Nuggets of History

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THE STORY OF ONE WOMAN'S LIFE AND FAMILY
Our Farm in Illinois
by Eleanor Forsaith Smith and David F. Smith

In 1818 Illinois became a state of the American Union. Among the first problems of the new state were those relating to lands and Indians.

During this time the Indians were comparatively friendly, but in 1831 the delay of the Sauk and Fox in withdrawing from the lands in northern Illinois caused Governor Reynolds to call out the Militia. The following year, Blackhawk, a Sauk leader, was engaged in an unsuccessful war in northern Illinois and Wisconsin. By 1833 all Indians had been removed from the state.

After Illinois became a state, the land had been divided into counties, townships, and sections. In each township, Section 16 was set aside for schools. One of these sections in Rockford Township is a part of our farm. In our abstract, it was sold to Lonson Corey and wife on November 23, 1848. The Governor of Illinois at that time was the ninth governor, Augustus C. French.

The land is only a part of the Foster Smith farm, formerly the Emery Forsaith land. The abstract lists 20 sales of land to be included in the 147 acres that now make up the farm. In 1870 the land was appraised at $41.17 per acre. It was transferred from the estate of Robert Brantingham by Executor Jane Brantingham to Asa E. Cutler in 1876. In 1903, it transferred to Emery Blake Forsaith, my father. In 1946 my husband and I bought four plus acres on a wooded hill which touched my folks' farm but was not a part of it. We intended to build a home on it but never did. When we acquired the farm, we had that land added to it by deed.

My father and mother, formerly Jenny Hart, moved onto the farm in 1903 and brought their baby son, Franklin, with them. In 1905, I, Eleanor Forsaith, was born.

At a very early age I was allowed to go anywhere on the farm - if - the dog went with me. Somehow I didn't need a leash, he was always near me. As my brother and I grew older, there were always chores for us to do: helping in the garden; feeding the chickens, the dog, and the cats; gathering the eggs; bringing the cows in for milking, and many other things. We always ate together as a family. When we went to town at that time, it was by horse and buggy. It was five miles to Rockford, and I remember being cuddled close to my mother. On cold days, she would tuck me under the mink cape that had been her mother's.

In the evenings, while my father was milking, mother read the Youths Companion to us. Sometimes my brother and I would play dominos, rook, flinch or coroms. Sometimes we would read or look through the Montgomery Ward catalog.

Many times in the spring my brother and I picked huge bunches of violets. He told me: "Always leave one of the best blossoms to make seeds for next year". I've always wondered who told him that. I've told it to my boys and my grandchildren. Now it is time to tell it to my seven great grandchildren.

Every spring there were also certain spots on the farm that had to be visited. Where the shooting stars were was a favorite spot. Once we found a special flower that was so beautiful one of the boys took it to

a botany class in high school. The teacher told him he should not have picked it as it was very rare and illegal to pick - a wild orchid.

Later in the year we gathered raspberries and huge blackberries in the prickly patch and still later the hazel nuts, hickory nuts, and walnuts. The hazel nuts are gone now. There must be a reason. The walnuts had to be spread out on the roof of the chicken house to stay until the husk became spongy and could be shucked off. We used to do that in the hand corn sheller. As children we didn't mind the yellow stain on our hands. It would wear off.

One outing we always took together was to look for morel mushrooms. We always found many, but today we are fortunate to find half a dozen. Mother would fry them in butter until the edges were just crisp.

My parents belonged to the Riverside Grange. When that met, we never missed a meeting. The meetings were rotated from one farm to another. The meeting was closed for business and that was the time all the kids were sent to the kitchen or some other room. What fun we had! Every once in a while we would be admonished to keep quiet while the meeting was in session. I can remember going up to the bedroom where the ladies put their wraps and, with other girls, we would try on all the hats. When the meeting was over, we'd be called, and the program would start. Someone would usually read a paper pertaining to farming, state, or world affairs. This was also the time when one of the kids had to recite some poetry or sing. Then the best part - sandwiches or cake or pie and coffee for adults and maybe hot chocolate for the kids.

Our farm was about 1½ miles from the one-room Riverside School. The road was crushed limestone. Transportation to school was by foot. When it came time for me to attend, my father declared I was just too small to walk that far. Result: I didn't start school until I was eight years old. Often the teacher lived in our home during the school year. Time for high school came. At that time all rural 8th grade pupils had to pass 8th grade exams in Rockford. We took the exam in Memorial Hall.

To attend Rockford High School we drove a horse and buggy, "parking" the horse and buggy in a livery stable. There was a small waiting room there, with a strong tobacco smell. A sign on the wall said: "If you spit on the floor at home, spit on the floor here."

It was not a pleasant room. We usually waited outside for our horse to be hitched up. Several times the horse ran away on the way home. Once a neighbor girl that rode to school with us broke her arm and my brother sprained his wrist when the horse kicked himself from the buggy and the buggy tipped over.

When my brother finished high school, he went to the University of Illinois at Champaign, Urbana. He graduated, married, and with arrangements went into farming with my father. It was a very good arrangement, and besides the regular farming they built up a Grade A dairy farm. The farm was named River Ridge Farm and was registered in Springfield. I have this certificate on my wall today.

A tractor killed my brother Franklin in 1938.

When I graduated from high school, I took the Teachers' Exams. The day I was to take the exam, in the County Courthouse, it snowed so hard no cars could travel. Exam started at nine. When the man stopped at the farm to take the milk to the dairy, he was driving horses with a bobsled. I rode to Rockford with him and got to the exam at 11:00 a.m. The Superintendent of Winnebago County Schools was Abbie Jewett Craig. She told me to start the exam and write through the lunch hour. Somewhere she found a sandwich for me. I flunked the grammar exam but passed everything else, including Pedagogy. Of course, I'd never had Pedagogy

in high school. I just read the introduction of the book and the short abridgment at the end of each chapter. This I passed. We were allowed during the summer to re-take the exams in areas we had failed. Without studying I was certain to fail again. But later, inquiring how I had done, Abbie Jewett Craig asked me how I could have failed the first test and received 98 the next time? She decided my first exam must have been mixed up with someone else's.

So that fall I started teaching in a little red school house called Mud Hollow in Burritt Township: eight grades, 17 pupils. The first three to take 8th grade exams passed. Abbie Jewett Craig was a good superintendent. She visited my school twice each year, staying half a day. I taught in that school two happy years. During the week I stayed with the Crandall family. My father took me the 20 some miles on Monday morning and picked me up on Friday afternoon. On the weekend I was on the farm.

After teaching two years I went to the University of Illinois for two years and met Foster Smith, the man I was to later marry. I taught a year in our own Riverside School, by then two rooms instead of one. In June the next year I was married in front of the farm house in which I had been born.

Marriage took me away from the farm for the next few years. My husband finished his law course at the University of Illinois, passed the Bar and started law practice. Our two sons, John and David, were born in 1933 and 1934.

Practicing law took us to Washington, D.C., where we lived in Arlington, Virginia, and our sons went to Nellie Custis School. Then we were in Chicago for a while. World War II came along and my husband enlisted. He was in the South Pacific most of his enlistment. When he returned he was a Lieutenant Commander. He decided he'd like to practice law in Rockford, so we finally settled here. While he had been in the service, the boys and I moved into a tenant house on the farm south of the home farm.

Soon after my husband came home, my father died. Seven years later my mother died. I inherited one half of the farm; my sister-in-law and her two children inherited the other half. They were willing, so my husband and I bought their half. We moved into the house by the Rock River on the farm, and rented the farm house to our son, David, and his family. They raised four children there.

If only our other son was near it would be perfect; but after his four years in the Navy, four years at the University of Florida, marriage and six children, he decided they wanted to live in the state of Oregon. He said a very good educational system, good hunting, and good fishing lured him there. They are happy and that is sufficient reason.

Of course since then there have been weddings, births, graduations, and deaths. All as it should be, I guess.

There are a few things about the farm that should not be forgotten.

One day a man came to the farm house and asked Carol, David's wife, if she could identify a picture he had taken from an airplane. She could, and told him the picture was of this farm. He was pleased because he'd taken many pictures and wasn't quite sure where this one was taken. The result was he brought us two enlarged pictures of the farm and the same picture was on all the Illinois Bell telephone books that year.

Our farm does not look as it would have if my father and brother had lived. For the past 40 years tenants have worked the tillable

fields. Fence lines have grown up with trees, berry bushes, grape vines and weeds. The Illinois Department of Conservation was contacted. This sign is now posted on our farm:

ILLINOIS ACRES FOR WILDLIFE

IN RECOGNITION OF EFFORTS TO INSURE
THE FUTURE OF WILDLIFE THROUGH HABITAT
IMPROVEMENT AND PRESERVATION THE
ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
AND ELEANOR SMITH DEDICATE THIS LAND

The farm is also very well posted with:

NO HUNTING

signs furnished by the Winnebago County Sheriff's office.

There is a large woods on the highest part of the farm, four other smaller woods, and trees on the river bank. Taking walks around the farm some of the birds we've seen and heard are:

Blue Heron	Plover	Cat Bird
Pheasant	Cuckoo	Grouse
Blue Bird	Indigo Bunting	Thrush
Baltimore Oriole	Blue Jays	Warbler
Quail	Woodpecker	Robin
Mourning Dove	Flycatchers	Hawks
Wood Ducks	Swallows	Sparrows
Canadian Geese	Chickadees	Junco
Blue Winged Teal	Nuthatch	Wrens
Bufflehead	Humming Birds	Towhee
Sandpipers	Kinglet	Buzzard
Kingfish	Gold Finch	Pigeon
Black Birds	Purple Finch	Warblers
Cow Birds	Wood Cock	
Tufted Titmouse	Cedar Wax Wing	
Cardinals	Scarlet Tanager	

Among the animals we see are:

Deer	Fox	Chipmunks
Coyote	Rabbits	Squirrels
Woodchucks	Skunks	Moles
Gophers	Beavers	Weasel
Shrews	Muskrats	Bobcats
Raccoons	Opossums	

Another recollection: As my father used to cultivate the cornfields, when we were children, he used a team of horses and a cultivator along each row of corn. Watching to see that the blades did not disturb the tiny corn plants, he also looked for Indian artifacts. He had quite a collection of arrowheads, pottery pieces and ax heads. It also happened that my husband was interested in doing the same. Many times I watched the two of them walking the farm, and other places when on vacation, looking for Indian pieces. When we knew we were moving to the farm, I made a wall hanging of the arrowheads. One of them was a Folsom point. Indians in Illinois didn't have that material and most Folsom points were found far out West. The Indians here must have had some contact with the western Indians.

A large flag is always flying at the entrance to the farm. It is

Mrs. Foster (Eleanor) Smith, who on April 15, 1988, received a certificate of recognition for Conservation from Rockford Chapter NSDAR

flown for many reasons. It flies for one of my ancestors who fought in the Revolutionary War; for the service of my husband and sons, John who served in the Navy and David in the Army. I fly it because I like to have the United States flag flying at my home.

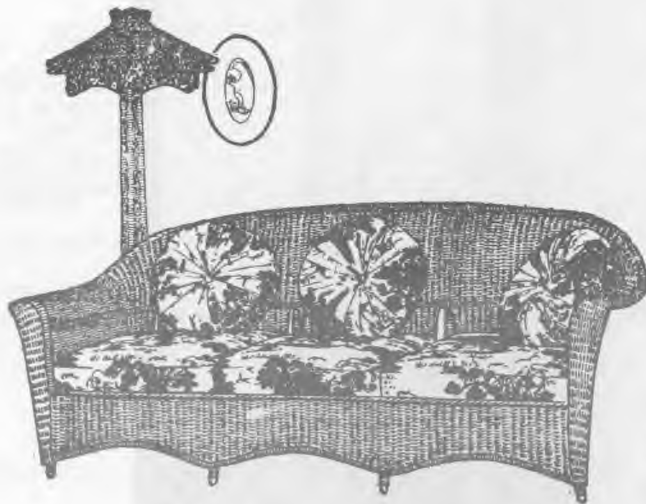
SOME THOUGHTS ON FARM LIVING
by David Smith

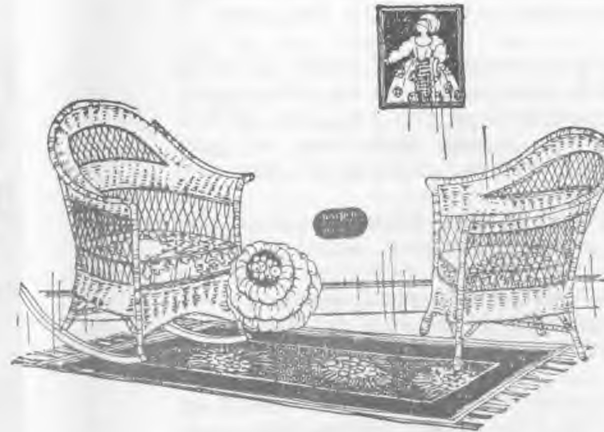
In the early winter time, even after the first snow, you could often find purple violets in protected places in the lowlands and around the creek beds. If you lay close to the ground and kept real quiet you could hear their pods pop and hear the seeds landing all around. Violets are mother's favorite and it was a real thrill to bring her a bunch.

Late fall we've been in the woods and although it's common to see the robins and blackbirds flocking, we've also seen the trees covered and branches sagging with monarch butterflies, which also migrate South.

Canadian geese and ducks yearly fly North and South but once I looked way up in the sky and a hundred or so hawks, the size of the dot

(Continued on page 8)





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at the end of this sentence, were circling and circling. I guess the younger hawks join up this way and migrate, although a number of hawks remain throughout the winter.

Lucky for me, unlucky for him, I was watching a mouse running across the top of the snow when a hawk swooped down and fetched him away for dinner. Hawks don't always have the upper hand. We often see the crows gang up on a hawk or owl.

Last winter, while it was still very cold, the great horned owls started their mating calls. They have their young while the snow is still on the ground.

We walked to school, a mile and a quarter away. Two rooms; five in my 8th grade class. In the winter we'd sometimes have to strap metal spikes to our feet to walk on the icy shoulders of the road. You walked facing traffic. The snowbanks seemed to be higher back then not just because we were smaller. Maybe a big red Roadway truck would stop and pick us up.

Ronnie Rule was our friend. We lived in the tenant house on the Rule farm which adjoins grandma's farm. In the winter, Ronnie, Johnny and I would go up the Rock River. We'd find tree branches along the bank. We broke off huge chunks of ice and poled ourselves down river for miles. Once we passed the house and mother had some friends down. They got real upset and wanted to call for help, but mother explained it was just our way of having fun.

It was war time in the early '40s, and our dad was in the Navy in the South Pacific. Sometimes we'd play war. The apple orchard was up on a ridge and we'd dig foxholes down in the valley. The good guys (or bad guys) would try and hit us with rotten apple grenades.

We'd have spear fights with 8 to 10 foot long dried out weeds. Johnny still has a neat three-line scar on his face to remember these good times.

Ronnie's dad - Golden Rule - owned a furniture factory. He stored wooden dowels in one of the barns. We boys would take these and have great sword fights. Every now and then you'd find a real hard one and you could break everybody else's sword and kill them. You might have to look for them in the baled hay forts we built in the bard.

We'd herd up cattle and run them 'til the farmers yelled. We'd sneak down the road and ride someone's ponies. Mine was Muley and he'd head to the trees to try and rub me off. Brownie with the brown tail and Brownie with the white tail were two of the others. Johnny cheated - he found an old leather harness to use while we only had ropes.

In the summertime, the coal furnace wasn't fired up. Hot baths were often taken in wash tubs in water heated by the sun. If you've never been in a wash tub with real soft rain water, you haven't lived.

Back to the river. That's where I learned to swim and almost drowned. I once floated down the river on an old creosote railroad tie and burned the skin off my naked body.

We'd find boats in the spring that had broken loose up river and gotten caught in the ice floes. Usually they were old ones that nobody tried to recover. The oldest kid got the first boat found and so on down the line to me. The boat I found was stuck way down in the mud. I cleaned it up and painted it black. I guess mother must have bought me a pair of oars - the river was mine.

The Rock used to fluctuate a lot before they boarded up the dam and regulated the flow. Sometimes you could walk half way across in the rocks and mud. We'd find all sorts of treasures and come home with bloody feet. I once found a fresh water pearl in a clam shell. Troxel jewelers peeled it and made it into a tie tack.

The bridge by Blackhawk Island also gave us another treasure. We'd

take ropes and tie them to the metal railings. We climbed down the ropes and swung back and forth until we could reach the concrete pillars. Inside of these pillars we would find baby pigeons. We'd take them when they were big enough; pin feathers on their wings and yellow down on their heads. We'd take them home, feed them bread soaked in milk, then grain. We put them into a big cage we built on the side of the garage. When they were big enoough we'd open the cage and let them go.

Quite a few would come back to feed. We'd collect the dead grass the highway department mowers would leave along side of South Main. We'd put it in the loft of the garage. Pete and Sugar, two of our pigeons, would nest there and raise their young.

We always had dogs. We'd get them as strays who stayed when we fed them. I used to get Brownie to come by throwing dirt clods at him.

Once a small pig fell off a truck and it was Johnny's, as he caught him. I think he was named "Porky". Almost like a dog, he was free to roam. Porky would lie down, the dog would lie alongside, and our banty rooster would climb up on his side, and they'd all sleep in the sun.

Eam and Um were two little lambs we raised. Bottles of milk with baby nipples on them started them off. They were also free to roam.

Johnny had a trap line. He'd be up early every morning to check it. Muskrats were plentiful, and he once caught a mink that brought a good price. One time a cock pheasant got caught and a fox ate the rear end off from him before we found it.

We'd collect rocks; Indian artifacts were rare. Fossil rocks with worms, leaves, fish and other things in them were easy to find. I found a meteor once. I kept it in the house for several years and then it got tossed out. Years later I went back to look for it but it was gone.

Grandma and Grandpa Forsaith had a piece of solid copper they found in a field. It looked like a big baked potato. It's gone too - like the glaciers that brought it.

We hunted a lot starting on sparrows with BB guns. There used to be quail and pheasants all over. There were several fox dens but they didn't seem to diminish the other game. Not many pheasants now, no quail. We've seen a couple of woodcocks recently, and Carol found a nest with eggs in the woods.

We never had much luck raising wild rabbits that the dogs chased down. We did have several cages of tame ones. The mommies would pull out their hair and make nests in the grass we collected. You'd reach in and look and there would be ten or twelve little pink things squirming around. You could tell what color they were going to be almost as soon as they were born.

Baby squirrels were easier to raise. They ate out of eyedroppers. If we let them loose in the house, they'd steal Kleenex and built nests in the bookshelves.

Many baby animals had their start in our houses. Ram Lamb used to run up the stairs and bounce on the beds with the kids until he got so big he had to go out with the other sheep.

When the Rules' two Irish Setters would kill our chickens, we'd tie the dead chicken around the dog's neck until it rotted.

We made pipes out of acorns and hollow weeds - smoked cornsilk. We also smoked hollow grape vines and other weeds.

We loved to climb trees. Young box elder, elm or maples might be 30 or 40 feet tall. You climbed up them almost to the top and got them swaying back and forth. They'd swing you down to the ground, or close to it, where you'd jump off.

We built bonfires. You put a little water in an old bottle and closed it up tight and threw it on the fire. You took turns running and jumping over the flames. We'd see who was the closest when the bottle blew up. Never did get cut.

We had collections - butterflies, birds' eggs, rocks, sticks, clamshells, nuts, feathers, weeds, flowers - anything collectible.

I remember the old gas station. You took this big handle and swung it back and forth to pump the gasoline out of the tank in the ground. I guess that's why you still call it "pumping gas". It would fill up the five gallon glass at the top of the pump. Five gallons for a dollar. The oil was in the basement. You twisted a handle back and pulled it forward to fill the glass bottle with the metal funnel on it. The air compressor was also in the basement and would run when you filled the tires. You had a metal sign that you put out by the road in the morning advertising the gas; seems like it was D-X.

One tall permanent pole held a sign that had a light shining on it. You should have seen the bugs collect from the river and nighthawks scream and swoop down on them.

There were candy and cigars in the old counter with sliding doors. I can remember the smells. We started our coin collection from change we earned at the station.

There was a sandstorm that I remember. You could see it rolling in over the field, darkening the sky. It was scary. It broke a window or two in the house and covered everything with sand, but really didn't do any damage.

I remember when the whole family was sitting in the sunroom having an afternoon dinner. It started getting darker and darker. Nobody knew that an eclipse was going to happen, and I think even the grownups were a little scared.

Things change, but not really. The old bridge is gone. Much of the old family have passed on but are replaced. New grandchildren have taken our places and are still in awe taking a "hike on the farm". Dogs go and are replaced. Friends leave, but new ones appear.

We now live in a log home facing the open fields and woods. Seventeen deer were in the pasture the day we left for a trip to Arizona. Coyotes, who have replaced the fox, hunt across the fields and yip at night, especially when a siren wails. Beavers that gnaw down trees on the riverbank now were never seen in the old days.

It's always fine to return to the farm from whatever chore we've been assigned.

NORTHERN LIGHTS

by Hazel M. Hyde

The darkness of night came gradually and the breeze had died down. Small rustlings in the dry grass might have been field mice. Then a mysterious sensation came and the eyes were drawn to the sky. A queer light appeared in the northern sky. In that direction the horizon began to glow with a green light which was rising rapidly to the zenith. The colors near the earth deepened to almost emerald green. The color spread and waved like curtains caught in a breeze. The hues changed constantly, fading to a pale sea blue-green at the highest points. The curtains of light shifted, swayed and faded to silver, a huge area of

the sky full of reflected arctic ice, thousands of miles from the ice bed. It had been many years since anyone reported seeing the aurora borealis or Northern Lights in the sky of northern Illinois. I have seen the Northern Lights just once, and the recollection lingers.

This glowing or flickering natural light seen at night in the Northern Hemisphere occurs most often in September and October or in March and April. The auroral displays are of many kinds. While green is the most commonly seen color, caused by atomic oxygen, red colors appear at times, caused by molecular oxygen and nitrogen. The Northern Lights do not occur often. The earth's magnetic field directs the particles toward the magnetic poles. Older residents recall the Northern Lights were visible in the 1950s to persons in rural areas.

Tales are told of the time when Indians lived in the northern part of Illinois, along Rock River and in the Rock River Valley. When the vivid, waving colors appeared in the sky, the older Indians could not remember having seen them before. They thought the Great Spirit was sending them an omen. At first the awestruck Indians set up a wailing sound. The medicine men brought out their bundles and rattles. Gradually the more adventuresome ran up the slopes of higher ground. There they stood to watch the almost magical weaving lights. Silver streaks and glowing red draperies rose as from the earth. The young men folded their arms and stood in defiant poses. The wise elders sat about the fires, their faces inscrutable, setting an example by showing no fear. The silvery light shown on their faces. The sky and earth were shining as though painted with silver and green. Finally the lights had faded and it was again dark. They became aware of the night creatures and it was time to sleep. The medicine man would tell them the next day whether this visitation of light was good or an evil magic. But most felt it was a rare vision foretelling good. As they sought their lodges, a kind of reverence had developed among the Indians. The Sauk and Fox Indians lived in Northern Illinois. The weaving lights bring awe to any person and to the Indians it may have been a sign in the skies, a portent of some great event or a good hunting season.

DISCOVERY OF ILLINOIS

by H. V. Church (1931)

The news that Columbus had come upon lands far to the west slowly stirred more than one nation to find out what these strange coasts were. First Spain, then England, and later France sent ships to our shores. The Spanish explorers were hungry for gold, but they never forgot that they were missionaries too. In their zeal to find precious metals, they always remembered that they belonged to the Christian faith and tried to convert the Indians to their belief. Cortez, the Spaniard who conquered Mexico, found gold there, and this discovery moved many Spaniards to explore. De Soto traveled across our southern states, and Ponce de Leon was delighted with the flowery peninsula which he called Florida. Soon Central and South America were under Spanish rule. The English early gave up the mad search for gold and settled the coasts which later became our Thirteen Colonies. But the French delayed their exploration to wage wars in Europe. They knew of the vast lands beyond the Atlantic Ocean, but at first only their fishermen crossed over to America. The early English sailors told of the

great supply of fine big fish, cod and salmon, to be had in the distant waters. The French were first to follow this lead, and they found the fishing best in the Gulf of St. Lawrence; consequently French fishing villages early in our history were built along the St. Lawrence waters.

The English made their settlements along the Atlantic coast. Facing the English settlers were the Allegheny Mountains, and this barrier for many years kept them out of the great valley beyond. On the other hand French settlers were on a direct water route to the interior, and they soon made use of this easy means to explore and claim the greater part of the valleys of the Mississippi and the St. Lawrence. This easy route brought to Quebec and Montreal every spring great fleets of Indian canoes laden with furs. The broad waters leading to the wilds of the interior, the hordes of Indians, and the great stores of furs brought in tempted the French to explore the unknown lands to the west. The founder of Quebec was Samuel de Champlain, in 1608. Setting out to explore, he discovered the long lake lying between New York and Vermont. By 1615 he had reached Lake Huron. In 1635 Green Bay was entered by the French, and the Indian tales of a wonderful country and of great rivers to the south and west tempted them on and on.

With the hope of finding a water route to the western ocean and with the resolve to secure the vast interior for France, Louis Joliet, an explorer and fur trader, and Father Jacques Marquette, a devout Jesuit missionary, were sent on a voyage of discovery. They left Mackinac in the spring of 1673, skirting the western shores of Lake Michigan, entering Green Bay, and then ascending the Fox River to the portage to the Wisconsin River. Down the latter, out onto the Mississippi, and southward to the Arkansas River they floated. There they were convinced that the Mississippi did not flow into the western sea; accordingly they turned north, returning by way of the Illinois River and Lake Michigan.

(To be continued in next issue)

The Route of Joliet and Marquette on their famous voyage of discovery in 1673, when Illinois was first seen by white men.

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