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## Hancock County, Illinois

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**Abstract:** A short historical essay on Hancock County, Illinois, where Nauvoo was located, and which occupies an important place in Latter-day Saint history.

## HANCOCK COUNTY, ILLINOIS.

## GENERAL DESCRIPTION.

Hancock County, Illinois, the headquarters of the Church from 1839 to 1846, is situated about forty miles north of the centre of the State of Illinois, on its west line, and within what is known as the "Military Bounty Land Tract." It is bounded on the south by Adams County, to which it was attached from 1825 to 1829, east by McDonough and Schuyler, north by Henderson, and west by the Mississippi River, which separates it from Clarke County, Missouri, and Lee County, Iowa, and constitutes about two-fifths of its whole boundary. It lies between 40 degrees and 10 minutes and 40 degrees and 40 minutes north latitude; and between 13 degrees and 35 minutes and 14 degrees and 5 minutes west longitude from Washington. It is 30 miles long from north to south, and on an average of 24 miles wide from east to west—its northern line measuring just 12 miles to its intersection with the Mississippi, while its southern measures a little over 30 miles. Its western line, following the meanderings of the river, measures about 45 miles.

The county includes 16 whole congressional townships and 8 fractional ones (the 8 being about equal to  $5\frac{1}{2}$  whole ones), subdivided into 769 square miles, or sections, containing about 492,160 acres.

The central portion of the county is composed of one grand prairie, bordered on the west by the wooded bluffs of the Mississippi, and east and south by the timber lands skirting the margins of Crooked and Bear Creeks, and their numerous tributaries.

The Burlington branch of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad, passing through the county from Dallas City to the southwest corner of Section 35, Township 3 north, of Range 7 west, cuts it into two nearly equal parts; while an east and west line, following the T., W. & W. Railroad to Carthage, thence east through the centre of Carthage and Hancock Townships, would divide it into nearly equal portions in the other direction. The east half of the county contains the most woodland, being intersected by the many streams tributary to Crooked Creek. Most of the woodlands bordering on Bear Creek and branches are in the west half.

The soil upon the prairie land is usually a deep black loam, with a brown clay subsoil. On the ridges that skirt the streams the soil is usually a chocolate brown, loamy clay, becoming locally light brown or yellow, on the slopes of the hills, from the predominant character of the subsoil. The timber on these ridges consists for the most part of black and white oak and hickory, with an undergrowth of red-bud, sassafras and hazel. On the more level portions of the timbered uplands we find, in addition to these, elm, linden, wild cherry and honey locust. The soil on the lands where the last named varieties of timber are found is fully equal, in its productive capacity, to that of the prairies, while that on the oak ridges is comparatively thin. In the southwest portion of the county there is a wide belt of alluvial bottom skirting the Mississippi River, commencing at the city of Warsaw, and extending

to the south line of the county, with an average width of about three miles. A part of this bottom is prairie, and a part is covered with a heavy growth of timber, consisting of cottonwood, sycamore, red and slippery elm, black and white walnut, ash, hackberry, honey locust, pecan, persimmon, pawpaw, coffee-nut, white maple, red birch, linden and mulberry, and the common varieties of oak, and shell-bark and pig-nut hickory. The greater portion of this bottom is susceptible of cultivation, and possesses a sandy soil that is not surpassed in its productive capacities, by any other portion of the county. It is subject to overflow, however, during seasons of extraordinary high water.

Springs are not abundant in the county, but are occasionally found at the base of the river bluffs and in the valleys of the small streams. Good wells are usually obtained on the uplands at depths varying from twenty to forty feet. All the uplands are covered by accumulations of drift, varying in thickness from twenty to sixty feet or more.

"A large portion of the material composing the drift deposits," writes Mr. Worthen, in his "Geology of Illinois," "has been transported from a distance, and many of the boulders are derived from the metamorphic strata of Lake Superior, several hundred miles from the spot where they are found. Many of these boulders are of great size and many tons weight, and must have required a mighty force to transport them to their present position. One of these may be seen at the foot of the bluffs between Nauvoo and Appanoose, composed of the metamorphic rock of the Northwest, which is

nearly twenty feet in diameter. The power required to wrench such a mass of rock from its native bed and transport it, for hundreds of miles, with a force sufficient to obliterate all its angles, is inconceivably great; but here is the boulder of granite, nearly five hundred miles, as the crow flies, from the nearest known outcrop of this kind of rock, giving unmistakable evidence that such a result has been accomplished. Several specimens of native copper have been found in the drift deposits of this county, which, from their appearance, leave no doubt that they have been transported from the copper region of Lake Superior."

Hancock County is well supplied with good building stone. There are numerous mounds throughout the county, as in many other sections of the State and the whole Mississippi valley. They are found chiefly on the bluffs bordering the river and the smaller streams. In some instances they are in the open prairie, but most of them are in the timbered lands, and often covered with large trees. They are mostly small, of various sizes and elevations, from a few feet in height up to 15 or 20, and from 10 to 40 or 50 feet in diameter.

Two larger mounds, however, are known. One of these is the Gittings Mound in the north part of the county, which covers nearly a section of land and is perhaps 50 feet high. The other is what is known as the "Big Mound" in Appanoose Township. This mound, which is situated about seven miles east of Nauvoo, on the open prairie, is mentioned several times in the history of Joseph Smith. On the east, south and west of it, the prairie is quite level for several miles, but on the north it is



approached by the broken timbered lands skirting the river bluffs. It is not less than 40 to 50 feet high, while it is about one-fourth of a mile in diameter. It belongs to the estate of the late Amos Davis, who chose it for the site of his fine residence, which occupies its summit.

The population of Hancock County in 1880, according to the U. S. census, was 35,376 (559 less than in 1870), divided among its 26 townships as follows:

Augusta Township.....	1,894
St. Mary's Township.....	1,538
Hancock Township.....	1,130
Fountain Green Township.....	1,254
La Harpe Township.....	1,898
Chili Township.....	1,418
Harmony Township.....	1,246
Carthage Township.....	2,686
Pilot Grove Township.....	1,229
Durham Township.....	1,098
St. Alban's Township.....	1,280
Bear Creek Township.....	1,189
Prairie Township.....	1,229
Rock Creek Township.....	1,444
Pontoosuc Township.....	789
Dallas Township.....	1,144
Walker Township.....	1,612
Wythe Township.....	1,135
Montehello Township.....	1,977
Sonora Township.....	1,399
Appanoose Township.....	846
Rocky Run Township.....	855
Wilcox Township.....	588
Warsaw Township.....	3,105
Nauvoo Township.....	1,399

The eight principal towns of the county at that time ranked in population as follows: Warsaw 3,105; Carthage, the county seat, 1,594; Nauvoo 1,402; Hamilton 1,025; Augusta 1,015; La Harpe 958; Dallas 714, and Plymouth, 593.

#### HISTORY.

That part of Illinois which now constitutes Hancock County, was first settled in 1814 by the establishment of Fort Johnson and Fort Edwards on the present site of Warsaw. Fort Johnson was burned by

the troops a few months after it was first located, but Fort Edwards existed until 1824, when it was evacuated and its garrison removed to Fort Armstrong.

Illinois was admitted into the Union in 1818. Only eight or ten counties, including Madison, had then been organized. Out of Madison Pike County was formed in 1821, and in 1825 several counties were formed from the latter, among which were Adams and Hancock Counties—the latter being attached to Adams until such time as its population would justify a separate organization.

Whether there was at the date of the State's admission into the Union a single white inhabitant, other than the garrison at Fort Edwards, within the territory now included in Hancock County, is not known; but there were a few in 1825, when Adams County was organized.

Hancock was first organized as a separate county in 1829, and the order issued for its organization represented that the county at that time contained 350 persons, the number fixed by law to enable it to maintain a separate existence. Counting one to five of its population would give it 70 adult male citizens. At the first session of the county commissioners court, held in August, 1829, there were 66 men chosen to serve as jurors and fill the various offices in the county. Thus it will be seen that it required nearly all the male citizens to put the county machinery in motion.

In the history of Hancock County by Thomas Gregg, published in 1880, the status of the county at the time the Saints settled there is given in the following language:

“At that time (1839) there was a little village on the river shore, where Nauvoo now stands, called Commerce, with but a few houses. Below was the farm of Hugh White, and out northeast on the hill, where the Temple since stood, was the farm of Daniel H. Wells, another old settler, who \* \* \* joined the Church, and finally left with the rest for Salt Lake, where he has since become a leader high in authority among them. Alongside of this village of Commerce lay the lots and squares, and streets and parks of Commerce City—a *paper town* which, a few months before, had been ushered into existence by a brace of Eastern speculators.

“Opposite, across the Mississippi, in the then Territory of Iowa, stood the barracks of the old fort Des Moines, but lately vacated by the U. S. Dragoons and occupied by a few settlers. Here was also the land-office of the New York half-breed land company. The village of Keokuk, on the same side and twelve miles below, also on the half-breed lands, had but a few inhabitants, while Fort Madison, above, had a somewhat larger population.

“In Hancock County was Warsaw, 18 miles below, with a population of, say, 300; Carthage, the county seat, had not so many; Augusta, St. Mary's, Plymouth, Fountain Green, La Harpe, Chili, and a few others, had been laid out (chiefly in 1836), and contained each a few families, and were in the midst of young and fast growing settlements. There was no newspaper in the county; *The Carthaginian*, at Carthage, had, in 1836-37, a sickly existence, and had now 'gone where the woodbine twineth.' The population of the

county was probably 6,000; by the census of 1840 it was 10,000, including the then Mormon emigrants.\*

“Such was the status of Hancock County and its neighborhood when the Mormon exodus from Missouri began. That people crossed directly eastward to Quincy, in Illinois, through North Missouri, as the nearest and best route to a place of safety. Their leader was yet in jail, but he, somehow escaping, soon made his appearance among them, and at once began operations for planting a 'new Stake,' and gathering his followers around him. The first intention was to settle on the half-breed lands in Iowa, to which Smith had been invited through correspondence with Dr. Isaac Galland before leaving Missouri. Dr. Galland had interest in those lands, and also resided and held some interest at Commerce. For various reasons, chief of which was imperfect title, the negotiation as to the half-breed lands fell through, and the main body of the Mormons remained in Hancock County, though numbers had already settled on the other side of the river.”

### NAUVOO.

Nauvoo is situated on the east bank of the Mississippi River, in Hancock County, Illinois, near the head of what are usually called the Des Moines Rapids, 12 miles by river above Keokuk (Iowa) and Hamilton (Illinois), 18 miles above Warsaw (Illinois), 50 miles above Quincy, (Illinois), 190 miles above St. Louis (Mo.) and 1,200 miles above New

\*The official census for 1840 gives the population of Hancock County as follows: 5,284 males, 4,724 females; total 10,008. Of this number 1,838 were subject to military duty. In 1830 the population of the county was 448, thus showing an increase of 9,560 during the ten years.