



The Illinois Territory Becomes the Twenty-first State

Moving to Illinois

Explorers had begun moving into Illinois even before the Revolutionary War. Settlers began to trickle into the southern part of the territory by the early 1800s. These new residents migrated from the southern states of North and South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, and Kentucky. These new settlers were called “Upland Southerners” because they moved from the southern highlands to start a new life in the hills and near the rivers of southern Illinois. These adventurous people were also called frontiersmen because, as a location became more populated, they would often move to a new place where there were fewer people.

Emigrants moving to a new home.
Courtesy Abraham Lincoln Historical Digitization Project, Northern Illinois University <<http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu>>



Glossary

territory—a part of the United States that is *not* a state but has a governor and legislature

Eventually, these people were joined by other settlers from the eastern states as they continued north into the central part of Illinois. The **territory** grew slowly, and it was not until

Glossary

compromise—a way to settle a disagreement with both sides getting some things but not everything; a give-and-take settlement

timber—trees used for wood or lumber

privy / outhouse—a very small structure with one or two seats built over a hole in the ground and used as an outdoor toilet.

Settlers Clearing timber. Courtesy Abraham Lincoln Digitization Historical Project, Northern Illinois University Libraries. <<http://Lincoln.lib.niu.edu>>.



1818, after a **compromise** over the required number of residents, that Illinois finally became the twenty-first state to add a star to the country's flag. The village of Kaskaskia, on the banks of the Mississippi River, was chosen to be the state capital, and Shadrach Bond was elected as the first governor. At this time the entire population of Illinois was only about 40,000 people.



Illinois' first Capitol building in Kaskaskia. Courtesy Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.

Life as an Illinois Settler

Life was dangerous on the frontier in 1818. Settlers in Illinois located their families near streams or rivers for easy access to drinking water and for the safer and faster means of transportation that the waterways provided. Living near tree-lined rivers was also important because the settlers needed **timber** to build their cabins, as fuel for heating and cooking, and for making furniture. It was also challenging to be a pioneer because one lived long distances from towns and neighbors. Pioneers had to work from sunup to sundown.

When settlers reached a place to settle, a cabin had to be built and the land readied for planting crops. Almost every item they needed on a daily basis had to be grown, hunted, trapped, caught, found, or made by the people themselves. Water had to be hauled to the cabin for drinking, cooking, laundry, and bathing. Of course, the toilet, called a **privy** or **outhouse**, was outdoors. Firewood had to be available every day for cooking. Even more firewood had to be ready for the winter to heat the cabin. In most cases, the entire

Glossary

chores—routine or daily tasks

wood ash lye—this substance was made by pouring water through ashes from burned wood; an essential ingredient in making soap.

family lived in a cabin of one or two rooms with only themselves for comfort and companionship. The whole family helped with **chores**. The men hunted, built homes, chopped firewood, made furniture, and farmed. Women cooked, made clothing, hauled water, tended the garden, and made everyday necessities, such as soap from animal fat and **wood ash lye**. Children helped as soon as they were strong enough to be useful. Of course, everyone pitched in to do whatever job needed to be done whether or not it was their usual task.

Breaking Prairie. Courtesy Abraham Lincoln Historical Digitization Project, Northern Illinois University Libraries. <<http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu>>.



As the new settlers migrated into the central part of Illinois, they saw very few trees growing on the stretches of open prairie. The scarcity of trees caused them to wrongly believe that the land was not good for growing crops. They reasoned that if trees did not grow on the open prairie, then corn and other crops would not grow there either. This was another reason for the earliest settlers to build close to rivers, where they cleared the trees to make fields for planting. After a while, the newcomers did move out onto the prairie. They learned to drill into the ground to make wells for water and soon realized the soil under the prairie grasses was fertile. Eventually they would learn that their farms were on some of the richest soil on the planet.

Illinois' second Capitol building in Vandalia. Courtesy Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.



State Government Moves North

The state capital was moved north from Kaskaskia to Vandalia in 1820. This was a more central location in the state, and the move was meant to encourage settlement in the central and northern parts of Illinois. A small, two-story state house was constructed for less than \$5,000, but it



The Old State Capitol building in Springfield. Courtesy Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.

was destroyed by a fire in 1823. A new brick building was constructed; however, in a very short time, the second Vandalia capitol proved to be too small for the growing needs of Illinois government.

In 1830 state legislators began to talk of again moving the capital city. Their desire to have a more central location was key to the decision. The citizens of Vandalia, however, were determined to keep the capital in their town. The city helped pay for a bigger statehouse in hopes of keeping the capital in Vandalia.

The effort was wasted on the lawmakers, and in 1837 the state legislature voted to move the capital to Springfield, definitely a more central location.

The cornerstone for the newest Illinois State Capitol was laid on July 4, 1837. This building served the people of Illinois from its completion in 1839 until 1876, when once again the state government's need for additional space made the construction of a larger building necessary. The present Illinois State Capitol was completed in 1888. Today, this building is surrounded by other government buildings, numerous statues, and important memorials, including a large tribute to Abraham Lincoln at the entrance to the building.

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The State Capitol building. Courtesy Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.