

Rediscovering ILLINOIS

By LESTER COLBY

When one gets to digging about into Illinois' musty past he is likely to find some forgotten things. I have just been to Flora, Clay county. That little Illinois city is on the ancient Vincennes-Cahokia road. Legend says that the first white man found this road, a well-worn Indian trail then, about 224 years ago.

Cahokia was established, on the Mississippi, in 1699 or 1700. Vincennes, on the Wabash, it is believed in 1702. From that year on white man's feet have steadily followed this cross-state trail.

Some Old Records
I have been brushing dust from some old records. The story of Mr. Blackbird bobs out. The story of Francis, Son of Tobacco. The story of George Rogers Clark, the Big Knife. In an hour among ancient archives I find antiques—in spelling; peculiar architecture in sentence-building.

Within short moments I find the Wabash river referred to under these spellings—Ouabash, Ouabache, Ouibatche and Wabachees. The spelling of Vincennes is even more liquid. I find it as Post St. Vincent, Post Vincent, St. Vincents, Post Vincennes and Au Poste. Cahokia is also referred to as Cohos.

Francis, Son of Tobacco, also known as Tobacco's Son, was the "Big Gate" of the Wabash. That means that he was the principal chief of a federation of tribes and family groups in control of south-eastern Illinois at the time of the Revolutionary war. He was a friend of George Rogers Clark.

Clark's Expedition
Clark, with a handful of men took Kaskaskia and Cahokia in 1778. Then with 170 men, in February 1779, he traveled the Vincennes-Cahokia road to Vincennes, with some deviations, and captured the hated Gov. Hamilton, known as "the hair buyer" because American scalps had ready market with him. Ending that task, Hamilton in irons, he wrote in his report to Washington:

"The settlements of the Illinois commenced about one hundred years ago by a few traders from Canada." And that was written in 1779!

Long-Traveled Trail
Yes, men have traveled the Vincennes-Cahokia trail for a long time. That first hundred years it was mostly on foot. Then, for a lifetime or two, even hauled wagons over it. Old-tim-

ers tell of a stream of covered wagons, merging—finally from ox team to horse team; an endless stream winding slowly; whiskered men, sunbonneted women, sober-faced children with their faces always turned west.

For a half century this stream, wheels grinding ceaselessly, flows over this road, the pioneers who are to turn the furrows of Missouri, Kansas and the west. During the gold craze, for a time after '49, a sort of tidal wave of humanity!

Towns on Trail
At intervals now along this road stands towns—Lawrenceville, Olney, Flora, Salem, Carlisle, Lebanon; then where Cahokia once was. They are evenly spaced, about 22 to 25 miles apart. In the old days, one day's travel. Today, on concrete, thirty minutes!

Graybeards in Flora still remember the ox teams, the three miles an hour. They recall, too, the dashing flight of the stage coaches, U. S. mail. Horses changed every eight or ten miles. And how the oxen, in bovine dullness, hugged the road until—

Sharp spikes, filed needle-sharp and driven into the ends of the whipple trees. They slashed the leathery hide of the oxen. Listen, and you can hear the "skinner's" road blatant curses after the speeding coaches. Next time and the oxen left the road.

Not "Good Old Days"
Who talks of "Good old days?" I found in Flora a patriarch, Dr. J. M. Boyles, pioneer physician who brought into the world men now grandfathers. Ask him of those good old days.

"Good old days," he remarks with a grunt. "Sickness everywhere. Green water to drink. Mosquitoes by the millions. Ague, malaria,—fever rampant. Pot-bellied children because their food was wrong and they reeked in pestilence, their livers enlarged. Chills every third day!

"Did I say every third day? Yes, and every second day and every day, too. And nobody knew why everybody was sick or why so many graves were dug in the fresh prairie sod! Ignorance appalling. That was what the pioneers met, facing the west, not only around Flora but everywhere in the new country. Sickness, physical torture, death! That was the price paid by those who broke the sod of the plains.

"Good old days? Huh!" And the ancient physician clattered out.

But the old-timers talked, too, of the beauties of the new land. Flora is named for the mythical character of ancient Greece—Flora, Goddess of Flowers. When white man came he found here a great plain covered with tall grasses. Blue-stem grew higher than a horse's back; red top, blue-

green in the spring time, not so tall but very worthwhile and thick.

And the flowers on those prairies! Riotous colors, the old men say. Blues and pinks in the springtime blending into golds as the seasons grew older and finally the reds and purples and browns of frost time.

The First Train
We had a wee bit of argument in the barber shop. Did that first train out of the east on the first rails to the Mississippi come through here on July 4 in '55 or '56? That was the train that put the stage coach out of business. The old tavern, stage station, was two miles west. But Sam White owned the land hereabouts. He gave away lots and started the town. Sam was clever; profited right smart.

Flora has grown slowly, steadily, never swiftly. The nearest to a boom was when the shoe factory came. It employs 300 people. The Sexton Mfg. Co., underwear, works about 125. It's a B. & O. railroad division point with shops. An ice plant works a dozen. A co-operative organization deals in red-top seed; four companies wholesale and job fruits and produce. Flora has about 4,000 population today and a problem—

Bureau of census figures point to the problem. It has to do with farms. This is the situation:

Population
Clay county—1900, 19,553; 1910, 18,661; 1920, 17,684.
Flora—1900, 2,311; 1910, 2,704; 1920, 3,558.

Movement from Farms
Note how the entire county shrinks despite the town's growth. That means a movement from the farms of no good portent. Why? Lack of scientific farming, people tell me. Ignorance in matter of soil-building, they say. There is no mystery about getting good returns from acres in southern Illinois. Land is cheap. Liming must be done because there is acid present. Rotation of crops is necessary. Sweet clover is probably best of all for "bringing back" fertility. Almost any leguminous crop will help, beans, clovers, alfalfa.

Southern Illinois farms also need livestock. Cattle, hogs, sheep, poultry. Give the acres any fair treatment, and an empire will be reborn in what we call "Egypt." Let us see how this country looked to George Rogers Clark, back in 1779. This he wrote after he had licked the British out of their socks with his 170 men:

Beautiful Illinois
"As for this Illinois country which you seem so anxious for. You may take for granted that its more beautiful than any idea I could have formed of a country almost in a state of nature, everything you behold is an additional beauty. On the river you'll find the finest lands the sun ever shone on, in the high country you will

find a variety of poor and rich lands with large meadows extending beyond the reach of your eyes variegated with groves of trees apparently like islands of the sea covered with buffaloes and other game; in many places with a good glass you may see all that is on their feet in a half million of acres; so level is the country, which some day will excel in cattle."

Some day investors may learn about southern Illinois what Clark foresaw. Concrete roads all through this country. At the center of the nation's great railroad system. The world's richest markets an overnight's ride away. Yet an undeveloped country, passed over by the waves of nation-builders. One wonders when the real development will start.

Mr. Blackbird
I almost forgot Mr. Blackbird. He is one of the bright spots in George Rogers Clark's memoirs. He lived, Clark says, somewhere near the southern end of Lake Michigan. Perhaps an original Gold Coaster.

Clark, in KasKaskia, as it was written, got a letter from Mr. Blackbird one day. An Indian writing a letter! It apologized for not calling on a neighbor sooner—but members of Mr. Blackbird's family were ill. As soon as he could—

The letter added that Mr. Blackbird was not to be met with "savagery ceremonial," as other chiefs were met. He was cultured, he intimated, wrote letters, looked with disdain on unlettered methods of conference. "I can talk better across a table," Mr. Blackbird, suggested.

"I found I could not converse with him in simile as with other Indians," Clark recorded. One wonders about the story of Mr. Blackbird, perhaps Chicago's first cultured gentleman. Odd the little things that come out of the musty past. I'd like to know more of Mr. Blackbird.

EXHIBIT NEW FUELS FOR AIRPLANE MOTOR

Display of Substitutes for Gasoline Shown at Sesqui-Centennial

The rapid strides made in experiments with new fuels for airplane engines are strikingly demonstrated at the exhibit of the National Advisory committee for Aeronautics in the Palace of Mines, Metallurgy and Transportation at the Sesqui-Centennial International Exposition, now being held in Philadelphia.

It is pointed out by Edward R. Sharp, special agent in charge of the exhibit, that most of the airplane disasters are caused by the gasoline tank

exploding after engine trouble. The use of oil for power is being tried by research workers and their experiments are described at the Sesqui display. The government investigators are at present working on a problem to cut down the weight of Diesel engines from eighty pounds per horse-power to two pounds per horse-power, making this type of engine available for heavier-than-air-craft.

President Coolidge planned his return trip to Washington so that he would pass through New York by daylight and we don't blame him. That's no place to be after night.

Press dispatches report hot fighting between rebels and government troops in Nicaragua but so far as can be learned nobody has been hurt yet.



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