

# Rediscovering ILLINOIS

by LESTER B. COLBY  
ILLINOIS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Opportunity comes in strange ways. The other day in Pittsfield, Illinois, I found a remarkable bit of history. Pittsfield is in Pike county. It lies between the Illinois and the Mississippi rivers in a country of high, steep hills. It has been pretty much a hermit town for close to a hundred years.

Railroads are not thick in Pike county. Railroads crossing it must bridge both rivers and building grade through these vaulted ridges and precipitous gulleys is costly. So this country is a part of Illinois rather apart.

Notable things happen only on rare occasions in Pittsfield. Lincoln's address, perhaps. And then, more recently, when a pyre was burned, with brass band and populace about, paying due homage to the passing of the backward days of Pittsfield; the vanishing of the ultra-frugal era of the fathers!

**A Large Contract**

For Pittsfield had just voted for waterworks, sewer, paving and other public things. The bill? About \$480,000 which is a fair load for 3,000 people. And for that reason Pittsfield looks like spring housecleaning. It is all torn up.

And Pittsfield is doing things. Pittsfield, hermit city of a hundred years, has a newborn ambition. This year the concrete road is coming in. Plans are about matured for a bridge across the Illinois river at Florence and another across the Mississippi at the town of Louisiana.

But I mentioned opportunity and the strange ways in which it comes.

**He Found Nicolay**

One day back in 1848 Z. N. Garbutt, editor of the Pike County Free Press, not having a horse borrowed one from the Rev. Mr. Carter, pastor of Pittsfield's first church, and set out to round up a new subscriber or two.

As he passed a hill-cabin he saw an angry woman with upraised broom-handle pursuing a boy. He called the boy to him. The boy explained that the woman was his stepmother and that she beat him regularly. Garbutt lifted the boy up behind him on the horse and took him back to Pittsfield.

On the court house square in Pittsfield stands a granite boulder and on it are four names:

Abraham Lincoln, Stephen A. Douglas, John G. Nicolay, John Hay.

The boy who fled before this stepmother and the broomstick was Nicolay. Because the editor that day befriended him and gave him a chance the boy became editor, author, historian, private secretary and confidential advisor to President Lincoln. (perhaps the Ed House of the Civil war period) United States consul to Paris and the marshal of the supreme court of the United States.

It is of record that he wrote a very famous editorial, while yet in Pittsfield, calling on the nation to make Lincoln president. It is said that editorial was copied throughout the nation and played a big part in bringing it about.

It is apparent that Lincoln gave him some credit for his own success or probably he would not have made him his personal secretary and confidential aide. Something more about the boy who fled the broomstick—

**Hay and Nicolay**

John Hay as a boy came to live in Pittsfield. Nicolay took a liking to him. Hay was given work in the little newspaper shop. And Hay became a secretary to Nicolay when 24 years old, was editor on the New York Tribune when Horace Greeley published it, became secretary of state under President Hayes and one of the nation's foremost diplomats of all time.

John Hay, discovered by the boy who fled from the broomstick in a hill-cabin in Pike county, promulgated the open door for China and entered into treaties with Great Britain which healed an open sore of nearly a century. John Hay afterwards became ambassador to Great Britain. Those who knew literature will remember John Hay for something else—his Pike County Ballads. Little Beeches, most famous of them all, is said to have been written in Pittsfield.

The next time you see a boy running away from a stepmother with uplifted broom, boost him up and give him a seat behind on your horse—

He may be the future discoverer of an Abraham Lincoln or a John Hay and given sufficient opportunity a cabin home may be turned into a consul's house in Paris and bare legs thrust into the silk stockings of the Court of St. James.

**Means a New Day**

Long years elapsed between Lincoln's address on the court house square and the departure of Nicolay and Hay for Washington and the later event—the burning of the pyre. For Pittsfield, perhaps, the latter affair holds more import than the freeing of slaves.

It means the new day. Paving, city water, bathrooms, renewed hope. Close contact with the outside world. Turn to your map of Illinois. Pittsfield is on the end of a "plug-line" railroad. A truck, mounted on iron wheels, makes connections with the Wabash at Maysville. It wobbles out slowly and rather noisily with the speed and motion of a toy train that winds up. Pittsfield among its hills is no great

ture for railroad building. But the bridges and the concrete, which will put it on an ocean-to-ocean artery, will mean much to it. And it means, with these bridges, freedom from the ferries which have choked it.

**Jewelry Manufacture**

In this little Illinois city, off to one side, I found another interesting thing. There is made in the United States annually about \$400,000,000 worth of jewelry. About \$300,000,000 of that moves through approximately 1,000 jobbers and distributors in Chicago. Chicago is the nation's great jewelry market. Yet almost all of the jewelry made in the United States is manufactured in the east. Chiefly it comes from Connecticut and Rhode Island.

Yet this village of Pittsfield is a jewelry manufacturing center. Automatic machinery stamps out cigarette cases, cuff buttons, vanity cases. Artists work over new designs. Engravers turn out the patterns. Platers are preparing the "baths" for the pieces of metal.

Examine any fine-lined cigarette case or vanity. How are the scrolls and curves and straight lines put on? Direct from a large pattern which reduces from six to twelve times. The operator follows the large pattern and the reduction is made with a pantograph.

**"Wired Wireless"**

I found something else of interest in Pittsfield. E. D. Glandon, who

controls the county telephone system, has developed what he calls "wired wireless." He has a central radio station with a girl in attendance. From this central radio receiving station he will run a wire to your home and put in a horn with speaker.

He has sixty of them in already and the system is growing. He believes that he has found a way for a telephone company to commercialize and profit by the radio. He charges \$2 a month for the service. He has a portable "mike" which can be used anywhere in town and public talks of any sort put into the homes of his customers.

Sermons of the various pastors in Pittsfield are placed on the "wired wireless" in turn.

**Always a Reason**

I said in the beginning that Pittsfield, after leisurely resting, a sort of hermit city, for nearly a hundred years has voted for things meaning better living which will cost about \$480,000.

Evolutions like these do not just happen. There is always a reason. Something has to be done. Towns don't awaken of their own accord. Then let us find the place to put the credit.

A few years ago a little group of men, a pastor or two and a couple who could cuss, a couple of merchants, perhaps an editor or two, for there are three newspapers in Pittsfield, no dailies, and a few others.

They began solemnly and deftly to shape public opinion and mold human ideals in Pittsfield. Their objective was—water-works, sewers, paving, high school expansion, industrial development.

They called it the Noonday Lunch club. Out of it has grown a well-organized Chamber of Commerce and the spirit developed, over a period of years in the Noonday Lunch club is living today in the local Lions club as well.

The spirit of development has brought all of these things including the larger high school and the industrial expansion. The jewelry industry is growing and a shoe factory was recently opened.

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