

Rediscovering ILLINOIS

By Lester B. Colby (Illinois Chamber of Commerce)

Until recently I supposed that in writing stories—"Rediscovering Illinois"—I was doing something original. Now I find that I am very late about it. John Regan did much the same thing something like three quarters of a century ago.

W. C. Regan, of Stronghurst, his grandson, loaned me a copy of the book that John Regan, "late of Ayrshire, now of Illinois," authorized far enough back so that the "second edition, greatly enlarged" was published in Edinburgh in 1859. It is called "The Western Wilds of America" although the book deals almost exclusively with Illinois.

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, almost in bondage, and start anew in the new world.

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

"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 joists, roof 5 feet pitch, with a nice little garret, and back room eight feet by seven:

Builds House for	\$60.00
Two days' hewing	1.50
Carrying timbers to ground	.50
600 feet studding, 4 in. sq.	6.00
200 feet scantling	2.00
400 feet oak sheathing for roof	4.00
2,000 black walnut shingles	10.00
1,000 feet black walnut lumber, siding	10.00
600 feet cottonwood planking, floors	6.00
2 1/2 pairs window sashes	1.87 1/2
30 panes of glass at 4 cents each	1.20
Putty	.18
Lime for building chimney	1.00
Nails, 20 lbs. at 4 c per 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 California gold fever, that "Our farm wages are from 60 to 80 dollars per half year with board and washing."

"Markets of late have been high for most articles:

Wheat, per bushel	\$1.00
Oats, per bushel	.40
Castor beans, per bushel	1.50
Flax seed, per bushel	1.25
Smoked bacon, lb.	.05 1/2
Butter, lb.	.10
Eggs, per doz.	.08
Sugar, per lb.	.06
Coffee, lb.	.10
Rice, lb.	.05
Molasses, gal.	.30
Whiskey, gal.	.25

Comment is made that among the nearby settlers there is very little drinking as public sentiment is against it. Apparently there was a servant girl problem even then. William Leighton, of Knoxville, Knox county, in 1851 wrote a letter to a friend in Scotland who proposed emigration in which he said:

"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 Fluctuate

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 rules 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 west at Ellisville and neighbors scorned to charge a new-comer for settings. So he found himself soon in the hog and poultry business.

The etiquette book tells us how to entertain our friends, but anyway it can always be done by giving them something to eat.

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-chooma, medicine man of the Pottawatomies.

This story must go back for the Pottawatomies were all swept out in 1833. One day Naugh-a-chooma 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?"

"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-chooma; 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-chooma'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.

Wages in Pioneer Days 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 to \$2.50. Plasterers, per day, \$2 to \$3. Housepainters, per day, \$1.75 to \$2.50.

Joiners, per month, \$36. Wagonmakers, per day, \$1.25 to \$1.50.

Cabinetmakers, per day, \$1.25. Blacksmiths, per month, \$25 to \$40. Founders (moulders) per month, \$40 to \$50.

Coopers, per month, \$18. Shopmen, per year, \$380 to \$800. Steamboat engineers, per month, \$60.

Steamboat hands, per month \$18 to \$22. Canal men, per month, \$14 to \$18. Farm servants, per month, \$15. to \$16.

Some space is devoted in the book to the building of "pise houses." Pise was a brick made by ramming earth into a mould 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. Someone must have erred. Pise houses seem gone.

Primitive Amusements 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 at 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 the 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.

WHAT TO DO IF CAR IS STALLED IN MUD

When stuck in a mudhole or on a sandy stretch, do not speed the engine and attempt to "jump" the clutch. Is the advice contained in a bulletin issued by the mechanical first aid department of the Chicago Motor club.

This method will only cause the wheels to spin and dig deeper into the mud or sand, and may possibly strip a gear or burn out the clutch. Open the throttle slowly and just far enough to prevent the engine from stalling, then engage the clutch slowly. In this way the tires will take hold slowly but firmly.

Some tourists carry a few extra newspapers under the seat and slide them under the wheels when stalled in mud or sand. They give the driver a contact for the tires, according to the bulletin.

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Objections may be filed to said application on or before the hour of ten (10) o'clock in the forenoon of said day.

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