

PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF REGIONAL CONCEPTS: SOUTHERN ILLINOIS AND LITTLE EGYPT

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It is the purpose of this paper to analyze southern Illinois and Little Egypt as regional concepts, in terms of the extent of their local usage, and to compare such concepts to those used on maps in various publications dealing with the areas.

Information about usage of the terms "Southern Illinois" and "Little Egypt" was compiled from business names in telephone directories. This was used as one basis in determining the areal extent of the two regions. In addition, students taking geography courses at Southern Illinois University during the fall of 1957 completed questionnaires giving their opinions on the boundaries of the regions and the locational relationships of their home towns to southern Illinois and Egypt.

PUBLICATIONS AND LITERATURE

In most publications dealing with Southern Illinois as a region, there is wide diversity of area included and boundaries used (Fig. 1). There seems to have been a tendency to choose the areal extent most convenient to the writer's problem or ambition. Actually, most boundaries simply follow county lines, particularly when census data comprise the chief information to be analyzed.

TELEPHONE DIRECTORY ANALYSIS

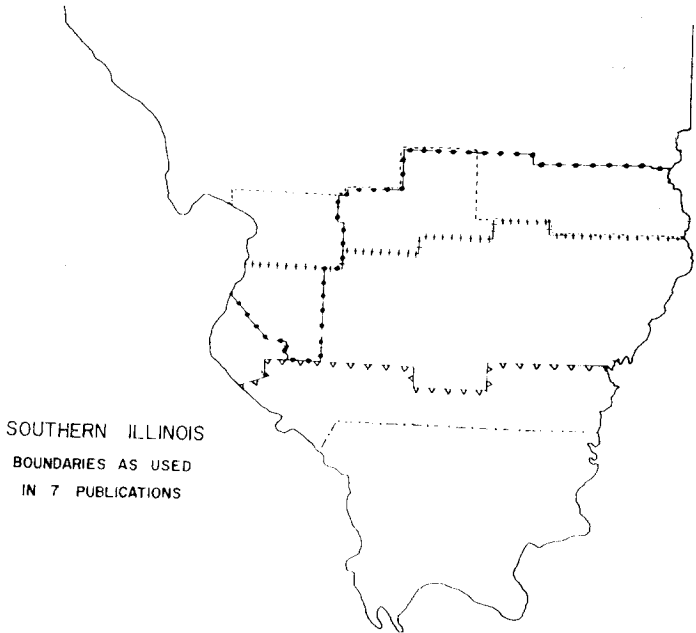
The area, Southern Illinois, as analyzed from telephone directory

data, lies south of a curving line, extending eastward from, and including, Alton to Vandalia and Effingham, and thence southeastward toward Mt. Carmel (Fig. 2). The greatest concentration of usage, however, centered on Franklin County. There was some secondary concentration in St. Clair County, where firms use the term, southern Illinois, in their business name.

Regional usage of the word Little Egypt or Egyptian for company or business names, as derived from directories, conforms generally with the line established from student questionnaires, particularly the home-town maps (Fig. 4). The chief exception is a northward extension to include Centralia and Salem, which reveals a decidedly larger area for Egypt than has heretofore been recognized. Even so, the greatest concentration of usage centers in the "Coal Belt" towns of Benton, West Frankfort, Herrin, Marion, and Harrisburg, although Egypt is almost as commonly used in Anna, Cairo, and Metropolis. In all of the above-mentioned cities, there is considerable local pride in regional identification with the term Egypt.

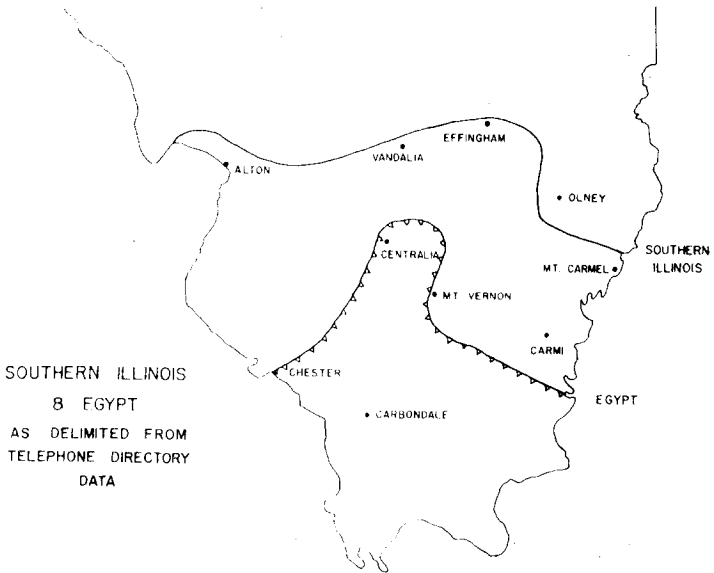
RESULTS OF QUESTIONNAIRE

Students were asked to draw boundaries of both Southern Illinois and Little Egypt on maps and to indicate if they thought their home towns were in the two regions (Fig.



SOUTHERN ILLINOIS
BOUNDARIES AS USED
IN 7 PUBLICATIONS

FIGURE 1.



SOUTHERN ILLINOIS
8 EGYPT
AS DELIMITED FROM
TELEPHONE DIRECTORY
DATA

FIGURE 2.

3). While a wide range of opinions was exhibited, there were much more definite patterns of agreement concerning the northern boundary of Southern Illinois than for Little Egypt's limits. The greatest preponderance of students believed that southern Illinois' northern boundary extends eastward from the Missouri-Mississippi River juncture, paralleling the B. & O. Railroad (but some 20 miles to the north) which, in the past, was widely used as the traditional northern boundary.

Extremes: A few students thought Southern Illinois began along an east-west line just south of Chicago. As might be suspected, those students' homes are in northern Illinois and Chicago. Most students living north of latitude 39 degrees tend to draw the line across the state south of their home, suggesting a tendency this writer has observed among many up-staters to think of Southern Illinois as being that part of the state south of their own home town! The smallest area designated as Southern Illinois is shown on Figure 3 and is roughly that area south of Carbondale and Marion.

When students were asked to indicate whether their home town was located in Southern Illinois or not, a different regional boundary for the Southern Illinois area emerged (Fig. 4). Students who live in Monroe, St. Clair, and Madison counties would exclude their home towns from southern Illinois. There was a tendency for the same feeling to be evidenced among students living near the Wabash River in Lawrence and Richland counties; this concurs with findings from telephone directories, indicating some desire to dis-

sociate one's home town from Southern Illinois, possibly stemming from a feeling that Southern Illinois is the poor part of the state. Home town pride is strong.

Analysis of the maps on which students placed the boundary of Egypt indicated more of a hazy notion of the limits of the area than was true about Southern Illinois, thus illustrating that people generally have an indefinite idea of the limits of Egypt, even though most can tell you whether they live in Egypt or not.

The line used most frequently by students for the north boundary of Egypt is shown on Figure 5 and extends in an arc from Chester to a point just north of the mouth of the Wabash River. Egypt, thus delimited, would include all of the southernmost ten counties and parts of the next tier of five counties, from Randolph on the west to White on the east. The boundary, as established from student questionnaires, follows closely the traditional one. The Centralia area would be excluded by students, although telephone directory analysis indicates that it should be included.

Extremes: A number of students felt that Egypt was a much larger region, and that its northern limits should more nearly coincide with the Southern Illinois boundary, as shown on Figure 3. Only a few thought Egypt should be restricted to the southern tip of the state near Cairo.

Home towns: When students were asked whether or not their home towns were in Egypt, there emerged a pattern similar to that which they designated for Southern Illinois

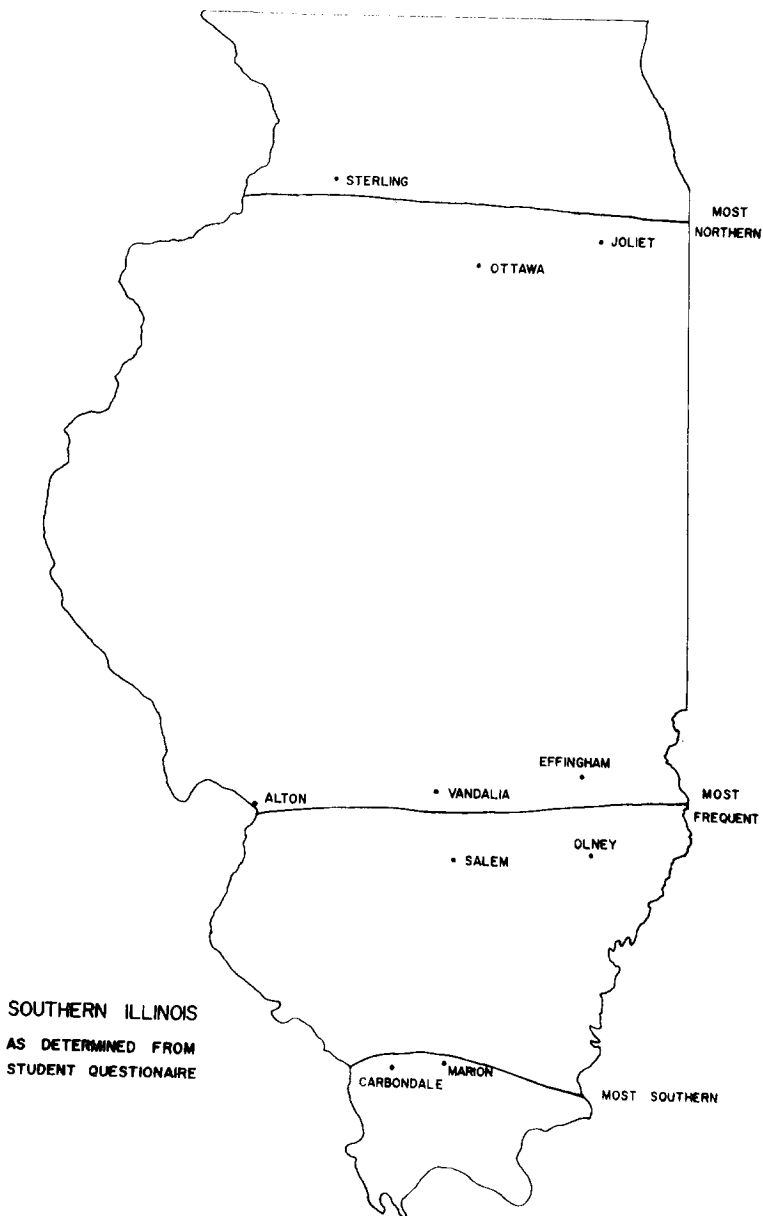


FIGURE 3.



FIGURE 4.

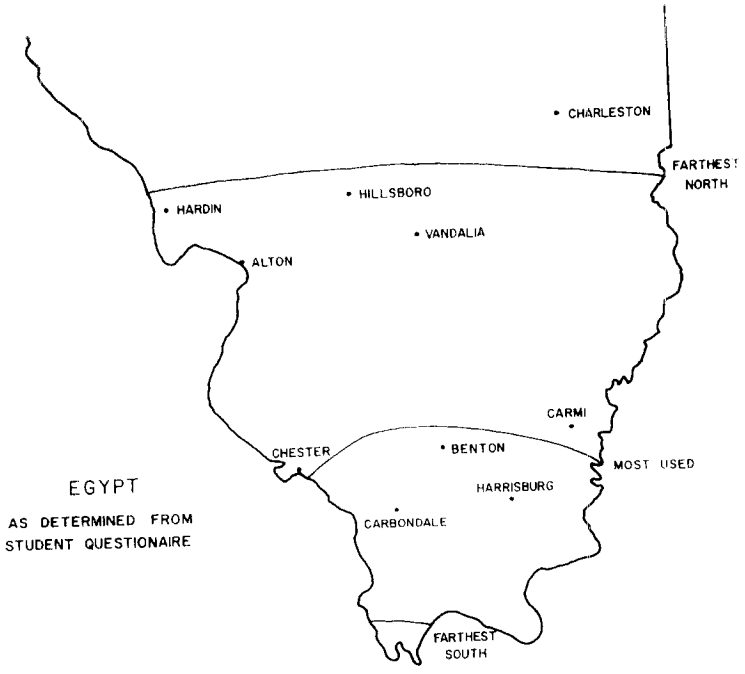


FIGURE 5.

(Fig. 4). Students living in the East St. Louis area and Wabash lowlands excluded their home towns from Egypt. Such students would include only areas within an arc extending northeastward from the Jackson-Randolph County line through Nashville, almost to Centralia, thence southeastward to the mouth of the Wabash River.

CONCLUSION

Apparently "Southern Illinois" and "Egypt" mean many things to different people. Yet, there is considerable agreement on what constitutes the regions; enough, surely, to indicate that the two regions bring to mind an area of more or less definite boundaries, even though opinions differ widely. There has been a tendency in some recent pub-

lications to push the northern boundary of Southern Illinois still farther north. This trend has been evidenced also by the fact that Southern Illinois University has extended its sphere of influence beyond the traditional B. & O. Railroad boundary, as, for example, the establishment of a branch of Southern Illinois University at Alton.

Where the northern boundary of Southern Illinois should be placed evidently depends on individual preference and needs, as much with geographers as with other researchers. There is little in the literature concerning Egypt, and that area is less well defined than is Southern Illinois. Only one publication actually was accompanied by a map of Egypt, and the boundary strictly followed county boundaries.