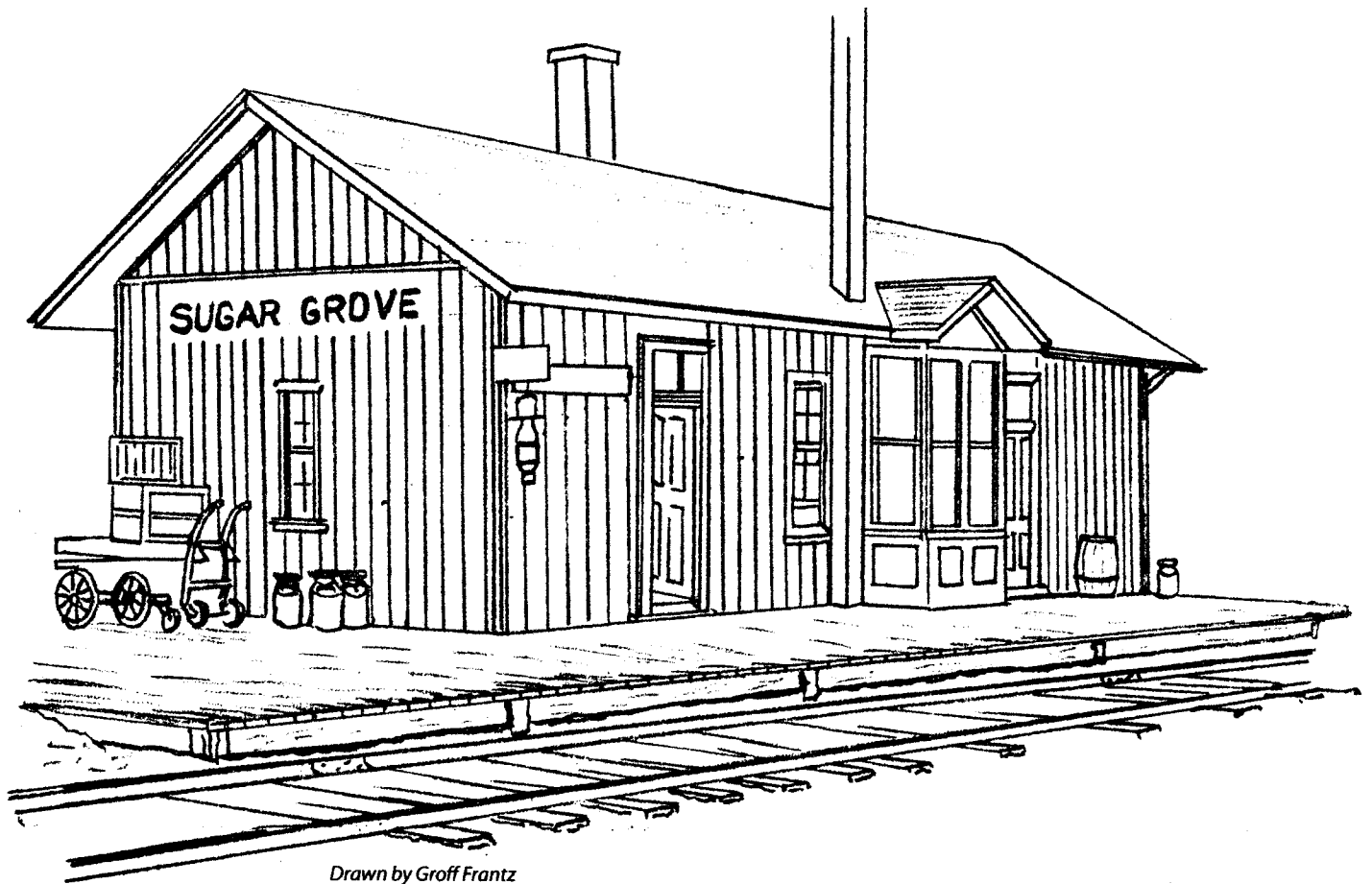


SIN-QUA-SIP

SUGAR GROVE

A HISTORY of SUGAR GROVE TOWNSHIP

KANE COUNTY, ILLINOIS



By Patsy Mighell Paxton

Compliments of Sugar Grove Historical Society

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SIN-QUA-SIP

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A History of Sugar Grove Township

Kane County, Illinois

The Beginning

The Native Americans named the area Sin-Qua-Sip, for the stands of sugar maples that grew in groves among the tall grass prairie west of the river where their permanent village was situated. Their sugar camp was a clearing among the maples, with a wigwam constructed from bent saplings, tree bark and sheaves of grass, which they lived in each spring while making maple sugar. As the winter's accumulation of snow began to melt and run off, replenishing the water in the wetlands, streams and rivers, the Native Americans packed the few necessities needed for their annual trek along the well-worn trails from the Fox River to their sugar camp in the grove of maples to the west.

Sugar Grove township was then a wondrous land of vast stretches of tall grass interspersed with wildflowers and crystal-clear streams of spring-fed water which eventually found their way into the creeks. There were wetlands in the low-lying areas and dense stands of timber on the otherwise endless sea of grass. Game was plentiful and fish jumped in the waters of the creeks that meandered through the prairies and woodlands. There were small herds of buffalo and deer, as well as bears and panthers that lurked in trees, waiting for their next kill. The timber rattlesnakes were a concern to unwary trespassers into their territory, as were the wolves who roamed the prairie in small packs.

The territory the Algonquin tribes called home had been created as the ice sheets from the last ice age receded, leaving a gently rolling landscape in Sugar Grove township. As the glaciers moved south, they leveled the hills which are still evident to the west along the Mississippi River basin, where the glaciers did not reach. The deposit of rich, black soil that was left in its wake was topsoil that had been pushed along as the ice sheet advanced south, also bringing along boulders, sand and gravel. Then, as the glacier melted, these elements were gradually deposited into the valleys and crevices. As the ice sheet receded, the trickles of icy water caused erosion in the rich soil as it began to dry, creating streams which led to meandering creeks, which eventually found their way into the newly created rivers. Once the tall grasses established themselves on this vast tableland, they contributed greatly to the richness of the soil with each passing season, as the old growth grasses died and decayed or were burned to ashes in prairie fires.

Groves of trees began to appear as seeds were dropped by birds or carried in the fur of animals or on the wind. Once a stand of timber was established on the Illinois prairie, the trees could withstand the numerous grass fires that burned around their stout trunks, and the fires cleared away the brush from the wooded areas, allowing the trees to grow unhindered.

The major Indian trails in the area ran along the Fox River and the creeks, with east-to-west trails across the open prairie, which in turn connected the streambed trails together. The primary travelers along the trails had been animals, and later the trails were used by the Native Americans. Some "streets" were worn down several feet below the level of the surrounding area, and proved to be an excellent place for a hunter to ambush animals as they traversed the trails. The abundance of

arrow and spear heads in the timber along the paths, well into the 20th century, told of the fate awaiting a deer as it made its way along these well-worn trails.

Journals kept by the first white men to explore the Illinois territory, tell of the loneliness and desolation of the prairie. These pilgrims were accustomed to the deep forests of the east, with their towering cover and protection from the elements which the openness of the prairies did not provide. There was only the sound of wind through the grass and trees, and the call of birds to break the solitude which permeated the wilderness. At night the stillness was broken by the call of prairie wolves or the hoot of an owl. Some of the grasses grew to a height of ten feet; taller than a man's head when astride a horse, and trails were quickly overgrown, which was probably the reason the most easily traversed trails were along the streams.

And in the early spring there was the echoing chopping sound of tomahawks striking the sugar maples, creating V-shape slices through the bark for the purpose of collecting the watery sap that flowed within. The local Native Americans channeled the sap into wooden trenchers, which were made from hollowed logs. Without iron kettles to boil the sap into syrup, the Indians devised a method whereby they heated stones in a hot fire and then transferred the stones with two sticks into the trencher of sap. As the stones cooled, they were removed and placed back into the fire for reheating. The process was repeated over and over until the desired consistency of "sugar" was reached. After drying, the chunks of sugar were wrapped in skins and transported back to the riverside village, where they were used as flavoring for ground corn and meat and also as a sweet treat.

This grove of sugar maples, with its primitive wigwam, would eventually become the site of the settlement of the first permanent white settlers to this pristine wilderness that was to become known as Sugar Grove Township.

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Resources of Sugar Grove Historical Society archives and pictures

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Personal notes and family letters and records of the author

Letters, poetry and journals of:

Cyrus P. Ingham

James Isbell

C. P. James

Ephraim Smith

Silas Reynolds

Emma J. Todd

Lydia L. Todd

Past and Present in Kane County, Illinois

Press and Tribune Steam & Job Print, 1859-60 Directory of Sugar Grove

State of Illinois Civil War Rosters

Clif Frantz sketches and memories

David Frantz sketch

Groff Frantz, 1926 map of the village of Sugar Grove

Meeting minutes of the Village of Sugar Grove