
GEOGRAPHIC PATTERNS OF ILLINOIS

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Within a state as uniform as Illinois, the delimitation of areas with sufficient homogeneity of cultural occupancy and natural properties to possess unity, and yet with contrasts sharp enough to set them off from the general structure of the state is no small task. The map (fig. 1) presents basic patterns of interrelated areas intended to serve as the basis of further field investigation and the preparation of detailed geographic studies of selected portions of the state. It is not to be supposed that this is the only geographic system or that each area is a faultless delimitation; rather, it is an approach to the detailed geographic study of a state possessing the degree of similarities and differences found in Illinois.

BASIS OF AREAL DIFFERENTIATION

Illinois lies partly, and in a few instances, entirely within regions, provinces, or even realms of major proportion. Areal delimitation of such magnitude, which is shared with neighboring states, places a general stamp upon the state. The corn belt, the prairie, the humid interior climate, continental glaciation, the central dairy belt, the American industrial zone, and the like are elements in the regional personality of which Illinois is a part. Within the state, detail that gives quality to the local aspect is of major importance; it is the spark of life within the broader national or even world framework. Thus, the

distribution of native vegetation, soil, glaciation, drainage, surface configuration, types of farming, settlements, density of population, transportation, and the proportion of total population engaged in agriculture, industry, mining, lumbering, and fishing are the chief items of local significance. No two items present identical state patterns, yet running through the innumerable combinations of cultural and natural environmental details are several threads of unity. In one area a natural feature seems to be the strong element of unity, in another a cultural condition, and in still another a dominant combination of cultural and natural elements. Thus the areas are delimited on the basis of the dominant or organizing features.

MAGNITUDES OF AREAS

The most conspicuous areal delimitation of the state is the presence of three major divisions arranged in a north-south manner and designated, chiefly by lack of better terms, as Northern, Central, and Southern divisions. Types of farming, settlement patterns, transportation patterns, and climatic differences, especially the length of the growing season, are the conditions upon which the divisions are based. A line from the Mississippi below the mouth of the Rock River to the great bend of the Illinois River to the Indiana state line separates the Northern and Central divisions,

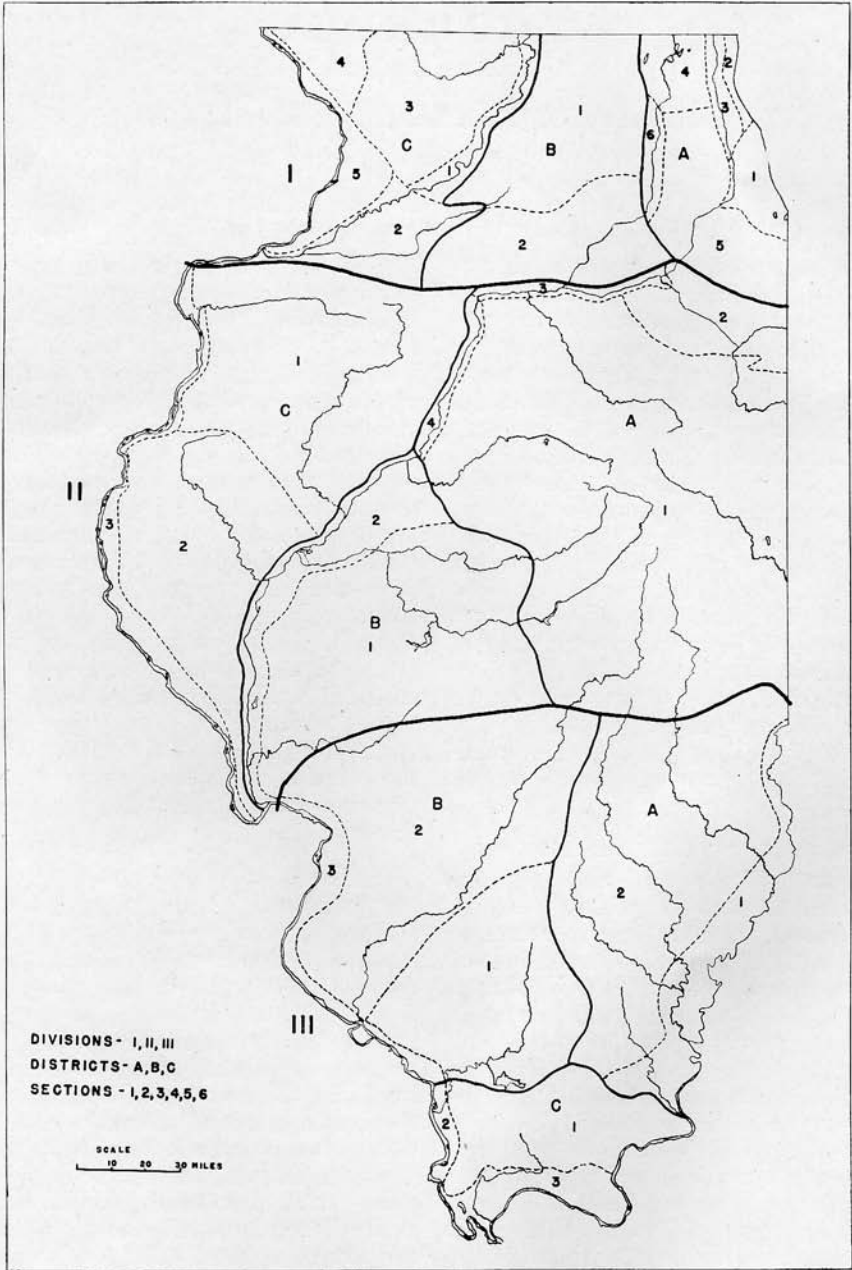


FIG. 1.—Geographic Patterns of Illinois.

whereas, a line from the Mississippi at the mouth of the Illinois to the Shelbyville moraine to the Indiana state boundary separates the Central and Southern divisions.

In a more detailed manner each division is separated into three districts and each district is reduced to several sections. In general the division falls into homogeneous districts in an east-west manner. The Northern division conveniently breaks into the Metropolitan district from the Fox River to Lake Michigan and the state boundary, the Western district from the Rock valley to the Mississippi, and the Moraine border district between the Fox and Rock valleys. Within each district are several sections each of which possess sufficient cultural and natural environmental agreement to warrant the delimitation of an area of that magnitude. Thus the Fox valley is one of the sections of the Metropolitan district and the Middle Rock valley and the JoDavie hills are sections of the Western district.

The districts of the Central division are the Eastern, Southwestern, and Western. The Eastern district is enclosed by the state boundary, the Illinois River, and the Shelbyville moraine. The Southwestern district lies between the Shelbyville moraine and the Illinois valley, whereas the Western is the triangle between the Illinois and Mississippi valleys. Districts such as the Grand prairie, the Kankakee lowland, the upper Illinois and middle Illinois valleys constitute the Eastern division. The Sangamon plain, the lower Illinois valley, the Galesburg prairie, and the Mississippi border are in the Southwestern and Western districts.

In the Southern division the Eastern district extends from the Wabash River to the divide between the Kankakee and the Little Wabash

drainage, whereas the Western district extends from that line to the Mississippi. The Southern district includes the tip of the state between the Ohio and the Mississippi from the northern edge of the Ozark hills southward.

The Southern coal section, the Metropolitan hinterland, the Wabash border, and the Ozark hills are some of the sections constituting the districts of the Southern division. The complete area structure in preliminary form is as follows:

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I. Northern Division

- A. Metropolitan district
 1. Chicago lake plain
 2. North shore and Border moraine section
 3. DesPlaines valley
 4. Lake section
 5. Valparaiso moraine section
 6. Fox valley
- B. Moraine border district
 1. Northern section (Rock tributary)
 2. Southern section (Illinois tributary)
- C. Western District
 1. Middle Rock valley
 2. Green-Rock lowland
 3. Northwestern upland
 4. JoDavie hills
 5. Mississippi border (northern segment)

II. Central division

- A. Eastern district
 1. Grand prairie
 2. Kankakee lowland
 3. Upper Illinois valley
 4. Middle Illinois valley
- B. Southwestern district
 1. Sangamon plain
 2. Lower Illinois valley
- C. Western district
 1. Galesburg prairie section
 2. Upland forest section

3. Mississippi border (central segment)
- III. Southern division
- A. Eastern district
 1. Wabash border
 2. Embarras—Little Wabash section
 - B. Western district
 1. Southern coal section
 - C. Southern district
 1. Ozark hills
 2. Mississippi border (lower southern segment)
 3. Ohio border
2. Metropolitan hinterland
 3. Mississippi border (upper southern segment)