

What They Said About Illinois

Henry David Thoreau, from his field notebook:

[May 22, 1861, in Chicago]

The prevailing shade tree in Chicago The cottonwood –
Saw last Pm high Dune hills along lake & much open oak
Chicago about 14 ft above lake – sewers or main drains fall but 2 feet in a
mile - Rode down Michigan Avenue. See the land loom across the lake 60 miles.
Ch. built chiefly of limestone from 40 miles SW. Lake st. the chief business one.
Water milky.

Fencing on RR in Canada & Michigan narrow boards - & Virginia fence – no
posts & rails. Another small fenny prairie on Calumet (?) river S of L. Michigan with
that rank dry grass (not bullrush) in it.

[May 23, 1861, on the train from Chicago to East Dubuque]

Chicago to Dunleith --

Very level 1st 20 miles – then considerably more undulating. Greatest rolling
prairie without trees just beyond Winnebago. Last 40 miles in NW of Ill. quite hilly.
Mississippi backwater in Galena River 8 miles back. Water high now -- flooded thin
woods with more open water behind.

like tree (thorn like) thru Illinois which may be the *Pyrus coronaria*.

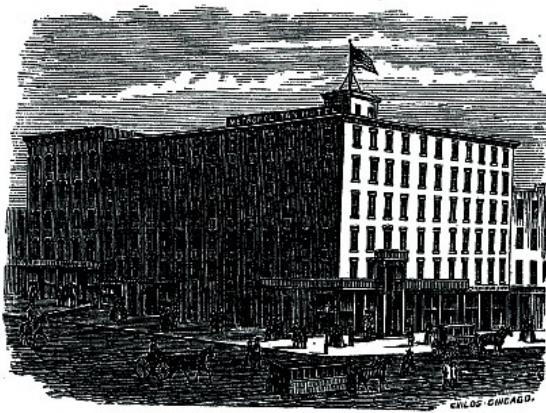
Distances on prairie deceptive – a stack of wheat straw looks like a hill in the horizon $\frac{1}{4}$
or $\frac{1}{2}$ mile off – it stands out so bold & high. Only one boat up daily from Dunleith by
this line – in no case allowed to stop on the way. Small houses – with out barns
surrounded & overshadowed by great stacks of wheat straw – it being threshed on the
ground. Some wood always visible – but generally not large. The inhabitants remind you
of mice nesting in a wheat stack – midst their wealth. Women working in fields quite
commonly. Fences of narrow boards. Towns are as it were stations on a RR.



Horace Mann, Jr., from a letter to his mother dated May 23, 1861:

I have just this minute been down to the post office & got your letter sent on the 18th. I was very glad to hear from you. I walked around most all day yesterday and saw considerable of Chicago. I went to Mr. Clarke's [William Hull Clarke, brother of James Freeman Clark] in the afternoon after considerable trouble in finding it and found he had gone out but I saw his wife. I saw him later in the afternoon in town. I saw also Mr. Carter, who let me have a check for a \$100 which I got turned into gold. The Chicago banks are having a good deal of trouble just now and I suppose most of them must fail so I was very lucky in getting gold, as it is scarce in the city. I got it of a Mr. Wiley [Benjamin B. Wiley], a kind of banker, a friend of Mr. Thoreau's. We got his morning at 9:15 A.M., so I am in a good deal of a hurry and therefore write with a pencil as it is easier. You had better direct your next letter to St. Anthony, Minnesota. I cannot write you much about what I am doing till we get where we shall stay a while. It was a beautiful day here yesterday, but it is a little cloudy this morning though I do not think it will rain. I may write to you again from the boat on the Mississippi though perhaps not till I get to St. Paul. I am very well and Mr. Thoreau is getting along very well also, excepting a little trouble that the water gives him in the bowels, though that is of no account. I do not know as I can say anything more now, so

Good bye
Your loving son
Horace Mann



Metropolitan Hotel, Randolph & Wells Streets,
Chicago

Follow the Journey West:

<http://www.thoreausjourneywest>

**Facebook: Thoreau's Journey
West**

Twitter: HDTs JourneyWest

**Corinne H. Smith
Athol, Massachusetts
chsmith@berkshire.net**