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# Rediscovering ILLINOIS

by LESTER COLBY

ILLINOIS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Until recently I supposed that in writing these stories, "Rediscovering Illinois," I was doing something original. Now I find that I am very late about it.

W. C. Regan, of Stronghurst, his grandson, loaned me a copy of the book John Regan, "late of Ayrshire, now of Illinois," authored far enough back so that the "second edition, greatly enlarged," was published in Edinburgh in 1859.

John Regan, who brought his bride with him, settled on the Spoon river near Ellisville. The book is really a plea to the people of England and Scotland to break away from the conditions which held them in poverty.

He tries to point out how they can do it. One chapter devotes to the building of his house. I quote:

Cost of Building House I will now give a statement of the entire cost of the structure, 18 feet long, 14 feet wide and 8 feet from floor to f Motorbus!

2,000 black walnut shingles	10.00
1,000 feet black walnut lumber, siding	10.00
600 feet cottonwood plank-ing, floors	6.00
2 1/2 pairs window sashes	1.87 1/2
30 panes of glass at 4c ea.	1.20
Putty	.18
Lime for building chimney	1.00
Nails, 20 lbs., at 4c lb.	.80
1500 bricks for chimney and oven	9.00
2 doors, black walnut, inch and a half	1.00
2 pair hinges, 35c-screw nails, 15c	.50
Total	\$55.55 1/2

"Add to this, say six dollars for board, and thus for \$61.50 or about eleven pounds sterling - not counting our labor - we got up a pretty commodious building. Still it was only a shell and on the approach of winter required to be lathed and plastered inside which cost \$15 more."

Search fails to reveal the exact year of John Regan's arrival in Illinois. The book is apparently the result of a number of years of experience. Probably he came sometime in the 1840's or even before that.

In one place it is recorded, in 1851, while he speaks of the Oregon and Californian gold fever, that "Our farm wages are from 60 to 80 dollars per half year with board and washing.

Pioneer Market Quotations

"Markets of late, have been high for most articles:

Wheat, per bu.	\$1.00
Oats, do.	.40
Castor beans, do.	1.50
Flax seed, do.	1.25
Smoked bacon, lb.	.05 1/2
Butter, do.	.10
Eggs, per doz.	.08
Sugar, per lb.	.06
Coffee, do.	.10
Rice, do.	.05

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Comment is made that among the nearby settlers there is very little drinking as public sentiment is against it.

Any Sort of Girl  
"My wife wishes you to bring girls who will go out to work. They are much needed in this country and, as you know, secure good wages. Do try to bring her one. You need not be particular about her looks for if she is good-looking she will be no time with us as they all get married. If she squints, or wants an eye, no matter - bring a girl."

Farm prices apparently fluctuated a great deal. A chapter apparently written in 1846 records that, "The farmers being in general men of small capital, an immense amount of grain is thrown upon the market immediately after harvest; and then, as a necessary result, the price rises low. A shilling for wheat, sixpence for oats, fourpence for Indian corn are common prices then; whereas in October, February, March, April, May and June, when navigation is open, the prices invariably rise and those who are able to hold on until then are sure to obtain a good return."

Good cows when John Regan arrived, and for some years thereafter, had a standard value of \$10 each. He puts down that when he went out among his neighbors to buy his first pigs he was surprised to find them in the same category with kittens. They were not sold to new settlers, but given away. Eggs were three cents a dozen in the store at Ellisville and neighbors scorned to charge a new-comer for settings. So he found himself soon in the hog and poultry business.

The author records his amazement when he came into this new country to find how well the settlers lived. Their tables were loaded with jellies and jams, many kinds of meats, game, pies, butter without stint, fats and greases and gravies. Tables literally groaned and there was cider and other drinks - which leads to the story of Patrick Murphy and Naugh-a-choo-ma, medicine man of the Pottawatomies.

This story must go far back for the Pottawatomies were all swept out about 1833. One day Naugh-a-choo-ma came to the Murphy home, looked at the family feast steadily for about ten minutes and then broke out:

"White man, have you been sick?"  
"Yes, very."  
"Have your children been sick?"  
"Yes, we have all been very bad."  
"The white man complains - let him blame himself."  
"How so? True for you. I have wrought hard since I came west and I know that the night dews and the bad airs from the damp grounds are hurtful; but what could I do?"  
Indian's Advice  
"The white man has a warm heart. He works hard for his squaw and children. The Great Spirit, sees it and is pleased. But the things that

harm him most are now on that table."  
"Go on, Naugh-a-choo-ma; tell me what's wrong."  
And the Indian medicine man, to speak in the language of today, told him to chuck out the jellies and jams and spiced foods, to eat potatoes and meat and live on plain stuffs and they'd all be well. They did, and were healthy and happy.

Perhaps the old Indian medicine men knew their onions pretty well after all. Naugh-a-choo-ma's advice will cost you nothing and save expenses if you want to try it. Mrs. Murphy, it is recorded, smoked a corn-cob pipe with a clay stem.

Peoria Principal Town  
Peoria seems to have been one of the main towns in the time of John Regan's researches. He mentions Chicago once or twice as a promising village. But when he devotes space to the salaries paid "artizans" he quotes the Peoria rate. Here are samples: Bricklayers, per day, \$2.00 to \$2.50. Plasterers, do., \$2.00 to \$3.00. Housepainters, do., \$1.75 to \$2.50. Joiners, per month, \$36.

Some space is devoted in the book to the building of "pise houses." Pise was a brick made by ramming earth into a mold and drying it in the sun. Pise houses were more or less common in Illinois, apparently, in the prairie districts where other materials were lacking.

Some settlers doubted the lasting qualities of pise but others thought houses made of it might last 300 years. Some must have erred. Pise houses seem gone.

"Amusements" in Early Days  
A lady in England wrote John Regan to learn what the women in Illinois did to amuse themselves. He reminded her that it was a "joy to see the ewes graze and the lambs suck; to hear the hens cackle and the ducks quack," and spoke of "a celebrated piano with one string called the spinning wheel that hummed a right pleasant roundelay, a notable organ with some stops called a loom" and he added:

"After a quilting is over, then the young lads pour in - the fiddle squeaks - the crockery is judiciously laid away, as being unfitted for the occasion - and, though I will not say with Davy Crockett, that the next morning you might gather up handfuls of toe-nails, I have no doubt but that the fiddler's elbow and the young folks' heels and the old folks' sides are all a little worse for wear . . . of course I have not said anything of love-adventures."  
Oh, all you gray haired ones, who shake wise and worried heads at the gay youth of today and call them jazz-mad! I wonder and wonder.

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