

The Feature

The Quarterly Newsletter of the Illinois Foundation for Frontier Studies

Summer 2005

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IFFS Making Plans For Member Events, More

Welcome to the second edition of **The Feature**, the newsletter of the Illinois Foundation for Frontier Studies. As you may already know, IFFS was organized in December 2004 to support research of the colonial and frontier period of Illinois history (1673-1840).

In addition to supporting the Museum Under the Prairie in Elkhart, IFFS will be sponsoring lectures and special programs, publications, archeological excavations and related activities. We expect the IRS to approve our non-profit status shortly, making donations tax deductible and allowing us to apply for public and private grants.

For more about our special **Charter Membership Drive**, see page 2. The **deadline** to receive all the benefits of being a Charter Member is **September 1!**

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Lorton vs. Laughton

The Laughton Brothers: First Settlers of the Sangamon River Valley?

Who were the first European settlers of the Sangamon River Valley?

Sangamon County histories give Robert Pulliam the honor for his arrival in 1817. Macon County histories state that the *“first white men who settled in this country were the brothers Lorton, from St. Joe Michigan. They were Indian traders, and built a trading house twelve miles north-east of Decatur in 1816.”*

The Lorton brothers traded with the Indians until about 1825-1826 when the Indians stopped coming to this part of the country. The Lortons simply abandoned their trading house and returned to Michigan. That is the extent of what the histories have to say about the Lortons. Were the Lortons the Sangamon River’s first settlers?

An archaeological excavation of the Lorton trading post site, conducted in 1966, did produce materials that fit into the time period of the trading post (1816-1826). These included the hammer and buttplate of a flintlock musket or rifle, hand-painted china, “pony beads”, shell wampum and trade silver. The artifacts plus reminiscences of people visiting the trading post provide proof of its existence. However, no conclusive evidence was found to place the Lortons at the post any earlier than 1822.

Recent research shows that the Lortons were actually the Laughtons, David and Bernardus. The Laughtons grew up in a trading family. Their father, John Laughton, served as an officer in the British navy on Lake Erie from 1775 to 1789.

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Join Now! IFFS Charter Membership Drive Ends September 1

You can still join a select group of local, public-spirited citizens in becoming a Charter Member of the Illinois Foundation for Frontier Studies. The designation, which carries with it special membership privileges, will only be available up until September 1.

Nearly a year of planning has gone into the creation of IFFS, which was incorporated in December and which is in the final process of receiving its IRS tax-exempt status. Its present six-member board is headed by Curtis Mann, manager of the Sangamon Collection at the Lincoln Library in Springfield. IFFS plans to add additional directors. If you are interested in serving on the board, please contact Mann at 753-4900, ext. 235.

While IFFS is primarily helping underwrite the operations of the Under the Prairie Museum in Elkhart, Illinois, its long-range goal is to support the work of archeologists and organizations doing research into this important period of Illinois history such as Sangamo Town in Sangamon County and the village of Wanborough in the English Settlement in southeastern Illinois.

Among other things, we want to broaden public knowledge of these important studies through public lectures and displays and in-school programs throughout Central and Southern Illinois.

As a Charter member, you will receive a quarterly e-mail newsletter bringing you up-to-date on the latest findings and IFFS activities and an invitation to a special Charter Membership recognition ceremony to be held this fall in connection with archeologist Robert Mazrin's public presentation of artifacts from Springfield's first retail business, the Iles Store.

You will also be able to participate in local archeological tours and get free admission to the Under the Prairie Museum. We hope to be able to offer you discounted admission to other area museums in the future. To become a charter member, fill out the form on the last page of the newsletter or fill it and join electronically with PayPal, at our website, www.illinoisfrontier.org. □

IFFS Board Okays Access Pact, Fund, Will Add Directors

IFFS has entered into a Preferred Use Agreement with the Sangamo Archaeological Center in Elkhart that will provide IFFS members special access to the Under the Prairie Museum. In addition to free admission for IFFS members, the agreement will give IFFS free access to museum space for events such as lectures and special programs. The IFFS board also voted to create a special fund to accept donations to underwrite the Wanborough archeological survey project. (*For more about the Wanborough project, see page 3*).

Nominations are now being accepted for the IFFS board. The present six-member board plans to add an additional five directors. Current IFFS officers and directors are board president Curtis Mann, manager of the Sangamon Collection at the Lincoln Library; treasurer David M. Brady of the Prairie Archives; community volunteer Elaine Birtch; Bob Church, exec director of the Illinois Professional Land Surveyors Association; William Furry, exec director of the Illinois State Historical Society; and history buffs Roger Whitaker, an electrical engineer and freelance writer Vicky Whitaker. If you are interested in serving on the board, please contact Mann at 753-4900, ext. 235.

IFFS Website Providing News, Other Information

Want to know what's happening with IFFS? You can read all about it at our new website, www.illinoisfrontier.org.

Parts of the new site are still under construction, notes webmaster Roger Whitaker, but you can view past and current issues of **The Feature**.

Eventually the site will have a calendar of events, a membership list accessible to members only, announcements, a member forum as well as links to other organizations interested in Illinois history and archaeology. We welcome any suggestions for the site.

The Feature is the quarterly newsletter of the Illinois Foundation for Frontier Studies,
Box 1834, Springfield, 62706.

IFFS Officers and Directors, 2005-2006

Curtis Mann, *president*, David M. Brady, *treasurer*

Directors: Elaine Birtch, Bob Church, William Furry, Roger Whitaker, Vicky Whitaker

Along the Edge of the English Prairie: Wanborough, Illinois

Exciting New Archaeological Survey to be Sponsored by IFFS

The site of the extinct village of Wanborough located in the English Settlement of southeastern Illinois is the focus of a new archaeological survey to be sponsored by the IFFS.

Wanborough, Illinois was created in August, 1818 by Morris Birkbeck, a gentleman farmer from Surrey County, England who emigrated to Illinois in 1817 to found a colony of English farmers and mechanics. Named for Birkbeck's farm in England, Wanborough was platted by his son Bradford Birkbeck who laid out a village of 32 five-acre lots and 8 two and a half acre lots. These lots provided temporary and permanent quarters for the settlers arriving from England.

Bradford's sister Elizabeth described beginnings of Wanborough in a letter written back to an uncle in England in February 1819. "*(Bradford Birkbeck) has lately been employed in laying out five acre lots within half a mile our house which Papa sells for 20 dollars, upon a written agreement that it shall be fenced round and a house built upon it within eighteen months. Many of Papa's labourers have bought these lots and are now industriously building their cabins and laying our their gardens. These lots lay along a sweet brow just in the skirts of the woodland, which on some spots commands a fine view of the Prairie.*"

The village grew rapidly and within a year boasted several improvements. Diarist John Wood, a temporary resident of Wanborough, noted these improvements in 1820. "*Mr. Birkbeck's settlement, called Wanborough, is situated at the north-west corner of the English Prairie, and contains 25 cabins, a tavern, a store or two, and several lodging houses; and several carpenters, bricklayers, brick-makers, smiths, wheelwrights, and sawyers, also a tailor and butcher. A horse or ox mill is building, a malt house planned out, and a new brick building for a tavern and several new houses began.*" Many of the public buildings such as the mill, brewery and tavern were underwritten by Birkbeck.

An informal census taken by resident William Hall from 1822 to 1829 shows the gradual decline of the village from a population of 75 people in 1822 to less than 50 by 1829. This decline was aided by the departure of several residents in 1825 for New Harmony, Indiana to participate in Robert Owen's community. The death of Morris Birkbeck in June 1825 also struck a blow to the village, depriving it of its leader. Residents who remained persisted for another 15 years or so, continuing to operate the mill, a pottery and possibly a store or two. By the 1840s, most of the village lots were absorbed into surrounding fields or lopped together to become fields themselves.



Birkbeck



A casual survey was conducted by the Sangamo Archaeological Center in March 2005 at several of the sites in the village. Initial results showed potential at some of them. More surveying is needed for the rest of Wanborough. A special account was created by the IFFS board in May 2005 to fund archaeological and historical investigations of Wanborough.

Sangamo Archaeological Center staffers explore the Jackson Tavern site at Wanborough.

Laughton Brothers: First Settlers of the Sangamon River Valley?

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Laughton then became the naval storekeeper at Detroit and eventually retired from the service. Laughton took his family to Stromness Island, northeast of Detroit on Lake St. Clair and established a trading post there where he died in 1810. Little is known about his family. Both David and Bernardus grew up to be fur traders.

A reminiscence from Aura Stewart, a fellow resident of the Stromness Island, states David Laughton was trading there in 1819. The next mention for David is a listing in John Kinzie's account book between February and May of 1822 in Chicago. In 1823 the Laughtons received a license to trade with the Indians at the Vermillion River.

Bernardus is reported to have operated a trading post at Grand Detour on the Rocky River in Michigan in 1825. This date corroborates the dates provided in the Macon County history for the departure of the Lortons. A new trading post at a place called Hardscrabble in northern Illinois was established in 1826 but in 1827 the Laughtons moved to the Des Plaines River, where both a trading post and a tavern were built. In 1830 David homesteaded, and on Sept. 29 purchased from the State of Illinois 160 acres consisting of the SE quarter of the Canal Section 35, Township 39 R, 12 E.

David is said to have had three Indian wives in succession, who all died before him. His last wife, a Pottawatomie woman named *Waish-kee-shaw* and their son Joseph received a small land grant in the Chicago Treaty of 1833. Bernardus died on April 4, 1834, and David, age 43, died shortly after on April 12 at Belle Fountain, Illinois.

More research is needed to firmly place David and Bernardus Laughton in the time period between 1816 and 1822. Their fur trading activities will reveal whether they had penetrated the Sangamo Country before 1822. The early date of 1816 is highly unlikely due to the influence the Kickapoo Tribe still exerted over the area prior to the Treaty of Edwardsville in 1819 where it gave up its rights to most of the land in the Sangamon River Valley.

IFFS CHARTER MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

(available only through September 1, 2005)

I'd like to become a Charter member of the Illinois Foundation for Frontier Studies. Enclosed is my check for \$100 made out to the Illinois Foundation for Frontier Studies. (Please mail this form and your check to: IFFS, Box 1834, Springfield, IL 62706. (If you prefer, you can fill out an application on line and pay electronically at our website, www.illinoisfrontier.org using Paypal. If you have any questions, please call Curtis Mann at 217-753-4900, ext. 235.

Today's date: _____

Name: _____

Street or Postal Address: _____

City: _____ State _____ Zip Code: _____

Telephone: (office) _____ (home) _____ (cell) _____

e-mail address: _____ fax: _____

I would prefer receiving the newsletter by regular mail