

Breaking up is hard to do

Regional efforts to secede from Illinois

By David Joens

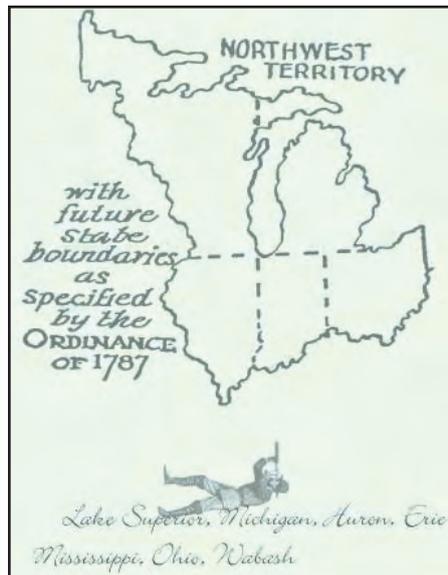
On December 3, 1818 President James Monroe signed legislation making Illinois the 21st state of the union. Just over 200 years later, on February 7, 2019, State Representative Brad Halbrook (R-Shelbyville) introduced House Resolution 101, calling for breaking up of the Prairie State by separating Chicago from the rest of Illinois. Fresh off the heels of the state's 2018 bicentennial celebration, to some it looked like Halbrook was thumbing his nose at the proud 200-year history of Illinois. In actuality, however, Halbrook's resolution became just one of a number of efforts through the years to break the bonds of Illinois' mystic chords of memory. Indeed, the idea of breaking up Illinois goes back to, well, almost the beginning.

Huron: The Fever River territory

In 1787 Congress passed the Northwest Ordinance. The ordinance laid down the future for the Northwest Territory, which was the land west of Pennsylvania stretching to the Mississippi River and north of the Ohio River to the Canadian border. The ordinance called for dividing the land into between three and five states and even laid out the boundaries of those states.

For the states that became Indiana and Illinois, the northern border under the ordinance was placed at the southern tip of Lake Michigan, while Ohio's border included just the southern shore of Lake Erie. However, when Ohio became a state in 1803, it successfully advocated Congress to extend its border up the western side of Lake Erie to add the present-day port city of Toledo. When Indiana became a state in 1816, it convinced Congress to give it a northern border that extended ten miles up the Lake Michigan shore and then east to the Ohio border, giving the state Great Lakes access.

Illinois followed Indiana's example



Northwest Ordinance Map, showing Illinois border at the bottom of Lake Michigan. (Illinois History Teacher 2004, Illinois Periodicals Online, Northern Illinois University Libraries).

two years later in 1818 but instead of just asking that its border be pushed up north by ten miles, it asked for, and received, a border 61 miles north of what the ordinance called for. This area contained approximately 8,400 sq. miles of prime farmland stretching from Lake Michigan to the Mississippi River. It also included the valuable lead mines of Galena. In one fell swoop Congress gave Illinois all or parts of what are now its northernmost fourteen counties, including present-day Cook, Lake, DuPage, Winnebago, Rock Island and Jo Daviess.¹ Congress took this action without consulting the settlers of what was then a very sparsely populated area and certainly without consulting any of the residents of what eventually became the State of Wisconsin.

In 1828, just ten years after statehood, lead miners from Galena sent a petition to Congress requesting that a new territory be created, consisting of mining areas around Galena and across the border in what is now southwest Wisconsin. This area was known as the

Fever River Lead Mines District (the Fever River is now known as the Galena River). The petitioners noted that splitting the district between two states didn't make sense. They also complained that the Galena part of the territory had been added to Illinois without the residents' consent. The petition drew the qualified support of the *Galena Miners Journal*, which wrote "We do not fully agree with the memorialists in petitioning Congress to dispose of that tract of country which has once been granted Illinois, but we think that it would be for the best interest of the miners to be erected together with the adjoining county above into a separate territory." The paper also criticized Congress for violating the Northwest Ordinance when laying out the northern border of Illinois. Although the petition and the newspaper's views were ignored by Congress, historian William Radebaugh, who called the territory Huron, noted the issue of the northern border would come back ten years later.²

Southern Wisconsin

When Illinois became a state in 1818, it became the third and final state in the southern tier of the Northwest Territory, joining Ohio and Indiana. The northern tier of the Territory (today's Michigan, Wisconsin and the part of Minnesota east of the Mississippi River) was then combined to form the Michigan Territory (1818-1837). When Michigan became a state in 1837, Wisconsin became its own territory. That territory's politicians immediately began thinking about statehood. And, some of those thoughts included retaking the northern part of Illinois.

In late 1838 the Wisconsin territorial legislature and Governor Henry Dodge sent a memorial to Congress, stating "that all that district of country lying between the northern boundary line of the state of Illinois, and a line drawn west from the southern extreme of Lake Michigan to the Mississippi rightfully belongs to the Territory of



The area in Northwest Illinois/ Southwest Wisconsin that roughly would have composed a state called Huron or the Fever River Territory. (Lead mines on the upper Mississippi River map. Wisconsin Historical Society, Turning Points in Wisconsin History website).

<https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/tp/id/45908>

Wisconsin.” Wisconsin argued that the Northwest Ordinance had been clear on the issue of where the state line should be drawn. Wisconsin wanted the land but it also needed the residents of that area so it could meet the minimum 60,000 population needed to become a state. However, Congress chose to ignore the petition. A year later, the territorial legislature asked the voters of Wisconsin to approve a request for statehood. That request included placing the southern border of the state at the old Northwest Territory border. Unfortunately, for Wisconsin politicians, voters in the territory rejected the idea of statehood, with or without the lower border.

In the disputed territory, however, voters were beginning to think being a part of Wisconsin might not be such a bad idea. Illinois had been settled from the south to the north and, although Chicago had incorporated as a city in 1837, in 1840 the population center of the state was still down south. Most settlers in southern and central Illinois were southerners with southern atti-

tudes. In northern Illinois, especially after the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, a majority of the settlers were Yankees from New England and New York, or immigrants from western Europe. Although the Illinois state capitol had moved to Springfield in 1839, which was closer to the center of Illinois, Illinois politics was still controlled by central and southern Illinois politicians. And, these politicians in 1837 had racked up a tremendous state debt through an ill-advised plan to have the state fund the building of railroads, canals and bridges, most of which were to benefit their regions of the state. Facing limited influence in Illinois and a large debt they felt they didn’t create, some northern Illinois residents began to seriously consider joining Wisconsin.

In early 1840, meetings were held in nine counties to elect delegates to a July 6 meeting in Rockford to discuss leaving Illinois. On July 6, 120 delegates from Jo Daviess, Stephenson, Boone, Carroll, Ogle, Whiteside, Winnebago, Rock Island and McHenry counties

attended the Rockford convention. Cook County, which was greatly benefitting from Illinois’ constructing the I & M Canal connecting Lake Michigan to the Illinois River, did not have representatives at the meeting.³ Delegates declared that by the Northwest Ordinance their counties belonged in Wisconsin and if that territory chose to have a constitutional convention for statehood, they wanted to elect delegates and be a part of the convention.

The rationale for secession could be found in an 1840 letter to the *Chicago American* from a resident from Pecatonica, in Winnebago County. The author wrote, “Three fourths of the inhabitants of Illinois proper are a totally different sort of people. They have numerical superiority. The most unreasonable and ill-grounded prejudices against us exist among them. We are powerless and our voice is, if not unheard, certainly unheeded in the legislative councils of the State. Whether designedly or not almost every legislative enactment is directly adverse to our interests, our views and our feelings.” Those words, written by a northern Illinoisan about southern Illinois, would echo throughout most of the secession movements in Illinois, with



Picture of the Wisconsin State Flag only the location of the authors and the region being criticized changing.

In early 1842 meetings were again held in Illinois counties but this time, along with passing resolutions and sending petitions to Congress, delegates at these meetings called for the voters to decide if they wished to be a part of Wisconsin. Where election returns are available, it appears as if voters overwhelmingly favored leaving Illinois and joining the Wisconsin Territory. In Stephenson County, the vote was 570 to 1. In Boone, it was 495 to 11. In

Winnebago it was 971 to 6. But, while the residents of the disputed Illinois territory apparently seemed to favor joining Wisconsin, in Wisconsin voters were still not eager to become a state. In 1843 they again voted down applying for statehood in a vote that did not include the residents of the disputed territory. Additionally, a report in the territorial legislature expressed concern that Wisconsin should only annex the area if it was assured northern Illinois didn't bring with it its share of the large debt Illinois had amassed. The report also expressed concern that this tract of land's population would overwhelm the rest of Wisconsin and shouldn't be allowed to join the state until the rest of Wisconsin was equal in population.

With Wisconsin not even sure it wanted to become a state, sentiment for separation died down in Illinois. In addition, in 1842 the state elected Judge Thomas Ford of Ogle County in northern Illinois as governor. Ford strongly opposed separation on legal grounds. And, although he hadn't lived in Ogle County long, his election made it difficult for dissolution supporters to make the case that as a region it had no strength in Illinois politics. As one person noted during Ford's election campaign, "If we must have a man who is opposed to the union of this section to Wisconsin we must not choose Judge Ford, for the simple reason that he being a citizen of the district itself will have a powerful influence in defeating the exertions of our people in accomplishing that object." Finally, Congress also did not want to become involved, having already set precedent for changing borders in the Northwest Territory with Ohio and Indiana. When Wisconsin finally sought statehood in 1847-1848, it recognized the northern Illinois border and Congress admitted Wisconsin to the union with the border firmly in place.

Egypt, CSA

Frontier Illinois was settled from the south to the north, as emigrants came down the Ohio River and then made their way up the Wabash and Mississippi Rivers. Most of the settlers before statehood and in the years immediately following statehood came



While there never was a flag for the secession movement for southern Illinois (Egypt), this recreation combines the well know Confederate battle flag with a pyramid to represent Illinois' Egypt.

from southern states. Some of these Southerners owned slaves in Illinois and many others were at least sympathetic to the idea of slavery. When Illinois became a state in 1818, not one of the state's 15 counties had a county seat north of Edwardsville. Chicago was still 15 years away from incorporating as a tiny village. Indeed, the state capital of Kaskaskia was considered the center of the new state and yet was located just 80 miles north of the Ohio River.

By 1860, things had changed. Improvements in transportation ranging from the opening of the Erie Canal in New York state in 1825 to the creation of roads, bridges, steamships and even railroads made northern Illinois more accessible. The once vacant lands in northern Illinois were now filled up with Yankees from America's northeast and immigrants from western Europe. Southern Illinois now lagged far behind both central and northern Illinois in population and in wealth. The boomtown of Chicago was on its way to becoming the second largest city in the country and a major manufacturing and transportation hub. The invention of the steel plow in 1837 led to the discovery that the prairies of northern and central Illinois contained some of the richest farm land in the world. Southern Illinois found it had more in common with New Orleans than it did with Chicago. New Orleans was closer too.

Democrat John A. Logan was the political leader of southern Illinois. While serving in the state legislature, Logan in 1853 had authored legislation known as the Black Laws, which severely discriminated against African

Americans living in Illinois. If the upcoming Civil War was to be about either abolishing slavery or even preventing its expansion, the loyalty of Logan and of southern Illinois to the union might be suspect.

As the southern states began seceding after Lincoln's November 1860 election, Logan in Congress sought compromise between the two regions of the country. His region of Illinois, however, was split.

The Salem *Advocate* newspaper, in Marion County, openly advocated for southern Illinois to join the confederacy. In Pope County, a large public meeting held in April endorsed secession. On April 15, three days after Fort Sumter, a meeting in Marion protested Lincoln's call for troops and passed pro-secession resolutions. One resolution, blaming Lincoln and his election as the cause of troubles with the south, stated "the interest of the citizens of southern Illinois imperatively demands a division of the State. We heartily pledge ourselves to use all means of our power to effect the same and attach ourselves to the southern Confederacy." Logan's father-in-law, John Cunningham, attended the meeting and helped draft the resolution.

Throughout early 1861, southern Illinois wrestled with which side to support. Reviewing letters sent to Illinois Governor Yates, some said the region was a hot bed of secession, while others said the region was mostly loyal to the union. The night following the Marion meeting, citizens gathered in Carbondale to condemn the resolution and call for its repeal. In late April, union general Benjamin Prentiss stationed a company of soldiers and two cannons by a bridge near Carbondale over the Big Muddy River. Pro-secession residents threatened to attack the company but

Map of Little Egypt. (Taken from Little Egypt Brass Home page) <http://www.littleegypt-brass.com/LittleEgypt.htm>



Logan and other southern Illinois leaders persuaded the mob not to. In May an attempt was made to organize a company of soldiers from southern Illinois to fight for the Confederacy. Thirty-five men, including Logan's brother-in-law, volunteered for the unit, which marched south and fought as part of the 15th Tennessee. Another of Logan's brothers-in-law was arrested by General Prentiss for taking part in rebel activities. Logan's own brother tried to form a company of soldiers to fight for the Confederacy.

Due to its location, southern Illinois was pivotal to the north's success. Cairo in particular, located at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, was vital to the union's war effort if it was to move down the Mississippi River and split the Confederacy in two. By May, the first Union troops began arriving in Cairo, both to secure it from the Confederacy and to prepare for an invasion of the south. With the arrival of northern troops, blatant secession support began to wane.

The death blow for southern Illinois secession came on June 18, when Logan spoke before Union troops commanded by Ulysses Grant, where he called for full support of the union. Although still a Congressman, Logan enlisted in the Union army as a colonel and raised a regiment of troops from southern Illinois. He eventually became a Major General and the north's greatest volunteer (non-West Point) general. After the war, he switched allegiance to the Republican Party, was again elected to serve in Congress and also elected as a U. S. Senator from Illinois. He was the Republican Party's vice-presidential candidate in 1884 and only his untimely death in 1886 prevented him from becoming the party's nominee for president in 1888.

Chicago

In the immediate years after the Civil War, there was no serious talk about dividing the state, in spite of differences between regions and changing demographics. In 1870 the state passed a new constitution (its third), that better reflected the realities of 1870s Illinois, especially with regards to transportation and the

growing size of Chicago. In 1871 Chicago, now by far the largest city in the state, made an attempt to take the capital from Springfield. However, the Great Chicago Fire in October of that year stopped Chicago's efforts. Had Chicago, located 450 miles north of Illinois' southern border, become the capital, the Chicago-downstate split would have been worse through the years. Instead, legislators in Springfield from all over the state generously voted to appropriate funds for the rebuilding of the great city. In 1877 the new state capitol building opened in Springfield, which pretty much secured that central Illinois city as the state's capital. Things began to fray shortly after the turn of the century.

Through the years Chicago and downstate grew in their differences. Immigration to Chicago began to include socialists and radicals from western Europe who wished to unionize; Irish Catholics; eastern Europeans who spoke different languages; and eventually, African Americans from the south. Downstate saw similar demographic changes, especially with Italian coal miners and pro-union immigration, but on a smaller scale and spread out in a larger geographic area. In addition, downstate farmers began to resent the big city. Any big city. In Chicago, the rich governed the newly created board of trade, which determined how much, or really how little, farmers should be paid for their produce. Railroad owners determined, with no government regulation, how much to charge in shipping and those costs often seemed, and, in fact, were, arbitrary. Storage and warehouse facilities, the largest of which were located in transportation hubs like Chicago, charged farmers' prices for storage and the amount they charged too, was unregulated and seen by many farmers as capricious. The grange movement, a national pro-farmer, mostly rural

Map of the proposed state of Northern Illinois.



movement of the 1870s and 1880s, saw its greatest strength in Illinois and affected some changes, as did the later progressive movement of the 1890s. But the biggest sin of Chicago in the eyes of downstate, was that it just kept growing.

Chicago's population in 1860 was 112,000. By 1900 it was 1.7 million and by 1950 it peaked at 3.6 million. The rest of Illinois couldn't keep it. Illinois' population in 1860 was 1.7 million, meaning Chicago wasn't even 10% of the state's population. By 1900, the state's population was 4.8 million, meaning Chicago was at 35% of the state's population. Cook County at one point held more than 50% of the state's population.

Under the 1870 Constitution, every ten years the General Assembly was supposed to redraw the lines of its legislative and Congressional districts, to reflect population changes shown by the decennial census. Legislative districts generally did not cross county lines or, in the case of Chicago, city lines. It was not until the 1960s that the federal courts made almost iron clad the requirement that legislative districts be of equal population. Before then, "close enough" was the mantra. While extremely small counties were lumped together into legislative districts, for the most part small and medium sized counties would have their own legislative districts. Following the 1870 Constitution, each district had one Senator and three representatives. Larger counties, such as Peoria and Sangamon, would have more than one district. As Chicago and Cook County grew, their number of legislative districts also grew.

In the 1872 election, Cook County had seven legislative districts, five of which were wholly within Chicago. After the 1891 reapportionment, Cook County jumped to 15 districts, with the rest of the state having 36.⁴ Chicago grew by 60% in the next ten years and the city filled with immigrants and residents with no connection to agriculture. For downstate legislators, this was too much. Republican Senator John McKenzie of Jo Daviess County introduced a resolution during the reapportionment process to limit the size of the Cook

County delegation to the same fifteen districts it had following the 1890 census. In the era before the court rulings on one man one vote, McKenzie is quoted in the *Chicago Tribune* as saying that Cook was only one county out of 102 and 15 districts was all it deserved. For the first time since the Civil War, secession was mentioned in Illinois and it was mentioned by Chicagoans. However, cooler heads prevailed and Cook County ended up with 19 districts, with the rest of the state having 32.

However, Chicago continued to grow and rather than give Chicago and Cook County its fair share of representatives in Congress and the General Assembly, downstate legislators, Republican and Democrat, simply refused to act. In 1911 and again in 1921, the legislature refused to reapportion the senatorial and Congressional districts. In 1921, a frustrated Senator John Denvir of Chicago's west side introduced a joint resolution in the Senate to create the State of Northern Illinois, which would consist of Cook, Will, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry, DeKalb and Boone counties, and a State of Southern Illinois, which would consist of the remaining 94 Illinois counties. The resolution did not advance. The *Chicago Tribune* editorialized at the time that: "There are differences between Chicago and downstate, but none of which are injurious except in the manner in which politicians use them. The real differences are beneficial." The downstate *Cairo Evening Citizen* agreed, writing that "the great city and the great state should be able to go along in the most harmonious relations." That said, the Cairo paper also urged Chicago to accept limitations on its representation in the legislature.

The issue would not go away however. In 1923, Chicago activist John Fergus reignited the issue and framed it as a "taxation without representation" issue. Encouraged by that argument, in 1925 Cook County threatened not to pay any of its state taxes until the state redistricted. In June of 1925 the Chicago City Council passed a resolution on secession. It had been a quarter of a century since

the last reapportionment and their motto became "reapportionment or secession."⁵ A committee of 150 was formed to look in to secession but a compromise was reached when the legislature voted to grant Chicago more home rule powers, in effect giving it more authority over itself and less interference from the state. Still in 1929 former state representative James Kirby of Petersburg felt compelled to organize a Downstate League of Defense, whose purpose was to prevent the City of Chicago from seceding from the state. In 1931 as the legislature again failed to reapportion, Representative John Garriott of Chicago presented a petition to the House calling for a new state to consist of Cook County. Again nothing happened. The issue would reappear every so often, including a petition drive during the failed 1951 reapportionment attempt, but nothing came of it.

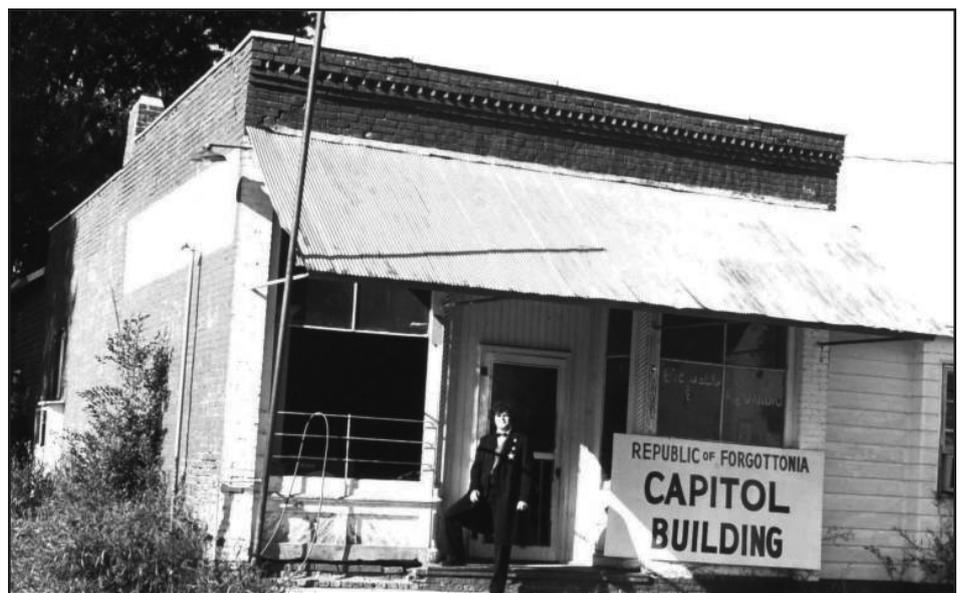
The redistricting stalemate continued until 1954, when voters approved an amendment to the State constitution that allowed the state to reapportion for the first time since 1901. After further issues of one-man, one-vote and redistricting were dealt with by the legislature and, especially, by the courts, the reapportionment issue died down. It went so well that in 1967 the *Rockford Register Star* wrote an editorial complimenting Chicago for

not threatening to secede but merely threatening to steal the state capital from Springfield. That détente didn't last long and two years later, in 1969, Chicago Alderman Vito Marzullo proposed to the Chicago City Council that Cook County secede. Still, by 1971, with the Chicago-Downstate split resolved, at least temporarily, all would seem peaceful in Illinois. It was not. In 1973, a new secession movement arose. This time, it was western Illinois that threatened to leave the state.

Forgottonia

In the 1970s, times were tough in western Illinois. The major road building projects of the 1950s and 1960s that had seen interstate highways like I-55 and I-57 built seemed to skip western Illinois. Businesses and people were leaving the region. Politically in the state, power seemed to rest everywhere but in Western Illinois. It seemed as if the region had been, well, forgotten.

In response, a group of businessmen from western Illinois came together and decided to vent their region's frustration by creating a separate country, based on the idea that it would fight a war, lose and receive reparations (see *The Mouse that Roared*). Later it was decided to just create a separate state, called Forgottonia. The state was to consist



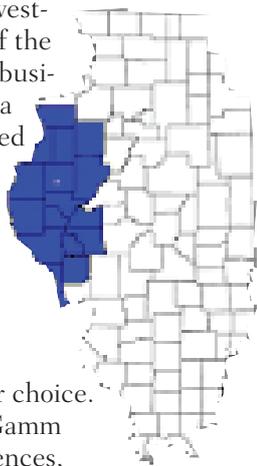
The Republic of Forgottonia's Governor Neal Gamm in front of the capitol building. (CARLI. Digital Image Collection of Western Illinois University). https://collections.carli.illinois.edu/digital/collection/wiu_digimgc/id/651/

of 16 counties in western Illinois, west of the Illinois River. The business leaders hired a theater major named Neal Gamm from Western Illinois University to serve as governor of the new state of Forgottonia. They couldn't have made a better choice.

As governor, Gamm held press conferences, lobbied politicians, visited local newspapers and television stations, walked in parades and attended civic functions. To improve his visibility, he wore a Lincoln-esque costume and travelled in a customized car. Billboards stating "Welcome to Forgottonia" were erected and t-shirts were made on behalf of the "movement." Fandon, in McDonough County, was chosen as the state capitol and the white flag of surrender chosen as the state flag.

The movement took off and even the national media covered the story. Within a week of announcing the creation of Forgottonia, the Mercer County Board voted to leave Illinois. McDonough County followed suit. Congressman Paul Findley of Jacksonville voiced his support for the movement and Congressman Tom Railsback attended a meeting. In November 1973, Gamm attended a session of the Illinois Senate, where State Senator Clifford Latherow of Carthage introduced him from the floor as the governor of Forgottonia.

Eventually, the movement faded. Gamm became tired of playing the role of governor and the novelty of the secession movement wore off. Western Illinois also began sharing in more state funding, with the extension of Route 67 and I-72, and the expansion of Western Illinois University serving as three examples. However, even 45 years later Forgottonia has not been forgotten, at least not as an entity. In 2018 a folk musical entitled Forgottonia premiered at East Central College in Missouri. Photographer Bruce Morton has released a series of



Map of Forgottonia (Wikipedia)

three photography books on Forgottonia. There is a Forgottonia web page. And, recently a microbrewery has opened in Macomb named Forgottonia Brewing. Thanks to that microbrewery, long after the other Illinois secession movements are actually forgotten, we'll all be drinking to Neal Gamm and Forgottonia.

Cook County

As we put western Illinois behind us (can we say as we forgot about Forgottonia), Chicago and Cook County began another secession movement. Actually, it would be more fair to say that a newspaper columnist started a secessionist movement.

In 1981, the Regional Transportation Authority, which provides public transportation for Chicago and the suburbs, was broke and came to Springfield looking for funding. The legislature balked and as the issue festered it became a crisis. In Chicago, *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist Mike Royko knew who to blame. "(The) problem is that the rural yokels and the smug suburbanites of this state dislike Chicago and do everything they can to destroy this city," he wrote. So, using his column as a platform, he wrote several pieces calling for Chicago to secede from Illinois.

Newspapers had a lot of influence at the time and Royko was a Pulitzer

Prize winning writer. However, it was the language and the tone he used that made the issue what it was. An eloquent Thomas Paine he was not. Some quotes:

"Chicagoans have little in common with the small town bumpkins and simple-minded rustics who make up most of the rest of Illinois."

"They talk funny, they eat greasy food and most of them are nothing more than hillbillies."

"Who uses highways anyway? Most of the Downstate highways are for the benefit of farmers, small town louts, hillbillies and village idiots."

"We are fed up with downstate hayseeds and polyester leisure-suit suburbanites trying to wreck our city."

Newspaper editorialists and columnists from all over Illinois quickly responded and then suburban and downstate legislators chimed in. According to Royko, some downstate legislators began circulating "Wanted Dead or Alive" posters with his picture on it and they named a restroom in the capitol building after him. Republican



The Republic of Forgottonia's governor, Neal Gamm, alerts drivers that they are crossing the border between Forgottonia and the rest of Illinois.

Senator Pate Phillip from DuPage County called Chicago a rathole.

The funding issue over the RTA continued and on June 10, 1981 the Senate Executive Committee approved a joint resolution sponsored by Senator Howard Carroll calling for Chicago and Cook County to become the 51st state. While done in a humorous vein, the resolution made it to the Senate floor, where on the last day of session it passed by a voice vote. Although the sponsor was a Chicago Democrat, Republican Senator Roger Sommer from Morton spoke in favor of the resolution, stating “this is something my constituents have been asking for for years. They’ve sent me down here to do it.” Although the resolution passed the Senate, the House never voted on it.

Over the next 30 years the idea of secession was raised but not in an official manner. In 1996, when Governor Jim Edgar and Mayor Richard M. Daley were feuding over a third airport for Chicago, *Chicago Tribune* columnist Thomas Hardy proposed that Chicago secede from Illinois and become the 51st state. He even named it Daleyland. However, Hardy didn’t have the audience that Royko did and the idea didn’t go anywhere.

In 2018 Democratic gubernatorial candidate Robert Marshall proposed dividing Illinois into three or four states. If it was to be three states it would have been Chicago, the suburbs and downstate. Four states would have been Chicago, the suburbs west to I-355, the rest of northern Illinois north of I-80, and the rest of Illinois south of I-80. Marshall did not become governor of Illinois or of any of his proposed states, so the idea went nowhere.

New Illinois

In the 2010s a new secession movement began and it continues to this day. Although the reasons behind this secession movement are familiar there was, and is, a difference between this movement and the ones in the past. In the past, secession movements



Although a Chicago newspaper columnist christened a separate Chicago “Daleyland” in 1996, when Richard M. Daley was mayor, a fictional flag for Daleyland replaces the stars on the flag for the city of Chicago with pictures of long-time Chicago mayor Richard J. Daley, Richard M. Daley’s father.

were “we want to leave.” This secession movement is “we are kicking you out.” Led by downstate members of the Illinois House, this movement seeks to kick Chicago and Cook County out of Illinois.

In 2011, 2018, 2019, 2021, and 2022 resolutions were introduced in the Illinois House by downstate legislators to have Chicago and Cook County become the 51st state. In 2019 there were seven representatives sponsoring this legislation. Because most were from east-central Illinois, they were known as the Eastern Bloc. In addition, there is a group known as “Illinois Separation,” which reportedly has 24,000 followers on its Facebook account and has been working on a county-by-county petition drive to get an advisory referendum on the ballot to separate Chicago and Cook County from Illinois. There is another group called “New Illinois,” which has a web site, a logo, a flag and the same goals as Illinois Separation.

Although kicking a region out of the state rather than a region choosing to leave the state is a new twist, the reasons behind the separation are the same. House Resolution 101 from 2019 talks about fair representation, stating that in 2010 Democrat Pat

Quinn won enough votes for governor in Cook County alone and didn’t need the rest of the state, where he lost in 98 of the remaining 101 counties. The resolution discussed the money issue, claiming that the city is often financially bailed out by the rest of the state. Finally, addressing regional differences, the resolution argues that “the majority of residents in downstate Illinois disagree with City of Chicago residents on key issues such as gun ownership, abortion, immigration, and other policy issues.”

The bottom line is this: the idea of breaking up Illinois is nothing new. From railroads and canals to mass transit and airports. From slavery to immigration. From paying for failed internal improvements projects to paying for struggling pension systems, only the issues have changed. And, in a larger sense the issues haven’t changed either, as they revolve around issues such as fair representation; taxes and spending; and differing beliefs.

Will Illinois ever break up? Well, you know what they say. Breaking up is hard to do. 

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