Prairie Pages

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Early Chicago

Glossary

massacre—the violent killing of a number of people

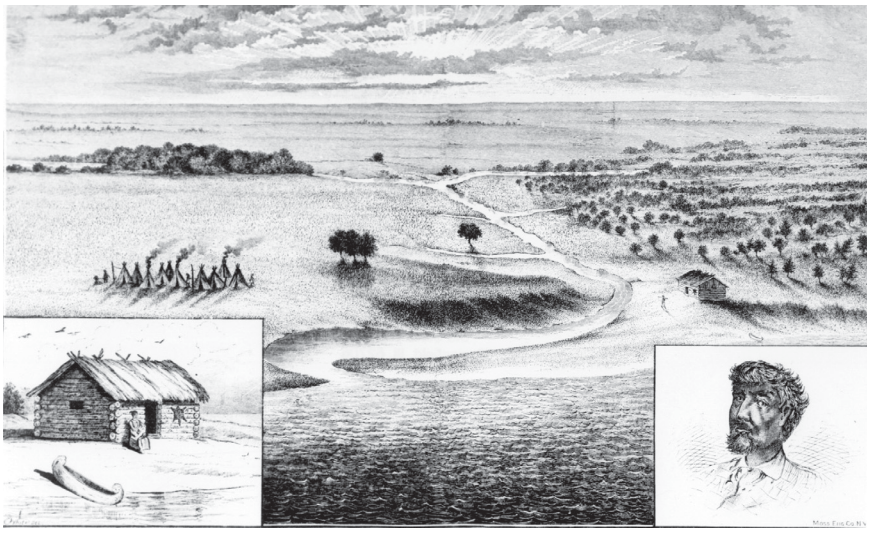
treaty—an agreement between two groups or countries

trading post—a place where goods could be exchanged; for example furs were traded for guns

mill—a building provided with machinery for grinding grain into flour

Fort Dearborn Massacre

After the Revolutionary War, the new federal government decided that Illinois needed protection from the British. Even though Great Britain had lost the war, a treaty in 1783 allowed the British to continue trading for furs with Native Americans in Illinois. Having a former enemy still in business on American soil was a strong reason to build a fort in this region. In 1803, Fort Dearborn was built at the mouth of the Chicago River. Before the Revolutionary War, Jean Baptiste Point du Sable had built a trading post in the same area. Du Sable had married a Potawatomie woman who helped him run the trading post, a mill, and a farm. He had to close the trading post during the war, but he and his wife returned when the war ended and stayed until 1800. The new trading post operator was John



DuSable trading post at the head of the Chicago portage. Courtesy Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.

Kinzie. From 1803 until 1812, life at the fort and the nearby settlement was fairly quiet. Things changed in August 1812. The British captured a nearby fort, and that frightened the settlers at Fort Dearborn. The soldiers stationed there were ordered to leave the strongly built fort and take the settlers to Fort Wayne, in Indiana. By then, the fort was surrounded by hundreds of Potawatomie and other Indians. On August 15 the departing soldiers and settlers were attacked less than two miles from the fort in the sand hills that separated the prairie from the shore of Lake Michigan. Many of the men, women and children were killed or taken captive. Some, like John Kinzie and his family, escaped. The next day the fort was burned to the ground. Many years passed before settlers returned to the area where the horrible event happened.

Fort Dearborn. Courtesy Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.

War of 1812

The attack at Fort Dearborn was part of the War of 1812, between the British and the Americans. The war between the British and the Americans started because of complicated issues. Some were issues that had not been settled during the Revolutionary War. Some had to do with trade, and still others with who owned the land. Many Native Americans in the area around the Great Lakes, on the border between Canada and the United States, took the side of the British in the war. This was very bad for the settlers in Illinois. What happened at Fort Dearborn is an example of just how bad it was. The British still hoped to end American independence, and the Native Americans hoped that a British victory would force the settlers off their homeland. The war ended in 1815, and neither side really won. They had tried to fight in too many places with too few men. LIfe worsened for the Native Americans.

Black Hawk War

Glossary

reservation—an area of land set aside for Native Americans; a place where Indians were forced to live by the United States government

Black Hawk was a chief of the Sauk Indians. He fought on the side of the British during the War of 1812. In 1804, his people had lost their lands east of the Mississippi River in a treaty with the United States government. Black Hawk said the treaty was not legal because the Indians had been tricked when they signed it. He said his people did not have to obey the agreement and led a band of them across the Mississippi River and back into Illinois. Black Hawk was brave and intelligent, but he could not win against the thousands of soldiers who attacked the group. The Sauk were trapped against the river. Hundreds died in the battle or drowned trying to cross the river back into Iowa. Enemy tribes attacked those who made it to the other side. Chief Black Hawk was captured and sent to prison. When he was released, he was sent to live on a reservation in Iowa. Among the volunteers who had gone to look for Black Hawk was a young man named Abraham Lincoln.

Blackhawk. Courtesy Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.

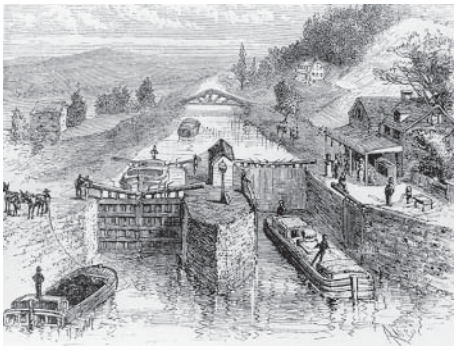
Chicago Is Established

After the Native Americans were forced out of Illinois and onto reservations farther west, settlers continued to pour into the state. From 1830 to 1860 the number of pioneer families

Many of the first people in northern Illinois were lead miners. The lead mine region was in northeastern Illinois near the town of Galena which is visible in the distance. Courtesy Abraham Lincoln Digitization Project Northern Illinois University Libraries, <http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu>.

increased from about 25,000 to close to 300,000. In central Illinois they built homesteads and farms in the Illinois and Sangamon River valleys. Most chose to build near rivers because of the trees growing along the banks. This timber was used for building homes and for fuel. When the settlers realized that the prairie soil was fertile, even more people moved to the central and northern portions of Illinois. Knowing that the prairie soil was incredibly rich encouraged new arrivals from the eastern states to build farms on the open land.

Improvements in transportation also drew people to the northern part of the state. The Erie Canal opened in 1825, making it possible for boats to travel from New York State to Illinois by way of the Great Lakes system. Because this made the trip easier, faster, and safer, more people were willing to move west to start a new life. Many of these settlers came from the northeastern states and were called New Englanders or *Yankees*. This gave the upper part of Illinois a different culture than the lower half which was settled by the uplanders from the southern states. A destination for many Yankee travelers was the growing settlement of Chicago on the shores of Lake Michigan. Chicago grew from the site of where DuSable and Kinzie had their trading posts and where Fort Dearborn and the nearby settlers had lived. From earliest times native peoples had used this same location. The point was a natural crossroads and continues to be so today.



Erie Canal. Courtesy Abraham Lincoln Historical Digitization Project, Northern Illinois University Libraries. <http://linclon.lib.niu.edu>.

Glossary

Erie Canal—a waterway built between Albany and Buffalo, New York, connecting the Hudson River to Lake Erie

uplanders—people from the Applachian Mountain regions who settled in Illinois

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