

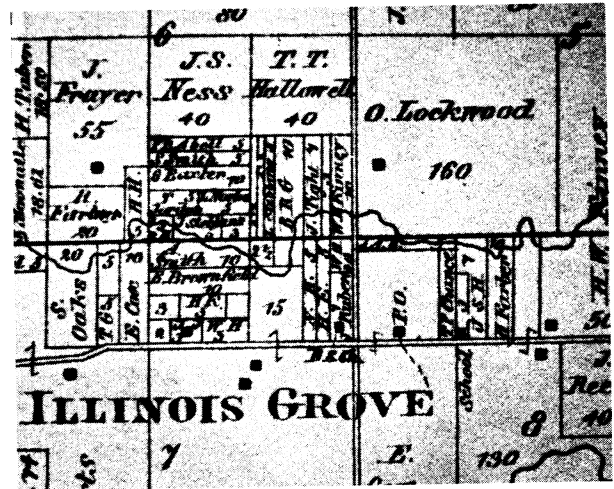
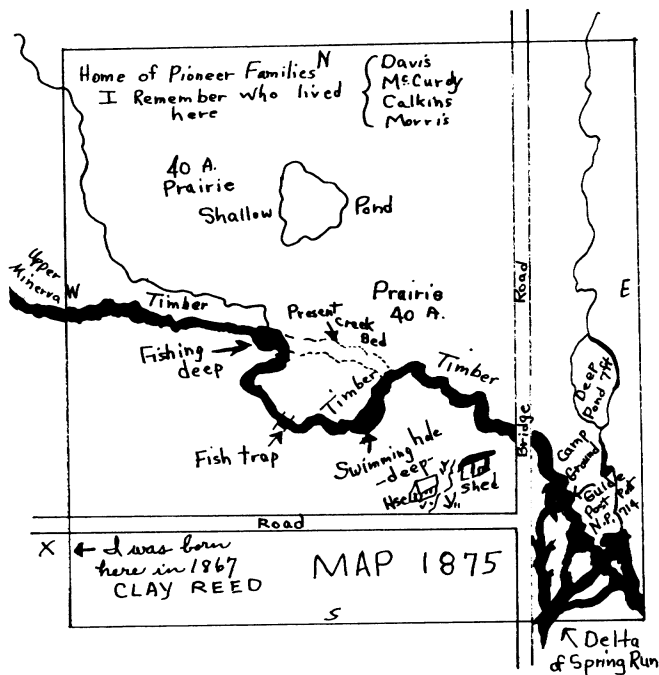
ILLINOIS GROVE

Along the Upper Minerva Creek, also known as Illinois Grove Creek, dense timber existed many years ago. The first settlers came from Illinois, Ohio and Indiana, although a few also came from Pennsylvania and New York. They settled in the timber, if possible, rather than on open land, because the timber provided shelter, building materials and wood for fuel. Clay Reed remembered the time when the timber was so extensive that a person could not tell where Illinois Grove ended and Bevins Grove began.

At the intersection north of the Illinois Grove Cemetery was the town of Illinois Grove, located in Section 6. The hotel, which housed the Illinois Grove post office, was on this corner. The post office was established September 14, 1857, the first one in Liberty Township. A star route from Iowa Falls to State Center delivered mail twice a week.

Illinois Grove is often referred to as a stage stop, because it was on the main road between Fort Dodge and Iowa City. Clay Reed, who was born there in 1867, said only prairie freighters traveled the road, and that it was not a stage stop. When the Reeds first lived in the area, there were only six families living between Illinois Grove and Fort Dodge.

The town had a large trade territory, extending as far as present-day Zeiring and Hubbard. In addition to the hotel and post office, there were two general stores, a livery barn, drug store, mercantile store, blacksmith shop and saloon. Two doctors practiced here also.



Above: 1871 map. Lower left: 1875 map of area drawn by Clay Reed

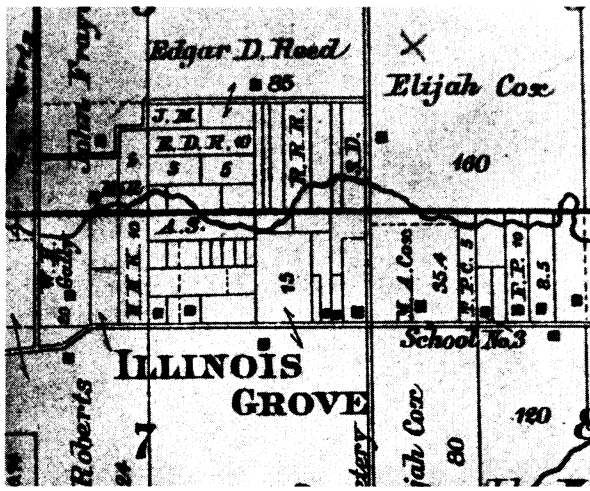
The Illinois Grove School, built of wood in 1874, succeeded the original small, brick school. When Clay Reed taught there around 1885, there were 54 pupils in eight grades. It closed in 1941 and was torn down in the 1950's.

About a half mile east of the Illinois Grove intersection was the Illinois Grove Meeting of Friends, built in 1898. The church had been founded in 1894, services having been held in the schoolhouse until the church was built. The church closed in 1955 because there were too few families to support it. The lumber from the church was used in the new chapel at the Quaker Heights Campground near Eldora and the pews were moved to the Chester Friends Church located between New Providence and Union.

Shortly before his death in 1951 Clay Reed drew a map of the area as it existed in 1875. Included on the map was a fishing hole, fish trap and swimming hole (see map). On the way to the Upper Minerva was a stream called Spring Run, appropriately named by the pioneers because it usually flowed only in the spring. Clay made a fish trap, a box-like invention for use in the stream. Blanche Reed, Clay's wife, recalled the 15-20 pound fish her husband caught in Spring Run, the largest weighing almost 25 pounds. The creek still exists but now supports only a few minnows.

In the timber along the Minerva or in the neighboring woods of Honey Creek or Tipton Creek was the location of the Reeds' annual trapping camp.

In 1904 the Reed brothers, Claude and Clay, along with a nephew, Jim Oakes, pitched their tent in Jordan's timber around Thanksgiving. They then loaded into the wagon the sheet iron cookstove, one rocking chair, one cane-bottomed chair, the bunk bed (which provided room for three men below and two women and a child above), an old door for use as a table, saw horses for table legs, canned goods and basic food supplies.



Above: 1885 map. Below: Reed trapping camp, 1904. Blanche Reed, Clay Reed, Claire Reed, Claude Reed, Jim Oakes

Once they were settled at the camp site, they trapped until just before Christmas. The men thought they had a lot of fun trapping, but it involved much work and they often walked 20-25 miles a day. When they returned to camp, they would spend most of the remaining daylight hours skinning animals.

Blanche complained when they pulled off their socks at night, after their feet had perspired during the day. Claude Reed consoled her by saying that, although he would not promise to wash his feet, he would buy a gallon of perfume when he was finished trapping.

The women's task of feeding this hungry crew wasn't easy either. They baked bread in the camp stove and prepared such delicacies as watermelon preserves and roast jackrabbit with dressing.

A late fall trip was always the best time to get pelts. A season's catch might include 150-200 muskrat pelts, worth about \$1 each (caught in the mink traps by accident), 285 mink pelts at \$8-\$10 each, 400 skunk pelts at \$1.50-\$2 each and 15 red fox at \$15 each.

Coal was discovered in Liberty Township in 1872, several miles east of Illinois Grove. A co-operative mining company was formed and among those who bought shares were: Elijah Cox, Henry Farber, John Frayer, William Holcomb (?) McCurdy, John S. Reed, Abe Smith and James Tight. The mine shaft was 150 feet deep and the vein four feet wide. The coal contained rocks and sulfur, water hampered the mining operation and hoisting the coal to the surface was difficult. In 1876, the mine was abandoned and not reopened.

Today, Illinois Grove consists of only a few hundred acres of timber. The remainder has been cleared and is used for farmland. Deep in the timber, however, are still found bluebells, violets, buttercups, ferns and many other wildflowers, with the Upper Minerva still trickling through the timber.

Some believe that Illinois Grove would still be a town today if the Iowa Central Railroad line had been laid through the town as had been originally intended.

—Karlene Kingery, based on
information from Mrs. Gary Mehlich
and Audrey Fee

