



RESEARCH ARTICLES

“The Rivalship of Insignificant Villages”: Springfield, Illinois and Town Development in the Old Northwest, 1817-1840

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In 1825, the citizens of Sangamon County, Illinois awaited news on the establishment of their permanent county seat.¹ When the county was formed only four years earlier, the town of Springfield was hastily created from a collection of centrally located cabins that would serve as the temporary seat. Originally located a distance from both the region’s main road and major river, Springfield had little going for it beyond population density. In fact, between 1821 and 1825, a resident of the county platted his own town, Sangamo, and set about developing it into the ideal location for the area’s permanent seat of justice. Unlike Springfield, Sangamo Town was situated on the Sangamon River (a tributary of the Illinois), was near increasingly well-trodden roads, and even supported a mill. On the surface, Sangamo Town appeared to be the better location, likely to be chosen by state-appointed commissioners as the county seat. Not about to see such a prize plucked from their grasp, the people of Springfield adopted different tactics; they cheated. Whether by luck or design, they managed to mislead the commissioners and see Springfield named the permanent seat. Their ruse snowballed into greater prosperity and prestige for the frontier community as Springfield grew from a collection of cabins to prosperous county seat and, by 1840, the state capital of Illinois. From seemingly insignificant roots, Springfield and Sangamo Town struggled as nascent cities on the path of frontier urbanization.

While Springfield and Sangamo Town might be minor settlements compared to Midwestern metropolises like Cincinnati or Chicago, their competition reveals much about the process of frontier urbanization in the early nineteenth-century Old Northwest Territory and the creation of the

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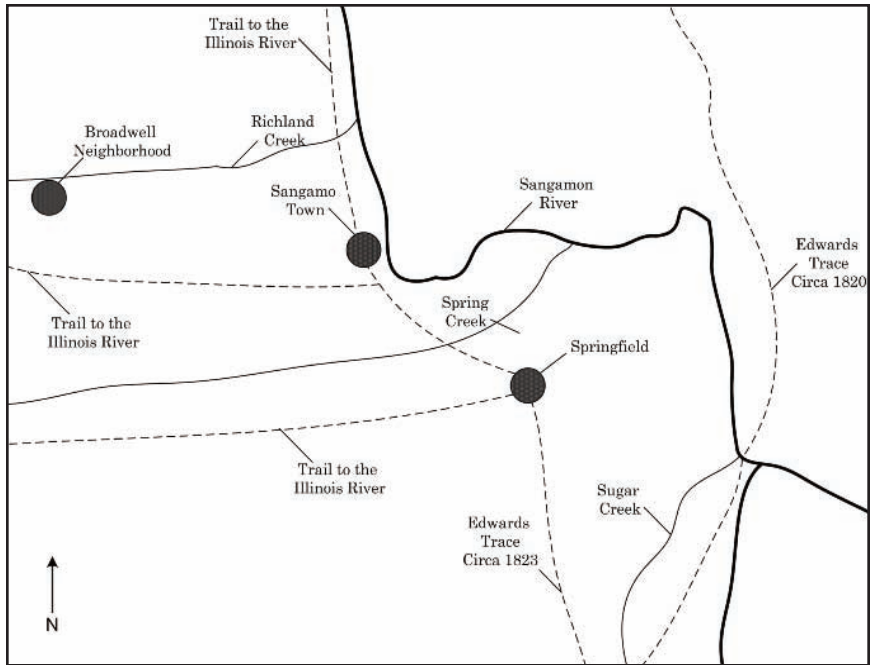


Figure 1. The core of Sangamo Country showing relative locations in the 1820s. Map by the author with data from: Illinois State Archives, Federal Township Plats of Illinois (1804-1891), Gardner, Fancy Creek, Williams, Springfield, Clear Lake, Curran, Woodside, and Rochester Townships, Sangamon County, <http://landplats.ilsos.net>, accessed Feb. 19, 2010; Illinois State Archives, Illinois Public Domain Land Tract Sales Database, <http://www.ilsos.gov/GenealogyMWeb/landsrch.html>, accessed Feb. 19, 2010; and Robert Mazrim, *The Sangamo Frontier: History and Archaeology in the Shadow of Lincoln* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 140.

modern Midwestern landscape. Far from the patriarchal or authoritarian establishment of towns for the benefit of a business concern, many communities in the Old Northwest developed in conjunction with competing sites and under the influence of resident owner-proprietors. These boosters were not merely seeking to turn their settlements into places of some significance; they were also seeking to keep those settlements from blinking out of existence. Thus, there existed nascent towns and cities of sufficient population to no longer count as "frontier" but which operated under raw conditions with enough uncertainty to continue qualifying as such. By careful manipulation of transportation improvements, business development, and government services, the proprietors of these towns attempted to usher their settlements from frontier conditions to established urban places.

The study of frontier urbanization began as such with the publication of Richard C. Wade's *The Urban Frontier: The Rise of Western Cities, 1790-1830* in 1959. Although a flurry of related publications followed Wade's work between the 1970s and early 1990s, the topic has since entered a scholarly lull. In studying five cities of the Ohio River Valley, Wade introduced

scholars to the notion of frontier urbanization and the idea that cities often existed simultaneously with, or even preceded, Frederick Jackson Turner's rural frontier.² In doing so, Wade opened the floodgates for scholars to study the origins of cities in the American West and made possible notable work on urbanization in the Old Northwest Territory. Between the late 1970s and early 1990s, numerous authors built upon Wade's work by highlighting factors and processes leading to the development of Midwestern metropolises. Don Harrison Doyle's *The Social Order of a Frontier Community* (1978) and Carl Abbott's *Boosters and Businessmen* (1981) emphasized the role of boosters in the growth of these cities, making way for William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis* (1991), a study of Chicago's ultimate control over subsequent frontiers and nature itself.³ John Reps's *Cities of the American West: A History of Frontier Urban Planning* (1979) and William Wyckoff's *The Developer's Frontier: The Making of the Western New York Landscape* (1988) emphasized the conscious act of town and city building inherent in various frontier settlements.⁴ In 1990, David Hamer's *New Towns in the New World* offered a comparative study of frontier communities in both North America and the South Pacific while Timothy R. Mahoney's *River Towns in the Great West* offered a case study using urban systems theory to understand frontier urbanization in the Upper Mississippi Valley.⁵ Following this flurry of activity, the study of frontier urbanization entered a scholarly lull. In 1996, Alan Taylor touched upon lingering paternalistic development in his *William Cooper's Town*.⁶ Most recently, Diane Shaw emphasized the importance of commerce to the development of western cities in *City Building on the Eastern Frontier: Sorting the New Nineteenth-Century City* (2004).⁷

Despite the publishing lull, important questions about the development of frontier towns and cities remain unanswered. While Doyle, Abbott, Cronon, and Shaw all highlight the importance of commerce to frontier urbanization, could other factors have also played significant roles? Despite Reps's, Wyckoff's, and Taylor's focus on the planned city, were boosters and proprietors of the early nineteenth century able to gain success for their communities through well-designed development alone? Finally, although scholars like Mahoney and Allan Pred emphasize the manner in which interests of different cities could work in conjunction to form urban systems, what happened when nascent cities with highly similar interests existed within a few miles of each other?

This paper seeks to address these questions through the specific experience of Springfield and Sangamo Town, Illinois. During the 1820s and into the 1830s, these two towns competed for dominance only seven miles apart within Illinois's nineteenth-century "Sangamo country," a region drained by the Sangamon River and the core of which was formed into present-day Sangamon County in Central Illinois (Figure 1). Starting from similar origins but with vastly different access to so-called natural advantages, both towns showed early promise. By manipulating transportation routes, commercial or industrial concentrations, and regional institutions, local boosters sought to gain and hold prominence to make their

communities significant centers for the surrounding rural territory. By 1840, however, Springfield became the state capital and the site of Sangamo Town was reverting to agricultural use. The competition between these nascent cities therefore reveals much about frontier urbanization and the process by which cities established and maintained their position on the early nineteenth-century landscape.

The setting: Sangamo country

At the opening of the nineteenth century, much of Illinois, including the Sangamo, was largely unknown to Americans and Europeans.⁸ In 1818, when Illinois became a state, the vast majority of Illinois's citizens could be found south of a line drawn between the mouth of the Illinois River on the Mississippi and Illinois's eastern border, the Wabash River (Figure 2). Although the Mississippi, Illinois, Wabash, and Ohio rivers had been used by generations of Europeans and Americans, the region drained by the Sangamon River, a tributary of the Illinois, remained Indian territory. During the War of 1812, Illinois's territorial governor, Ninian Edwards, formed a company of 350 rangers at Edwardsville, near St. Louis on the Illinois side of the Mississippi River. From Edwardsville, Edwards led his men north to attack Indians allegedly assembling near modern-day Peoria on the eastern bluff of the Illinois River. Through the course of this expedition, the rangers passed through the territory to the east of modern-day Springfield and crossed the Sangamon River.⁹ While Edwards and his men succeeded in sacking two Indian villages, the expedition's real value was to expose future settlers to the Sangamo. By 1821, at least ten veterans of the 1812 campaign to Peoria could be found residing in Sangamo country.¹⁰ By the 1830s, two of Governor Edwards's own sons would call Springfield home.¹¹ Governor Edwards's trail became the first major land route into the area and was afterwards known as "Edwards Trace."¹²

Although Edwards's attack foreshadowed future white immigration to central Illinois, it was not until 1817-1818 that the first permanent settlers arrived in the Sangamo and not until 1819 that the Kickapoo ceded their rights to the land.¹³ Many Kickapoo were forced west, creating a vacuum ultimately filled by white settlers. While the new residents would report nomadic bands of Indians, the Sangamo was spared much of the native-white conflict that characterized many other frontier areas.¹⁴ As word spread, the reports of the Sangamo took on mythical proportions. In 1819, German immigrant Ferdinand Ernst decided to settle near Vandalia, then the new Illinois capital, but reported that "everyone is full of praise for those [lands] which lie about 60 to 80 miles northward upon the river Sangamon." That August, Ernst embarked upon a trip to see the country for himself. Traveling north on Edwards Trace, "a fine, well-traveled road," Ernst discovered sixty farms along Sugar Creek and visited others along the Sangamon River itself. He noted "fields covered almost without exception with corn from ten to 15 feet high," stands of sugar maple offering the "promising prospect of a harvest of sugar," and "sufficient timber for



Figure 2. Illinois as it was known to American map makers, circa 1820. Sangamo Country was the region to the northwest of the arrow at the center of the map. From: Joseph Yeager, "Geographical, Statistical, and Historical Map of Illinois," (Philadelphia, 1822), Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library & Museum.

a moderate population." Curiously, Ernst remarked upon an area on the Sangamon River, between Sugar and Spring creeks, as "a grand spot for the founding of a city." He further claimed that the Sangamon River "must be navigable the greater part of the year for medium sized vessels."¹⁵ About the same time, "An Agriculturist" hinted in the *Edwardsville Spectator*, the newspaper published nearest to the Sangamo, at the ease with which crops could be cultivated in the area: a "seafaring man" had planted ten acres of corn near the Sangamon River from which the author estimated the farmer "would yield little less than one hundred bushels per acre." Thanks to Sangamo country's access to ports via the Sangamon, Illinois, and Mississippi rivers, the author further claimed the region would be especially well positioned to take advantage of good markets at New Orleans.¹⁶

As Ernst noticed, numerous settlers took the accounts of Sangamo to heart and settled in Sangamo country as early as 1818. Generally speaking, these settlers traveled from communities to the south, often clustering in rural neighborhoods within the timber adjacent to creeks feeding the Sangamon River. Although Ernst first visited the scattered settlement on Sugar Creek, similar neighborhoods popped up throughout the Sangamo. Among these communities was that of the Kelly clan along Spring Creek, fifteen miles to the north of the core Sugar Creek settlements. After a particularly fruitful hunt in the Sangamo, Elisha Kelly convinced his father, brothers, and extended families to immigrate to the area. Originating in North Carolina, by 1819 the Kellys had begun one of the largest chain migrations to the Sangamo.¹⁷ Another of these neighborhoods got its start in the spring of 1820 when Moses and Jane Broadwell came to the Sangamo with eight of their children, the wives of their two oldest sons, and one infant grandchild. Originally from New Jersey and Ohio, the extended clan reportedly traveled via boat from St. Louis to the mouth of the Sangamon on the Illinois River. Upon reaching the Sangamo, the Broadwells settled in the timber along Richland Creek, several miles to the northwest of the Kelly neighborhood on Spring Creek.¹⁸ While the Kellys, Broadwells, and others then set about transforming the land into farms and pastures, it is also worthy to note that these settlers set the stage for developing villages and towns as well. By settling in clusters and neighborhoods, immigrants formed the bonds of community and fostered the sense of mutual dependence necessary for village life.

In this way, prairie and timber of the Sangamo country began to transition into the farms and villages of Sangamon County. In the absence of marketable commodities and with little need for a variety of goods and services, however, the Sangamo continued to develop in a predominately rural fashion. Neighborhoods were spread out along creeks, the first store would not open until 1821, and even men with marketable skills maintained a farm for subsistence.¹⁹ Agriculture would always be important to the region and these rural patterns were unlikely to change by themselves. As such, one might have expected a traditional narrative of town development to play out in the Sangamo. As farms took shape and less time was devoted to preparing land for agriculture, these pioneers-turned-farmers

would inevitably begin to produce a surplus. A farmer with an entrepreneurial streak might then construct a horse or ox-powered mill to grind that grain, taking a share for his trouble. As more farms produced a surplus, that miller would shift his concern to the nearest stream to take advantage of water power and create a larger operation. Trails and roads would appear to connect the farms in the immediate area to that mill. For the convenience of his patrons, the miller might also add a store and a saw mill to his operation. Taverns and inns would later open to entertain farmers waiting for their grain. Social functions and civic obligations might eventually focus on the area and other businesses would soon locate there as well. Within a few years, the area could become a small village servicing the rural population. Although this tidy little story of progress glosses over the realities of economic cycles, dry seasons, and the presence of a mobile, cash poor population, the overarching narrative seemed plausible and was embraced by many in the early nineteenth century.²⁰ Like the work of Doyle, Abbott, Cronon, and Shaw, this pattern also emphasizes the role of commerce in the urbanization of these settlements. By all accounts, this progression appeared to be underway in the Sangamo by 1820: early Sugar Creek settler Robert Pulliam operated a horse mill at his homestead and entertained waiting farmers at his tavern.²¹ Thus, this pattern of development continued until the following year when the state of Illinois introduced an entirely different catalyst.

Nascent cities: Springfield and Sangamo Town

In 1818, the first significant year of Sangamo migration and the year Illinois became a state, all the land north of the Illinois River mouth-Wabash River line was divided into three counties. Madison, one of these three northern counties and the most populous in the state, included most of the Sangamo country.²² At the time Illinois was admitted to the Union, Madison County boasted over 5,400 people.²³ By 1820, Madison had a population of over 13,500 people. In comparison, the second largest Illinois county in 1820 (by population) claimed just over 5,200 souls.²⁴ Faced with this startling reality, the Illinois General Assembly reorganized the three northern counties into several new jurisdictions during their 1820-1821 legislative session. Among these new counties was Sangamon, incorporating much of the Sangamo country. The establishment act further stipulated that, upon election, the first duty of the new county commissioners would be to select "some place near the centre of the population" as the temporary county seat.²⁵ Once elected in early 1821, Sugar Creek residents Zachariah Peter and William Drennan performed their duty as county commissioners by designating "a certain point in the prairie near John Kelly's field on the water of Spring Creek" as the county seat. The two commissioners further had the honor of naming the spot "Springfield."²⁶ Elijah Iles, a Kentuckian relocating to the Kelly neighborhood as a storekeeper at approximately the same time, remembered the residents living within two miles of the new county seat as being invaluable to the selection of that

site. He recalled that “[t]hese were the families with whom it was expected the judges and lawyers would find quarters until other accommodations would be provided.”²⁷

Although the Kelly settlement was close to the spot Ferdinand Ernst identified two years earlier as a “grand spot” to build a city, it had few of the natural advantages one expected from a village. Springfield was not located on any major transportation routes; the Sangamon River was about five miles to the north and Edwards Trace ran another five miles to the east, along the east bank of Sugar Creek. In 1821, no one had yet constructed a horse mill near Springfield or any mills on the nearby waterways. While other minor overland trails converged in the vicinity of the Kelly settlement, their original terminus appeared to be Edwards Trace and not the future site of Springfield.²⁸ Even within the Sangamo, Springfield bore little resemblance to the small neighborhoods developing along Sugar Creek. Yet, Springfield was centrally located between the new county’s population centers along Sugar Creek, the Sangamon River, and the river’s lesser tributaries. Likely, the county commissioners paid special attention to the “centre of the population” portion of their instructions and, knowing that it could be moved later, selected a location that was close enough to the major transportation routes without greatly inconveniencing their constituents. The creation of Springfield further offers an interesting counterpoint to the work of Doyle, Abbott, Cronon, and Shaw. Here, the interests of government, not commerce, created the town.

In any case, the designation as temporary county seat began a transformative process for the Kelly settlement and the old Sangamo country.²⁹ The first and most immediate change was the construction of a log courthouse during the spring of 1821 and a jail the following summer. During the commissioners’ March 1822 meeting, the land around this courthouse was set aside as the town’s first public square.³⁰ The new courthouse joined Elijah Iles’s store and a Kelly clan cabin along the east/west trail to form something of a main street for the new county seat. The county seat also acted as a draw for additional settlers who occupied government offices. The earliest of these was Charles R. Matheny, who had been appointed both county and circuit court clerk.³¹ Likewise, Thomas Cox and Pascal Enos arrived in 1823 as the officers of the federal land office.³² These men, with their families, settled in the immediate vicinity of the new courthouse, adding to the population density of the broader Kelly neighborhood. In doing so, Springfield grew with little of the planning inherent in the towns studied by Reys or Wyckoff.

Equally significant for the development of Springfield was the establishment of the region’s several trails as official county roads. While the roads remained trails in all but name, adoption by the county entitled them to infrequent maintenance and promised travelers the occasional ferry or simple comfort in the home of a family along the route. Following its establishment as county seat, Springfield became a destination and the local road system adapted to this change. By 1823, Edwards Trace detoured from the east side of Sugar Creek to instead pass through Springfield (Figure 3).

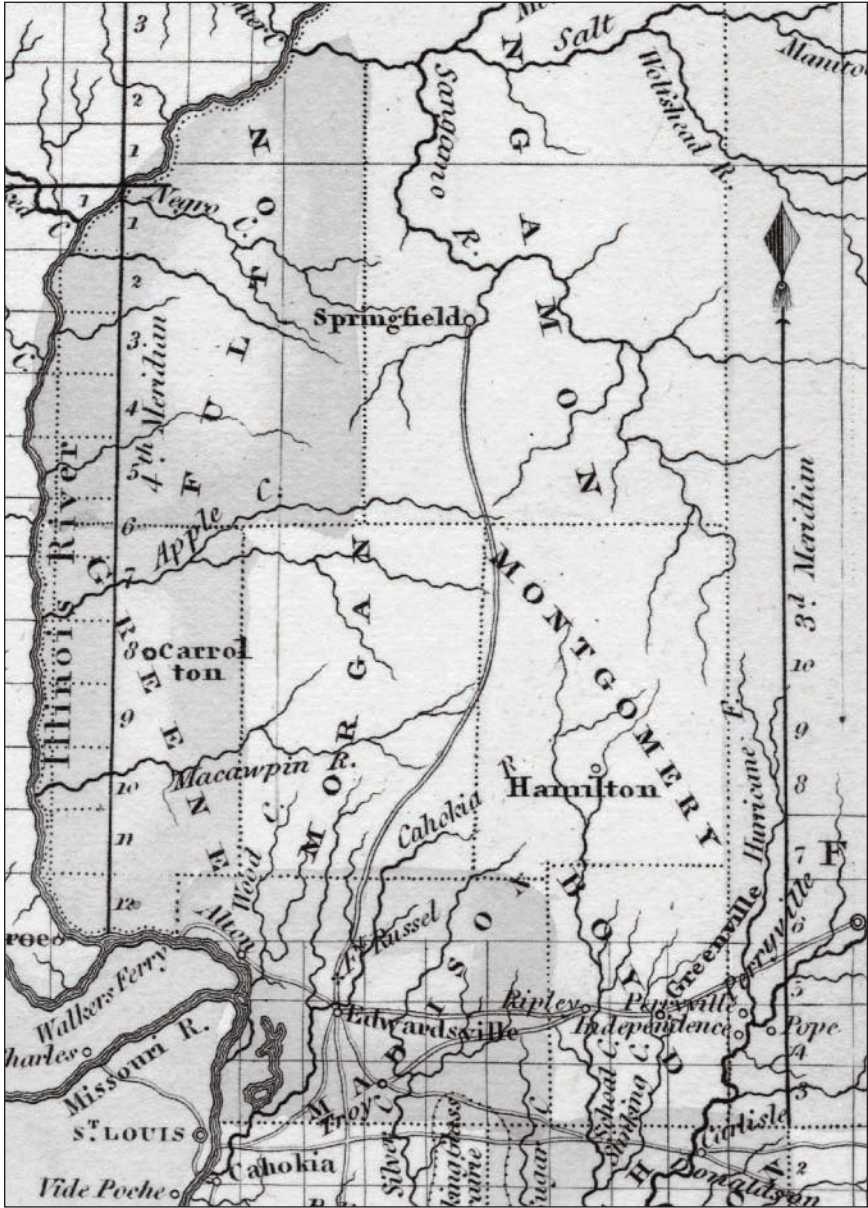


Figure 3. Edwards Trace from Edwardsville to Springfield, Circa 1823. This map is significant for showing the government road terminating in Springfield. The original trail ran to the east of Springfield and continued across the Sangamon River towards Peoria. From: Fielding Lucas, Jr., "Illinois," (Baltimore: F. Lucas, ca. 1823), Indiana Historical Society.

Likewise, a trail from the Illinois River to Springfield was soon named an official road. This road proceeded northwest from Springfield, turning to the north near a bend in the Sangamon River, and proceeding to the Illinois River south of Peoria.³³

This system of trails also offered a promising location to Moses Broadwell at his Richland Creek neighborhood. Upon entering the Sangamo, the Broadwells settled near an east-west trail, a few miles from where it met the northerly trail connecting Edwards Trace with various points on the Illinois River. As people like Ferdinand Ernst believed the Sangamon River was navigable, the junction of these trails near the river offered numerous opportunities for a variety of businesses. In 1821, Broadwell incorporated the Sangamo Milling Company.³⁴ Quite possibly, Broadwell had the mill-town creation narrative in mind when forming this company. The following year, Broadwell joined with several other Sangamon County residents residing in close proximity to the river to form the Sangamo Exporting Company, an association primarily designed to facilitate the collective shipping of pork to markets downstream.³⁵ Likely, Broadwell saw the location of his milling company as the ideal place for the depot and boat-building site of the exporting association. Over the ensuing years, Broadwell's intentions for this spot on the Sangamon River would become increasingly clear.

In the meantime, however, business concerns most likely acted as a way of biding time for men like Moses Broadwell and storekeeper Elijah Iles. Ready cash or not, the reality of settlement in the Sangamo was one of squatting on "Congress land" (i.e. land not yet transferred from the ownership of the U.S. government) while awaiting surveyors and a government land office to make federally-owned land available for purchase. Until Sangamon County's lands were made available for purchase from the federal government, men of means had little else in which to invest. Although a small profit could be made developing unoccupied land and selling the "improvements" to a wealthier newcomer, settlers like Broadwell and Iles were in a position to turn a tremendous profit in land speculation. Both Broadwell and Iles came to the Sangamo with money and sought greater returns than those of a small farm or business. Broadwell clearly had money to spend if he transported his family to the region via boat and, only a few years later, constructed one of the first brick homes in the region.³⁶ Likewise, Iles had recently made a healthy profit selling cattle and running a store in Missouri.³⁷ Physical presence in the county enabled them to scout out choice parcels and lay claims while their business concerns offered an additional opportunity to make money. Sangamo settlers knew their land office would be opening soon. As early as 1820, efforts were being made in Congress to create a Sangamo land office.³⁸ Likewise, residents would have seen surveying marks, if not the surveyors themselves, upon the landscape as plat maps of both Richland and Spring Creeks had been certified in December 1821.³⁹ In 1822, Congress officially established a Sangamo land office, although it would not open until the following year.⁴⁰ In 1823, with a hint of impatience, a toast was offered at a Sangamon County Fourth of July celebration: "The citizens of the

Sangamo Land District... May they receive a rich reward for their toils and privations in subduing the wilderness."⁴¹ When the first land sales were held that November, Broadwell and Iles were among the earliest purchasers.⁴²

Although Iles made his first purchase from the land office on November 7, 1823, preparations to buy and develop Springfield had gone back several months, if not years.⁴³ As early as 1821, Iles had purchased improvements, and with it the unwritten right to purchase the land itself, on 160 acres to the east of John Kelly's cabin. Others later joined Iles in purchasing the improvements to the three quarter sections to the south and west of the county courthouse and the majority of the site was formally purchased from the federal government on November 7, 1823.⁴⁴ Despite not gaining title to the fourth section until 1824, the proprietors lost no time in seeing their town surveyed and the town plat recorded on December 5, 1823.⁴⁵ Curiously, the proprietors saw fit to do away with the name Springfield and rechristened the town Calhoun, likely after John C. Calhoun, then U.S. Secretary of War. Jefferson Street, one of five streets named after the several U.S. presidents, replaced the old east-west trail on the new town plat (Figure 4). Including a new public square, the town expanded the original settlement to the southeast. Interestingly, the proprietors tried their hand at urban planning by locating this new square far from the existing settlement, courthouse, and public space.

Moses Broadwell also had grander plans than a self-sufficient farm and a few business concerns. On November 8, 1823, the day after Iles and company made their purchases, Broadwell's intended properties came up for sale. That day Broadwell purchased over eight hundred acres, almost three hundred of which were located on the Sangamon River roughly halfway between his Richland Creek homestead and the Kelly settlement at Springfield/Calhoun. While he had purchased nearly two thousand acres by the end of November, much of his attention was focused on this parcel along the river.⁴⁶ The following February, Broadwell placed an advertisement in the *Edwardsville Spectator* for the new town of Sangamo. The town was laid out on the "south-west bank of the Sangamo River," which was "navigable for large keel boats at almost all seasons." Speaking to his earlier interest in mills, Broadwell claimed "a Merchant-Mill, Saw-Mill, and two Carding Machines" would be operational that spring. In an indirect swipe at Springfield/Calhoun, he further claimed that great roads, including Edwards Trace, would be diverted through his town. More directly, however, Broadwell stated that "the central situation and natural advantages of this town give it a greater claim to the permanent seat of justice than any other place in the county." To that end he promised twenty-five percent of the net proceeds from the sale of town lots for construction of a new courthouse, should the county seat be moved to Sangamo. Broadwell even prepared a contingency plan: should Sangamo not win the county seat, the donation would be provided to establish "a Seminary of Learning."⁴⁷ As early as 1822 Broadwell was arranging for similar advertisements in his former home of Cincinnati.⁴⁸ The town of Sangamo was

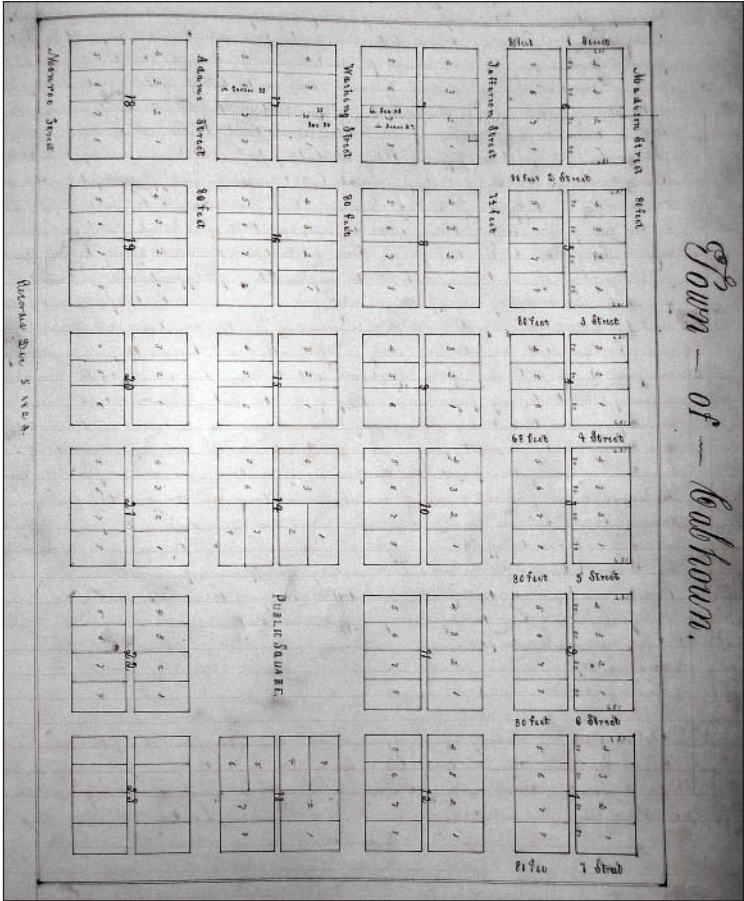


Figure 4. Plat Map of Calhoun, Recorded December 5, 1823. Sangamon County Recorder, Deed Record, Book AB, 89, record series 4/266/2, Illinois Regional Archives Depository, University of Illinois at Springfield.

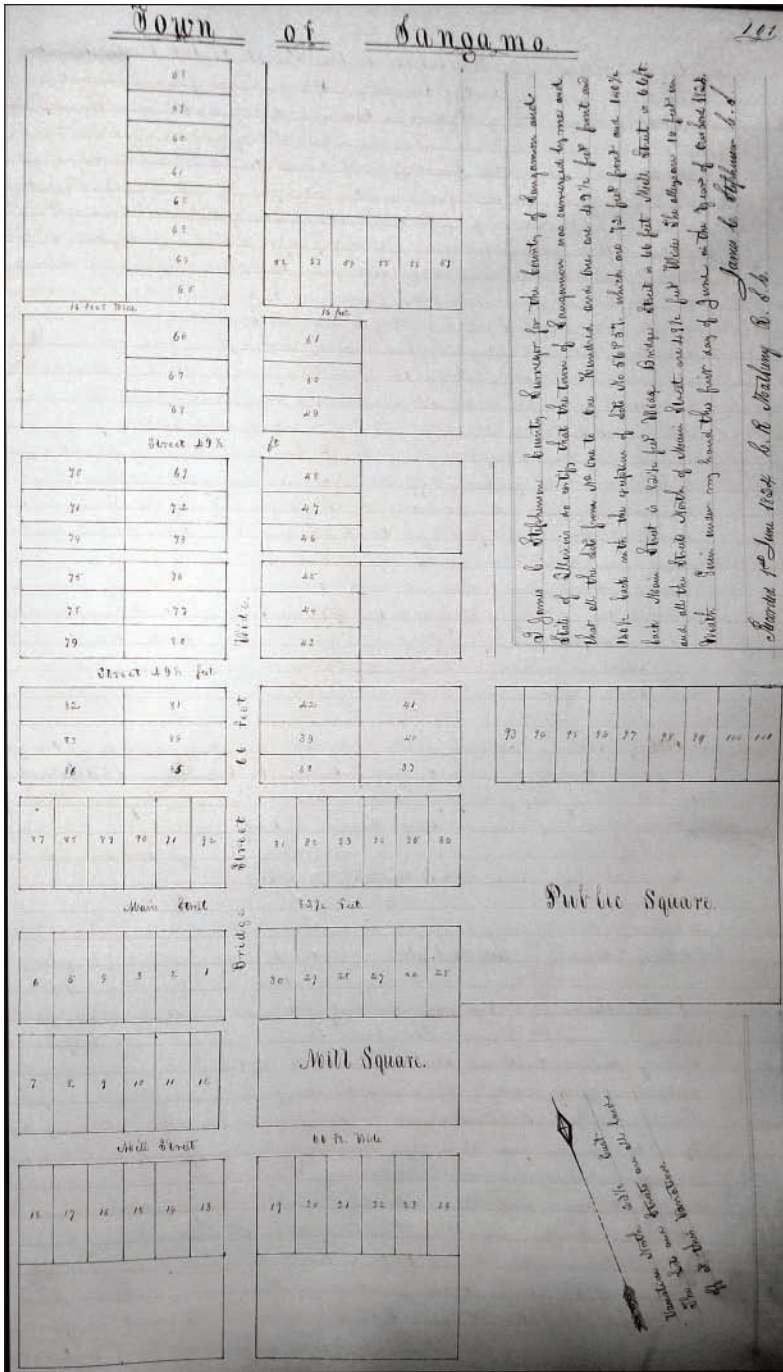


Figure 5. Plat Map of Sangamo Town, Recorded June 1, 1824. Sangamon County Recorder, Deed Record, Book AB, 101, record series 4/266/2, Illinois Regional Archives Depository, University of Illinois at Springfield.

thus laid out with a public square, a specially designated "Mill Square," and "Bridge Street," to connect the town with the opposite side of the river via a planned bridge (Figure 5).⁴⁹ While Broadwell likely selected the name Sangamo to create an automatic association between Sangamon County and his town (à la Indianapolis), in common parlance the spot was always referred to as "Sangamo Town" so as not to be confused with the river or county. In its conception, Broadwell's community was very much representative of the ingredients for successful frontier urbanization as highlighted by previous scholars; Broadwell's plan had a clear commercial emphasis that strove to use the area's transportation network to join Sangamo country with a system of cities and markets downstream.

Both the towns of Calhoun and Sangamo showed early promise. Moses Broadwell successfully sold almost half the Sangamo Town lots that spring. Buyers purchased heavily in the area of a blank space at the north end of town, later remembered as the site of a saw mill. Given Broadwell's business activities before Sangamo Town and the fact that only one lot adjacent or facing this space remained unsold, this mill was most likely operational or very near completion during the spring of 1824.⁵⁰ The remaining lot sales, leading to the public square on Main Street, between the saw mill and Main on Bridge Street, and on Mill Street near the mill square, all speak to the potential seen in Sangamo Town: by locating on major thoroughfares (Bridge Street) or near business-generating attractions (the mills or the public square with its future courthouse or seminary), early Sangamo Town investors could get a jump start on business while the old mill-to-town narrative took its course.

Things looked promising in Calhoun as well. Elijah Iles himself expanded his storehouse to accommodate both himself and new bride Malinda.⁵¹ Thomas Cox, the Register of the Springfield land office, built an ox-powered mill and distillery on Jefferson Street.⁵² Saddle maker Thomas Strawbridge opened a shop, again on Jefferson Street, in 1823 or 1824.⁵³ Between 1821 and early 1825, three taverns had also begun operation, again spread out on Jefferson Street.⁵⁴ All and all, settlers and investors found promise in both towns. The public squares, however, remained empty and removed from the core of both settlements while large portions of the towns remained undeveloped.

A turning point

While Sangamon country was growing dramatically in the early 1820s, it is hard to believe that it could indefinitely support two towns with such aspirations in such close proximity. Likely known to both Broadwell and the Calhoun proprietors were the ideas of one "Young Rustic," publishing anonymously on the subject of village sites in the *Edwardsville Spectator*. In 1821, the Young Rustic wrote that "[t]wo respectable villages cannot then be the fruit of one creek....One must sink and the other must rise." In the event two towns were forced to compete for the seat of

government, the rustic thought it best for two towns to "decay to nourish some central spot," thereby "preventing the rivalry of insignificant villages."⁵⁵ Unbeknownst to the proprietors of both towns, this turning point was reached in 1825 when the general assembly named a committee to select a permanent location for the Sangamon County Seat.⁵⁶

As it was remembered years later, the people of Calhoun were not above a degree of deception in order to ensure that the county seat stayed in their town. When the appointed commissioners arrived that March to view the competing sites, Andrew Elliot, a Calhoun tavern keeper and member of the extended Kelly family, was recruited to guide the commissioners the roughly seven miles from Calhoun to Sangamo Town. As Elijah Iles remembered it, Elliot informed the commissioners that "as the ravines were full and the marshy ground [was] covered with water, they would find it a tedious trip, but he would do the best he could. He had his cue." Whether Elliot carefully avoided what by then was a well traveled path between the temporary county seat and Sangamo Town or if he simply took advantage of a wet Illinois March is unclear but Iles remembered the commissioners "found the route almost impassable." After viewing Sangamo Town, the commissioners requested that Elliot find a better route back to the temporary seat. Elliot obliged them by returning through water that "nearly swam the horses." Upon returning to Iles's store, Malinda Iles served the commissioners a particularly enjoyable meal and Elijah offered to cash their depreciated state warrants at full value. Having been paid for their services by Illinois in paper money worth less than its face value, the commissioners were likely appreciative of this offer to essentially increase their pay.⁵⁷ When the Sangamon County Commissioners met on March 18, 1825 to receive the report of the state commissioners, with little surprise, "Springfield" was named the permanent county seat of Sangamon County.⁵⁸ The name Calhoun appears to have never caught on and, with the state commissioners' report, it gradually faded from use.

As opposed to a site with a clearer commercial advantage, the naming of the permanent county seat gave a clear boost to Springfield. As a condition of becoming the county seat, Sangamon County was to receive a donation of no less than thirty-five acres from the town's residents for the use of the county.⁵⁹ The representative town proprietors donated the public square, several blocks to the south and east, and additional unsurveyed land adjacent to the town's western edge.⁶⁰ As Springfield's development heretofore clustered around the original courthouse, the lots donated to the county were most likely sitting vacant in 1825 and the donation represented no great hardship to the town proprietors. Once the county commissioners ordered the construction of a new courthouse across from the public square, town businesses began a gradual process of shifting their focus from the old public space surrounding the original log courthouse to the eastern side of town. The loss of thirty-five acres eventually became a net gain for the proprietors as other unsold lots to the south and west of the original courthouse came into demand. Signaling a

transition from Springfield's unrefined roots, the new courthouse was originally to be constructed of brick, though an inspection of the county coffers likely encouraged the commissioners to contract for a considerably less expensive frame structure during the summer of 1825.⁶¹

Although the choice of Springfield as permanent county seat dealt a blow to Sangamo Town, the latter community continued to grow nonetheless. In April 1825, before Moses Broadwell's auction of Sangamo Town lots, the Sangamon County Commissioners authorized Jacob Carman to keep a tavern at Sangamo.⁶² Jacob Roll, an acquaintance of Moses Broadwell's from Cincinnati, relocated to Sangamo Town in the fall of 1825 and operated a store with resident Ebenezer Brigham.⁶³ Given the town's location on the Sangamon River itself, Sangamo promised better opportunities than Springfield for both industry and transportation. As early as 1826, Broadwell's son Charles participated in the construction of the carding mill immediately to the west of town. By the time of Moses Broadwell's death in 1827, a grist mill had joined the town's saw mill and Charles's carding mill to turn Sangamo into something of an industrial center for the county. In the early 1830s, at least one of the Broadwell mills was upgraded to steam power. In 1834, Sangamo was even graced by a visit from the steamboat Utility, something Springfield would never see, given its distance from the river.⁶⁴

Despite these early successes, however, Springfield and Sangamo Town progressed upon very different paths. Moses Broadwell's original plan for Sangamo had called for a diversified number of industries and a school should the town fail to become the county seat. Following the establishment of the permanent county seat in Springfield, not even a grammar school appears to have opened in Sangamo Town. Despite a few steamboats navigating the Sangamon, the river never proved itself to be consistently navigable. Nor was the bridge across the Sangamon River ever constructed, thanks in large part to substandard lumber provided for it by a contractor.⁶⁵ Following Broadwell's death in 1827, Sangamo never met his vision "as a plase of buisnis at some futer day not far distant [sic]."⁶⁶ While a handful of stores, a tavern, and a blacksmith operated in Sangamo, few appear to have been entirely satisfied with their prospects. As early as 1827, Ebenezer Brigham sold his mercantile interest to his partner and, judging by a December 1831 "Store for Rent" advertisement, Jacob Roll might also have left Sangamo Town earlier that year. Even before Roll departed, Sangamo Town was beginning to look less like a town: Charles Broadwell, Moses's son and successor as proprietor, entered a lawsuit against Roll for issues surrounding Roll's construction of a blacksmith's shop outside of his property line on Main Street. Robert Mazrim, the archaeologist who excavated the site, concluded that Roll could no longer tell where Main Street was located or that the road carried so little traffic that he thought no one would mind if he occupied a portion.⁶⁷ Jacob Carman even sold his tavern around 1830.⁶⁸ Sangamo's greatest success was its mills, which outlasted most of the town's residents.

Springfield followed a very different path, however. Springfield's frame courthouse was completed in 1826 and oversaw the gradual transition of Springfield's business district from the old settlement to the area surrounding the public square. In 1825, an advertisement announcing the first sale of county lots claimed the town was home to more than two hundred people.⁶⁹ Reminiscing about his move to Springfield in 1828, attorney John Stuart recalled a population "not exceeding five hundred inhabitants."⁷⁰ In 1830, the Sangamon County Commissioners resolved to solicit bids for the construction of a new, brick courthouse at the center of the public square. Completed in 1831, this court house became the center of community life in Springfield. When newcomer George Pasfield, for example, arrived in town to open a dry goods store that spring, he set up shop across from the new courthouse on the north side of the public square. The following year, in 1832, the Illinois General Assembly officially incorporated the town. Springfield, along with much of central Illinois, grew so prosperous and prominent that, in 1837, the Illinois General Assembly voted to relocate the state capital there from Vandalia. When Sangamon County donated Springfield's public square to the state for the construction of the new capitol building, a history of short-lived courthouses was continued: the five-year-old brick courthouse was dismantled and construction began on the new Illinois capitol.⁷¹

With the construction of this new capitol building, the fate of Springfield seemed certain and the fate of Sangamo Town was sealed. Sangamo Town continued a downward spiral until, by an 1845 act of the General Assembly, the town plat was vacated, around which time proprietor Charles Broadwell moved north to Pekin, Illinois.⁷² The community of Sangamo Town literally ceased to exist. The town site was gradually turned over to agriculture, in which capacity it continues today. Although the capitol building was still under construction when the state government moved from Vandalia in late 1839, Springfield too appeared very different than it had when the Kellys arrived in 1818-1819. By 1840, prairie and timber had been replaced by a growing community of over 2,500 inhabitants.⁷³ Springfield's public buildings offered a measure of the town's increasing importance: the early log courthouse had given way to a short-lived wooden frame structure which had been replaced by a Federal-style brick courthouse. That brick courthouse was equally short-lived as it was replaced by the Greek Revival statehouse, constructed with locally quarried stone. By the late 1830s, bands of Indians no longer patronized Springfield's retail shops. Perhaps most telling, Elijah Iles sold his store in the early 1830s, most likely to concentrate upon his growing real estate concerns. By 1839, however, he had changed professions entirely by opening the American House, then the largest hotel in the state of Illinois, catty-corner from the new statehouse.⁷⁴ While Springfield would continue to develop as the Illinois capital, it was no longer "the prairie near John Kelly's field."

Conclusion

Springfield's success was undoubtedly thanks to the community's hold on government institutions: first as the temporary county seat, followed by its status as permanent seat, and ultimately as the state capital. The population density of the Kelly settlement and the good fortune to be centrally located among the Sangamo's other settlements likely supplied the community with the first honor. Elijah Iles and the other proprietors' early decision to develop the Kelly settlement into a town, combined with Andrew Elliot's act of deception, enabled the community to maintain its hold on the county seat. Springfield's position as the seat of government for rapidly developing Sangamon County diverted the local transportation network in the town's favor and resulted in a gradual, but noteworthy, increase in population. The increasing prosperity tied to a growing population and again the good fortune to be centrally located, this time within the state of Illinois, ultimately brought the capital to Springfield. While this exact series of events was not within Moses Broadwell's line of sight, his early interest in the Sangamon County Seat and Iles's bribe to the state commissioners plainly show the value placed in this honor. The competition between Springfield and Sangamo Town, therefore, clearly illustrates the effects of government institutions in ushering nascent communities into urban standing.

This high stakes competition for government institutions was not uncommon beyond Sangamon County. Hard fought efforts to relocate the county seat in Illinois's DuPage County, for example, took place throughout the 1850s before the county sheriff and eighty armed men seized the county records from the Naperville courthouse in 1867. Although county residents had voted to move the seat from Naperville to the centrally located town of Wheaton, a Naperville mob attempted to prevent the records' removal and, once in Wheaton, armed guards watched over those records for the next sixty days.⁷⁵ Between the Civil War and the close of the nineteenth century, struggles over county seats became, with some frequency, increasingly violent.⁷⁶ Most famously, the state of Kansas was home to several county seat wars between 1885 and 1892 resulting in multiple deaths.⁷⁷ The result in the majority of these cases, however, was the prosperity of one community and the stagnation or disappearance of another, a troubling possibility attested to by the partisans' increasing willingness to resort to violence. What sets Springfield and Sangamo Town apart in this context is the clear use of the county seat as a development tool. Moses Broadwell explicitly used the promise of the county seat to attract investors to Sangamo Town while the Springfield proprietors implicitly tied the seat to their town's continued growth and prosperity.

Springfield's acquisition of the Illinois state capital differs from the creation of capitals in the other states of the Old Northwest Territory but further emphasizes this ability of the business of government to make or break individual towns. Of the state capitals in the Old Northwest, Columbus, Ohio; Indianapolis, Indiana; and Madison, Wisconsin existed only on

paper before being named capital of their respective states. Lansing, Michigan was the site of a much older paper town but was undeveloped and virtually unoccupied when Michigan made the spot state capital.⁷⁸ Springfield, however, was a viable town in 1837 when the Illinois General Assembly selected it as the new seat of government. Like the county seat's presence in Springfield or Sangamo Town, the state capital's location in Columbus, Indianapolis, Madison, and Lansing gave those towns a powerful reason to exist and enabled them to make the jump from nascent cities to fully formed municipalities. Even in Springfield, the moving of the state capital encouraged the county seat of a few hundred people to grow into a small city of over 2,500 by 1840.

Although Springfield's modern dominance over the Sangamon County landscape is virtually absolute, this history, together with that of Sangamo Town, better illustrates the realities of frontier urbanization in the early nineteenth century. While the importance of commerce to town building should not be downplayed, the presence of government institutions undoubtedly contributed to the success of Springfield while the lack of those institutions made the limited success of Sangamo Town fleeting. Within the Sangamo country, significant commerce followed the county seat. Moses Broadwell's careful planning further emphasizes the importance of the county seat in this scenario. Broadwell put a great deal of stock in industry (his mills), understood the importance of transportation (the Sangamon River and Edwards Trace), yet still saw the value of institutions (the county seat or seminary). As such, he explicitly planned a community to take advantage of each of these factors. At the same time, Iles and company seemed to put their stock in institutions, betting that the transportation and industry would follow the county seat. In hindsight, the Springfield proprietors were right: an early hold on the county seat brought people and shifted the transportation network in their favor. Only at that point was Springfield able to join the system of cities that brought merchandise to the Illinois frontier and produce to New Orleans. By the 1840s, Springfield, and not Sangamo Town, became the most prominent point on maps of the old Sangamo country. In the end, the Young Rustic's words on the rivalry of insignificant villages rang prophetic: Sangamo Town sunk and Springfield rose, the former existing today only in memory and the latter ranking among Illinois's largest cities.

Notes

1. In period documents, the river, territory, and county are spelled both "Sangamo" and "Sangamon." Sangamo is more commonly used before the late 1820s while Sangamon becomes fixed by the mid 1830s. Both names are used interchangeably here.
2. Richard C. Wade, *The Urban Frontier: The Rise of Western Cities, 1790-1830* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959).
3. Don Harrison Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community: Jacksonville, Illinois, 1825-1870* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978); Carl Abbott, *Boosters and Businessmen: Popular Economic Thought and Urban Growth in the*

- Antebellum Middle West* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981); and William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991).
4. John W. Reys, *Cities of the American West: A History of Frontier Urban Planning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); and William Wyckoff, *The Developer's Frontier: The Making of the Western New York Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).
 5. David Hamer, *New Towns in the New World: Images and Perceptions of the Nineteenth-Century Urban Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); and Timothy R. Mahoney, *River Towns in the Great West: The Structure of Provincial Urbanization in the American Midwest, 1820-1870* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Regarding urban systems theory, see also Allan Pred, *Urban Growth and City Systems in the United States, 1840-1860* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).
 6. Alan Taylor, *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996).
 7. Diane Shaw, *City Building on the Eastern Frontier: Sorting the New Nineteenth-Century City* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).
 8. For the general history of Illinois's territorial and early statehood periods see James E. Davis, *Frontier Illinois* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998). Also of value is the Centennial History of Illinois Series, specifically: Clarence Walworth Alvord, *The Illinois Country, 1673-1818*; Solon J. Buck, *Illinois in 1818*; and Theodore Calvin Pease, *The Frontier State, 1818-1848* (various editions).
 9. John Reynolds, *My Own Times, Embracing also the History of My Life* (Belleville, Ill.: Printed by Perryman and Davison, 1855), 136-143; Davis, *Frontier Illinois*, 147.
 10. Curtis Mann, *The First Citizens of the Sangamo Country: A Study of the 1821 List of Taxable Inhabitants of Sangamon County* (Elkhart, Ill.: Sangamo Archaeological Center, 2003), Archival Studies Bulletin Number 3; Illinois State Archives, *Database of Illinois War of 1812 Veterans*, <http://www.ilsos.gov/GenealogyMWeb/1812frm.html>, accessed April 27, 2008.
 11. Governor Edwards's sons, Ninian Wirt Edwards and Benjamin Edwards became prominent members of the community in the 1830s and 1840s.
 12. Zimri A. Enos, "The Old Indian Trail, Sangamon County, Illinois," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 4, No. 2 (Jul. 1911): 218-222; Robert Mazrim, *The Sangamo Frontier: History and Archaeology in the Shadow of Lincoln* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 58-61.
 13. Mazrim, *The Sangamo Frontier*, 138.
 14. John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 33-34, 44-45.
 15. Ferdinand Ernst, "Travels in Illinois in 1819," *Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society for the Year 1903* (Springfield, Ill.: Phillips Bros, 1904): 158-162.
 16. *Edwardsville Spectator* (Ill.), Aug. 7, 1819, 3.
 17. John Carroll Power, *History of the Early Settlers of Sangamon County, Illinois* (Springfield, IL: The Old Settlers Society by Edwin A. Wilson & Co., 1876), 142-143.
 18. *Ibid.*, 423-425.
 19. Elijah Iles, *Sketches of Early Life and Times in Kentucky, Missouri, and Illinois* (Springfield, IL: Springfield Printing Co., 1883), 30-31. Regarding tradesmen and farms, James Patton, for example, apprenticed as a tanner before relocating to the Sangamo. Once moved, Patton opened a tannery but also improved a farm, which he would later turn over to his youngest son. Faragher, *Sugar Creek*, 67; Power, *History of the Early Settlers*, 560.

20. David E. Nye, *America as Second Creation: Technology and Narratives of New Beginnings* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 91-116.
21. Faragher, *Sugar Creek*, 67-68.
22. Illinois Office of Secretary of State, *Counties of Illinois: Their Origin and Evolution* (State of Illinois: ca 1940).
23. Margaret Cross Norton, ed., *Illinois Census Returns, 1810, 1818* (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1935), 137.
24. John L. Andriot, *Population Abstract of the United States, Vol 1: Tables* (McLean, VA: Andriot Associates, 1983), 185-6.
25. "An Act establishing the County of Sangamon," *Laws Passed by the Second General Assembly of the State of Illinois at their First Session* (Vandalia, IL: Brown & Berry, 1821), 45-46.
26. Sangamon County Board of Supervisors Minutes, April 10, 1821, Book A, 2, record series 4/264/2, Illinois Regional Archives Depository, University of Illinois at Springfield (hereafter abbreviated as "Board of Supervisors Minutes").
27. Iles, *Sketches*, 31.
28. Robert Mazrim, "Now Quite out of Society": *Archaeology and Frontier Illinois* (University of Illinois/Illinois Department of Transportation, 2002), Illinois Transportation Archaeological Research Program, Transportation Archaeological Bulletins No. 1, 42-45.
29. Mazrim, *The Sangamo Frontier*, 142-144.
30. Board of Supervisors Minutes, Book A: 9, 15.
31. Power, *History of the Early Settlers*, 479.
32. *Ibid.*, 288-9; Zimri Enos, "Description of Springfield," *Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society for the Year 1909* (Springfield, Ill.: By the Authority of the Board of Trustees of the Illinois State Historical Library): 193.
33. Mazrim, *The Sangamo Frontier*, 139-144, 289-291. For other examples of official roads, see Board of Supervisors Minutes, Book A.
34. Mazrim, *Ibid.*, 241.
35. "Articles of Association of the Sangamo Exporting Company," *Edwardsville Spectator* (Ill.), April 19, 1822, 3.
36. Power, *History of the Early Settlers*, 142, 144.
37. Iles, *Sketches*, 28.
38. Letter to the Editor from D. P. Cook dated April 26, 1820, *Edwardsville Spectator* (Ill.), May 23, 1820, 2.
39. Illinois State Archives, Federal Township Plats of Illinois (1804-1891), Springfield & Gardner Townships, Sangamon County, <http://landplats.ilsos.net>, accessed March 29, 2008.
40. *Edwardsville Spectator* (Ill.), June 1, 1822: 3, June 22, 1822, 1.
41. *Ibid.*, "Sangamo Celebration," July 12, 1823, 3.
42. Illinois State Archives, Illinois Public Domain Land Tract Sales Database, <http://www.ilsos.gov/GenealogyMWeb/landsrch.html>, accessed March 29, 2008.
43. *Ibid.*
44. Elijah Iles to Daniel Pope Cook, October 21, 1823, Sangamon Valley Collection, Lincoln [Springfield, IL Public] Library, transcription provided by Sangamon County ILGENWEB, <http://sangamon.ilgenweb.net/sciles.htm>, accessed March 30, 2008; Power, *History of the Early Settlers*, 707.
45. Sangamon County Recorder, Deed Record, Book AB: 89, record series 4/266/2, Illinois Regional Archives Depository, University of Illinois at Springfield (hereafter abbreviated as "Deed Record").
46. Illinois Public Domain Land Tract Sales Database.
47. "Town of Sangamo," *Edwardsville Spectator* (Ill.), February 10, 1824, 3.

48. Receipt "for advertising the town of Sangamo," 1822, Folder 6, Box 46, Broadwell Family Research Papers, Clayville Rural Life Center Administrative and Program Records, University of Illinois at Springfield Archives (hereafter abbreviated "Broadwell Papers").
49. Deed Record, Book AB: 101.
50. Kay Maclean, "The Broadwells of Clayville and their Roots, Part II: Family Land Dealings in Illinois" (Clayville Rural Life Center, 1981), 21, 35-38, Broadwell Papers.
51. Iles, *Sketches*, 36-39.
52. Enos, "Description of Springfield," 193.
53. Power, *History of the Early Settlers*, 694.
54. Enos, "Description of Springfield," 201.
55. "Sites for Villages," *Edwardsville Spectator* (Ill.), April 8, 1821, 4.
56. "An Act establishing the Permanent Boundaries of Sangamon County and providing for the permanent location of the County Seat," *Laws of the Fourth General Assembly of the State of Illinois* (Vandalia, IL: Robert Blackwell & Co, 1825), 20-22.
57. Iles, *Sketches*, 35-37.
58. Sangamon County Commissioners Minutes, Book A: 110.
59. "An Act establishing the Permanent Boundaries of Sangamon County..." *Laws of Illinois: 1825*, 21.
60. Board of Supervisors Minutes, Book A: 111-113, 133-134, 145; Deed Record, Book AB: 152-154.
61. *Ibid.*; "Town of Springfield," *Edwardsville Spectator* (Ill.), April 12, 1825, 4.
62. Board of Supervisors Minutes, Book A: 123.
63. Mazrim, *The Sangamo Frontier*, 257-258.
64. The visit of the *Utility* to Sangamo was a very different affair than that of the *Talisman* farther upriver in 1832. The *Talisman* succeeded in navigating up the Sangamon River as near as possible to Springfield. The captain of the boat was received and entertained in Springfield as a hero for at last proving that the Sangamon River was navigable. Within a week of docking near Springfield, however, the crew of the *Talisman* was forced to beat a hasty retreat down river when the water levels dropped too low for their comfort. As insufficient time appears to have been allowed for the loading of cargo, the sponsor of the voyage would later skip town as his financiers came seeking payment. No such story of woe appears to be attached to the voyage of the *Utility*. William H. Herndon and Jesse W. Weik, *Abraham Lincoln: The True Story of a Great Life* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1900), 77-82.
65. Mazrim, *Sangamo Frontier*, 244.
66. Will of Moses Broadwell, Box 45, Folder 11, Broadwell Papers.
67. Mazrim, *Sangamo Frontier*, 255-258.
68. *Ibid.*, 251.
69. "Town of Springfield," *Edwardsville Spectator* (Ill.), April 12, 1825, 4.
70. John T. Stuart, "Old Settlers of Springfield," in *History of Sangamon County* (Chicago: Interstate Publishing Company, 1881), 198.
71. Patrick A. Pospisek, "Springfield's Acquisition of the Illinois Seat of Government, 1833-1845," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 99, No. 1 (June 2006): 8-18.
72. *Sangamo Journal* (Springfield, Ill.), March 6, 1845: 2; Power, *History of the Early Settlers*, 143; Mazrim, *Sangamo Frontier*, 272.
73. Andriot, *Population Abstract*, 193.
74. Power, *History of the Early Settlers*, 399, 771; Iles, *Sketches*, 34.
75. Stephen J. Buck, "To Hold the Prize: The County Seat War in Du Page County,

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- 1867-1872," *Illinois Historical Journal* 85, No. 4 (Winter 1992): 195-200.
76. James A. Schellenberg, "County Seat Wars: A Preliminary Analysis," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 14, No. 3 (Sept. 1970), 345-352; James A. Schellenberg, *Conflict Between Communities: American County Seat Wars* (New York: Paragon House, 1987).
77. Robert K. DeArment, *Ballots and Bullets: The Bloody County Seat Wars of Kansas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 2006).
78. Samuel W. Durant, *History of Ingham and Eaton Counties, Michigan* (Philadelphia: D. W. Ensign & Co., 1880), 122-129.