



My Ravinia

Blessings from Nature: Origins of Ravinia's Environment

By Elliott Miller

Illinois is known as The Prairie State due to the predominance of its Tallgrass prairie ecosystem. However, a primal eastern woodland forest sheltered the land along the southwestern coast of Lake Michigan. Towering oaks were interspersed with occasional shagbark hickory and Sugar Maple trees. An understory of viburnum shrubs and the arching boughs of witch hazel complemented the gaps between heaven and earth. In the spring, the shimmering shades of the native crabapple and Redbud trees adorned the edges of forests with garlands of white and sprays of lavender blossoms. Here, the earth was cut by deep ravines that provided contour and vistas. Trillium, Hepatica, dog tooth violets, and other native flowers carpeted the ground.

Ranging from Winnetka to Waukegan, the lakeshore topography is characterized by bluffs rising as high as 100 feet above the surface of Lake Michigan. Deep forested ravines, extending up to one mile long, cut these bluffs from the end moraine glacial ridge (now Green Bay Road) to Lake Michigan. This topography is strikingly different from the overall prairie environment of the region.

Why is our terrain different than the rest of the state? These ravines of Chicago's Northshore were created by the process of erosion beginning at the end of the last Ice Age and continuing for thousands of years.

During the Ice Ages, walls of mile-high glaciers pushed south, scoured the land and deposited sediments in northeastern Illinois. When the last Ice Age ended about 12,000 years ago, the re-

ceding glaciers left behind clay ridges and valleys. The melting ice ultimately created five huge freshwater seas—the Great Lakes.



*Flowering native Crabapple Tree at the edge of an Oak/Hickory Forest
(Photo Jesse Lowe Smith, ca. 1915, courtesy Highland Park Historical Society)*

Highland Park is situated on a high bluff, traversed with deep, picturesque ravines. It is about 80 feet above Lake Michigan. The whole property is covered with a vigorous growth of young trees, which have been carefully preserved in the midst of the residences, and properly trained. The undulations of the ground afford excellent natural drainage, which has been well and suitably improved.

(The Past and Present Lake County, Illinois, Chicago, Wm. LeBaron & Co., 1877, p. 263)

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First Phase of Clavey Road Improvements On The Way Toward Completion

By Jeffrey Stern

Perhaps the best news for drivers as the first phase of the two-year Clavey Road Improvements project heads toward completion is that a temporary roadway is now in place that will allow for two-way traffic most of the way between Green Bay Road and U.S. Route 41 until the work is finished.

Traffic lights will control a section of single-lane operation that will remain while the bridge across the Skokie River is replaced. Drivers will be expected to remain vigilant for construction crews and equipment as the work continues, but the work zone will be a lot easier to navigate with two-way traffic.



One of the most challenging aspects of this year's work has been the removal and replacement of the bridge across the Skokie River. The new bridge will have a wider and safer span to accommodate vehicular as well as pedestrian and bicycle traffic. The 2021 work includes construction of a new water main that also involves repositioning fire hydrants on the north side of the roadway.

The second phase of the project, scheduled to begin next April, will provide for the construction of new asphalt pavement, an 8-foot-wide bicycle path and pedestrian safety enhancements. By the time of the project's scheduled completion in November of 2022 there will also be traffic signal upgrades and invisible but welcome upsized storm sewers.

After all the infrastructure construction work is finished, a separate contract will complete the Clavey Road corridor landscape beautification plan. ■

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Historic Ravinia Station A Gem Worthy of Preservation

By Jeffrey Stern

If it's worth keeping, it's worth maintaining, and the historic centerpiece of Ravinia is an outstanding example. The Ravinia train station, built in the Queen Anne style for the Chicago & North Western Railway in 1889, has been the most authentic traditional station still in use on what more recently has been Metra's Union Pacific's North Line commuter service.



Over the years, of course, the landmark wooden structure has required a lot of upkeep, and even structural changes to meet the needs of the times. In the late 19th Century, for example, one wouldn't want to expose ladies to the cigar smoke, business talk and possibly coarse language of gentlemen waiting for their trains, so separate waiting rooms were created for both.

When some trains began running express past the station, doors on the west side of the structure were deemed to be too close to the tracks. It was feared that someone exiting the station at the wrong time could get blown off their feet by the impact of a train speeding past, so those doorways were sealed off and new ones were created at the north and south ends.

Since the station was in need of a durable foundation, and the floor was often in danger of rotting, Metra in the 1980s put together a

\$523,000 project to address several issues at once. The station was moved off to the side while a true foundation was built a few steps farther east of the tracks, rotting wood was replaced, and the old track-side entrances were put back.

The rehabilitation project included a new shelter for the northbound train platform, a park modeled in the style of Jens Jensen in place of a section of parking lot east of the station, a new platform and new lighting. Inside, the wall between the waiting rooms was removed, the restrooms were both put at the south end of the station, and a water fountain was installed.

Mayor Dan Pierce rededicated the refurbished station September 2, 1989, during its centennial year. More recent improvements have included the decoration of its walls with historic pictures of the area provided by the Ravinia Neighbors Association, and RNA-promoted, vintage-looking waiting room benches secured by the Highland Park Department of Public Works.



Photo 1: Original station doors were too close to the tracks, so new ones were installed at the north and south ends. Photo 2: After the station was moved to a new foundation, doorways to the platform were restored. ■

Week-Long Track Fix Makes Ravinia Crossing Safer

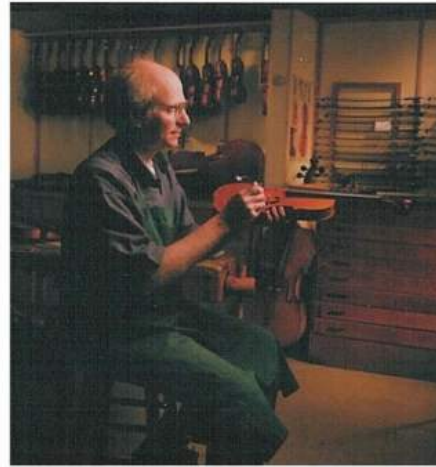
By Jeffrey Stern

What you can't see can sometimes come back to bite you, so the Union Pacific Railroad closed Roger Williams Avenue for a week in mid-July to renew part of its North Line track bed that never normally sees the light of day because it's always covered over.

It still has to be maintained, however, and that's why the paved approaches to the crossing had to be dug up and the concrete slabs between the tracks set aside so work crews could reach and replace the rails and the ties that hold them in place.



With Roger Williams closed, drivers could take Lincoln Avenue West or Lake Cook Road to reach the other side. Pedestrians could use the crossing just south of the Ravinia station. ■



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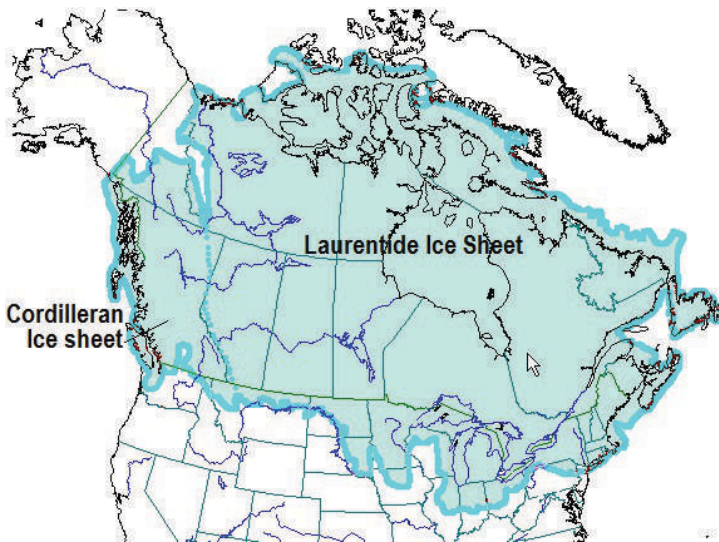
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Blessings from Nature: Origins of Ravinia's Environment (Cont'd)

(Continued from page 1)



shed that slopes directly down to Lake Michigan. (U.S. Geological Survey, The Interpretation of Topographic Maps, Professional Paper No 60, 1908, p. 26)

End Moraines – Accumulations of debris pushed forward by glacial ice flows that form ridges at the margin or edge of the ice.

Slue – An older term for a swamp or bog.

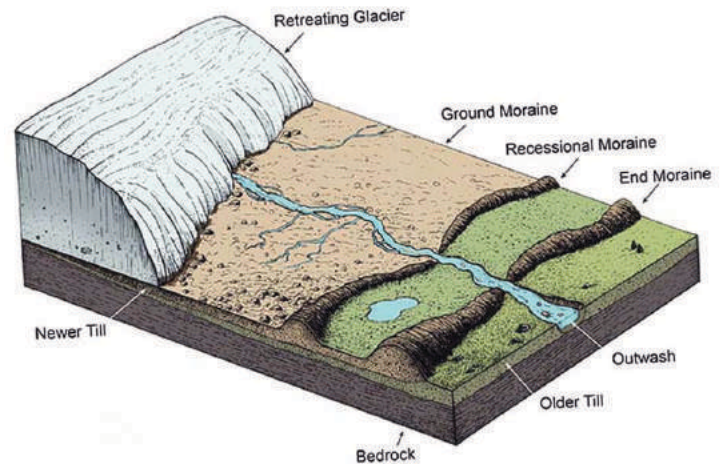
Native American's trails often run along the top of end moraines since the land is higher and drier.

Ice Sheets near the peak of the Wisconsin Glaciation. The northern half of Illinois was covered in ice.

16.1 Glacial Periods in Earth's History, <https://opentextbc.ca/geology/chapter/16-1-glacial-periods-in-earths-history/>

The glacier that carved out the basin of what is now Lake Michigan moved forward to the southwest in colder periods and retreated to the northeast in warmer times. A series of low end moraines, running parallel to the lake shore, were left by this forward and backward movement. Between these ridges were valleys (moraines), which trapped water from the melting glacier, creating marshes. The Skokie River continually replenished the marshes. The eastern-most marsh in northern Illinois was commonly called the Skokie Slue. These ridges and valleys ran parallel to the shore of Lake Michigan. This caused the Skokie and Des Plaines Rivers, which run down the bottoms of these inland moraines, to feed the Chicago River to the south, rather than simply emptying directly into Lake Michigan to the east.

One such ridge, whose top runs northward along Green Bay Road in Highland Park, was left by the final advance and retreat of the Wisconsin glacier in Illinois. This ridge, a banked-up line of debris called an end moraine, formed a water-



Glacier Cross Section Showing an End Moraine, Ohio Dept. Natural Resources

Water from the melting glacier, trapped behind the glacial ridge, began to create gullies down the lake side of this ridge, following irregularities in the surface of the ridge down to the lake. Subsequent rain and melting snow broadened and deepened the gullies into gorges.

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Blessings from Nature: Origins of Ravinia's Environment (Cont'd)

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These ravines are incipient valleys — gullies grown big. They have steep slopes, as shown by the crowded contours that border them on both sides. Some of them are no more than a quarter of a mile long, others are a full mile. There are numerous short gullies on the sides of the larger ones. Such a ravine as that north of Ravinia illustrates the general plan of a river-valley system, and many a valley system is but a further development of the sort of ravine ... The ravines are lengthened at their heads by successive rains, just as the common gully or "wash" is lengthened by head erosion with every passing shower. (U.S. Geological Survey, *The Interpretation of Topographic Maps*, 1908, p 26)



A current view to the west atop the Green Bay Road end moraine at Highland Place showing a drop in elevation. Before 1950, this would have been a view of the Skokie marshlands.

Prairie ecosystems are maintained by several ecological factors:

- Brush fires, often sparked by lightning strikes, would sweep across the prairie, which burned the enormous accumulation of dead grasses and renewed the vegetation. The Plains Indians would start fires to attract game to new grasses. Ranchers today start fires to improve cattle forage.
- Grazing by bison and other foragers disturbed the vegetation and opened new areas for seeds to sprout in the prairie.
- The Skokie Sedge/Cattail marsh formed a natural barrier to grass fires, and the topography of the western shore of Lake Michigan ensured protection from prairie incursion.
- Trees and woody shrubs took a foothold along the western Lake Michigan shore. Trees create shade causing further restrictions in sunlight available to most prairie plants that need full sun.

Volo Bog is a living example of the morainic marsh in Illinois.

The word "skokie" comes from a Potawatomi Native American term for marsh, which once extended north from the present-day village of Skokie.

The Skokie River (North Branch of the Chicago River) was channeled, and the Skokie marsh was drained by the Army Corp of Engineers in the 1950s. Thus, the Northshore lost a valuable marshland ecosystem but gained a highway — the Edens, which largely paved over the marsh.

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Blessings from Nature: Origins of Ravinia's Environment (Cont'd)

(Continued from page 9)



“Today the uncleared portion of the morainic uplands of Lake County are covered with a forest dominated by the oaks and hickory, hard maple, scarlet maple, ash and linden well represented and flanked by a varying undergrowth of hawthorn, witch hazel, sumac, plum, wild crab, ironwood, etc.” (Jesse Lowe Smith, Flora of Lake County, in Halsey, John, editor. History of Lake County Illinois, Roy S. Bates, 1912, p. 325)



The ravines from Glencoe to Lake Forest and the Skokie marshes to the west. Source: U.S. Geological Survey, *The Interpretation of Topographic Maps*, Professional Paper No 60, 1908, Pl. XXIII, <https://pubs.usgs.gov/pp/0060/report.pdf>

“...the great ravines which have worked back from the lake shore deep within the morainic barrier fronting the lake are of interest equally to the student of earth processes and to the nature lover in general. Their great beauty and the picturesqueness and diversity they give to the landscape of the “north shore” should insure them for all time to come from despoilment and doubtful ‘improvement.’” (Jesse Lowe Smith, *Physical Geography of Lake County*, in Halsey, John, editor, *History of Lake County*, Roy S. Bates, 1912, p. 323)



(Continued on page 11)

Blessings from Nature: Origins of Ravinia's Environment (Cont'd)

(Continued from page 10)



Despite the fact that Ravinia is located in the American Midwest, its ecosystem is more similar to the eastern woodlands. To the west are a series of open savannahs and short grass prairies in swampy areas, eventually followed by the Tallgrass Prairie. The quirks of this moraine geology – alternating ridge and marsh – created a buffer between the woodlands of the east and the prairies of the Midwest. The result was the coexistence of several different ecosystems within a space of several miles.

“From the county line to Waukegan, only a narrow strip of beach separates the shoreline from the foot of the precipitous bluffs; this strip is frequently broken where the waves beat directly against the front of the clay headlands.” (Jesse Lowe Smith, *Physical Geography of Lake County Illinois*, p. 323.)



(Left) Jesse Lowe Smith (1869-1934) was a remarkable educator, naturalist, and accomplished photographer whose quotes and photographs are presented in this chapter. Superintendent of Highland Park Schools, Smith's lantern slides, used in an early type of image projector, were taken between 1910 and 1920. They were used to teach about the environment in the Highland Park classrooms. (Right) Whorled Milkweed: A native plant common to the northern prairie. Photographed by Jesse Lowe Smith ca. 1915.



Edith Watson, President of the Ravinia Garden Club (right) and May T. Watts (left), a noted naturalist and resident of Ravinia May Watts is giving a magic lantern presentation showing the different environments in Highland Park to the garden club members, ca. 1930. She probably used Jesse Lowe Smith's lantern slides for this presentation.

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Blessings from Nature: Origins of Ravinia's Environment (Cont'd)

(Continued from page 11)



The Skokie Marshland created by water trapped between ridges of the moraines, JLS ca. 1915.



*Interrupted Fern (*Osmunda Claytoniana*) in Oak/Hickory Woods (photographed by E.E. Parratt, hand-colored, ca. 1915.)*



Tallgrass Prairie – rich, flat land as far as the eye can see – the predominate ecosystem in Illinois.



The Cary Avenue Ravine at Rosewood Park exhibits an Eastern Woodlands environment – an uncommon ecosystem in Illinois.

New Plantings Under Way for Park Adjoining Ravinia Metra Station

By Jeffrey Stern

The great thing about new plantings is that if the work is done with appropriate consideration for what belongs in a particular setting, and can be properly cared for, the results can be enjoyed for years to come. That's what Ravinia residents can look forward to, now that the City has begun upgrading a prominent site in the Ravinia Business District.

According to City Forester Ben Miller, the plan is to incorporate native species into the formal landscaping of the small park on the east side of the Ravinia Metra Station. Enhancements also involve clearing out the mostly non-native species that were planted the last time the property was landscaped.



Miller noted that the new plantings will take a year or two to grow into what will truly become a community asset. He said the station landscap-

ing is being done in conjunction with other Ravinia Business District improvements, such as new street lights, streetscape renovations and the pollinator garden along the Robert McClory Bike Path.

The construction of a new Ravinia Fire Station, scheduled for 2022 on the site of the existing 92-year-old facility, will provide yet another improvement giving the Business District up-to-date amenities while maintaining Ravinia's historic small-town charm. ■



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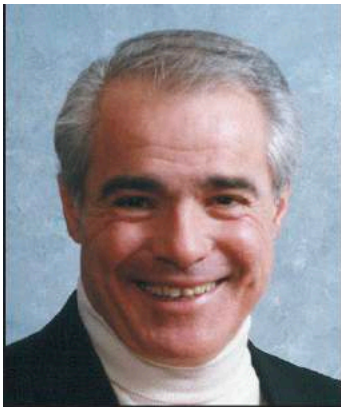
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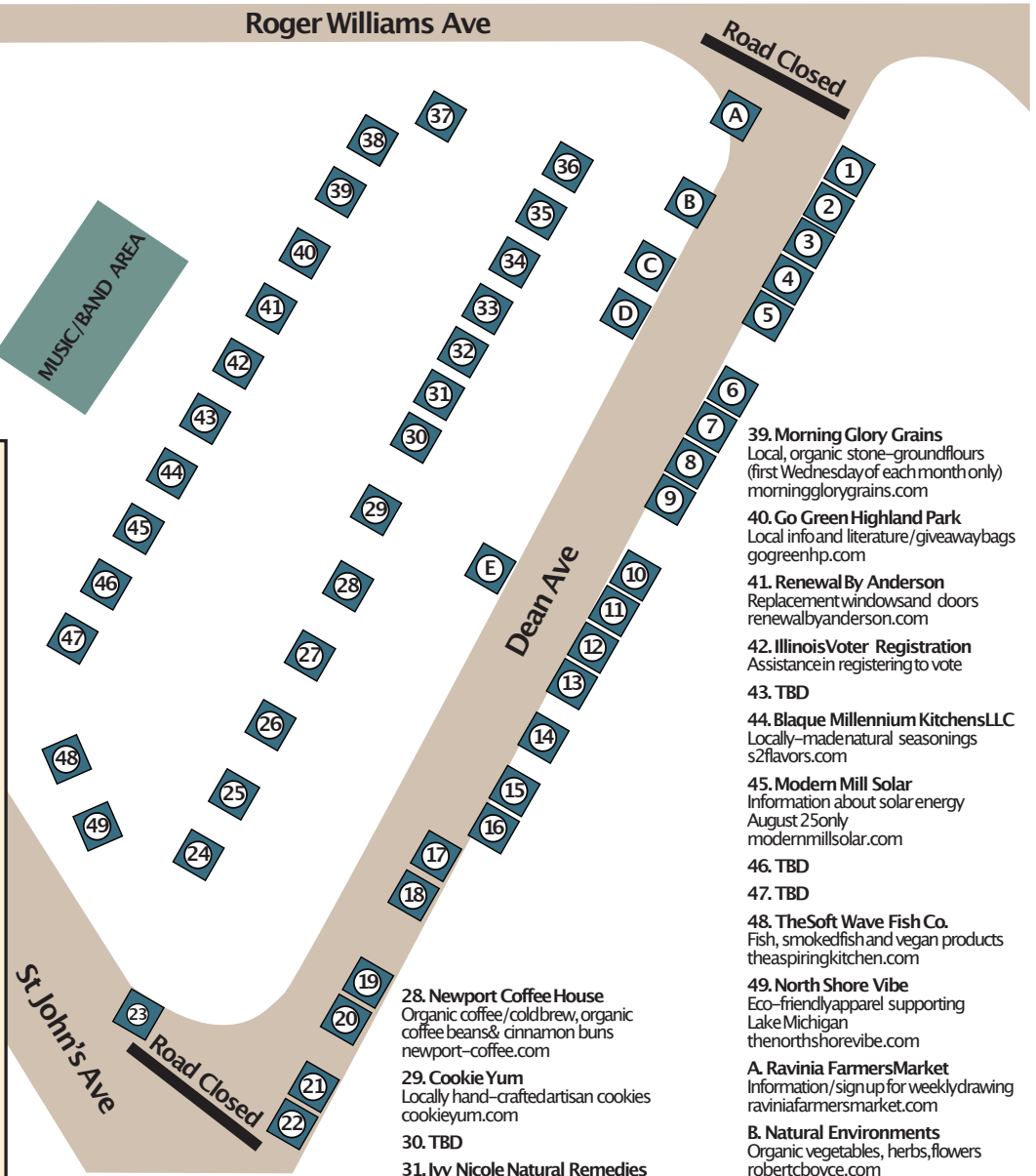
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Regular RNA meetings are normally held on the first Thursday of every month.
Meetings offer our members a chance to bring up new ideas and discuss issues you care about.

Our next meeting is to be virtual via conference call on Thursday, October 7th