
CHAPTER 1: HISTORY AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

Introduction

A plan that conveys Piatt County accurately demonstrates that it is a product of, among other things, its history, geography, geology, location, and natural resource availability. Understanding the past is crucial to making any recommendations for the future. Piatt County's history is rooted in settlement, expansion, agriculture and manufacturing. This section shows how the county is situated in Illinois and the larger region, how it is accessed, basic infrastructure and natural resource statistics, and how the population is distributed. All of the topics discussed in this section are detailed further in other areas of the plan.

History

Before being admitted to the Union in 1818, Illinois was claimed by the French by right of discovery, and later Virginia through the exploits of George Rogers Clark. In 1784, the land was deeded to the United States. In 1804, the territory of Illinois was established and in 1818 the State of Illinois was formed. European settlers had already moved into the southern areas of the state, and only came into the Piatt County area in the 1820's. Settlements were established as land was cleared for agriculture, and the population grew. Soon, demand for closer County Government grew; petitions were circulated, and in January of 1841, Piatt County was established. Growth continued, and by 1870 there were 10,946 persons reported in the county.

Monticello, named after Thomas Jefferson's Virginia home, became the County seat. The first Circuit Court was held May 1, 1841, in the "Old Fort", which was the first large structure in the city. 1843 saw the construction of the first courthouse, a wooden building. The first brick courthouse was not built until 1903. That building continues to serve as the County Courthouse today.

By 1889, Samuel Allerton was the largest landowner in Piatt County. He converted over 7,000 acres to farmland and established an estate southwest of Monticello. Around that time, the City of Monticello was notified that if a building was constructed, Mrs. Allerton would donate the books to establish a library. In July 1897, the Allerton Library and opera house opened. Mrs. Allerton donated over 2,500 volumes to the new library. In 1900, Samuel Allerton's son Robert took over his father's estate and 19,000 acre farm,



Robert Allerton Park

turning it into a magnificent display of art and sculpture. In 1946, Robert Allerton donated the mansion and several hundred acres of farmland to the University of Illinois, creating a public retreat and conference center.

Infrastructure has been an integral part of Piatt County's growth and development. Villages and other incorporated areas tended to grow up near railroads, grain elevators, and other important community resource points. Piatt County is situated nearly halfway between two Central Illinois city centers: Champaign/Urbana and Decatur. Travel between these populated areas was frequent from early settlement times, and roads were established within Piatt County by settlers following old Indian trails. The first state road was a route that led from Urbana, through Monticello, and on to Springfield.

Postal service began regularly with the arrival of stagecoaches around 1839, travelling on the east-west road from Urbana to Springfield. Stagecoach delivery ceased after the introduction of railroads in the County. Railroads within the county were established in the mid 1850's and carried freight and passengers. Many of the villages in the county had their origins along one or more of those rail lines.

Population grew in the County until the turn of the 20th century, when it peaked at around 17,000 people. Today, the population of Piatt County is estimated to be 16,493 and is expected to grow to 17,842 by 2030.

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Regional Context

Piatt County is situated in the east-central part of Illinois, between Champaign and Macon Counties to the east and west, DeWitt and Mclean Counties to the north, and Moultrie County to the south. The cities of Decatur and Champaign/Urbana are both within a 25 mile radius of Monticello. Bloomington is within 50 miles; Springfield, Danville, Peoria, and Terra Haute, Indiana are within a 75 mile radius.

Map 1-1 shows the regional transportation system, including the major roads running through Piatt County. The County is crossed by several state and federal highways. Federal interstates include I-72, which runs east-west through the center of the county near Monticello, and I-74, which runs near Mansfield through the northern part of the County. Paralleling these interstates are IL 47, which runs along I-72, and US 150, which runs next to I-74. Other state and US highways include IL 10, which runs east-west through the northern portion of the county, IL 105, which runs north-south through the southern half of the county, IL 32 which runs from Cerro Gordo to the north, and US 36, which runs along the southern county border.

Several railroads run through Piatt County and serve most of the municipal areas. Exceptions to this are the villages of Deland and White Heath, which are not located adjacent to a rail

line. The Norfolk Southern runs north-south through Mansfield and Monticello, and east-west through Cerro Gordo and Bement. CSX runs parallel to US36 through Hammond and Atwood on the southern end of the County.

Map 1-1:

Regional Context

Champaign, Dewitt, Douglas, Macon, Mclean, Moultrie, Piatt Counties



The County contains one airport: Monticello Airport, located two miles south of Monticello. This airport has one 2,797-foot turf-surfaced runway, serving small single-engine planes and gliders. Nearby commercial airports include Willard Airport, Decatur Airport, and Central Illinois Regional Airport at Bloomington-Normal.

The topography of Piatt County is generally flat and rolling, with a few exceptions, such as two glacial moraines. The Champaign Moraine runs through the northeastern portion of the county and rises approximately 80 feet to a maximum elevation of 810 feet, also the highest elevation in the County. The Cerro Gordo Moraine runs roughly along the southern bank of the Sangamon River, and rises nearly 70 feet to a maximum elevation of 760 feet. Other terrain features include land sloping to tributaries and flood plains.

Because of the level nature of the land, use is primarily agricultural, with 92% of the County's 440 square miles devoted to cropland. Of the remaining land, 2.0% is institutional or open space, 2.5% are undeveloped, and 3.5% other (municipal areas, roads, water bodies).

Surface water within the County is primarily restricted to streams and small ponds. The largest river running through the County is the Sangamon River, which runs northeast-southwest. The watersheds within the county are the Salt Fork, Upper Sangamon, and Upper Kaskaskia.

Piatt County, along with the majority of the region, obtains a large percentage of its ground water from the Mahomet Aquifer, which stretches from Indiana to the Illinois River and lies under most of Piatt County.

Land cover, as a result of extensive agriculture, is primarily restricted to river and stream floodplains. This is in keeping with the rest of the east-central Illinois landscape of gently rolling fields, broken up by occasional windrows, floodplains, and irrigation ditches. An exception to this in Piatt County is the large strip of forest and grassland that corresponds with the ½-mile wide floodplain of the Sangamon River.

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Townships

As Map 1-2 shows, Piatt County is divided into eight civil townships which provide general services such as township road maintenance. Townships with county highways are contracted by the county for road maintenance as well. Each township has an incorporated municipality within their borders, and several contain smaller, unincorporated towns and residential centers. Table 1-1 lists the populations of each of the Townships.

Table 1-1: Piatt County Townships








Township	Population	Municipalities	Unincorporated Areas
Bement	1979	Bement	Milmine
Blue Ridge	1414	Mansfield	Harris
Cerro Gordo	2199	Cerro Gordo	Burrowsville, La Place, Lintner
Goose Creek	852	DeLand	
Monticello	5604	Monticello	
Sangamon	2014	Monticello	Centerville, Galesville, Lodge, White Heath
Unity	1560	Atwood, Hammond	Pierson Station, Voorhies
Willow Branch	716	Cisco	

Source: US Census, Census 2000

Map 1-2:

Townships and Municipalities

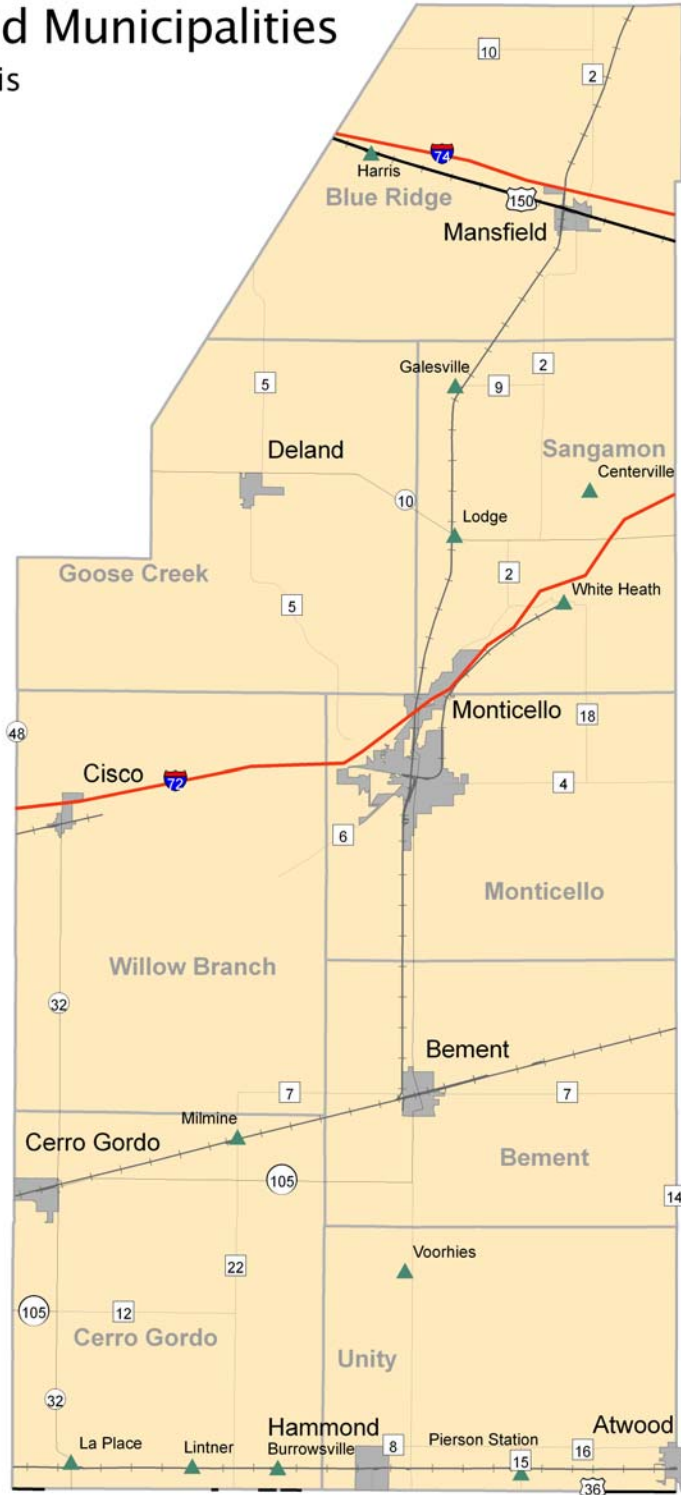
Piatt County, Illinois

-  Township
-  Municipality
-  Settlement
-  County Hwy
-  State Hwy
-  U.S. Hwy
-  Interstate



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Sources:
IDOT
CCGIS



Municipalities

Atwood- The Village of Atwood is located in Unity Township in the southeastern corner of Piatt County, with approximately half of the village lying in Douglas County. Atwood began as a railroad town, and much of the older, commercial development is situated near the tracks as a result. The majority of residential development on the Piatt County side is located between County Road 16 and the railroad.

Bement- Bement is located in the center of Bement Township, in the south-central part of the County. Development occurred in line with the railroad, and many older streets do not correspond with the north south grid as a result. Commercial property is situated along the rail line, leaving residential development to the north and south of the downtown strip.

Cerro Gordo- The Village of Cerro Gordo is located along a railroad near the southwestern edge of the County, in Cerro Gordo Township. Another railroad town, Cerro Gordo also developed off the north-south grid. Commercial and institutional land is situated adjacent to the railroad and to the south, with some development occurring at other locations. Homes are left to fill in the gaps, occurring somewhat evenly north and south of the tracks.

Cisco- The Village of Cisco is in Willow Branch Township, in the west-central portion of the County, and is located along a railroad and south of I-72. Development is centered almost entirely south of the highway, with the exception of one residential development north of I-72. Commercial development and a small industrial development are almost entirely along the railroad.

Deland- The Village of Deland is located in Goose Creek Township in the northwest portion of the County along Illinois 10 and Goose Creek. Open space exists in two parks within the village, as well as along the creek. Commercial development occurs along Illinois 10 and the main north south axis, County Highway 5. Residential areas are distributed evenly on either side of this axis, with the exception of a residential development east of the village.

Hammond- The Village of Hammond is in Unity Township on the south-central edge of the County, north of US 36. Hammond has developed on the south side of the railroad, and nearly all commercial and institutional developments are along either the rail line or along US 36.

Mansfield- Mansfield is located at the northern tip of the County, along US 150 and south of interchange exit 166 on I-74, in Blue Ridge Township. Development of the town has occurred along US 150, with the exception of a residential and recreational development on the northwest side adjacent to I-74. Commercial development is along the railroad at the west edge of the village and at the intersection of County 2 at US 150.

Monticello- The City of Monticello is located in Monticello and Sangamon Townships, near the center of the County. Railroads helped in the early development of Monticello, and the introduction of I-72 through Piatt County has had an impact on growth and development of the city. Development has occurred along I-72, IL 47, IL 105, and several railroads.

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