



Settlement

Settlers came to this area to build farms called homesteads. While they found the land difficult to plant in because of the thick root system, trees were not in the way—the area was mostly an open grassland. When settlers came, they traded goods with the Potawatomi to get food and animal skins. After a time, the Potawatomi were forced to move when homesteaders took over the land. The Potawatomi asked if they could stay “on the land given to us by the great spirit,” but they could not continue to live here. By 1831, they had to move.

Here is what one woman wrote about her trip to live in Illinois.

I have dragged one foot after the other so long and hope for the best. Friday Eve – We commenced a fourteen-mile prairie trip after we got to Paris, Illinois. Hot though the sun was setting, it was very good part of the way—many bad slews. The doctor’s wagon was stuck twice, and twice the oxen drew him out. The prairies look fine. Many kinds of flowers grow on them—and prairie hens live on them, one of the company shot one. Eliza looks bad but says she feels like helping me get supper. Oh, dear, I think it’s a hard time. Saturday 15th –

Today we have been traveling through prairie and timber, both, and got lost in the bargain. We took the wrong road and wallowed around the prairie grass, sometimes as high as the horses’ backs.

Night came and we pitched our tent after mowing the grass down and made ourselves as comfortable as could be expected amongst the mosquitoes.

Here is what one woman’s life was like after settling.

The woman told me that they spun and wove all the cotton and woolen garments for the family, and knit all the stockings; her husband, though not a shoe-maker by trade, made all the shoes. She made all the soap and candles they used, and prepared her sugar from the sugar-trees on their farm. All she wanted with money, she said, was to buy coffee and tea, and she could “get enough any day by sending a batch of butter and chicken to market.” They used no wheat, nor sold any of their corn, which though it appeared a very large quantity, was not more than they required to make their bread and cakes of various kinds, and to feed all their live stock during the winter.”

Here are some of the problems these settlers faced each season.

Fall—the threat of fire—the prairie grass became very dry and a spark could start a fire that would burn the prairie and sometimes their cabins.

Winter—the freezing cold, deep snow, people got lost in the drifts or out on the prairie when the trails were covered.

Spring—the prairie became swampy when the snow melted.

Summer—some days were very hot and there was no shady forest to cool yourself; there were so many insects that sometimes horses died from being stung so much.