see them almost every morning going from the timber out on the prairie, but they could see you about as soon as you would see them." 37
Mrs. Patton recalled the year after her arrival, 1855: “John Adamson that lived at Covington, brought two hundred and over of four-year-old steers to be herded on the prairie, and they were so large and got so fat on the grass without any expense except to pay the herder and for salt, the prairie grass was so fine.” 37

1856: “That summer everything was corn. . . . Corn would grow then if you planted it, without any trouble. The weeds had not got a start then, only the tumbleweeds, and they would roll over the field and lodge against the fences as high as the fence.” 37

1858: “That spring the creeks were very high. We could not cross the middle fork of the Vermillion for six weeks, there was so much rain, and no bridges then.” When Mr. Patton rode east to see his dying father, “The east fork of the Vermillion * was very high. He went horseback, and had to swim his horse to get over the creek.” 37

Mrs. Patton concluded her autobiography with an essay, “Illinois in 1854, and some of the changes in the country since that time, and the neighborhood in which I have lived since that time.” She began her discourse,

It was not a barren waste; it was a bleak cold place in the winter time. The snow went the way the wind took it as far as it wanted to go, and the tumbleweeds also; but in the summer time it was all grass and flowers, and you could see as far as the strength of your eyes would let you see, and the tall grass, when the wind blew, was like the waves of the sea, beautiful to behold. If you knew where you wanted to go you had nothing to do but to start out and go, but look out for the ponds of water or you would be right in one if you did not, for the grass in the ponds would be higher than your head, and it would be lots more trouble to get out than it was to get into a pond. They were just like getting into trouble about other things, it was easier to get in than to get out. Now you have the hedge fence and the straight roads and the square corners and the groves, and you can’t see a wagon five miles on the prairie, as you could then. 37

1905: History of Champaign County

This volume was written by J.O. Cunningham, who came to Champaign County in 1853. Judge Cunningham was familiar with many of the people who helped establish the county, and he compiled a historical narrative that is rich with personal experience.

Chapter IV of the History of Champaign County is ABORIGINAL OCCUPATION:

That this county was often visited by these people, and that the immediate site of Urbana and other favorite camping places on the Okaw, † the Sangamon and the Salt Fork, were the scenes of many a camp and bivouac, there is abundant proof

* East fork of the Vermillion = North Fork of the Vermilion River.
† Okaw = Kaskaskia River.
in the traditions of the early settlers of this county, some of whom yet remain to verify, from their own recollections, the truth of this claim.

... But a few years since—and plainly to be seen until the white man's plow had turned up the sod and effaced the evidences of their occupancy—were many Indian trails across the prairies; and it is within the memory of many now living, as well as attested by the well remembered statements heard from early settlers, that the corn-hills of the Indian occupants were found not far from the site of the public square in Urbana, as late as 1832.

Many yet remember a fine spring of water which came from the bluff, two or three rods south of the stone bridge on Main Street, which was obliterated by being covered with earth only a few years since. This spring afforded an abundance of water to the campers in the edge of the timber, as it did to the families of William Tompkins and Isaac Busey, who afterwards took possession of the site for their home, though they frequently shared it with these returning Indian visitors. This was a point having great attractions for the latter.

Indian trinkets and ornaments of bone and metal were often picked up in the neighborhood of this spring by the whites, after settlements were established here, and the bones of game animals, strewn over the ground, showed a long and extensive occupancy of the locality, for camping purposes, before the white occupancy.

... Many were the incidents told by the earliest settlers about the Big Grove—few of whom yet remain—in connection with the visits made here by the Pottawatomies, which continued for many years after the first occupancy by the whites. The prairies and groves of this county, as well as the neighboring counties of Illinois, were favorite hunting-grounds of the people of this tribe, whose own country was along the shores of Lake Michigan, as they had been of the former occupants and claimants, the Kickapoos, who had relinquished their rights.

Not only was this region esteemed by those people on account of the game with which it abounded, but it yielded to their cultivation abundant returns in cereals and vegetables.

... Our early settlers around and in these timber belts and groves well remembered many of their Indian visitors by name. ... Particular mention was made by many of a Pottawatomie chief named “Shemauger,” as pronounced by them, who was also known by the name of “Old Soldier.” ... Shemauger often visited the site of Urbana after the whites came, and for some years after 1824. He claimed it as his birth-place, and told the early settlers that the family home, at the time of his birth, was near a large hickory tree, then growing upon a spot north of Main Street and a few rods west of Market Street. ... At the time of

* Market Street is now Broadway Avenue.
the later visits of Shemauger there was not only the hickory tree, but a large wild cherry tree standing about where the hall of the Knights of Pythias is now situated. Besides these trees, there were others in the neighborhood of the creek, which made this a favorite and most convenient and comfortable camping place for the Indians . . . .

... The winter of 1831–32, these Indians, to the number of fifteen or twenty, remained in their camp near the big spring on what, of late years, has been known as the Stewart farm, in the neighborhood of Henry Dyson’s, about two miles north of Urbana.

... Another favorite camping ground of Shemauger was at a point known as the “Clay Bank,” on the northwest quarter of Section 3 of Urbana Township—sometimes called “Clement’s Ford”—towards the north end of the Big Grove.

... Shemauger told . . . that many years before there came in this country a heavy fall of snow, the depth of which he indicated by holding his ramrod horizontally above his head, and said that many wild beasts, elk, deer and buffalo, perished under the snow. To this fact within his knowledge, he attributed the presence of many bones of animals then seen on the prairies.

Chapter V is titled PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS:

It has been estimated by early observers of the county that about one-fifth of the surface of Champaign County was originally covered with native forests, but this estimate was probably too large. The areas of native forests were usually confined to the courses of streams, although some isolated groves were found upon high points of land, as at Linn Grove, in Sidney Township, and Mink Grove, in Rantoul Township. The largest bodies of native timber were those found along the Sangamon River, in the west part of the county, and upon the Salt Fork, including the Big Grove at the geographical center of the county, and the timber along that stream in the eastern part.

... The presence here and there all over the State of isolated groves and belts of timber land, with the well known tendency of all lands to revert to a forest condition, is not hard to understand and explain. It will be seen by observation that, wherever such a grove or belt of timber is found, there will also be found a protector or proximate cause in the presence of water, either in the form of ponds or of a running stream, generally situated upon the south or west side of such bodies of timber. The explanation is found in the well-known fact that the autumnal winds of the country, which, before its settlement and subjection, drove before them the prairie fires, came from the south and west, and if no

* This site is along the Saline Branch of the Salt Fork on the north side of Urbana, southwest of Brownfield Woods.

† Roughly a tenth of Champaign County was originally wooded.
obstruction was met in the way of a stream or wet marsh, drove the fires widespread and destructive, in advance of them. Thus, consult any of the groves or belts of timber in Champaign County, as the Mink Grove at Rantoul; the Linn Grove in Sidney Township; the Lost Grove in Ayers Township; the Big Grove at Urbana; the Bur Oak Grove or Hickory Grove in St. Joseph and Ogden Townships; or the belts of timber known as Salt Fork timber or the Sangamon timber, as they were found by the first comers, and it will be seen that all of these bodies of timber are protected upon the south or west side—or both, in the case of the isolated groves—by ponds of water or wet prairies, or in case of the timber belts, by the running streams. In the case of the Salt Fork, both from the head waters of the west branch, in Somer Township, to the bend to the eastward at Urbana, and from the junction of the two principal branches near the village of St. Joseph, south to near Sidney, the timber line is close to the stream on the west, while upon the opposite side, in both instances, for a mile or more, the timber, in the greatest luxuriance, stretches out to the east. The Big Grove owes its existence as clearly to the protection given on its western border by a stream of living water, as it does its destruction to the coming of the white settler. So, the fine body of timber along the east and north sides of the Salt Fork, from St. Joseph to the junction of the creek with its fellows in the formation of the Vermilion River, owes its existence to the protection given against the attacks of the fire fiend driven from the south and west annually, since the growth of the prairie grass upon which it fed. These ponds and streams have said to the Fiend, for all these ages, “Thus far shalt thou come and no farther.” So the county owes the presence of these groves, which did so much for it by the invitation to early settlement, to the streams and ponds near their margins, which ponds, in the fullness of time, yielded to the early settler their quota of fever and ague.

... Boulders from many different ledges in the far north, and of every size, from the pebble found in the gravel-pit to the large boulder of many tons, are found scattered over the surface of the prairie or are dug from the ground where excavations are made. It is not uncommon to find boulders of considerable size upon the prairie, but the pebble is rarely found except in layers of gravel and sand, underlying some land swell, in the prairie or timber land, generally the latter, and near some stream, the position and form of the deposits showing unmistakably the agency of the floods of the past in shaping the deposit, as well as in preparing the material for it. The largest of these strange visitors seen by the writer are two immense boulders, one in the north part of the county, lying upon the lawn in front of the home of John Roughton in Ludlow Township . . . .

... The limestone boulders found on the surface well served the purpose of early settlers in the manufacture of lime, for they were gathered up in early

* Cunningham estimated that this boulder “would probably weigh not less than ten tons.” 4
times and burned in extemporized kilns, for building purposes. One of these kilns existed in the bluff a few feet north of the Wabash depot in Urbana, fifty years since.

... The original forests, which have been greatly depleted, and in some cases nearly destroyed, by the demands made upon them for farm uses and railroad ties, consisted of the usual varieties of oak, walnut, hickory, sugar and soft maple, linden, † elm (white and red), ‡ ash, hackberry, sycamore and iron-wood †... .

... Artificial groves and orchards upon the prairie, which were planted and have grown up mostly within the last half century, by breaking up the monotonous views of an unbroken prairie, have greatly changed and improved the appearance of the country. Very little of this land is so low or so level as to forbid artificial drainage, and very little is so broken by bluffs or hills as to render it incapable of cultivation; so that the entire surface of the county may be considered as tillable land, or such as will eventually be brought into use as arable or pasture land.

Since the adoption in 1878 of the amendment of the State Constitution of 1870 (Section 31 of Article IV, commonly known as the “drainage section”), great tracts of land in the county, before then incapable of being cultivated, have been drained by artificial ditches and by tiling, and are now reckoned the best, and have proven to be the most valuable, lands in the county.

In this connection it may be said in reference to the wet lands of the county, that the county authorities about 1853, for the purpose of taking advantage of the Federal and State legislation giving to counties all of the swamp and overflowed lands within their borders, appointed Benjamin Thrasher to examine all of the unsold lands in the county coming within the definition of the Federal act, as “swamp and overflowed lands,” and to report a description thereof to the County Court. This examination having been made, it was reported that 85,000 acres answered to this description. Subsequently the title to 35,957 acres was confirmed to the county. These lands were subsequently sold and the funds used, in part, for the erection of a court house in 1860, the residue being appro-

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* The region’s “Large Glacial Bowlders” are the subject of an article in the 1911 volume of the Journal of Geology. Extracts from this article can be read in Early Accounts of the Ecology of the Headwaters Area.

† Linden = American basswood (Tilia americana).

‡ White elm = American elm (Ulmus americana); red elm = slippery elm (U. rubra).

† Both hop hornbeam (Ostrya virginiana) and musclewood or blue beech (Carpinus caroliniana) are known as ironwood.
priated to the school fund. It was upon these lands that the great work of drain-
age was mostly done.

Much has been said and written of the beauties of our prairie landscapes in their
natural condition, and much has also been said and written of their repulsive and
dreary, unchanged sameness. Both descriptions have in them much of truth,
depending upon the season of the year in which the snap-shots of the scenes
were taken.

No one who has traversed the unbounded rolling prairie of Illinois in summer,
and witnessed the dazzling beauty of its flora, the magnificent exuberance of
its vegetation, the limitless expanse of clear sky and rich earth, could write or
speak otherwise than extravagantly of the impression produced; on the other
hand, few could survey the same landscape in winter, whether covered with
an unbroken blanket of snow, with no diversification, save here and there the
gentle swells of the drear surface swept by fierce, chilling winds, or behold it
bereft of its snowy covering, presenting, in its place, the whole wide expanse
blackened by autumnal fires, or sere and russet from winter’s frost—oppressive
in its barren monotony—and yet describe the scene in poetic language—especial­ly if use had been made of the prairie roads as they were usually found in early
times.

Another season—the autumnal—with its invariable and terrific accompaniment,
the prairie fire, should not be forgotten for the reason that the accompaniment
no longer exists, and its place has been taken by the autumn harvest of abundant
grain from the fields where fires swept all before it but a few years since. These
prairie fires have been well described by authors, and possessed all of grandeur
and beauty, or terror and devastation, claimed for them, according as the obser­ver was only the witness of the fires or the victim. In Champaign County, and
from the doors and windows of residents yet in life, the prairie fires of story
have been seen, time and again, year after year, and presented the same scenes
of beauty or terror to the beholder, according as he and his were safe from the
devouring element, or being pursued by the hungry flames.

. . . As the prairie sod gave way, year after year, to the breaking plow, these
phenomena grew less and less, and are now seen no more.

. . . At many places in the northeastern part of the county within the valley of
the Middle Fork of the Vermilion, artesian wells have been sunk, from which a
constant and abundant supply of pure water flows. Springs, except in the beds
of creeks and rivers, rarely occur.

A feature of many landscapes of the county, quite noticeable before the prairies
were broken and drained, were the many sink holes found, even upon the high­est grounds. These holes varied in size from a square rod to an acre or more.
They were sometimes several feet in depth below the level of the surrounding
prairie, and, in the early times, afforded water for the greater part of the year,
thus becoming useful to the early stock raiser and traveller. Various causes for the existence of these holes have been advanced, but it is thought that none are more reasonable than the claim put forth in favor of the wild buffalo which, for ages, roamed over these plains before the coming of the white man. The same variety of ponds are, in the remote West, to this day called "buffalo wallows," which name, originating when the habits of the animal were well known in those regions and upon the grounds where the work of excavation was going on, may well be received as authoritative.

... Another physical feature, not to be omitted in this meager description of Champaign County, is the presence, here and there upon the smaller water-courses, of what was known to the early comers as "beaver dams." By this term it will be understood reference is had to those obstructions to the flow of the water, in early times, which were created by the wild beavers, once very numerous throughout the temperate zone of North America, and a fruitful source of revenue to the early hunter and trapper on account of the value of their furs.

... One of these dams was found by the earliest comers constructed across the western branch of the Salt Fork, about four miles north of Urbana. As described by those who saw the work for many years, it fully met the descriptions written and published by observers of these works elsewhere. At first the animals were killed and their possession and work interfered with. As fast as any damage was done by curious intruders, they repaired the same, until, their numbers being lessened by the hunters, the home was abandoned and finally the last of this interesting and intelligent animal, with his contemporary, the wild Indian, moved westward. This dam has been perpetuated in memory by giving its name to a drainage district organized upon the ground for the recovery of the adjacent lands.

Mr. Cunningham quoted from an account written by a Danville minister about the Sudden Change of December 16, 1836. Here is an excerpt from the Reverend Enoch Kingsbury's article, which was written 21 years after the event:

The weather on Monday was quite warm, softening the heavy snow. On Tuesday it began to rain before day and continued until four in the afternoon, at which time the ground was covered with water and melting snow. All the small streams were very full and large ones rapidly rising. At this crisis there arose a large and tumultuous looking cloud in the west, with a rumbling noise. On its approach everything congealed. In less than five minutes it changed from a warm atmosphere to one of intense cold, and flowing water to ice.

* These natural basins may have served as buffalo wallows, but most of them probably originated when the last glacier melted and left an uneven surface, pitted with shallow depressions.

† This is the Beaver Lake Drainage District.
One says he started his horse to a gallop in the mud and water and on going a quarter of a mile, he was bounding over ice and frozen ground. Another, that in an hour after the change he passed over a stream of two feet deep on ice, which actually froze solid to the bottom and remained so until spring. The North Fork, where it was rapid and so full as to overflow its bottoms, froze over so solid that night that horses crossed next morning, and it was thus with all of the streams.

Mr. Alvin Gilbert, with his men, was crossing the prairie from Bicknell's * to Sugar Creek, with a large drove of hogs. Before the cloud came over them the hogs and horses showed the greatest alarm and apprehensions of danger. And when it actually came upon them, the hogs, refusing to go any farther, began to pile themselves in one vast heap as their best defense on an open prairie. During the night half a dozen of them perished, and those on the outside were so frozen down that they had to be cut loose. About twelve others died on their way to Chicago, in consequence of being badly frozen, while many others lost large pieces of their flesh. Mr. Gilbert and his young men rode five or six miles distant, all of them having fingers, toes or ears frozen, and the harness so frozen that it could not be unhitched from the wagon, and scarcely from the horses.

Two men riding across the same prairie, a little farther west, came to a stream so wide and deep that they could not cross it. The dreary night came on, and after exercising in vain to keep from freezing, they killed one horse, rolled his back to the wind, took out his entrails and thrust in their hands and feet, while they lay upon them. And so they would have used the other horse, but for the loss of their knife. Mr. Frame, the younger and more thinly clad, gradually froze and died in great agony at daybreak. The other, Mr. Hildreth, at sunrise, mounted the remaining horse and rode over the ice five miles to a house, but so badly frozen that about half of each hand and foot came off. †

Cunningham quoted from an editorial notice in the November 9, 1854, issue of the Urbana Union newspaper, describing the scene at the future site of Champaign, as viewed from Race Street in Urbana:

The other evening a sight presented itself to our citizens which was grand in the extreme. At dark, a mile to the southwest of town, on a high ridge of prairie, there appeared a small patch of fire which was by the south wind swept towards the north. As it ran along in a northerly direction on the ridge, it also spread slowly towards the summit, to the westward, the flames mounting upwards in beautiful forms. At the end of about half an hour, the northern wing had spread two miles in that direction, when for a few moments the whole line danced for

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* Bicknell's Point was the northernmost timber on the North Fork of the Vermilion River, the point where north-bound travelers set out across the prairie toward timber that lay about 12 miles away on Sugar Creek, a tributary of the Iroquois River.

† A more detailed account of Frame and Hildreth's ordeal is on page 55.
our amusement in the most appropriate manner, sending high up towards heaven its illumination and lightening up the varied landscape for miles around. At last the figure was finished and the scene closed by the flames becoming exhausted, when all again assumed its accustomed quiet.  

Chapter VII, EARLY NAMES OF LOCALITIES:

As was the fact in most of the early settlements in Illinois, the first homes of white families in Champaign County were set up in the groves and timber belts, on account of the protection yielded in winter and the accessibility to water, fuel and building material. There being many such timber tracts, and each one having, in turn, served as a shelter to the newly arrived settlers, it will be most convenient, in detailing the facts in hand concerning the early settlement of the county, to treat each grove or timber belt and its settlements separately, designating them by the names in use fifty years since . . . .

. . . The names . . . universally used to designate localities other than the immediate neighborhood of the few villages, were such as “The Big Grove,” . . . meaning the large grove of natural timber just north of the City of Urbana, lying partly in Town 19 and partly in Town 20. “The Salt Fork” . . . was a general term used to designate not only the lands covered by the timber along that stream, but the neighboring farms, from its northern extremity to the point where it leaves the county. . . . “Middle Fork” . . . was understood to mean the timber sometimes called “Sugar Grove,” in the northeast corner of the county. . . . “Linn Grove,” . . . as a name, early became attached to the beautiful eminence crowned with trees of nature’s planting in the southwest corner of Sidney Township, which name it yet retains. “Lost Grove,” . . . at the northwest corner of Ayers Township, is supposed to have received its name from its remoteness from everywhere else. “Hickory Grove,” . . . in St. Joseph and Ogden Townships; “Bur Oak Grove,” in Ogden; “Mink Grove,” . . . in Rantoul; and “Dead Man’s Grove,” in St. Joseph Township, like those above named, had then a definite meaning and referred to certain localities . . . . The last name has not been in use for many years, the grove referred to having long been called “Corray’s Grove,” . . . .

. . . About one mile north of the village of Philo, in the early times, was a tuft or small patch of timber and brush—along the margin of a small pond, which protected it from the annual prairie fires—of less than one acre, which, from the earliest settlement of the country, was a noted landmark for travelers, and which was known far and near as the “Tow-Head,” from its supposed resemblance to something bearing that name. Its position upon a very high piece of prairie made it visible for many miles around. It has long since yielded to the march of farm improvement, and its foster guardian, the pond, has likewise given way to the same enemy of the picturesque, and now yields each year fine crops of corn.  

146
Chapter IX is titled FIRST SETTLEMENT—BIG GROVE. Members of Runnel Fielder’s family were the first white residents of Champaign County, arriving at Big Grove in 1822. The Fielder farmstead was along the Saline Branch east of Urbana, not far from the remnant of Big Grove now known as Trelease Woods. The second immigrant family was that of William Tompkins, who selected a site along Boneyard Creek in what was to become downtown Urbana. It was “upon the bank of the creek, within a patch of hazel brush and small timber”:

The place chosen by Tompkins for his dwelling had long before then been a favorite camping ground of the Indians, who continued to so use the vicinity for ten years thereafter. . . . In places in the vicinity the corn-hills, remaining from the recent crops of corn grown by the Indians, were plainly to be seen by those who first settled here. 4

Judge Cunningham quoted from an address made by Archa Campbell at an Old Settlers’ meeting in May of 1870. Mr. Campbell recalled the creek that carried water through Urbana on its way to the Salt Fork of the Vermilion River:

The Indians used often to camp on the creek near the west end of Main Street, Urbana, from which cause the bones of their game accumulated on that spot in great quantities. The annual recurrence of prairie fires bleached the bones to whiteness, and the place took the name from the early settlers, of ‘Bone Yard’—hence the name of the creek running past that point. 4

The *History of Champaign County* chronicles the arrival of many families during the 1820s and early '30s. J.O. Cunningham emphasized that several families on the east side of Big Grove chose to keep to the forest rather than venturing into the grassland:

. . . John Tuman . . . entered the northwest quarter of Section 10.  * Here he hewed out of the timber, and upon the bluffs of the creek, a farm upon which to rear the family, when less than a mile away lay the unbroken level prairie, without a stone or a bush, open to entry and occupancy. . . . Both the Brumley and the Truman families made farms in the timber nearby the Boyd family, all seeming to prefer the shelter and protection of the timber grove to the ease and adaptability which offered itself upon the open prairie. 4

Chapter XIII—SETTLEMENTS IN OTHER GROVES:

. . . the earliest settlements of the county were made in or near the natural groves of timber found here. . . . With but few exceptions all entries made prior to 1845 were within the protection of the timber, or upon choice selections of prairie nearby.

Samuel Kerr . . . in the year 1833 entered land in Section 9, in what has since been known as “Sugar Grove,” an aggregation of fine timber which grew up

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* This tract is bisected by Interstate 74 at the east edge of Urbana.
under the protection of the Middle Fork of the Vermilion River, which makes a cut across the northeast corner of this county. Here he lived and died—with the exception of a very few others who also ventured so far away—alone in the great waste of timber and prairie which lay unclaimed around him.

... Samuel McClughen was first to choose a residence at Bur Oak Grove, which he did in 1836. In this retired situation all that nature could do for the lone settler was done, for free air, free pasturage and free land for cultivation were all around in abundance.

... Archa Campbell, as early as 1849, entered land, then and since known as "Mink Grove," at Rantoul.

... Lost Grove, situated near the line which divides the Township of South Homer from the Township of Ayers, was, from its isolation and the very wet conditions which surrounded it, shunned as a place for settlement until long after the other situations were well peopled. It was, however, well known and often visited by travelers. The road from Paris to Homer and Urbana made this a point.

Hunting is a major topic of Chapter XV, SOCIAL LIFE—AMUSEMENTS:

Hunting the wild animals which bred and roamed over these prairies before their lairs were broken up by cultivation, was engaged in by men and boys universally. No law interfered with the natural right to take for their use these wild animals, and their profusion and the ease with which they were taken, either by snare or gun, made the sport engaging and profitable if deer and fowl were taken, and if wolves and other destructive vermin were taken, protection was given to domestic animals.

At an Old Settlers' meeting, in 1882, William Sadorus stated that he, on one occasion, shot and killed twenty wolves in five days, and upon another occasion he piled twenty-five of their carcasses in one fence corner.

In the earlier years of the settlements, the incursions of wolves, foxes, wildcats and other predatory animals upon the sheep, pigs and domestic fowls of the settlers, was a serious menace, and made their protection at night necessary. So, as a matter of self-defense, the hunting and trapping of these destructive animals was followed with a purpose.

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* Bur Oak Grove was an isolated stand of trees in the Salt Fork drainage of northern Ogden Township.

† Lost Grove was in the uppermost reach of the Little Vermilion River.

‡ William Sadorus lived at Sadorus Grove (present-day Sadorus), on the Embarras River in the southwest part of Champaign County.
The pelts and furs of these animals, taken in the course of a year, formed no small item in the incomes of the hunters, when transported with surplus products to Chicago, or when sold to the local or itinerant fur dealer.

The buffalo disappeared from this country long before the same was occupied by the white race, driven therefrom, or perhaps wholly exterminated, by the aborigines whom our people found here. * That the prairies here, like those beyond the Mississippi, were once the home of vast herds of this now nearly extinct animal, is well shown by . . . the yet visible marks left by them; but the smaller game remained in great abundance.

Deer were found here in almost incredible numbers until the middle of the last century, when, as population increased, they gradually decreased until about 1860, when they had become nearly or quite extinct. The writer has seen them in considerable flocks in passing upon the stage from Urbana westward.

Mr. H.M. Russell, who came to the county as late as 1847, relates having seen a drove of sixty or seventy of these animals in the winter of 1848, a short distance west of Sidney. The same drove had nearly cleaned up a field of corn of a citizen there, and the neighbors, as a matter of protection to their crops, turned out en masse and destroyed them.

The means resorted to for taking the game were very numerous and suited to the taste or necessities of the hunter. At first, and before contact with men had taught them caution, the gentle deer would come near the cabin of the pioneer, but such curiosity on the part of the animal was pretty certain to cost him his life . . . .

. . . As has already been stated, wolves were altogether too plentiful for the most abundant success in the farmyard, and so were accounted as an enemy to be destroyed, from whose death no benefit accrued to the captor except the removal of an enemy. They were trapped, poisoned and shot. They were run down by the aid of horses and dogs, and beat to death with clubs. 4

Cunningham added a footnote regarding these pests:

So ferocious were these animals that they would attack full grown hogs. H.M. Russell remembers in the fall of 1847, the circumstance of a drove of fat hogs being driven from Mt. Pleasant, now Farmer City, to the Wabash. On the prairie between the Sangamon River and Urbana, a large pack of wolves scented the drove and dogged the steps of the hogs to Urbana, where the drove was yarded and fed for the night. The wolves invaded the streets of the town and it was necessary to guard the hogs all night to protect them from the marauders. 4
The History of Champaign County describes a pastime that was possible for only a brief period of years, before the wide open prairie was too broken up by fields and fences:

One of the most popular and largely practiced sports in the matter of hunting all sorts of wild animals, was what was known, far and near among the early settlers, as the “Circle Hunt,” from the manner of prosecuting the same. This kind of sport could only be practiced in a considerably settled country, because it needed men from a large area of country to organize and carry out the plan. As will be inferred from the name given it, the hunt was in a circular form; that is, beginning at the outsides of a given and agreed territory. The men, having taken their places, proceeded to a central point in unison, meantime driving ahead of them and towards the central goal all animals they might scare up in their course. Usually, as the center was approached, a miscellaneous gathering of wolves, deer and smaller game would be driven together, all heading towards the center pole—for it was usual to set up at the agreed center of the circle a long pole, upon which would be placed some kind of flag, to render the object more conspicuous and noticeable. The rules of this sport excluded all firearms and all dogs, that accidental injuries might not occur, and that a stampede of the enclosed game might be avoided. The men, either on foot or on horseback, as they chose, armed only with clubs, continuously approached the center of the circle, keeping as nearly in touch with their neighbors on the right and left as possible, meantime permitting no game to turn back. As they neared the goal the work of destruction commenced and continued as they got within reach of the animals, until all game had been killed or had escaped by breaking through the circle.

In well conducted hunts of this kind, where sufficient numbers were engaged and the weather favored the enterprise, the slaughter of game and of predatory animals was often quite considerable, and rarely ever did failures occur.

Judge Cunningham recalled a hunt that centered around a small grove near Ivesdale, in which “the catch of game was very great and no one was hurt.” According to an article in the Urbana Union, a hunt south of Urbana in mid-January 1855 was not so successful:

Instead of returning laden with the trophies of the chase, and for weeks fattening on good venison, our hunters came in early in the afternoon with horses jaded, empty stomachs and frozen fingers; in short, with anything but plenty of game. It appears that detachments from other settlements, not so adventurous as our hunters, did not venture to brave the cold winds of the prairies that day, and the circle was not completed until they arrived upon the ground near the centre; therefore the game was comparatively scarce. A few deer and wolves were headed, but from the few hunters on the ground, all escaped but one wolf.

More hunting stories:

The writer remembers, about January, 1854, seeing a wild wolf, which had been hotly pursued by hunters on the prairie south of town, run the whole length
of Market Street, in Urbana, from south to north, in his effort to reach safety in
the Big Grove, then a dense thicket of brushwood a quarter of a mile north of
Main Street. A wolf chase, at that time was easily held by any party but a short
distance from the settlements, and was much indulged in by sportive men who
owned good horses, often greatly to the injury of the horse.

Equally attractive as a sport, and as a means of supplying the table, was the
hunting of wild turkeys, prairie chickens, and others of the grouse family. One
whose knowledge of these fowls goes back to the beginning of settlements
in this county, says that turkeys were as thick in the timber as domestic fowls
about a farmhouse, and almost as easily taken. So of the prairie chicken until
about 1870, when their ranges and breeding places were being taken for farms;
their abundance can hardly be described. The skillful huntsman, with a double-
barrelled fowling piece, could, within a few hours in any of their haunts, load
himself with the finest of their flocks.

In the autumn and spring of each year droves of wild geese and ducks, in great
swarms, visited the country, generally en route from northern to southern fields,
or for longer stays about the many sloughs and ponds which yielded food and
harboring places for them, and they were an easy prey to the man with a gun
whose knowledge of their habits, and whose skill with his weapon, fitted him
for the sport. 4

We finish this perusal of the History of Champaign County with J.O. Cunningham’s per-
sonal recollection of his first view of the area:

It was near the close of a very sultry day in June, 1853, after a two days’ tire-
some journey in a loaded lumber wagon from one of the Wabash towns, that the
writer first saw Urbana . . . .

. . . The day—his first upon the great western prairies, . . . had been one of
surprises to the writer. Along the road from Danville, as then traveled through
the then Homer village to the eastern line of this county, were well cultivated
farms and fair farm buildings; but beyond this belt of improvements bordering
Salt Fork Timber—and all the time within the observation of the traveler—was
the boundless, unbroken, flower-decked, prairie, rolling away in the distance
and shimmering under the summer sun.

After crossing the Salt Fork at Kelley’s Tavern, eight miles east of Urbana,
the open prairie—the real thing of wonder and admiration—was entered upon.
Now, for the first time, immediate contact was had with the prairie of song and
story. Looking in any direction except to the rear was a boundless view of
space, made up of a soil black as night, covered with unknown plants and

* The only other member of the grouse family that might have been present locally is the
ruffed grouse.
grasses, and seemingly inviting the husbandman to sudden and certain wealth. A single, unfenced trail led from the ford of the Salt Fork to the westward, pointing to a low timber line miles to the northwest, which he was informed was the "Big Grove," and that far along in its southern skirts was situated Urbana, the place of his destination and possible future home.

Far off to the south, sitting like a feudal castle upon an elevated peak, was Linn Grove glistening in the June sun; while farther to the west, but nearer by, was the little tuft of timber, then known as "The Towhead," but long since destroyed and forgotten by most, which, like a verdant plume, also reflected the sunshine—both being early landmarks for the traveler over the trackless expanse of prairie. To the north, two miles away, was also seen the scant fringe of timber which, with Corray’s Grove, borders the eastward trend of the Salt Fork, and which connected the Big Grove with the main body of timber along that stream. Beyond and still to the northward could be seen the elevated prairie in Stanton Township, whose solitude was unbroken for a hundred miles in that direction, as was the view to the southward. Over these prairies then, and for some years thereafter, roamed herds of deer and wolves, while the tall shelter of the prairie grass afforded protection and breeding places for thousands of prairie chickens and others of the grouse families. 

The view described, as seen in the passage of the seven or eight miles intervening between Kelley’s Ford and the Big Grove, on that June afternoon fifty years since, was unbroken, save by the groves and belts of timber alluded to and not to exceed half a dozen houses of venturesome home-makers, who had challenged the popular belief of the country that, to live away from the protection of the timber in winter was to invite sudden death by freezing, and had set up their cabins away out on the prairie.

Though in this view, as then seen, we have but superficially described the territory of that part of this country then traversed, we have at the same time described typical conditions which, at that date, applied to the entire county and to its adjoining counties. Vast, undulating expanses of prairie were seen upon every hand.

1905: *History of Edgar County*

The south rim of the Vermilion River Basin is a high moraine that extends along the Edgar–Vermilion County line. This high ground is described in a chapter about industrial progress in the *History of Edgar County*:

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* The Towhead is described on page 146.

† The only member of the grouse family to dwell on the region’s prairies was the prairie-chicken.
The prairie lands of the county are very flat and during a wet season were naturally incapable of producing a crop of corn, or indeed anything except prairie grass. There is some undulating prairie in the north side of the county—a “ridge,” as it is called, rising fifty or sixty feet above the lower level, extending clear across the county and much farther westward. . . . These elevations are not as permanently fertile as the lower areas, but were first selected by settlers to obviate the difficulties of rainy seasons, and because the mere grazing on them by domestic animals would extirpate the prairie grass and the blue grass would come as its natural successor.  

This morainic ridge and the adjacent lowlands are again discussed in the history of Young America Township, which occupies the northwest corner of Edgar County:

There is a tract of elevated land extending east and west through Young America, which is perhaps fifty feet higher than the southern part of the town. Until construction of a large drain in the southern part of the town, extending for miles along the channel (a mere “swag”) of the Brushy Fork of the Embarras River, the low prairie of this region was useless for cultivation, but every acre of these big swales has been redeemed and thousands of acres now produce the heaviest crops of corn and oats, where formerly water hindered and prevented any growth except the flags § and grasses that grew as well in water as on dry land.  

Young America Township is further described:

It was originally treeless, except about 400 acres called Big Hickory Grove, near the north side of the town, and about half a section on the south side called Culver’s Grove. There were large trees in these groves, indicating that they had long been there to adorn and beautify the vast landscape of prairie.  

Prairie Township embraces a small part of the Vermilion River Area in the northeast corner of Edgar County: “The Town of Prairie is . . . all rich prairie except a fraction along the south side where the prairie is interrupted by the North Fork of Brouilet Creek.”  

On the north line of Edgar County in neighboring Ross Township, “The lands were so nearly all prairie that people, coming from the States where timber abounded, were reluctant to settle down in this treeless waste, as it seemed to them.” But by the time the History of Edgar County was published in 1905, Ross Township was “all substantially belonging to the fine, rich prairie of the ‘Corn Belt’ of Illinois.”

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*Flag was a general term for wetland plants with long, relatively broad leaves, such as cattails (Typha).*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purchase date</th>
<th>Purchaser; Township (section)</th>
<th>Acreage and condition when purchased</th>
<th>Acreage and condition in 1887 or earlier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1832</td>
<td>Robert Brownfield's father; Somer (34 &amp; 35)</td>
<td>&quot;had never been turned by the plowshare&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1836</td>
<td>Henry Leigh; St. Joseph (2)</td>
<td>unimproved</td>
<td>120 acres; &quot;valuable land, thoroughly drained with tile, and fitted up with all modern improvements&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About 1843 or '44</td>
<td>Lewis Kruder; Kerr</td>
<td>40 acres; &quot;partly improved land&quot;</td>
<td>1,300 acres; &quot;The land is all in a high state of cultivation . . . . &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About 1850</td>
<td>Edmund Freeman; Ogden</td>
<td>&quot;unimproved&quot;</td>
<td>438 acres; &quot;part of it devoted to pasturage and the balance producing the richest crops of the Prairie State&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About 1850?</td>
<td>Robert Peters; St. Joseph (14)</td>
<td>&quot;raw prairie&quot;</td>
<td>240 acres; &quot;fine farm,&quot; &quot;one of the finest homesteads on the township&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>Samuel Hyde, Sr.; Hensley (19)</td>
<td>200 acres; &quot;wild land&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;a high state of cultivation&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1852</td>
<td>Samuel McKee; South Homer (16)</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;wild condition&quot;</td>
<td>120 acres; &quot;great improvements . . . a series of fertile fields, rich in grain and pasturage, neatly fenced&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1854</td>
<td>Salem Hensley; Hensley (26)</td>
<td>&quot;little removed from its original condition&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;finely improved and thoroughly drained&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>Henry Clay West; Hensley</td>
<td>&quot;unfenced prairie&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;smiling fields of green meadows and growing grain&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855</td>
<td>Peter Myers; Tolono</td>
<td>&quot;wild land&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855?</td>
<td>John J. Mumm; Sidney (17, 18 &amp; 20)</td>
<td>40 acres; &quot;uncultivated prairie&quot;</td>
<td>320 acres; &quot;a fine farm,&quot; &quot;a fine state of cultivation&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 1855</td>
<td>John N. Norton; Crittenden (18), Pesotum (13)</td>
<td>60 acres; &quot;raw prairie&quot;</td>
<td>240 acres; &quot;under a high state of cultivation,&quot; &quot;The land is well drained and entirely destitute of swamp ground.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1855 or '56</td>
<td>Menzo Dunlap; Champaign (36)</td>
<td>&quot;wild land,&quot; &quot;wild, uncultivated prairie, no part of which had been turned by the plowshare&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;a fine state of cultivation, enclosed . . . with good fences,&quot; &quot;a valuable farm,&quot; &quot;a good state of cultivation&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 1855 and '56 or '57</td>
<td>Henry Beecher; Champaign (26)</td>
<td>80 acres; &quot;wild land&quot;</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;... for a period of nearly thirty years, he was employed in the improvement and cultivation of his farm . . . . &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1856</td>
<td>E.W. Parker; Philo (10)</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;wild land&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;a thorough state of cultivation, well drained with tile&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase date</td>
<td>Purchaser; Township (section)</td>
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<td>Acreage and condition in 1887 or earlier</td>
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<tr>
<td>1856</td>
<td>Nicodemus Full; St. Joseph (9)</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;The land upon which our subject located first could scarcely be dignified by the name of a farm, because it was simply raw prairie, uncultivated and unfenced.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1856</td>
<td>John Weeks Dodge; Rantoul?</td>
<td>1,000 acres; &quot;wild land&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;He put up a house upon this in 1866, ... and ... was industriously engaged in the improvement of his new farm.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 1856 and '64</td>
<td>Myron E. Nelson; Condit</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;never been broken&quot;, &quot;wild land&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;most of which is improved&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857</td>
<td>Frederick A. Beisser; Champaign (24)</td>
<td>&quot;unimproved prairie land&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857</td>
<td>John H. Funston; Newcomb (14)</td>
<td>400 acres; &quot;a cabin 12 x 14 feet, ... the only structure on the farm&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>Hugh J. Robinson; Sadorus (33)</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;unimproved land&quot;</td>
<td>320 acres; &quot;every acre of which he has brought to a high state of cultivation&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>John L. Lester; Compromise (3)</td>
<td>164 acres; &quot;wild prairie,&quot; &quot;There was no house within five miles.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;one of the finest bodies of land in Compromise Township,&quot; &quot;He ... added to his first purchase by degrees, allowing none to run to waste or be neglected, and draining the swampy sections with tile.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1858 or later</td>
<td>Jotham C. Thompson; Harwood (29)</td>
<td>120 acres; &quot;wild land&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;... he battled with the primeval wilderness until ... he had the satisfaction of seeing the prairie grass give way to fields of golden grain.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>John M. Spencer; Crittenden (17 &amp; 20)</td>
<td>460 acres; &quot;unbroken prairie&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;a fine farm, enclosed with neat fencing&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>Jefferson Trotter; Champaign</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;wild prairie&quot;</td>
<td>200 acres; &quot;a fine state of cultivation&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>Isaac Francis; St. Joseph (33)</td>
<td>120 acres; &quot;originally but few improvements&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;well tiled and fenced, and supplied with a good barn and a pleasant farm residence&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>William C. Custer; South Homer</td>
<td>This farm must have already been improved: &quot;He ... purchased a farm near the town limits, to which he retired and spent the remainder of his life.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>Philip Hummel, East Bend (28)</td>
<td>120 acres; &quot;unenclosed and uncultivated&quot;</td>
<td>320 acres; &quot;enclosed with good fences,&quot; &quot;all necessary farm buildings,&quot; &quot;under a good state of cultivation&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Early land purchases in Champaign County, from the *Portrait and Biographical Album of Champaign County (1887)*—continued:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purchase date</th>
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<th>Acreage and condition when purchased</th>
<th>Acreage and condition in 1887 or earlier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>George W. Johnston; Hensley (4)</td>
<td>180 acres; &quot;Upon this there was a log cabin, and 100 acres were broken. Aside from this the land was practically in its original condition.&quot;</td>
<td>320 acres; &quot;The smiling fields are in a fine state of cultivation, enclosed with beautiful hedge fencing . . . He has also drained the soil with about three miles of tiling . . . all of which is under a good state of cultivation.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>John C. Parry; Philo</td>
<td>80 acres; &quot;a wild and unbroken state,&quot; &quot;barren soil&quot;</td>
<td>120 acres; &quot;a beautiful farm,&quot; &quot;cultivated fields and smiling meadows,&quot; &quot;well drained with tile&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>Walter Reese; Hensley</td>
<td>&quot;wild land&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;a good state of cultivation&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>Abner Moore; Hensley (36)</td>
<td>&quot;entirely uncultivated&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;excellent land in a fine state of cultivation&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>Richard Towne; Sidney (23)</td>
<td>80 acres; &quot;bare, unimproved prairie&quot;</td>
<td>360 acres; &quot;fine farm,&quot; &quot;thrifty grain fields, and pasture lands neatly fenced, its handsome and imposing residence in the midst of a beautiful grove&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1862?</td>
<td>John H. Hudson; St. Joseph (30)</td>
<td>80 acres; &quot;open prairie&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>Thomas Babb; Mahomet</td>
<td>40 acres; &quot;Twenty acres were broken, this being the only effort at improvement; there was neither fence nor building . . .&quot;</td>
<td>several hundred acres; &quot;... the green fields, with the yellow grain, form in the summer season a picture delightful to the eye.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>James Goudie; Pesotum</td>
<td>&quot;wholly unimproved&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>William Hewerdine; Condit?</td>
<td>80 acres; &quot;wild land&quot;</td>
<td>240 acres; &quot;The land is all enclosed with neat fencing, and yields in abundance the best crops of the Prairie State.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>Franc H. Lange; Hensley</td>
<td>80 acres; &quot;Of this thirty-five acres had been broken and there was a small shanty.&quot;</td>
<td>500 acres; &quot;The unbroken prairie of his first purchase has now been transformed into a fine farm . . .&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>Joseph Jervis; Condit (35 &amp; 36)</td>
<td>80 acres; &quot;uncultivated prairie&quot;</td>
<td>400 acres; &quot;a good farm,&quot; &quot;improved land&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>John T. Moore; Philo (19)</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;practically in its original condition&quot;</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;a fine state of cultivation&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>John Anderson; Ludlow (6)</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;wild prairie,&quot; &quot;neither fenced nor supplied with a building&quot;</td>
<td>360 acres; &quot;one of the finest farms in Champaign County,&quot; &quot;a valuable landed estate,&quot; &quot;all of which he improved from wild prairie&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>Thomas Babb; Hensley</td>
<td>57 acres; partly broken</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>Hiram L. Durfey; Philo (18)</td>
<td>80 acres; &quot;not far removed from its original condition&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Nothing is wasted, every acre being made available . . .&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Early land purchases in Champaign County, from the *Portrait and Biographical Album of Champaign County (1887)*—continued:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>Henry D. Corlies; Harwood (in part)</td>
<td>1,136 acres; “wild, uncultivated prairie”</td>
<td>“In time he had brought the entire tract to a good state of cultivation and planted eight miles of hedge.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>Joseph H. Welles; Compromise</td>
<td>320 acres; “not a foot of his land . . . broken”</td>
<td>160 acres; “. . . he has labored to perfect it as the property of the modern and progressive farmer.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>George Edwards; Philo (18)</td>
<td>80 acres; “had never been cultivated”</td>
<td>160 acres; “a fine farm in a good state of cultivation”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>Henry J. Leidendeker; Hensley</td>
<td>“But a few acres of this were broken and there were no buildings.”</td>
<td>320 acres; “a fine modern homestead”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>William M. Phenicie; Stanton</td>
<td>120 acres; “wild land”</td>
<td>“The ground is now enclosed with neat fences and graced with a fine residence . . . .”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865 or later</td>
<td>James Alexander Hossack; Champaign</td>
<td>200 acres; “wild prairie, upon which there was not a single tree and scarcely a stone”</td>
<td>“This land, now redeemed from its original condition, now constitutes . . . a beautiful farm, well drained, wooded and tilled.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About 1865–68</td>
<td>Frederick Sperling; East Bend (32)</td>
<td>“wild land”</td>
<td>114 acres; “one of the most finely cultivated farms,” “under a fine state of cultivation”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>John Halberstadt; Philo (26)</td>
<td>160 acres; “A small portion of the sod had been broken . . . .”</td>
<td>“. . . the whole is now under a good state of cultivation . . . .”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>Thomas Jefferson Beverlin; Stanton (34)</td>
<td>80 acres; “unimproved prairie”</td>
<td>280 acres; “well improved and in a high state of cultivation”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>Elisha J. Hill; Harwood (30)</td>
<td>80 acres; “partially improved”</td>
<td>“His land is chiefly devoted to grain and pasturage.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Ezra Dickerson; Compromise (19)</td>
<td>640 acres; “unbroken prairie”</td>
<td>“a beautiful and desirable homestead,” “drained with 1,300 rods of tile,” “His fields . . . are conveniently laid out and neatly fenced, . . . finely adapted both for pasturage and grain-raising . . . .”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>James W. Vanschoyck; Ludlow (10)</td>
<td>160 acres; “Eight acres of this were under cultivation and a small frame house stood upon it.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>William H. Williams; Stanton (16)</td>
<td>80 acres; “mostly wild prairie, with three or four acres broken and a small wooden building”</td>
<td>200 acres; “all of which is in a tillable condition, and will bear comparison with the farms around it”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Elizabeth Evans Gabriel; Rantoul</td>
<td>“wild land”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Early land purchases in Champaign County, from the *Portrait and Biographical Album of Champaign County* (1887)—continued:

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<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>John Comer; Crittenden (8)</td>
<td>80 acres; &quot;mostly in a wild condition&quot;</td>
<td>180 acres; &quot;a good state of cultivation,&quot; &quot;the whole of which is now finely improved and well drained&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>John Clark; Compromise (6)</td>
<td>&quot;uncultivated&quot;</td>
<td>370 acres; &quot;one of the finest farms in this section,&quot; &quot;all enclosed and improved&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>Anthony Coyle; Kerr (32)</td>
<td>40 acres; &quot;wild prairie&quot;</td>
<td>80 acres; &quot;He has remained here since the winter of 1869, cultivating and improving his farm . . . .&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>William White; St. Joseph (30)</td>
<td>80 acres; &quot;no improvements&quot;</td>
<td>300 acres; &quot;valuable land, a commodious and substantial residence, good barns and out-buildings, and everything required by the progressive and intelligent agriculturalist,&quot; &quot;most . . . in a good state of cultivation, well fenced and thoroughly drained with about 23,000 rods of tile&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>Abraham C. Brown; East Bend</td>
<td>80 acres; &quot;wholly unimproved&quot;</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;all under a good state of cultivation&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>Miles Sunderland; Compromise</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;He at once broke sixty acres of this . . . .&quot;</td>
<td>Mr. Flatt improved the land and then sold it in 1883 to buy a tract of 357 acres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>James H. Flatt; Sadorus (22)</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;raw prairie&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>William Davis; Harwood (16)</td>
<td>&quot;The soil had never been turned by the plowshare, and there was neither a building nor a fence upon it.&quot;</td>
<td>80 acres; &quot;smiling with grain and pasture fields, neatly fenced and with comfortable buildings&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>Thomas McClintock; Crittenden</td>
<td>80 acres; &quot;in an uncultivated condition with no improvements&quot;</td>
<td>275 acres; &quot;under the plow and productive of the choicest crops of the Prairie State&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>Thomas Babb; Condit</td>
<td>80 acres; &quot;wild land&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;a good farm&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>A.J. Reed; Philo (25)</td>
<td>&quot;unbroken stretch of prairie&quot;</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;one of the most attractive farms in his locality,&quot; &quot;a fine state of cultivation,&quot; &quot;drained by 900 rods of tile&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>David G. Fisher; Tolono (10)</td>
<td>640 acres; &quot;but little removed from its original condition&quot;</td>
<td>400 acres; &quot;a valuable and productive farm,&quot; &quot;thoroughly drained with 2,200 rods of tile&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>Elias L. Harless; Condit</td>
<td>&quot;It was a wild tract of open prairie at the time of purchase, as was also the greater part of the land adjacent.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;He . . . has all the land enclosed, and produces some of the finest crops in the Prairie State.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>Perley A. Rusk; Compromise</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;unimproved&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;He worked diligently for nine years following, cultivating the soil and erecting an inexpensive residence and barn . . . .&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Early land purchases in Champaign County, from the *Portrait and Biographical Album of Champaign County (1887)*—continued:

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<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>James Watson; Ludlow</td>
<td>80 acres; &quot;unimproved land&quot;</td>
<td>440 acres; &quot;one of the finest farms in this part of Champaign County,&quot; &quot;all improved and enclosed with neat and substantial fencing, a good set of farm buildings, and a fine grove,&quot; &quot;He has planted mile upon mile of hedge and his broad pasture lands and cornfields are a constant delight to the eye.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>Joseph Gordon; Compromise</td>
<td>200 acres; &quot;uncultivated prairie,&quot; &quot;wild land&quot;</td>
<td>800 acres; &quot;one of the finest farms in Compromise Township&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before 1869</td>
<td>David Fry; Condit</td>
<td>&quot;only a few acres were broken,&quot; &quot;wild prairie&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;His land is well drained with tile, and is in all respects one of the model farms of that locality.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>John T. Ainsworth; Ludlow (28)</td>
<td>&quot;unimproved&quot;</td>
<td>400 acres; &quot;a fine estate,&quot; &quot;many of the fields enclosed with beautiful hedge fences, of which he planted five miles the second year after taking possession, and has planted more as time and opportunity afforded.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>John I. Clark; Rantoul</td>
<td>120 acres; &quot;unimproved land&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;one of the most attractive estates in Champaign County,&quot; &quot;a fine state of cultivation&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>Samuel McKee; Hensley (32)</td>
<td>&quot;... 100 acres were broken, and the only buildings were a small frame house and a stable with a straw roof . . . .&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;all enclosed with fences and other improvements&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>Isaac Layman; Condit</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;wild land&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;... there is not an acre of waste land on the farm.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>William Fletcher; Rantoul (7, of Range 9 East)</td>
<td>329 acres; &quot;uncultivated prairie&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;... there is not an acre of waste land on the farm.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>William H. Townsend; Rantoul (18)</td>
<td>&quot;A few acres of the sod were broken, and upon the place was a building sixteen feet square . . . .&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;... there is not an acre of waste land on the farm.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>David Maxwell; Crittenden (7)</td>
<td>&quot;unbroken prairie&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;a good farm, enclosed with neat fences&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>Morris Jones; East Bend</td>
<td>80 acres; &quot;wholly without improvements&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;first-class modern improvements&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>Joseph M. Besore; Stanton</td>
<td>&quot;a small frame house and a stable&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;It ... is now among the finest land in this township, improved with a good set of farm buildings and devoted chiefly to the raising of stock and grain.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>Robert Penman</td>
<td>162 acres; &quot;It was then an uncultivated prairie . . . .&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;a series of productive fields&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>J.C. Whallon; East Bend (5)</td>
<td>&quot;but partially improved&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;a series of productive fields&quot;</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>James Exton; Ogden (6)</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;unimproved&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;... he had the land generously underlaid with tile, and by means of proper drainage and skillful tillage his farm has become one of the most fertile and desirable in the township.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late 1860s</td>
<td>Robert Hewerdine; Rantoul (17 &amp; 18)</td>
<td>80 acres; &quot;about one-half of which had been broken, and upon which stood a small house&quot;</td>
<td>200 acres; &quot;finely cultivated,&quot; &quot;all but sixty acres ... in pasture or grain fields&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>Bernard Gordon; Kerr</td>
<td>200 acres; &quot;wild land&quot;</td>
<td>800 acres; &quot;finely improved land&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>Nathan Patton; Stanton</td>
<td>&quot;uncultivated prairie&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;He ... labored incessantly for five years ..., breaking the sod, putting up fences and buildings . . . .&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>W.S. Waters; Stanton (7)</td>
<td>256 acres; &quot;wild prairie,&quot; &quot;The first year he broke and fenced about forty acres and built a small house . . . .&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;The land is finely improved . . . .&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>John Leonard; Condit (23)</td>
<td>&quot;wild prairie&quot;</td>
<td>720 acres; &quot;a valuable country estate,&quot; &quot;one of the finest farms in this section&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>Truman Covert; East Bend (30)</td>
<td>80 acres; &quot;uncultivated prairie&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;The prairie has been transformed into cultivated fields, enclosed with neat hedges and substantial fences . . . .&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>John W. Day; East Bend</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;unimproved prairie&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;enclosed with neat fences, thoroughly drained with tile, supplied with a shapely and convenient set of frame buildings&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>Edwin C. Sale; East Bend (26)</td>
<td>80 acres; &quot;wild prairie . . . , entering at once upon its improvement and cultivation&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>John D. Seltzer; Raymond (30)</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;raw prairie&quot;</td>
<td>440 acres; &quot;all improved&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>Edward S. Obenchain; Compromise (20)</td>
<td>&quot;unimproved land&quot;</td>
<td>240 acres; &quot;finely improved,&quot; &quot;all enclosed, laid off in convenient fields for pastureage and the raising of grain and stock&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>George Webster; Rantoul (9)</td>
<td>&quot;a small house and a few acres under cultivation&quot;</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;finely laid out in grain fields and pasture lands, and equipped with good stock, creditable farm buildings, all necessary machinery, and the usual appliances required by the progressive, modern agriculturist&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>Christian F. Summit; Ludlow</td>
<td>&quot;A few acres of this had been broken, and upon it stood a rude shanty.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;He now has all the land in a good state of cultivation, with all the necessary buildings . . . .&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>James H. Tennant; Condit (13)</td>
<td>640 acres; &quot;wild land&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;one of the best conducted stock farms in this section&quot;</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>About 1873 or '74</td>
<td>Stephen L. Tompkins; Harwood (17)</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;but partially improved&quot;</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;choice land, and under a good state of cultivation&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About 1873 or '74</td>
<td>Linus G. Hubbard; Urbana (29)</td>
<td>80 acres; &quot;no improvements&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;valuable, well-improved land&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1874?</td>
<td>George W. Griswold; Harwood (17)</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;wild land&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;The results of his labor have been eminently satisfactory . . .&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>Michael Rassler; Harwood</td>
<td>80 acres; &quot;unimproved land&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1877</td>
<td>Thomas M. O'Conor; Colfax (33)</td>
<td>80 acres; &quot;raw prairie&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;a beautiful farm&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>Casper C. Benjamin; Compromise</td>
<td>120 acres; &quot;mostly wild land, at $16.50 per acre&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;From this he slowly but surely built up a homestead, laid off the fields and fenced them, drained the land with tile, and sold it at an advance of $21 per acre.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>John T. Freeman; South Homer (29)</td>
<td>180 acres; &quot;indifferent&quot; condition</td>
<td>&quot;a high state of cultivation&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>John W. Giddings; Ludlow</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;only partially improved&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;under a good state of cultivation&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>Thomas Laverick; Ayers (31)</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;improved land&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;... he has since brought to a high state of cultivation, and improved with a fine residence and substantial farm buildings.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Henry J. Hunsley; Condit</td>
<td>160 acres; &quot;under a good state of cultivation, and supplied with excellent frame buildings&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Prairie Farm, which is well known as one of the handsomest bodies of land in Condit Township&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES CITED


44. Stoddard, A. 1812. *Sketches, Historical and Descriptive, of Louisiana.* Mathew Carey, Philadelphia.


