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## A Look at Some Middle Western Gazetteers

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When Ralph Leslie Rusk published his monumental study of the literature of the middle western frontier in 1926, he attempted to survey everything written about and in the area northwest of the river Ohio down to the year 1840. This goal led him inevitably to consider not only codes of law, periodicals, schoolbooks, volumes of travel, histories, and beginnings of belletristic writing, but also gazetteers. Indeed he listed a dozen such books, notably John Kilbourn's volume on Ohio, John T. Blois's on Michigan, John Scott's on Indiana, Alphonso Wetmore's on Missouri, and two volumes by John Mason Peck on Illinois. Rusk remarked that these gazetteers were generally written by men familiar with the western country and that because of their geographical limitations they were superior to volumes which attempted to cover an entire region.<sup>1</sup>

Twenty-four years after Rusk's book appeared, R. Carlyle Buley published a detailed and informative study of the Old Northwest which won a Pulitzer Prize. Buley too listed several of the old gazetteers, such as those by Kilbourn, Blois, and Peck, and observed that these books contained a little history

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph Leslie Rusk, *The Literature of the Middle Western Frontier* (2 vols., New York, 1926), I, 129-30. Rusk provides a list of gazetteers in Volume II, 136-44. Among the gazetteers devoted to regions rather than to states are Samuel R. Brown, *The Western Gazetteer; or, Emigrant's Directory* (Auburn, N.Y., 1817), and Robert Baird, *View of the Valley of the Mississippi, or the Emigrant's and Traveller's Guide to the West* (Philadelphia, 1832). Baird's book, perceptive and valuable, dealt with southern as well as western states and included in Chapter X an excellent general survey of the character of the western people based on long residence and extensive travel.

although they were largely descriptive. But neither Rusk nor Buley had much to say about the contents of the gazetteers cited.<sup>2</sup> Both writers implied—and this is a common assumption today—that because these volumes were highly topical they quickly outlived their usefulness. I should like to look at a few of these old gazetteers with a rather different purpose in mind. The modern reader who picks up these tattered and foxed books will often find surprising if miscellaneous information which is not readily available elsewhere; he will also be pleased by sprightly details about locations or settlers and occasionally he will find an unexpectedly literary style.

A gazetteer is defined most simply as a geographical dictionary, a book which gives descriptions of places in alphabetical order. As the American frontier pushed westward, there was a great demand for such books as convenient sources of information about generally unknown country. Gazetteers were bought and read by a large number of people seeking vital data, by travelers, merchants, administrators, clergymen, professional men, and most of all by prospective settlers. Morris Birkbeck's *Letters from Illinois* (1818) was hardly a conventional gazetteer, but it was widely read and consulted by Englishmen who were thinking about emigrating to the Wabash Valley.<sup>3</sup>

For the most part gazetteers followed a standard pattern. In an introduction or preface the author described his qualifications for compiling such a book and cited his obligations to various informants. Invariably he reported some personal contact with the state or territory described and often that he had traveled through it extensively. He usually indicated also that he was familiar with the accounts of earlier travelers, ranging from Charlevoix and Schoolcraft to Long, Carver, and Beltrami. The author frequently cited correspondence with leading citizens of the region to confirm factual statements and provided census figures. Generally a long and diffuse essay on military or political history, as well as on the

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<sup>2</sup> R. Carlyle Buley, *The Old Northwest: Pioneer Period, 1815-1840* (2 vols., Indianapolis, 1950), II, 555.

<sup>3</sup> Morris Birkbeck's *Notes On a Journey in America* (Philadelphia, 1817) and his *Letters from Illinois* (Philadelphia, 1818) were reprinted several times although the author's motives in writing them were sometimes suspect. See Rusk, *Literature of the Middle Western Frontier*, I, 125, 216.

flora and fauna of the area, preceded the actual alphabetical listings. Lewis C. Beck's *A Gazetteer of the States of Illinois and Missouri* (1823), one of the best of the early gazetteers, supplied this kind of information about both of the states with which he was concerned. The bulk of every gazetteer, of course, consisted of a compilation of evidence about political divisions and geographical locations: towns, townships, post offices, counties, rivers, creeks, lakes, prairies, mountains, mounds, and swamps. For convenient reference this material was ordinarily given alphabetical arrangement.

Historians today make little use of gazetteers for obvious reasons. The population figures, for example, are obsolete and may be inaccurate. Geographical measurements, often made casually and quickly, have been superseded by more precise mensuration. The enormous data about climate, topography, wild animals, and even political organizations have little present-day value. Rare allusions to early settlers probably interest only local historians. Nevertheless, many of the gazetteers are still useful. Hamlets or villages which once seemed to have an optimistic future have become ghost towns; some have disappeared entirely. Thus Sprinklesburgh, which John Scott listed in his Indiana gazetteer of 1826, is unknown today. Two Minnesota communities, Sevastopol in Goodhue County and Elliotta in Fillmore County, have completely vanished.<sup>4</sup> Again, county boundaries have altered and counties themselves have been divided or merged. St. Croix County in western Wisconsin at one time stretched 130 miles from the Falls of the St. Croix River to La Pointe on Madeline Island in Lake Superior and was 50 miles wide. But in 1845 its northern half was detached and formed into La Pointe County, which itself extended to the source of the Mississippi River and the Lake of the Woods.<sup>5</sup> Ponds and lakes, once shimmering and alluring, have dried up and are as unfamiliar to the present-day citizen as glacial Lake Agassiz. One might have trouble today floating a canoe on streams once called navigable, such as Indiana's Beanblossom Creek (except where it forms a reservoir in Monroe County), while seasonal droughts sometimes shrink Illinois' Sangamon River to a pitiful flow.

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<sup>4</sup> Roy W. Meyer, "The Story of Forest Mills, a Midwest Milling Community," *Minnesota History*, XXXV (March, 1956), 11-21.

<sup>5</sup> I. A. Lapham, *Wisconsin: Its Geography and Topography* (Milwaukee, 1846), 200.

Wet prairies in southwestern Illinois have been drained and made arable. And the origins of place names once familiar to every new settler have become lost in the mists of time. It is true that such data can often be garnered from early newspapers or from the reminiscences of old-timers, but the value of the gazetteers in this connection should not be overlooked.

There are also other values. The gazetteers supply population estimates and other statistics and they include comment on the make-up of the local population in terms of regional or even racial origins. Data on early church organizations frequently appear as well as information about the trades of some of the first settlers. Land and commodity prices are given. Early, often sporadic, attempts to build railroads or dig canals are referred to, and predictions of various kinds about the best crops to grow are printed. The gazetteers may identify settlers whose names were unknown even to the first local newspaper editors. If these books were reticent and unfortunately terse, the details they do record can be fascinating.

Among the early middle western gazetteers John Kilbourn's *The Ohio Gazetteer*, a volume of 166 pages published at Columbus in 1816, was undoubtedly the most successful. By the time of the compiler's death in 1831 ten editions had appeared, and an eleventh edition was published in 1833, "Rev. and enl. by a citizen of Columbus" to 512 pages. Fourteen thousand copies of the gazetteer were sold between 1826 and 1830.<sup>6</sup> Kilbourn's Preface to the seventh edition states effectively not only his own motive but the motives of other compilers of gazetteers:

Much solicitude has been evinced, and frequent enquiries made in the east, concerning this state, respecting its extent, soil, climate, navigableness of its rivers, the relative fertility, population, healthiness, and advantages and disadvantages of different districts and sections of the country.<sup>7</sup>

Kilbourn adds that no previous book of the kind had appeared in Ohio and that even the contemporary population of the state would benefit from a systematic and accurate account of

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<sup>6</sup> William Coyle (ed.), *Ohio Authors and Their Books* (Cleveland, 1962), 358.

<sup>7</sup> John Kilbourn, *The Ohio Gazetteer* (7th ed., Columbus, 1821), Preface.

the commonwealth. His gazetteer proceeds alphabetically from the town of Aberdeen to the village of Zoar. The seventh edition credits Cleveland with 606 people, identifies Sandusky as a lake port with two stores and a promising future, and calls Cincinnati a large commercial city of 10,000 people. Akron and Toledo did not exist in 1821. Chillicothe, the original capital of Ohio, once had "a towering semiglobular mound, a stupendous remain of antiquity," in the middle of the town. But Kilbourn observes that "the owner or owners, preferring [*sic*] the pecuniary value of the ground for building lots, to a preservation of it as a curiosity, have removed it, for the purpose of erecting buildings on its site."<sup>8</sup> The compiler, incidentally, was quite conscious of the richness of Ohio in Indian remains, and devotes part of his introductory section to comments on the tumuli of varying shapes and sizes which then existed.

Kilbourn tells little about the inhabitants of the various towns and rarely lists their occupations. On the other hand, he carefully records place names or multiple names; thus the Portage River which flows into Lake Erie used to be called the Carrying River, and Sandusky was once known as Portland. He indicates that the name Belpre was derived from the French words *belle* and *prairie* and claims that the combination (beautiful meadow) was well suited to the location. Troubled by the usual difficulty of finding something distinctive to say about each of his entries, Kilbourn resorts to clichés which he repeats endlessly: most streams are "considerable," post towns are either "flourishing" or "thriving," and townships are "populous" even when they obviously were not. In contrast, the community of Tarlton in Pickaway County is described as "a tolerably pleasantly situated village" and Old Woman's Creek as an "inconsiderable stream" in Huron County. Some of the towns he included—for example, Union or Shakerstown in Warren County where the Shakers once held all property in common—have subsequently disappeared from the map.

When John T. Blois published his *Gazetteer of the State of Michigan, in Three Parts*, in 1838, he apologized at some length not only for its delay in publication but also for certain necessary omissions. He had hoped to give a complete account

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

of the sales of public lands, a succinct judicial history, and a tabulation of the geographical names derived from Indian terms. But his own personal indisposition had postponed publication, and for some of his projects data were missing or could not be collected. He felt that the absence of any such book about Michigan had already deterred settlers from choosing that state for their residence. Many persons would have selected Michigan "had her superior advantages been equally well known."<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, Blois's gazetteer is packed with solid information, much of which retains interest today. His first part—210 pages, which comprise just over half the book—surveys the topography, soil, climate, flora and fauna, rivers and lakes, educational facilities, and internal improvements such as canals and railroads. Over thirty pages are devoted to a summary of the state's history. The second part lists the counties in alphabetical fashion and provides information about boundaries, soil, water, and political organization. The third part is the familiar alphabetical tabulation of places and settlements, including rivers, lakes, townships, and cities. Various appendixes supply information about banks, agricultural production, and mileage between communities.

Blois, like Kilbourn in his Ohio gazetteer, felt obliged to say something specific about each of the items he listed and sometimes this compulsion taxed his ingenuity. Generally his identifications are enthusiastic: rivers are navigable or important, harbors can be improved easily for future traffic, towns invariably have bright futures. Detroit, he reports, was the largest city in the young state (Michigan was admitted into the federal union only a year before Blois published his gazetteer), and boasted almost ten thousand people. It had "a healthy and beautiful location on the west bank of a strait" and was "one of the most ancient settlements in North America."<sup>10</sup> Yet Blois admits that the plan of the city was rather uncouth and ill-adapted to practical utility. He points out, however, that three of the city's main avenues were two hundred feet wide and that the authorities had begun to pave them with wood.<sup>11</sup> In general, Detroit had "a cheerful and comely appearance" and was attractive to the immigrant.

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<sup>9</sup> John T. Blois, *Gazetteer of the State of Michigan* (Detroit, 1838), Introduction.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 270, 272. The federal census of 1830 gives Detroit 2,222 people and Wayne County 4,559 people, for a total of 6,781. Blois's figure is obviously a bit inflated although there may have been a large influx of settlers into the Detroit region in the 1830's.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 271-72.

Other Michigan communities such as Grand Rapids, Flint, Niles, and Kalamazoo are described as flourishing and important villages. On the other hand, Gull Creek is termed a "trifling rivulet," Vance River a "trifling stream," Gun Lake merely a "collection of water," and various streams are dismissed as "insignificant," "diminutive," or "inconsiderable." Blois was only slightly concerned with the origins of place names or even their variant spellings, yet could not resist giving an explanation of the meaning of Manitou (which he defines as the residence of a spirit) or making a comment on the pronunciation of Mackinac. He observes also that Jackson had been called Jacksonopolis and Jacksonburg before it reached its truncated form, and that Monroe, settled by the French as early as 1776, was first called the River Raisin Settlement. The number of lakes, rivers, and creeks named Portage provoked Blois to comment that the name was apparently applied everywhere that bodies of water were fairly contiguous. Blois refrains from identifying early figures in Michigan history whose names were commemorated in towns; Cassopolis (still the county seat of Cass County), Tecumseh, Schoolcraft, and Pontiac are simply mentioned without comment. In 1838 Houghton did not exist.

*The Indiana Gazetteer* of John Scott, an itinerant printer who came to Indiana in 1816, originally appeared in 1826 and is a slighter book than the Ohio and Michigan compilations. Scott devotes 21 pages to introductory material, entitled "General Description of the State of Indiana," and 112 pages to the alphabetical tabulation. In his Preface he gives the usual reasons for his authorship of a gazetteer:

Indiana, although young, comparatively speaking, is not surpassed, in point of natural advantages, by many of the older states; she is rapidly advancing in the great work of internal improvement, in literature, the arts and sciences; and is destined to an important post in the ranks of the Republic. To facilitate her march, and to give, not only to her own citizens, but to those of the neighboring states, and emigrants generally, some idea of her Soil, Climate, Population, and advantages of various kinds, are the primary objects of this work.<sup>12</sup>

The editor alludes to the heterogeneous character of the population of Indiana but observes that the inhabitants are "affable, generous, and hospitable." Distinctions of rank and social status were unknown.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> John Scott, *The Indiana Gazetteer, or Topographical Dictionary* (Centreville, Ind., 1826), Preface.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

Scott lists townships, counties, and physical features in the usual way, praising settlements liberally and providing a good deal of information succinctly. He locates counties with reference to the state's boundaries or identifies them as interior counties. Villages are designated as mill sites or post towns; county seats are identified as seats of justice. An interesting feature of Scott's descriptions is his occasional enumeration of the occupations of the citizens, his gazetteer differing radically in this respect from the books of Kilbourn and Blois. Thus the hundred inhabitants of Bloomfield in Greene County included "2 carpenters, 2 cabinet-makers, 1 physician, &c." Centreville in Wayne County was twice as large and could boast of a wheelwright, a wagonmaker, two plasterers, a tinner, a saddler, two blacksmiths, two cabinetmakers, two shoemakers, a millwright, five carpenters, two bricklayers, a tailor, two tanners, three physicians, and three lawyers. The population of Salem in Washington County was even more diversified, the 630 inhabitants including, in addition to the above, such artisans as silversmiths, watchmakers, chairmakers, hatters, and a painter, while the buildings housed groceries, taverns, looms, several manufactories, and a public library which contained 280 volumes.<sup>14</sup>

The second edition of *The Indiana Gazetteer*, revised by James Scott, a former judge of the Indiana Supreme Court, appeared in 1833. It retains the original format although it includes much additional information. Thus Bloomington, identified as the seat of justice of Monroe County but deriving its importance "principally from its propinquity to the Indiana college," is credited with some six hundred people; among them were "four clergymen, three physicians, two lawyers, five teachers of common schools, eight merchants, and about thirty artisans and mechanics of different descriptions."<sup>15</sup> Crawfordsville with about a hundred fewer persons still claimed "five physicians, five lawyers, two preachers . . . besides artisans of almost all descriptions."<sup>16</sup> It also included seven mercantile stores, a printing office, a federal land office, and three taverns.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 37, 41-42, 106.

<sup>15</sup> *The Indiana Gazetteer, or Topographical Dictionary* (2nd ed., Indianapolis, 1833), 38-39.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

The population of Indianapolis is estimated at about 1,600 and the variety of settlers who made their living in the state capital is most impressive: "two tanners, a coppersmith, two silversmiths, two chairmakers, two wheelwrights, two painters, two plasterers, seven blacksmiths, two gunsmiths, seven or eight carpenters, five or six cabinet-makers, three hatters, four saddlers, five tailors, seven shoemakers, five bricklayers, two butchers, and two or three bakers." Identified as professional men are "four clergymen, six physicians, and sixteen lawyers."<sup>17</sup>

One fascinating aspect of the gazetteer's census of occupations in all the Indiana towns is the high percentage of physicians to the population, literally one to every hundred persons. This ratio would suggest an alarming incidence of disease, a speculation which is confirmed by the prefatory admission that fevers and agues often prevailed in Indiana because of the large amount of marshy land and stagnant water. But a more likely explanation is that the term "physician" denoted not a trained medical man but simply a person who had some knowledge of pills and poultices, perhaps gained pragmatically. One suspects the presence of a large number of "Indian doctors" among the early Hoosier settlers.<sup>18</sup>

Both editions of *The Indiana Gazetteer* provide occasional information about individual settlers but the details are sparse. It is noted that Connersville in Fayette County was named for John Conner and that extensive vineyards near Vevay are the property of various gentlemen named Du Fours, Bateau, Morod, and Galay.<sup>19</sup> John Work is identified as the original miller on Fourteen Mile Creek in Clark County, John Sheets is referred to as the owner of a paper mill in Jefferson County, and the discovery of silex deposits on the lands of David Pitman in Harrison County is reported.<sup>20</sup> Reference is made to the recent establishment of Solon, a small post village in Jennings County, by Solon Robinson.<sup>21</sup> The settlement of Harmony is of course linked with George Rapp and Robert Owen. On the other hand, miscellaneous

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed account of backwoods medicine see Madge E. Pickard and R. Carlyle Buley, *The Midwest Pioneer: His Ills, Cures, & Doctors* (Crawfordsville, Ind., 1945).

<sup>19</sup> Scott, *Indiana Gazetteer* (1826), 44, 128.

<sup>20</sup> *Indiana Gazetteer* (1833), 71 93, 83.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

details are both amusing and revealing. The towns of Paragon and Delphi were "laid off"; Burlington was "laid out," but is not yet inhabited; Zenas is "a new village and not far advanced in improvement"; Clay County has "one church of Newlights or Unitarians"; and Madison is praised because of its rapidly increasing number of houses, "mostly of brick, many of which are three stories high, and constructed in the best style."<sup>22</sup> One of the most disapproving descriptions concerns French Lick and its mineral springs: the water is undeniably rich in chemicals but "is of a bluish colour, and emits a very strong offensive odour, and is exceedingly loathsome."<sup>23</sup>

The earliest important gazetteer of the Illinois country was the work of Lewis C. Beck, *A Gazetteer of the States of Illinois and Missouri*. The scientific interests of Dr. Beck, a graduate of Union College, led him to be more diligent in the assembling of data about the rocks, soils, water courses, minerals, and plants of the area he concerned himself with than the other compilers of gazetteers had been, and he also relied more fully on the works of previous travelers and explorers. His sense of obligation impelled him to make frequent acknowledgments of the work of Schoolcraft, Brackenridge, and of John Mason Peck, who settled in St. Louis in 1817 and began to collect data long before he published his own guides to emigrants.

Beck's gazetteer contains 353 pages, about equally divided between Illinois and Missouri. His method is the same for each state. The initial geographical and statistical view of the region is followed by an alphabetical listing of counties, towns, villages, rivers, creeks, etc.—in the case of Illinois, from Albion to York. The introductory essays, however, also contain important observations on basic features of the topography. Beck's attention was attracted, for example, by the fabulously rich American Bottom extending for a hundred miles along the east bank of the Mississippi River from Chester, Illinois, to Alton. "No soil can exceed this in fertility," Beck writes, "many parts of it having been under cultivation for more than a century, without the least apparent deterioration."<sup>24</sup> Beck noted the prevalence of miasma, how-

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 50, 111.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>24</sup> Lewis C. Beck, *A Gazetteer of the States of Illinois and Missouri* (Albany, N.Y., 1823), 13-14.

ever, and he declared that public health would not improve until various stagnant ponds and lagoons had been drained. He also remarks on the peculiar properties of the water where the Missouri and Mississippi rivers meet and the large amount of sand held in suspension by the current below their confluence. Of the Mississippi River below this junction he writes:

It is supposed by many that the water of this stream is medicinal, and hence it is very common to see the old inhabitants drinking it daily, impregnated as it is with filth and sand. When cleared and cooled with ice, it has a pleasant taste, without the rankness of the Ohio or Illinois waters.<sup>25</sup>

Beck indicates his strong support of internal improvements and advocates an Illinois-Michigan canal. He also has much to say about prospective crops. Corn he describes as the staple, but he thinks that cotton could be grown for home consumption. He claims that hemp was indigenous and that both the soil and the climate of the two states favor tobacco. He asserts that the slopes of the Ohio and Illinois valleys would be quite favorable to viticulture and remarks in passing that wild horses were still prevalent in Illinois.<sup>26</sup> Beck's identification of settlements is terse but specific. Of Cahokia's people he writes: "These preserve all their ancient manners and customs; with few exceptions, are poor, indolent and illiterate."<sup>27</sup>

No work dealing with the Middle West was more highly regarded by prospective settlers than the emigrant's guide and the gazetteer of Illinois compiled by John Mason Peck, a Baptist minister who devoted a lifetime to education and public service. His *Guide for Emigrants*, originally published in Boston in 1831, was reissued as *A New Guide for Emigrants to the West* in 1836, 1837, and 1843, the later editions showing no substantial changes beyond the correction of proofreading errors. The *Gazetteer of Illinois* was published in 1834 by R. Goudy of Jacksonville, Illinois, in an edition of 4,200 copies, and a completely revised and amplified version appeared in 1837 under the imprint of Grigg and Elliot, Philadelphia.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

Peck's statement in his Introduction to his *New Guide for Emigrants* well defines his purpose in publishing such a volume:

no portion of this immense and interesting region, is so much the subject of inquiry, and so particularly excites the attention of the emigrant, as the States of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and Michigan, with the adjacent territorial regions.<sup>28</sup>

Since he was quite aware that a duodecimo of 381 pages could not begin to include all the relevant or desirable information about the states of the Ohio Valley, he refers readers who need additional data to the standard books of travel and to gazetteers for individual states. But he claims that his volume will appeal to three classes of people: prospective settlers; travelers for pleasure, health, or business; and readers eager to have an accessible and dependable reference book about what he called the "Great West." Eighteen years of experience in the Mississippi Valley, he thought, gave him a vantage point which he supported further by extensive reference to the books produced by travelers.

The brevity of Peck's emigrant's guide and its geographical scope make the ordinary alphabetical tabulation impossible. Indeed he lists the counties for only two states (Indiana and Illinois), gives only brief descriptions of even the principal towns, and omits the usual geographical data. On the other hand, he provides informative essays about the history, educational institutions, manufactures, climate, and geography of the region, and often makes interesting specific comments. In his enthusiasm for the western country Peck was second to no one. Cabbage heads, he affirms, were often two or three feet in diameter. Beets surpassed twelve inches in circumference and apples from St. Clair County, Illinois, exceeded thirteen. Corn sometimes yielded one hundred bushels to the acre. Hemp and cotton could be successfully cultivated. Peck condemns farmers for their prejudice against clover and thinks they have been remiss in not erecting barns to shelter crops and tools.<sup>29</sup> But he has his own prejudices too, undoubtedly reflecting his ministerial training. He is glad to observe a falling off in the production of whiskey, and he

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<sup>28</sup> J. M. Peck, *A New Guide for Emigrants to the West* (2nd ed., Boston, 1837), Introduction.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 278-79.

hopes that "this branch of business, so decidedly injurious to the morals and happiness of communities and individuals, will entirely decline."<sup>30</sup> He is equally opposed to tobacco although he states with pride the fact that it could be raised successfully in his adopted state. "Tobacco," he writes, "though a filthy and noxious weed, which no human being ought ever to use, can be produced in any quantity, and of the first quality, in Illinois."<sup>31</sup>

For *A Gazetteer of Illinois* Peck went to considerable trouble to verify his facts and to be as complete as possible. He claims in his Introduction: "Accuracy of description, or a registry of facts and things as they actually exist in every part of the state, has been a paramount object."<sup>32</sup> Peck interviewed men from every county of Illinois in order to check data; in addition he resided in Vandalia (the capital of the state from 1820 to 1839) during the winter of 1831-1832 for the purpose of searching all the legislative documents and printed laws. The gazetteer had three parts: a general view of the state; a general view of each county; and a particular view of "each town, settlement, stream, prairie, bottom, bluff, etc." Peck incorporates into the Illinois gazetteer much of the general material of the emigrant's guide, repeating many of the original statements about plants and manufactures but revising and updating his information. On the other hand, he provides a fairly full description of each county and, in the second edition of the gazetteer, devotes 168 pages to the geographical tabulation of places. Towns getting special attention are Alton, Kaskaskia, Shawneetown, and Vandalia. Peck describes Chicago as an incorporated city "beautifully situated on level ground," and predicts it will shortly become the "emporium of trade and business for all the northern country."<sup>33</sup>

Peck was especially interested in place names. He often gives the etymology of names of French origin (for example, Au Sable, Des Plaines River, Mauvaiseterre, Embarras River). Names which were transliterations of aboriginal words

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>32</sup> J. M. Peck, *A Gazetteer of Illinois, In Three Parts* (2nd ed., Philadelphia, 1837), Introduction. Another Illinois handbook, *Illinois in 1837*, probably the work of Samuel A. Mitchell, was published in Philadelphia in 1837; it is obviously based on Peck's work.

<sup>33</sup> Peck, *Gazetteer of Illinois*, 179-80.

troubled him, but he tried to standardize them or to employ established pronunciations and orthography. Peck also records alternative place names, some of which have long since been lost to history. Thus, Job's Settlement in McDonough County was also known as New Hope; Fountain Bluff in Jackson County was called Big Hill; Grand Marais in St. Clair County had the alternative name of Clear Lake; and Fever River in Jo Daviess County was once known as Bean River. Occasionally Peck is not explicit where the reader would appreciate additional information. He does not comment on the fact that Troublesome Creek was a branch of Crooked Creek. Yet he is more careful than most compilers of gazetteers to link places with celebrated citizens. He cites Dad Joe's Grove in Putnam County as a settlement named after Joseph Smith, and identifies the place of Morris Birkbeck's drowning; he explains the tradition that Starved Rock got its name from a band of Illinois Indians who were marooned and eventually perished on its summit. Peck also notes his indebtedness to previous writers and even borrows their place descriptions; his accounts of Alton and Peoria incorporate the identifications of Lewis C. Beck written a decade earlier.<sup>34</sup>

Four years before statehood Wisconsin had a gazetteer, Increase Allen Lapham's *A Geographical and Topographical History of Wisconsin* (1844), the first bound book printed in Milwaukee. A "second edition, greatly improved" was published in 1846. Lapham's purpose was the usual one of providing useful information for settlers and recording data for future historians, and he fulfills his intention to the best of his abilities. A long introductory essay of eighty pages sketches the history, geography, mineralogy, geology, and internal improvements of the territory. Population and commercial statistics are provided. Lapham then proceeds to describe the individual counties but on a rather peculiar plan. He first deals with the six counties that touched on Lake Michigan, then devotes seven pages to the lake itself, and eventually describes the interior and the Mississippi River counties. The second edition of the gazetteer ends with accounts of the new counties established in 1845 in the north-western section of the territory. Since Lapham disregards alphabetical order, his gazetteers are not adapted to quick reference, but the county descriptions are short and compactly written.

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 149-50, 269-70.

Lapham was interested in geographical nomenclature and not only gives variant names for rivers or settlements but also comments on their origin. Thus the name Sheboygan, which he transliterates from the Ojibwa word "Shawb-way-gun," fascinates him. "The original Indian name of this river it is almost impossible for any white man to pronounce, and its meaning is 'the river that comes out of the ground.'"<sup>35</sup> He identifies the Bad Axe River in Crawford County as the scene of Black Hawk's final battle in 1832 and explains French names such as Prairie du Chien and the Trempealeau River ("la montagne qui trempe dans l'eau"). Lapham's scientific training—he later served as the state geologist of Wisconsin—led him to devote unusual attention to mineral formations and botanical identifications. He also had the characteristic enthusiasm of all compilers of gazetteers for the country he described. To him the salubrity of the climate, the purity of the atmosphere, the cool, brief summer, and the dryness of the air in winter (he does not emphasize a fact in his own tables that the minimum temperature at Fort Howard on Green Bay reached thirty-two degrees below zero) conspire "to render Wisconsin one of the most healthy portions of the United States."<sup>36</sup>

John Warren Hunt's *Wisconsin Gazetteer*, published at Madison in 1853, is a more substantial volume than Lapham's book and includes additional data. The compiler utilized the help of postmasters and legislators to supplement Lapham's accounts. After some thirty pages of physical description, in which Hunt pays special attention to the rapidly developing lumber industry, he devotes the core of his book to the usual alphabetical list in which counties, towns, rivers, lakes, and post offices are juxtaposed. Hunt makes no effort to discriminate his listings and seldom editorializes. Unique is his comment that flagstones cut from the beautiful limestone produced in Fond du Lac County have "a texture nearly as fine and compact as marble."<sup>37</sup> But he is careful to list the economic activities and the professional people in the important communities. Beaver Dam had sawmills, oil mills, and flour mills, store buildings, churches, three hotels, and no less than six doctors for some 1,500 people. Hunt's inventory is factual and objective; it is also thorough. He lists the prairies (Bald, Fountain, Heart, Liberty, Rising, Big

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<sup>35</sup> Lapham, *Wisconsin: Its Geography and Topography*, 102.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>37</sup> John Warren Hunt, *Wisconsin Gazetteer* (Madison, 1853), 90.

Foot, Sun) and the mineral deposit "diggings" (Beetown, Blue River, Fair Play, Nip-and-Tuck, and the inevitable Hard-scrabble), most of which were in Grant County. Hunt records little history and seldom indulges in speculation. But he does predict hesitantly that the Sheboygan County village of Quit-quioc, a name which he says was originally Manomonee and was not derived from a corruption of *hic, haec, hoc*, might eventually become the Saratoga of Wisconsin.<sup>38</sup>

James S. Ritchie's *Wisconsin and Its Resources*, which originally appeared in 1857 and had a revised third edition by 1858, is perhaps less a gazetteer than a descriptive history, a commercial census, and the narrative of a tour. Ritchie was also greatly interested in the Lake Superior littoral and devotes one hundred pages of his book to an account of the cities and mineral resources of Wisconsin's northern coast line. The compiler provides many facts about Wisconsin but his enthusiasm generally overcame his desire to be informative; moreover, he could not repress his liking for rhetorical effusions. Chapter Five of the second part of his volume is entitled "The Early Settler of Lake Superior," and gives a composite picture of a happy forest dweller and paterfamilias who has migrated from the eastern states to benefit from cheap western land. The account suggests Chateaubriand's idyllic picture of life among the Indian tribes of the lower Mississippi.<sup>39</sup>

The first books to deal with Iowa Territory are brief and inconsequential. John Plumbe's *Sketches of Iowa and Wisconsin*, published at St. Louis in 1839, and Isaac Galland's *Iowa Emigrant*, published at Chillicothe in 1840, strive to give information in capsule form to prospective settlers and are manifestly incomplete. Galland boasts that he had lived in Iowa fourteen years, but he seems more interested in discussing the Indian tribes of the territory than in providing solid details about the twenty-two counties that then existed.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, John B. Newhall's *Sketches of Iowa, or the Emigrant's Guide*, published by J. H. Colton at New York in

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>39</sup> James S. Ritchie, *Wisconsin and Its Resources* (Philadelphia, 1858), 262-66. It is surprising that Lapham's gazetteer, Hunt's gazetteer, and Ritchie's effusive tribute fail to achieve mention in the *American Guide Series* volume, *Wisconsin, A Guide to the Badger State* (New York, 1941). The books are not mentioned in the bibliography and the authors' names are not indexed.

<sup>40</sup> Isaac Galland, *Galland's Iowa Emigrant* (Chillicothe, Ohio, 1840), was reprinted at Iowa City in 1949 in an edition of 3,500 copies with an introduction by William J. Petersen.

1841, devotes 252 pages to the kind of compilation of geographical and economic facts that had made the gazetteers focused on the eastern side of the Mississippi of signal value.

Newhall is enthusiastic about the new territory; its rolling prairies, its soil, its climate are alike admirable. His intention of course is to provide a brief and concise description but he points out that the editor's task was difficult:

to *know* the people, their social condition, the arteries and impulses from which they derive support, riches, and happiness, he must swim their creeks, penetrate their forests, descend into the hidden recesses of their mines, eat the bread of their cornfields, in short, share the fortunes of the humblest settler of the frontier cabin.<sup>41</sup>

He succeeds, nevertheless, in dealing with the significant aspects of the area. A general account of the geography and history of Iowa is followed by separate tabulations of counties and towns. Fifty pages are devoted to minerals and ores, another fifty pages to Indian history and antiquities. Newhall finds room for short essays about education, agriculture, and churches, and concludes the book with useful information about mileage figures, routes, and population. Much of the data of Newhall's *Sketches*, revised and updated, appeared in his later volume, *A Glimpse of Iowa in 1846*, published in an edition of three thousand copies in Burlington, Iowa, by W. D. Skillman in the year of Iowa's statehood.<sup>42</sup>

The books by Nathan Howe Parker about Iowa and Minnesota are not true gazetteers although they reveal some of the standard qualities. *Iowa As It Is In 1855* was dedicated to the young men of Iowa to whom was entrusted a sacred duty "to advance into an ever-expanding prosperity the noble state whose helm they hold."<sup>43</sup> Parker devotes nine chapters to such subjects as Iowa's history, climate, soil, geology, timber lands, rivers, and prairies. He also discusses immigration and the stimulus given the increase of population by the building of the railroads. Seven chapters deal with Iowa counties arranged in the usual alphabetical fashion. A long chapter prints the constitution of Iowa, and the volume closes with brief discussions of education, religion, and banking. Parker's enthusiasm for Iowa recalls the tributes of other editors to the regions they were defining:

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<sup>41</sup> John B. Newhall, *Sketches of Iowa; or, the Emigrant's Guide* (New York, 1841), 6.

<sup>42</sup> William J. Petersen, Historical Introduction to John B. Newhall, *A Glimpse of Iowa in 1846* (Iowa City, 1957), xv.

<sup>43</sup> N. H. Parker, *Iowa As It Is In 1855: A Gazetteer for Citizens, and a Hand-book for Immigrants* (Chicago, 1855), Dedication.

Her resources are inexhaustible, her advantages are beyond the scope of calculation, and her claims upon the attention of every class and sex of the energetic, the industrious and the ambitious, are as peremptory as they are vast.<sup>44</sup>

*The Minnesota Handbook*, a slim volume of 159 pages published at Boston in 1857, deals like Lapham's earlier book with a territory rather than a state.<sup>45</sup> The volume is essentially a travelogue since the author follows the Mississippi, Minnesota, and St. Croix rivers and describes the towns en route. Parker frequently utilizes the accounts of earlier travelers and is also indebted for data to the editors of various territorial newspapers. The amount of space given to land offices and the fact that he urges correspondents to address him care of certain land agents suggest that Parker's purpose in compiling the Minnesota handbook—and possibly the Iowa book as well—may have been partly commercial. Certainly the promotional tone is more obvious here than in the volumes previously discussed.

In many ways the *Gazetteer of the State of Missouri* compiled by Alphonso Wetmore in 1837 is the most interesting and readable of all the early middle western gazetteers precisely because it attempts to be considerably more than a geographical handbook.<sup>46</sup> In his introductory section Wetmore acknowledges his debt to a lawyer named William M. Campbell, who had earlier embarked on a similar project but had relinquished his data to Wetmore. The compiler remarks that he will not aim at mere description, valuable as it might be; rather "it was deemed important to intersperse throughout the work entertaining passages, for the purpose of relieving the reader from the monotony of narrative or the sameness of descriptive detail." Sketches of frontier characters and Indian history, Wetmore continues, "can in no way diminish the value of the production."<sup>47</sup> But to substantiate his book he borrows freely from Beck, Schoolcraft, and Brackenridge.

The bulk of the Missouri gazetteer is conventional reporting. After Wetmore laments the lack of a state-supported seminary of learning, a state-chartered bank, and adequate internal improvements, he goes on to describe the water courses, the minerals, the animals and plants. With two great rivers on their borders, Missourians were naturally conscious

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, Preface.

<sup>45</sup> N. H. Parker, *The Minnesota Handbook, for 1856-57* (Boston, 1857).

<sup>46</sup> Alphonso Wetmore, *Gazetteer of the State of Missouri* (St. Louis, 1837). The book was published by Charles Keemle.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, Preface.

of fluvial traffic, and though "the mad waters of Missouri furnish a devious channel," Wetmore feels that Captain Shreve's ingenious snag-boat had made steam transportation fairly safe.<sup>48</sup> Wetmore envisions a state population of from five to six million people, the higher figure being tied curiously to the successful development of silk culture.<sup>49</sup>

The compiler inserts bits of state history—such as the account of the New Madrid earthquake in 1811-1812—wherever this is feasible. Exactly two hundred pages are devoted to the familiar tabulation of counties, but settlements and place names are listed within the county descriptions so that a reader without a geographical sense may have had difficulty in locating a specific name. Wetmore inserts occasional remarks about natural phenomena; thus he claims that "the Ozark Mountains are elevations of a reputable class."<sup>50</sup> He is highly conscious of French place names in Missouri, calling attention to Vide Poche, the old *nom de nique* of Carondelet,<sup>51</sup> and giving the English equivalents of such names as Roche Percée Creek, Loutre River, Les Mamelles, and Big Bonne Femme River.

Anecdotes of the frontier or bits of dialogue are also scattered through the gazetteer. In one such episode a visitor in a certain locality expressed curiosity about the prevalence of rattlesnakes. The reply was immediate:

There is a right smart sprinkle of snakes in these parts. I and my brother-in-law went out snaking a few days ago, and we killed three hundred and fifty rattlesnakes, and two *yearlin* copperheads, and it warn't a very good morning for snaking, neither.

The visitor suggested that more favorable weather might produce a better haul. Again the reply was quick: "Ye-s, we cords 'em up, sometimes."<sup>52</sup>

In another incident a frontiersman who was also a state legislator had loaded his keelboat with salt for the market. Rough water caused him to lose his cargo, but he reached shore safely and thanked a housewife for hospitality:

I am a raal ring-tail painter, and I feed all my children on rattle-snake's hearts, fried in painter's grease. There ar a heap of people that I would not wear crape for if they was to die before their time; but your husband, *marm*, I allow, has a soul as big as a *courthouse*.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 27, 34.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

Even the language of the main text reflects Wetmore's knowledge of frontier idiom and evinces his desire to make his book colorful. A figure who is admired is called "a real horse" of a man. Citizens of Independence in Jackson County who disliked Mormons warned them to depart "or we'll row you up Salt river!" A botanically unidentified plant called "rattlesnakes' master" is proclaimed a sovereign remedy for snakebite if "properly applied and in season." A colt destined for the race track is identified as "sired by Chain-lightning, out of the celebrated full-blooded dam Earthquake."<sup>54</sup>

Perhaps the really distinctive feature of Wetmore's gazetteer, however, results from his decision to include six stories of western life in a seventy-page appendix. Two of them, "Biography of Blackbird" and "Pawnee Sacrifice," relate to Indian life. One, "The Village Gathering," describes the advent at a backwoods hamlet of a moth-eaten circus or animal show, whose creatures included an elephant, a hyena, a baboon, a dromedary, and a freshly painted zebra. "Annals of the Shop" introduces Dr. Bibo Oxygen, the typical versatile frontiersman who was physician, justice of the peace, notary public, postmaster, and politician simultaneously. "The Dead Husband" is the story of a fugitive from justice. Best of all is "Sketch of Mountain Life," the adventures of a hunter named Gall Buster whose biography epitomizes the frontier: "I was raised in North Carolina, got religion in Tennessee, married in Madison county, Kentucky, and emigrated and settled in Missouri in 'early times.'"<sup>55</sup> Gall Buster is at times correct in his speech and at other times drops into the vernacular; his language is sharply contrasted with that of Jonas Cutting, a "downeaster" who is his companion on various expeditions. Gall Buster's story is full of escapes from grizzly bears, quests for deer, and meetings with "painters." But, like Natty Bumppo's reliable firearm, his gun Sweet-lips never misses. These six tales not only contribute to the development of the American short story but they add immeasurably to the richness and interest of Wetmore's gazetteer. No other compiler of an American geographical handbook ventured so far afield in order to vary the content and style of his volume.

It remains to supply some biographical data about the compilers of these gazetteers which emigrants, prospective

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 97, 159, 284.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

settlers, and readers interested in the Middle West found so important in the first half of the nineteenth century. John Kilbourn (1787-1831), originally from Connecticut and a graduate of the University of Vermont, taught school at Worthington, Ohio, in 1810, and after 1815 was a newspaper editor and book publisher in Columbus. John T. Blois (1809-1886) was a civil engineer from Connecticut who established residence in Detroit in 1836 and subsequently practiced law in Jonesville, Michigan. He served as register of deeds and justice of the peace in Jonesville. John Scott (1793-1838) was a Pennsylvanian who came to Indiana as a printer, founded a newspaper first in Franklin County and then in Cass County, published several books, and died at Logansport. James Scott, employed by the Indianapolis publishing firm of Douglas and Maguire to revise the original *Indiana Gazetteer*, can be identified only as a quondam judge of the Indiana Supreme Court. John Mason Peck (1789-1858), born in Connecticut, was ordained a Baptist minister in 1813 and removed to St. Louis four years later as a missionary. In 1832 he established his residence at Rock Spring, Illinois, where he farmed as well as preached, and for the rest of his life was involved in both education and religious journalism. Peck was instrumental in the founding of Shurtleff College in Alton, Illinois. Lewis Caleb Beck (1798-1853) was a New Yorker, a graduate in medicine from Union College, a specialist in both botany and chemistry. He was subsequently a professor of chemistry at Rutgers. Increase Allen Lapham (1811-1875), born at Palmyra, New York, had little formal education but acquired a mastery of natural science by diligent study. He moved to Milwaukee in 1836 and devoted himself to the botany, conchology, and geology of the area. From 1873 to 1875 he served as state geologist of Wisconsin. John B. Newhall (died 1849) was born in Massachusetts and became one of the best known citizens of Iowa during territorial days; he died of cholera at Independence, Missouri. Nathan Howe Parker (dates unknown) was a journalist and land agent who published gazetteers of Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska besides his books on Iowa and Minnesota. At one time he identified himself as a resident of Clinton, Iowa. Alphonso Wetmore (1793-1849) was born in Connecticut, had little schooling, and served in the War of 1812; he lost an arm in a Canadian engagement and later was named paymaster of the Sixth Infantry. In Missouri he resided at Franklin but

traveled widely throughout the state. In 1833 he resigned his federal appointment, removed to St. Louis, practiced law there, and was copublisher of a literary newspaper, the *Missouri Saturday News*. His play *The Pedlar: A Farce in Three Acts*, published at St. Louis in 1821, reveals as much interest in Missouri local color as does his gazetteer. Like Newhall, he died of cholera. It will be noticed that virtually all of these men were New Englanders. Several were college graduates but for the most part they were self-educated, often with a natural bent toward science. Lured westward by various factors, they resided in the regions of their choice and most of them died there, Dr. Beck being a conspicuous exception.<sup>56</sup>

Their gazetteers were based on the hard strata of personal experience, supplemented by extensive travel, interviews, correspondence, and diligent reading of the available records. They consistently strove for accuracy and completeness. They tried to make their books as substantial, as factual, as reliable as they could, regardless of the fact that the extraordinary growth of the Middle West between 1815 and 1850 soon made their tabulations obsolescent. Personal prejudices are not absent from their accounts, but a century later the most subjective works are often the most interesting. Because of the conscientiousness of the compilers, because of their shrewdness and diversified backgrounds, their books still have value and interest. As the editor of a modern reprint of John Scott's Indiana book recently observed, Scott's gazetteer had omissions and errors. "But underneath he has left a solid core of good history."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> For sketches of Lewis C. Beck, I. A. Lapham, and John M. Peck, see *Concise Dictionary of American Biography* (New York, 1964). For Kilbourn, see Coyle, *Ohio Authors and Their Books*, 358. For Blois, see *Historical Collections Made by the Pioneer Society of the State of Michigan . . .*, Vol. XI (Lansing, 1888), 42-43. For Scott, see Gayle Thornbrough's Introduction to the reprint of John Scott's *The Indiana Gazetteer, or Topographical Dictionary* (*Indiana Historical Society Publications*, Vol. 18, No. 1; Indianapolis, 1954). For Newhall, see Petersen's Historical Introduction to *A Glimpse of Iowa in 1846*. For Wetmore, see Kate L. Gregg, "Major Alphonso Wetmore," *Missouri Historical Review*, XXXV (April, 1941), 385-93; also Scott C. Osborn's Introduction to the reprint of *The Pedlar* published as *Keepsake No. 2* by the University of Kentucky Library Associates at Lexington, Kentucky, 1955. Significant biographical data about Nathan Howe Parker, John Warren Hunt, and James S. Ritchie have not been located.

<sup>57</sup> Thornbrough, Introduction to Scott, *Indiana Gazetteer* (1954), 16.