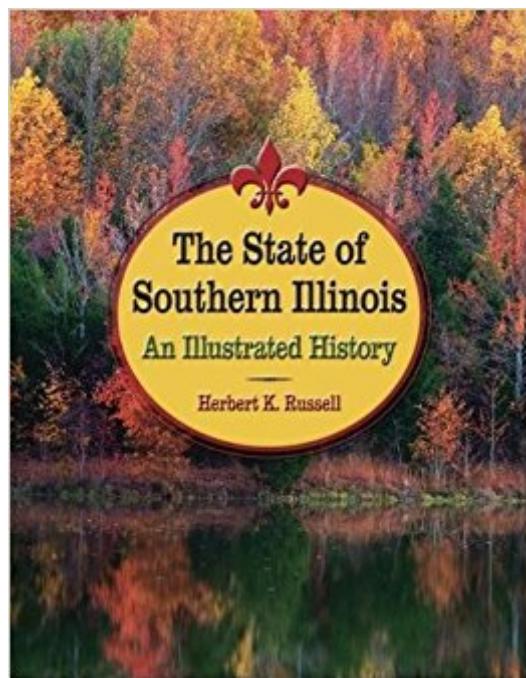


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# The State Of Southern Illinois: An Illustrated History



## Synopsis

In *The State of Southern Illinois: An Illustrated History*, Herbert K. Russell offers fresh interpretations of a number of important aspects of Southern Illinois history. Focusing on the area known as "Egypt," the region south of U.S. Route 50 from Salem south to Cairo, he begins his book with the earliest geologic formations and follows Southern Illinois's history into the twenty-first century. The volume is richly illustrated with maps and photographs, mostly in color, that highlight the informative and straightforward text. Perhaps most notable is the author's use of dozens of heretofore neglected sources to dispel the myth that Southern Illinois is merely an extension of Dixie. He corrects the popular impressions that slavery was introduced by early settlers from the South and that a majority of Southern Illinoisans wished to secede. Furthermore, he presents the first in-depth discussion of twelve pre-Civil War, free black communities located in the region. He also identifies the roles coal mining, labor violence, gangsters, and the media played in establishing the area's image. He concludes optimistically, unveiling a twenty-first-century Southern Illinois filled with myriad attractions and opportunities for citizens and tourists alike. *The State of Southern Illinois* is the most accurate all-encompassing volume of history on this unique area that often regards itself as a state within a state. It offers an entirely new perspective on race relations, provides insightful information on the cultural divide between north and south in Illinois, and pays tribute to an often neglected and misunderstood region of this multidimensional state, all against a stunning visual backdrop. Superior Achievement from the Illinois State Historical Society, 2013

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Herbert K. Russell, formerly the Executive Director for College Relations at John A. Logan College, is a literary scholar and southern Illinois historian who has been a college teacher, an editor and a writer. He is the author of *Edgar Lee Masters: A Biography* (University of Illinois Press) and editor of *A Southern Illinois Album*, *Southern Illinois Coal: A Portfolio*, and *The Enduring River: Edgar Lee Masters' Uncollected Spoon River Poems* (all published by SIU Press).

I bought this book both to use as a travel guide during my next mini-vacation along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, and to use as a historical reference. It fully met my expectations in both regards. The book is a delightfully illustrated and well-written pictorial history of the "State" of Southern Illinois (it is usually pronounced as one word), a region so different from the rest of Illinois that it has always been thought of as a "state" unto itself. I've lived at the edge of the region in Metro East St. Louis and have spent a good part of my life travelling through it. It has always struck me as one of America's more interesting places because it shares similarities with neighboring regions but also has its own distinct character, which is brought to life in this book's pages, pictures, and maps. Because Southern Illinois is a hybrid of the South and Midwest in land, history, and people, it has been subject to various interpretations, depending on how much one wants to emphasize or de-emphasize each piece of its mosaic. Author Herbert K. Russell starts off with its least controversial aspect, the picturesque landscape that is so starkly different from the rest of the Midwest: "The beauty of Southern Illinois is easily explained: nature has spent ages making it perfect, or nearly so." He explains how Southern Illinois was shaped by volcanoes and the intrusion of the Gulf of Mexico, and how it was NOT shaped by the glaciers that flattened most of the rest of the Midwest. This brought back memories of those cool sunny days of early summer and autumn when beautifully shaded limestone cliffs and waterfalls sparkle in the clear breeze. Locals call it the "small beauty" of America --- not spectacular like the Grand Canyon, but inspiring in that Midwestern way of scenic hills, forests, and rivers. Russell then explains the equally colorful history of its early settlement. The first White settlers were the French, who mingled peaceably with the Indians as traders, trappers, and small farmers. The French brought the first Negroes into the territory as slaves. The British held the territory until it was wrested from them by the epic military expedition of George Rogers Clark sent out by the infant United States, 600 miles away across the Appalachians. Then highland Southerners moved in from the mountains of Kentucky and Virginia, giving the area

its Southern feel. Northern Illinoisans use words like "Hick, White Trash, Redneck" to stereotype Southern Illinoisans, and like most stereotypes it is somewhat true. The culture favors country music stars like Gretchen "I'm a Redneck Woman" Wilson who was raised in a rural Southern Illinois trailer park that probably flew a Confederate Flag on the commons. But Russell explains that besides attracting happy-go-lucky indolent hillbillies, Southern Illinois also attracted Northeastern American, English, and German immigrants who layered on a Midwestern character. For that matter, there are more descendants of the original French settlers than is generally known. Due to all this blending of peoples, there is something Southern, something Midwestern, and something typically AMERICAN about the place. Because the settlement is so typical of all the peoples who came to America, the region became the pivot point of national politics from the 1850s through the Civil War. Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas met as young bucks in the little towns of Vandalia and Springfield and then went on to develop political careers debating the great national issues of westward expansion and slavery. Then came the Civil War. Depending on who you talk to, Southern Illinois was either a bastion of Union sentiment or a quasi-Confederate State where people flew the Rebel Flag and cheered Jeff Davis. When the war began Southern Illinoisans joined the Federal Army in large numbers. A year and a half later the Emancipation Proclamation prompted many to desert. After all, these were people who tried to vote Illinois into a Slave State, who lynched Abolitionist Elijah Lovejoy in Alton, who elected a pro-Confederate Congressman, and who turned the Illinois State Legislature into a "Copperhead" body of Confederate sympathizers until the pro-Union governor suspended it. Perhaps the most correct view is that Southern Illinoisans were old style CONDITIONAL Unionists who saw the Union as a CONFEDERATION OF SOVEREIGN STATES wherein each state was to be governed exclusively by Whites. When it became apparent that the Union was being remade into a consolidated republic with the central government supreme over the states and Blacks guaranteed civil rights, many turned against the war. Yet here again Russell paints a more complex picture of race relations than Southern Illinois has been stigmatized for. Whereas African Americans WERE often treated as badly in Southern Illinois as they were in other regions settled by poor Southern Whites, Russell documents a dozen Free African American communities before the Civil War that seem to have coexisted in a neighborly way with the White communities that surrounded them. He explains that there were a few Southern and immigrant churches with Abolitionist congregations. Indeed, Abraham Lincoln may have picked up his anti-slavery views from just such a Southern Abolitionist church that his father belonged to on the other side of the river in Kentucky. After the Civil War Southern Illinois faded away into irrelevance as the centers of population and political power shifted to Chicago, St. Louis, and the other growing urban centers

beyond its periphery. It became notorious for violent "coal mine wars" between labor unions and management and for small-time hooliganism during Prohibition. The book concludes with thoughts of the future, which after a hundred fifty years of decline, may now be favoring Southern Illinois. It is enjoying a renewal of its traditional mining mainstays and is prospering as a transportation crossroads. It is also benefiting from the trend of people relocating away from the metro areas in order to improve their quality-of-life in small towns with low cost of living and traditional values of family and community. It is feeling less like the seedy "Hooterville" from the old Green Acres TV sitcom and more like the "crossroads of Mid-America" frequented by travellers from St. Louis, Memphis, Nashville, Louisville, Indianapolis and Chicago. It is becoming more of a centralized location and less of a remote one. The University of Southern Illinois has brought world-class university education. The book fully captures the blending of the people, landscape, geology, and history that makes Southern Illinois what it is --- both a unique place and one that seems to be core America. The beautiful pictures fill in the colors of a land that is seen in shades of black-and-white while driving through it on I-24, I-57, and I-64. If you live in one of the adjoining metro areas or are passing through from further away this book may persuade you to take some time to explore an interesting, friendly, and unexpectedly scenic part of our country that doesn't get a lot of press!

Finally a thorough history of this region of Illinois. Often ignored, viewed as irrelevant, or just unheard of, the history of far southern Illinois has existed as anecdotes passed down through generations of natives. Fragmented information, lacking the when, how, and why, the region became what it is. Now, we have a book with solid historical research, that brings together many loose ends of tales told through the years.

Herb Russell has written a very educational, enjoyable book, full of little-known facts often refuting the mythology of this beautiful region of Illinois. The range of photos Russell either took himself or was able to acquire from archives, plus a brief but diverse textual history lesson on southern Illinois, blend into an eminently readable book. Highly recommended for anyone, a southern Illinoisan or not.

great gift for someone who has everything!! Such a great illustration of southern Illinois. Makes you proud to be live there

I loved this book. having lived in Southern Illinois during my childhood, I enjoyed reading about the

history of the area. Wonderful pictures, too.

Love the book! Great gift for my father who lives in Southern Illinois. Excellent Christmas gift for the hard to shop for.

This book is an ok book. It has a lot of Illinois history if you care to know more. Its not a book you just can't put down, but slow, steady reading before bed book. will get it to you fast, and makes it easy if you want to return it. What have you got to lose??

Interesting illustrated history of southern Illinois. It took a little effort to get through but the book was worth reading. I disagree very slightly with the author's assertion that his history is revisionist.

Technically he is probably correct but the book lacks the usual revisionist requirement of an axe to grind. Facts are presented clearly without fanfare which helps the narrative. Arguments against Southern support in the region during the Civil War are strong and supported by another recent book about the 5th Illinois Cavalry. Especially relevant are the arguments that the people in southern Illinois chose to live there and would have gone elsewhere if they wanted to. The pictures were brilliantly chosen and the best part of the book.

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