The Emiquon National Wildlife Refuge during the last five years, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service has conducted environmental and economic assessments, held public hearings, coordinated federal and state involvement, and begun acquiring land for an ambitious new wildlife refuge at the confluence of the Spoon and Illinois Rivers in Fulton County, Illinois. When carried to fruition, the Emiquon National Wildlife Refuge will encompass about 11,000 acres of land from the mouth of Stoner Creeks to just below Spoon River (six miles) and from the shore of the Illinois River to the bluffs three miles west.

Today, use of the refuge location is entirely agricultural. For the last seventy-five years the Illinois River has been wallowed off from these bottomlands, their rich agricultural potential put to use growing crops and raising livestock. In important ways, this land use has preserved the bottoms. The proposed refuge includes two drained backwater lakes, Flagg and Thompson Lakes, the latter of which was one of the largest backwaters along the Illinois River.

Above: A view of the proposed refuge site from the observation deck of the Dickson Mounds Museum. Photo by Gary Andrusko.

The Emiquon National Wildlife Refuge is planned to encompass about 11,000 acres of the Illinois River bottomland near Havana, Illinois. (Map courtesy of Outdoor Illinois and Illinois Department of Natural Resources.)

Duane Esarey, ISM Assistant Curator, Dickson Mounds Museum
Emiquon: A Place in Nature

O ut of quarter of a million years ago, the blufftop where the Dickson Mounds Museum stands overlooked the confluence of two of the mightiest rivers on the continent. The Ancient Mississippi River, flowing out of the north to roughly today’s Quad Cities region, had carved its channel through to the Princeton/Hennepin area and flowed in a deeper valley down the present Course of the Illinois River valley. Near what is now Havana, the Ancient Mississippi met with a predecessor of the Ohio River, the Teays/Mahomet, which flowed west from the Appalachians through West Virginia, Ohio, and central Indiana. At their juncture, these giant rivers formed the Havana lowlands, today filled with terraces of gravel, pebbles, and sand and hiding a vast underground store of water.

The Illinois glaciation cut off the Teays/Mahomet River and created the modern Ohio River in its place, laying down the flat, fertile till plains of Ohio, Indiana, and south-central Illinois. Much later, at the end of the Wisconsinan glaciation (a little over 20,000 years ago), the Ancient Mississippi River was also cut off, and its present channel south from the Quad Cities was formed. The Illinois River valley was partly filled with glacial sands and gravels and was remade by the meltwater from the Lake Michigan lobe of the Wisconsinan glaciers.

The change in course of the Ancient Mississippi provided the Illinois Valley with a very special legacy. Through the last 12,000 years as it settled into its present course, the new Illinois River left a series of valley floor channels that became shallow backwater lakes. As it rejoined its old course near St. Louis, the new Mississippi River sometimes dammed and slowed the current of the Illinois River and caused its valley floor to grade upwards. The Illinois River became one of the slowest and flattest of the great rivers of North America. The silt that was dropped by the tributary streams when they reached the flat Illinois River bottom accumulated the backwater networks by building low dams across the valley, facing the Illinois River. This way and that, and redirecting rainfall of the backwaters. Channel scars and low areas of the Illinois River bottom became vast backwater lakes, seasonally filling.
drinking, growing huge stands of wet sedges, and marshland. Thompson and Flagg Lakes were thus formed, perhaps 5,000 to 7,000 years ago. For at least the last 3,000 years, the Illinois River has remained in its present-day channel.

**Early Descriptions of Emiquon**

Throughout this last 12,000 years, multiple cultures have lived along the banks of the Illinois River. Native inhabitants were sustained for hundreds of generations by the resources of the Illinois River valley. The environment has changed significantly over time, but few written documents describe the Emiquon area. As the river changed, so too did the landscape and resources available to those who lived there.

**The 1870 Journal of Henri Jouteil**

In the early 1870s, Robert Jouteil, Seur de LaSalle, explored the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers and established a fur-trading empire with its center on the Illinois River at Starved Rock. After returning to France for a period, he once again set off for North America, where he led an attempt to colonize the mouth of the Mississippi River. LaSalle's ill-fated venture ended with his ships wrecked and the colony stranded on the Texas coast. Attempting to reach Illinois, LaSalle led a small party on foot in search of relief for the colony.

**1872 Journal of Philippe Coues**

LaSalle was killed by some of his men during the trip, and by the late summer of 1868, all that was left of LaSalle's expedition was making its way up the Mississippi River, led by Henri Jouteil and LaSalle's brother. In an account described in the published English translations of his journal, Jouteil describes the voyage up the river. On the second of September the group entered the Illinois River, passing through "very pleasant country." From time to time they passed prairies "half a league" (over a mile) broad, and in one of these they killed a bison for much needed food. They described forests of oaks, maple, elms, cedars, firs, and other trees that they did not recognize. They had been warned by Frenchmen in Arkansas that they would come to a lake where it was hard to clover the way, which they did on September 9:

**We came to a lake about a half a league broad the junction of Spoon River, Thompson and Flagg Lakes, the Illinois River, and Quiver Lake, where Coues and La Salle, who had told us, where we were with the Arkanseys, that we must go to the left, which we did but we went quite properly for we entered a river which came from the left [Spooner] and went up it. When, however, we got near a shore we saw, I saw that we were not following the shore we had to keep. I told Mr. Coues, "We are out of the river." [LaSalle's brother, who was a guide,] said: "Several times this river could not be the one we had to go by; but we went on."

**Next day, the 10th of September, we started, taking the other [right] side of the lake, where we were wrong again, for after going on for some distance, we were unable to get to the river on account of the shallow and small islands encroaching on the entrance to it (they had gone up Quiver Lake, which is now water and it is off from the lake of the,Illinois River). We were obliged therefore to go back and look again for the channel leading to the river, which we found on the left. This lake bears the name of Deux Mammoules [two bays], as there are two small mountains, round and separated from one another, which lead to travelers and people of the country giving them their name. [Deux Mammoules are today known as the Twin Mounds, two large 2,000-year-old Middle Woodland Period mounds on the bank of Quiver Lake].

**The 1773 Journal of Patrick Kennedy**

In 1773, Patrick Kennedy, an Englishman from Kaskaskia who later aided George Rogers Clark in his conquest of the Illinois Country, was searching for copper mines on an expedition on the Illinois River. Kennedy gave a graphic description of the site, including a map showing the location of the mounds and the river.

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continued on page 14

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Emiquon in the future

Eventually, Emiquon National Wildlife Refuge may again look something like it did when Patrick Kennedy described it over 200 years ago. There cannot yet be a firm timetable for restoring Emiquon, as there is no schedule for acquiring the land. In keeping with its over-fifty-year-old policy, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service is purchasing land only from willing sellers. Importantly, two of the twenty-one owners of the land account for 87 percent of the planned refuge. Acquisition of these two properties will be key to the full development of the refuge. However, with the purchase of 1,115 acres of land near the confluence of the Spoon and Illinois Rivers, the restoration of Emiquon has officially begun.

Additional Reading


In Our Next Issue

Emiquon: A Place in Time

Part One of the essay reviewed the environmental history of the area encompassed by the proposed Emiquon National Wildlife Refuge in Fulton County, Illinois, showing how a 200,000-year sequence of glacial and post-glacial drainage patterns resulted in the formation of an especially rich floodplain and backwater lake regime for the Illinois River valley. This legacy, combined with the history of drainage and degradation of the Illinois River and its floodplain during the last 100 years, has made the Emiquon area a prime candidate for environmental recreation. Paragraphs from journals written as early as 310 years ago describe this location as a myriad of lakes, men, and swamps where there were abundant fish, waterfowl, and large game animals. One of these accounts indicates that the location was used for seasonal Illinois Indian occupations, and another notes that the French were the first to record a variation of the place name, Emiquon, for Spoon River and the lakes and swamps around it.

It is gratifying that with the establishment of the Emiquon Refuge the ancient place name for this location is in use again. There are numerous spellings of this place name and some geographical confusion exists over its use, but historical continuity makes it clear that all previous usages derive from the same source. What does the place name Emiquon mean? In the past it had always been translated to mean “spoon.” Part Two of the essay reviews the history of this place name, showing that such translations are not always what they seem.

What Does the Word Emiquon Mean?

There has been no time during the one hundred and seventy-five years since the EuroAmerican settlement of western Illinois when it was not recognized that the name for the Spoon River was derived from a previous Indian place name. In fact, translations were sometimes supplied by those making early maps and writing historic journals. For instance, John Melish's 1819 Map of Illinois labels the Spoon River as “R. Miucour or Spoon.” Clearly, the current place name “spoon” implies continuity with the earliest known version of the place name, written as Emiquon on a 1684 map.

In spite of at least twelve variations in spelling (Miucour, Miquon, Micouer, Amequon, DemiQuan, Emiquon, etc.), the English translation for all versions of this Indian place name as spoon has been universally accepted. However, the interpretation of Emiquon as a place name is not quite as simple as it would seem. Certainly most of these cognate place names are variations of an Algonquian term for “spoon.” As indicated, one of the early 1800s maps used both the previous place name and the English translation. Likewise, Henry Schoolcraft, who was quite familiar with Algonquian languages, referred to the river in 1820 as Amiquem, and indicated that it meant “spoon.” In 1826, when Charles Bird King painted a copy of a portrait of a Wyandot man named Amiquem, he indicated the name signified “wooden ladle.” More to the point, the word emiquon translates exactly as spoon in Reverend Maurice Galland's 1761 English-Franco-American dictionary and it was the Pouawatomi who lived in the Spoon River area from at least the 1790s through the early 1830s.

Of some interest is the question whether the word translated into English in the early 1800s was French or Indian. Miquon, a borrowed word from the Algonquian language, is French Canadian for “wooden spoon.” Pierre Charles Delievent, a French administrator in Illinois 300 years ago, used this word, indicating that in adoption into French Canadian took place by the 1680s. Because the Algonquin River DemiQuan, DemiQuan Lake, and DemiQuan Swamp, as documented in the 1773 journal of Patrick Kennedy, are clumsily Anglicized continued on page 13
version of the place name as it was ex-
pressed in French (that is, Rivière de Emi-
couen), it is quite possible that the names most commonly used in subsequent de-
cades could easily have derived from French
Canadian as opposed to strictly aboriginal
terminology. Nonetheless, whether the
term is a Potawatomi or French Canadian
term, could there be any doubt that the
translations of all of the previous names for
the river signify "spoon"?
The locational name Perry used one
step further in his 1812 History of Knox
County, creating an enduring popular inter-
pretation of the meaning of Spoon River that
continues to be cited to the present day. Perry
asserted that amkapaw is the Potawatomi
word for mussel shell, which the Indians fre-
quently used as spoons. Thus, the name Spoon
River came to be linked to mussel shells,
in spite of numerous references to
"emisken" and "messien" as specifying a wooden
spoon.
Mussel shells or not, given all of this
evidence, can we confidently conclude that
the original Indian place name refers to "spoon" in one sense or another? If so, only in
a historically derived sense. Originally,
Emicouen had a meaning not reflected in
any of the interpretations so far discussed.

When is a Spoon Not a Spoon?
Our important observation recommends
cautions in accepting the commonly in-
warded interpretation of Spoon River's etymology.
The earliest written use of the place
name Emicouen dates to Jean-Baptiste
Franquelin's 1684 map, made in Quebec.
The information for this map came from
LaSalle's expedition to Illinois. As noted,
the French Canadian term miskouin was in use by
this time. If the French had named the river themselves, or been told that the name of
the river signified spoon, wouldn't the 1684
map have used something like that term?
Why was the term emicouen used instead?
The French map maker must have utilized
the name given by the current inhabitants
of that region—the Illinois tribes, known
collectively as the Illinois or Illiniwek. The
language spoken by the various Illinois
(Kokadiqua, Peora, Tanea, Carokia, Cabokia,
Michi-
game, etc.) and Miami (Miami, Wia, Puankashaw) tribes is a branch of Central
Algonquian known as Illinois/Miami. It is
related to Potawatomi and other Central
Algonquian languages, but has significant
differences.

As first observed by Virgil Vogel in his
landmark study "Indian Place Names in Illi-
nois," there is a problem if we accept emicum
as an Illinois language word. Although Potaw-
atomi and some other Algonquian terms
for spoon are close to emicouen, amkapaw,
mesken, etc., the Illinois and Miami words
for spoon (Oheenewe and kawaak), are not.
(The symbol "B", originally used in trans-
scriptions by French Jesuit scholars, can be
translated to represent a sound closely ap-
proximated by the letters "ou" in English.)
If the word emicouen came from the Illi-
nois language, it must have a different in-
terpretation than spoon. One thing emicouen
certainly does not refer to in the Illinois
language is mussels, which, according to
White and White's "Illinois Indian Words and
Phrases..." would be wapapias.

Significantly, several later maps that in-
clude the Spoons River region still give the
Indian place name of the main tributary
above Spoon River (Copper Creek) as variations of the word "Wapapias." Written
accounts refer to Copper Creek as Wapapias
in 1813 and to Spoon in 1773. An 1812 map labels the minor tribu-
tary below Spoon River and Copper Creek
(Dick Creek) as Little Wapapias. The importance of these nearby place names
helps to interpret the etymology of the name for Spoon River has been overlooked.

Emicouen: An Illinois Place Name

It is of considerable significance that the
documented place name for the locality
changes through time (see Table on page 14).
The placement and nomenclature of Illinois River tributaries was inaccurate and
highly variable until the 1770s. The place
name Emicouen was intermittently used
from the earliest map of this region (1684)
until the 1760s, although most French
maps during this interval showed no west-
ern tributaries to the Illinois River and did
not use any version of the name Emicouen.
As noted earlier, in 1773 the term
Demisquin, poorly translated from the
French version of the river's name, was first
documented. The term Demisquin was
then copied extensively from Thomas
Hutchins' 1778 map, and its use
continued until at least 1807. The
various cognates of miskouin came into use cir-
ca 1807.

Maps made late in Illinois' territorial
period, such as this 1815 Reno Paul map,
label Spoon River with a variety of spellings of the French Canadian
word miskouin, meaning wooden spoon.
The shift to the English usage (spoon) took
place circa 1820.
1813, and the English name Spoon River came into standard use by 1830. However, the assumption that the original Illinois language place name Emicon is has the same meaning as the very similar place names documented for Spoon River in later times has created a problem.

The place name for nearby Copperas Creek was recorded as the cognate Sheopheque, Shehopeque, Shehopequin, and She-muquewan between 1773 and 1815. The common suffix of the words ste-muquewan and emicon is at first glance seems to imply that both refer to some kind of spoon (that is, does muquewan = muciwan). However, the "I" sound is missing from three of the four renditions of this former place name.

Interestingly, sheophysical is the word many Illinoisans spoken use for a gourd rattle, which was called a chichiquia or chichiquia in the Illinois language. A further clue, from Carl Vogel's Illinois State and Great Indian Plants (1883), Manual of botany, is that the Miami word zitibuu means "a speckled gourd" and that the elaboration stizititutu specifies a gourd rattle. This is important because bottle gourds not only were made into bottles and rattles by most native groups, but also served as vessels. Prominent among the sources of information on the Illinois/Miami language is a French/Illinois-language dictionary written by the Jesuit priest Jean LeBoullenger, who was stationed among the Illinois tribes from 1704 until his death in the early 1740s. LeBoullenger's dictionary (which is at the John Carter Brown Library), is the most cited and authoritative source on the Illinois language due to its accessibility, relatively early date, and comprehensive nature. In modern French (according to Harp's French/English dictionary the word for gourd are courge and gouge, meth- ods of which are provided with entries in LeBoullenger's dictionary, but the French word for bottle gourd is calabasse. LeBoullenger records the Illinois words for calabasse not only as stizititutu, but also as emicon. Likewise, emicon is also the Illinois word for a gourd pitcher or jug. The Illinois word chichiquia apparently refers to the bottle kind of gourd bottle since it is nearly identical to the Miami term stizititutu. Clearly, the native ste-muquewan and emicon are.

Squad River

If emicon meant a bottle gourd with special reference to a container, then it is clear that the prefix "emi-" is key to our search for the meaning of the word emicon. What would the names of other kinds of gourds be? In modern French, another name for pumpkin is citrouille. LeBoullenger's translation of citrouille is emicon. Pumpkins, as we now know it, are today, is one of a wide variety of New World edible squash-derivative plants. Further elaboration of the Illinois/Miami use of this term can be seen in the translation of the French word citrouille, a small, Ne- guinean gourd closely related to squash and pumpkins. LeBoullenger's dictionary lists citrouille as emicona.

Although the names of the various New World gourds were inconsistently applied in the 18th century, we can be sure that the Illinois language term emicon meant as used on the 1684 map, at least in the genetic sense to squash/pumpkins. This would be in line with other Native American uses for the squash/pumpkin distinction. Melvin Gilmore, in his 1919 ethnobotany classic Lux de Plantas by the Indians of the Missouri River Region, notes that the Osage do not distinguish between pumpkin and squash, but call them both by the same name with descriptive modifiers attached. This is a
similar distinction to that seen in the Illinois use of *ischen* and *erich*. The original place name of the Spoon River/Thompson Lake region almost certainly meant pumpkin or another closely related variety of squash. Thus, Spoon River itself can be translated as “River of the Pumpkin,” or more generically as “River of the Squash.” This interpretation is strengthened when we observe that this name was used in random with “River of the Bolder Gourd” for Copperas Creek. In all probability, the transition to the place name’s implied reference to “spoon” came about when the name in Illinois/Miami was adopted by the Potawatomi (to whom *emiskwa* is spoon) and/or the French Canadians (who readily translated it as *massue*, which is “wooden spoon”). As late as 1815 the name for Copperas Creek maintained its original reference to the bolder gourd (or gourd testa), but the creek later received its EuroAmerican name during settlement of the Military Tract in the 1820s. Likewise, Lake Maquaun, near the mouth of the Spoon River, was renamed Thompson Lake. The town of Maquaun, on the upper Spoon River, has retained the Indian place name used by the Potawatomi from their occupations in that area. Spoon River itself was able to survive yet another translation, its significance altered, but its history not quite lost, in its 300-year journey through four languages. 

**Further Reading**


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