

# Little Railroad Town on the Prairie

A History of West Chicago





# The Prairie

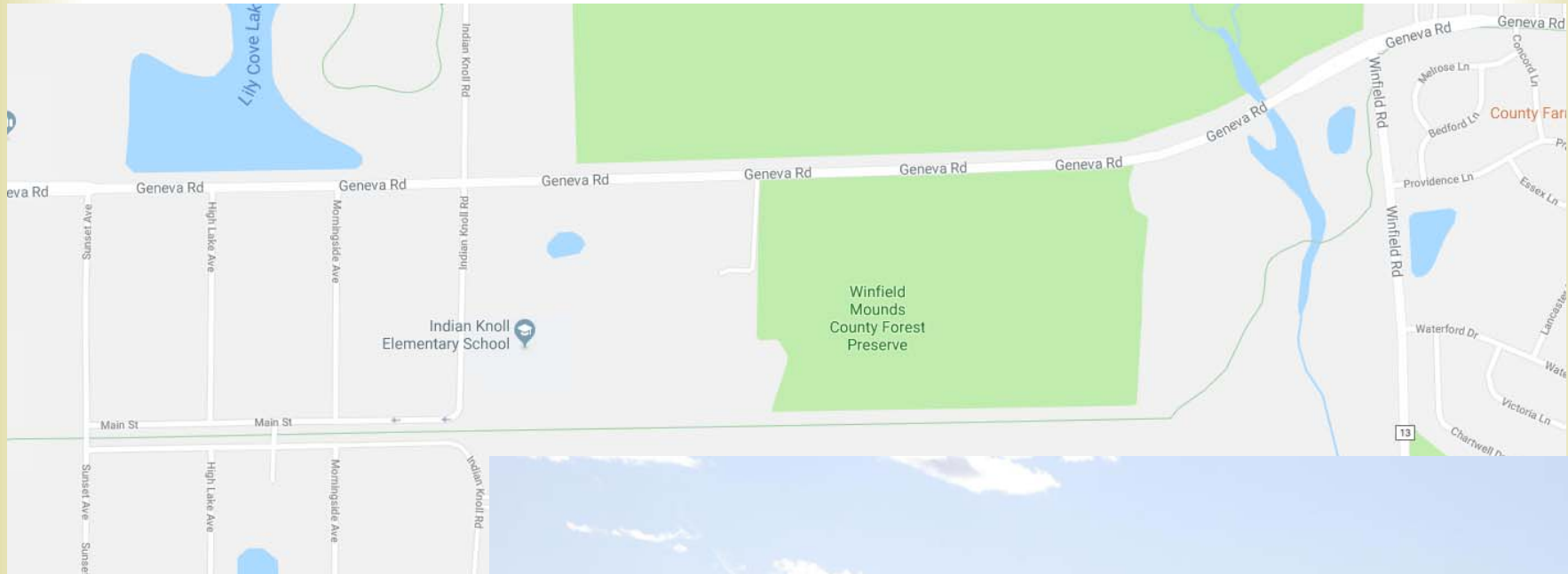




# Prairie Inhabitants



# Winfield Mounds



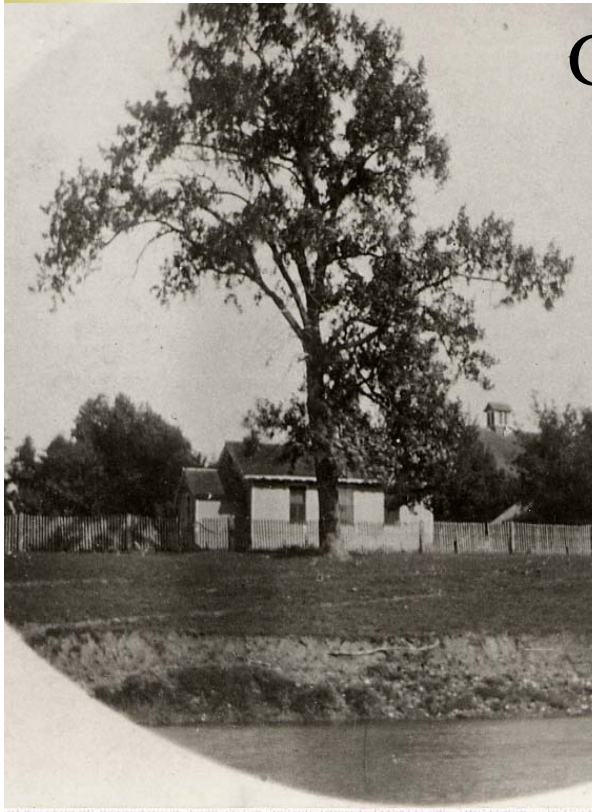
Dickson Mounds,  
near Lewistown, in  
southern Illinois.  
An example of  
what Native burial  
mounds look like.





# First Permanent Settlers

Gary's Mill School

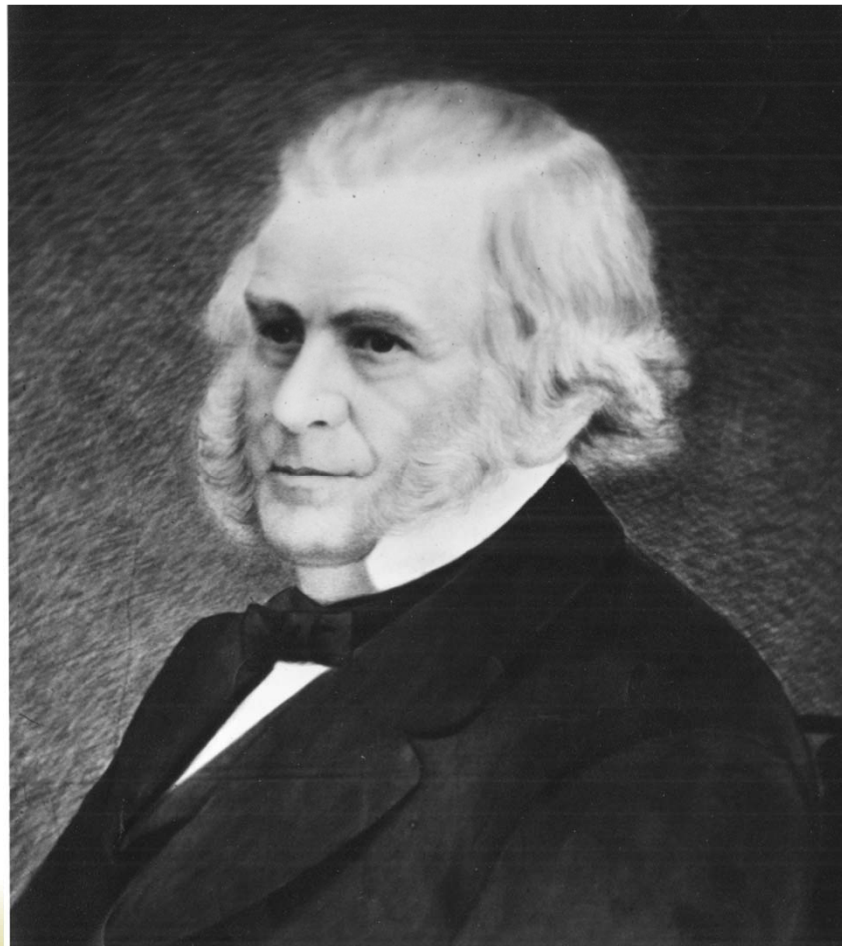


Gary's Mill School  
Children - circa  
1896





# John B. Turner

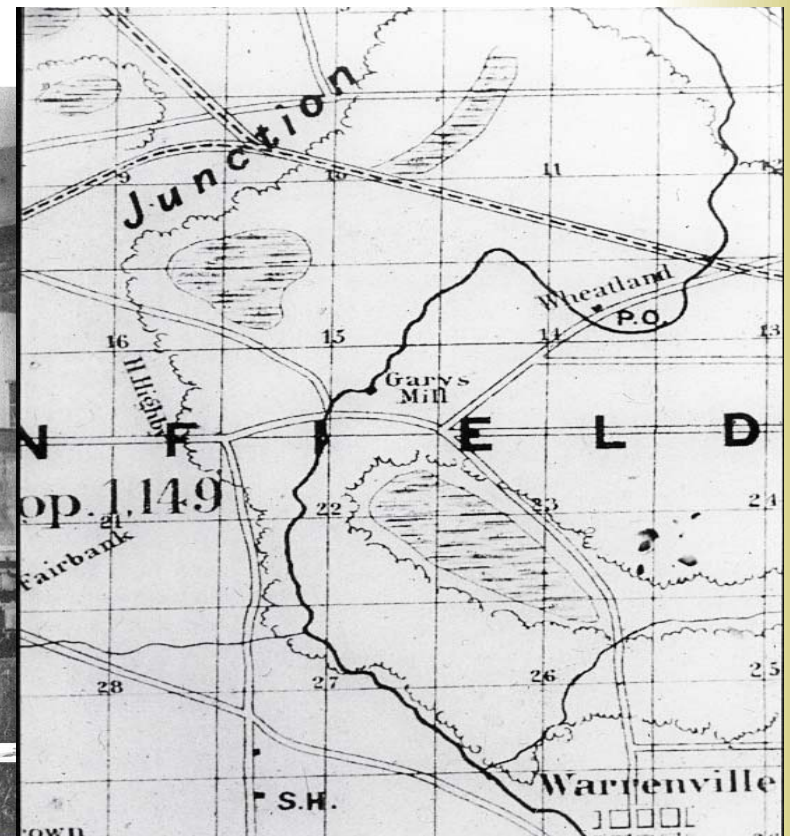
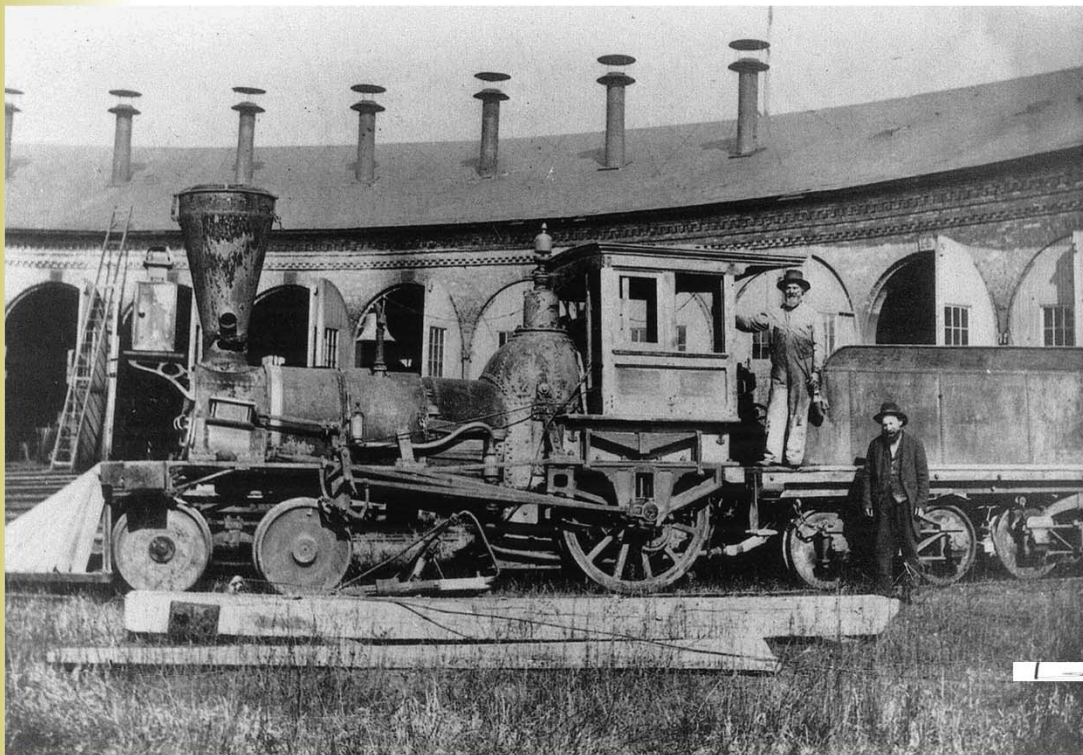




# Junction, Illinois

The Pioneer

Map of Junction  
circa 1851







# Turner Junction

The Bahnfleths,  
German Immigrants



The Zarates,  
Mexican Immigrants

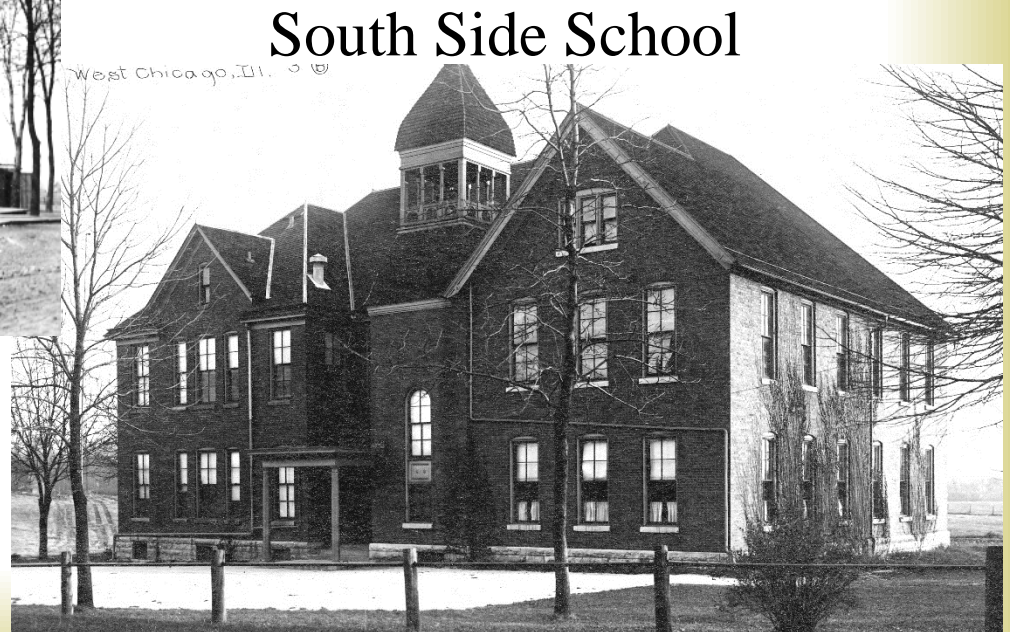




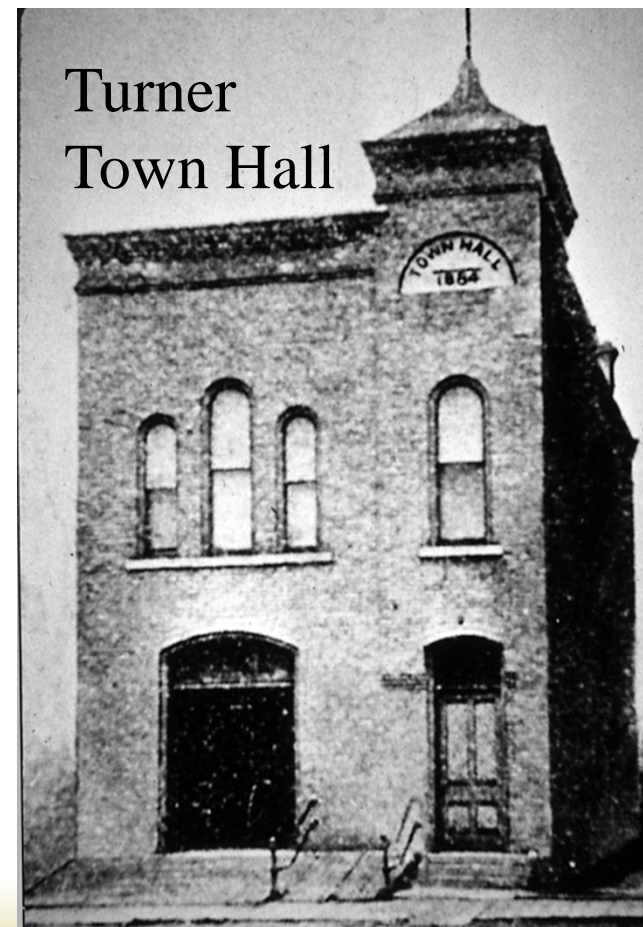
# A Town Grows on the Prairie



North Side School

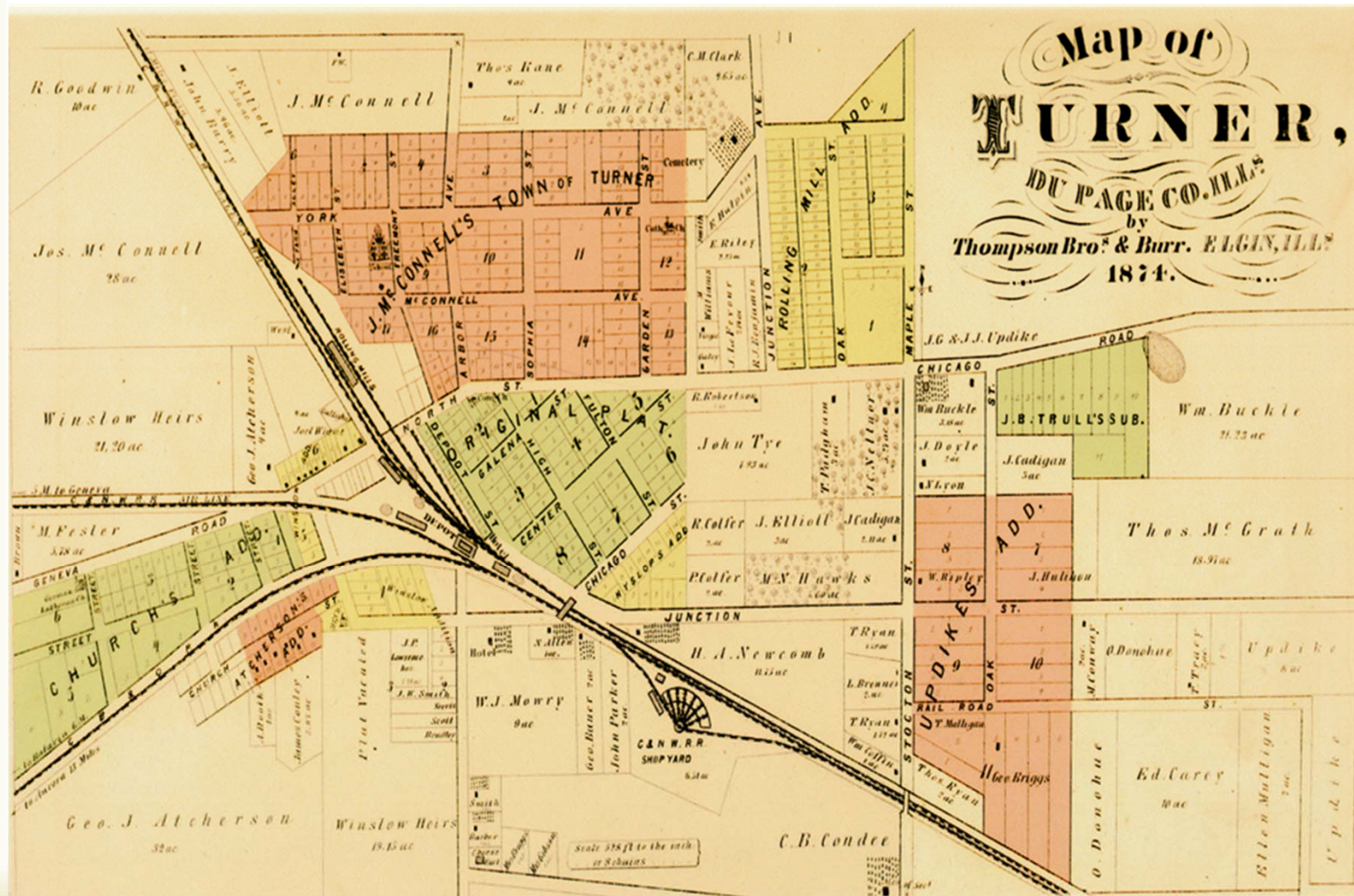


# A Town Grows on the Prairie





# 1874 Map of Turner



# Community Development





# Train Jobs Song

*Sing to the tune of Farmer in the Dell*

The **engineer** drives the train  
The engineer drives the train  
Go fast, go slow, look out you know,  
The engineer drives the train.

The **fireman** stokes the fire,  
The fireman stokes the fire,  
Keep it hot – but not too hot!  
The fireman stokes the fire.

The **brakeman** stops the train  
The brakeman stops the train  
Even in the ice and rain  
The brakeman stops the train.

# Train Job Song

(continued)

*Sing to the tune of Farmer in the Dell*

The **flagman** sends messages

The flagman sends messages

With lantern and flags he spreads the word

The flagman sends messages.

The **conductor** is the boss

The conductor is the boss

Tracking people and goods and railroad cars

The conductor is the boss.



## **Teacher notes and background information for Railroad Town presentation**

### **Slide 1**

West Chicago, once known as Turner Junction, was the first railroad junction in the state of Illinois. At one time, as many as 12 different railroad tracks ran through town. The railroad was the main reason our town came to be. The Roundhouse can be seen behind the water tower. Early steam locomotives, like the Pioneer, could only travel forwards. The roundhouse had a turntable in the center, a large revolving platform, which would turn the locomotive around.

### **Slide 2**

The area known as West Chicago in DuPage County was at one time tallgrass prairie. Imagine a sea of grass spreading as far as your eye can see. Pioneers who first encountered prairies felt like they were traveling a vast ocean. Prairie grasses and plants can grow as high as 8 or more feet tall.

### **Slide 3**

Indians, or Native Americans, lived here, along with buffalo, elk, and prairie chickens. By 1833, the United States government had forced the Native Americans to move west of the Mississippi River and European settlers began to move into this area.

### **Slide 4**

Winfield Mounds was named for burial mounds of prehistoric Native Americans who lived along the West Branch of the DuPage River. The three mounds at this site are dome-shaped and set in a triangular pattern and are the only documented prehistoric burial site in DuPage County. The mounds lie west of the river, along the edge of a mature oak-hickory forest. After vandals dug up the mounds in the 1920s, and subsequent digs by the University of Chicago and Wheaton College, it is believed that nothing more remains in the mounds. Why is it important to protect and honor ancient burial sites such as these?

### **Slide 5**

The first permanent settlers were from the New England states. They settled along rivers, which supplied transportation, and much needed food, water and lumber. The first settlers in our area were the Gary family. The Garys ran a sawmill on the DuPage River and established the community of Gary's Mill. The first school in the area, Gary's Mill School, was built there (Currier school is now located near this site). Most families settled in towns that were along rivers or roads going west. West Chicago, however, owes its history to the railroads. In fact, West Chicago is the first Illinois town formed by the coming of the railroad and the location of the first railroad junction in the state.

### **Slide 6**

The person credited for the initial development of West Chicago is John B. Turner. He wanted to build a train line from Chicago west across Illinois to the town of Galena. Turner bought many parcels of land in DuPage County for his railroad.

### **Slide 7**

In 1849 the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad starting laying track west from Chicago. In November of 1849, the first locomotive, the “Pioneer” arrived here. In 1850, the Aurora Branch Railroad laid tracks from here to Aurora. In 1855 Mr. Turner decided to create a town around the union of the two railroads; his original one, the Galena & Chicago Union (later the Chicago & North Western and today the Union Pacific) and the Aurora Branch (later the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy, today the Burlington Northern Santa Fe). He called his town “Junction,” after the intersection of these two railroad lines. A “junction” is the place where two railroads join or cross paths. Can you find it on the map? The train line proved highly successful and brought industry and people out to this area.

### **Slide 8**

In 1857, Dr. Joseph and Mary McConnell added a second portion to the town which they named “Turner”, in honor of John B. Turner. This was located north of Mr. Turner’s original part of town named “Junction”. The two portions of town were joined and the Village of Turner was incorporated in 1873.

### **Slide 9**

Turner or “Turner Junction,” as it was commonly called, grew quickly, with its main industries being railroads and farming. Its first community members were settlers from the East Coast, and later, immigrants from England, Ireland, Germany and Mexico.

### **Slide 10**

By 1880 the population was 1,001 and many new buildings had been built to serve the community: in 1873 one of the first schools, Turner Public School (later North Side School) was built. Later South Side School was built to accommodate the growing community.

### **Slide 11**

Between 1855 and 1870 four churches were built: First United Methodist, the Congregational Church, St. Mary’s Catholic and St. Michael’s Evangelical. Also, in 1884 the Town Hall was constructed (now the West Chicago City Museum), which housed both the police and fire departments, the jail and city offices.

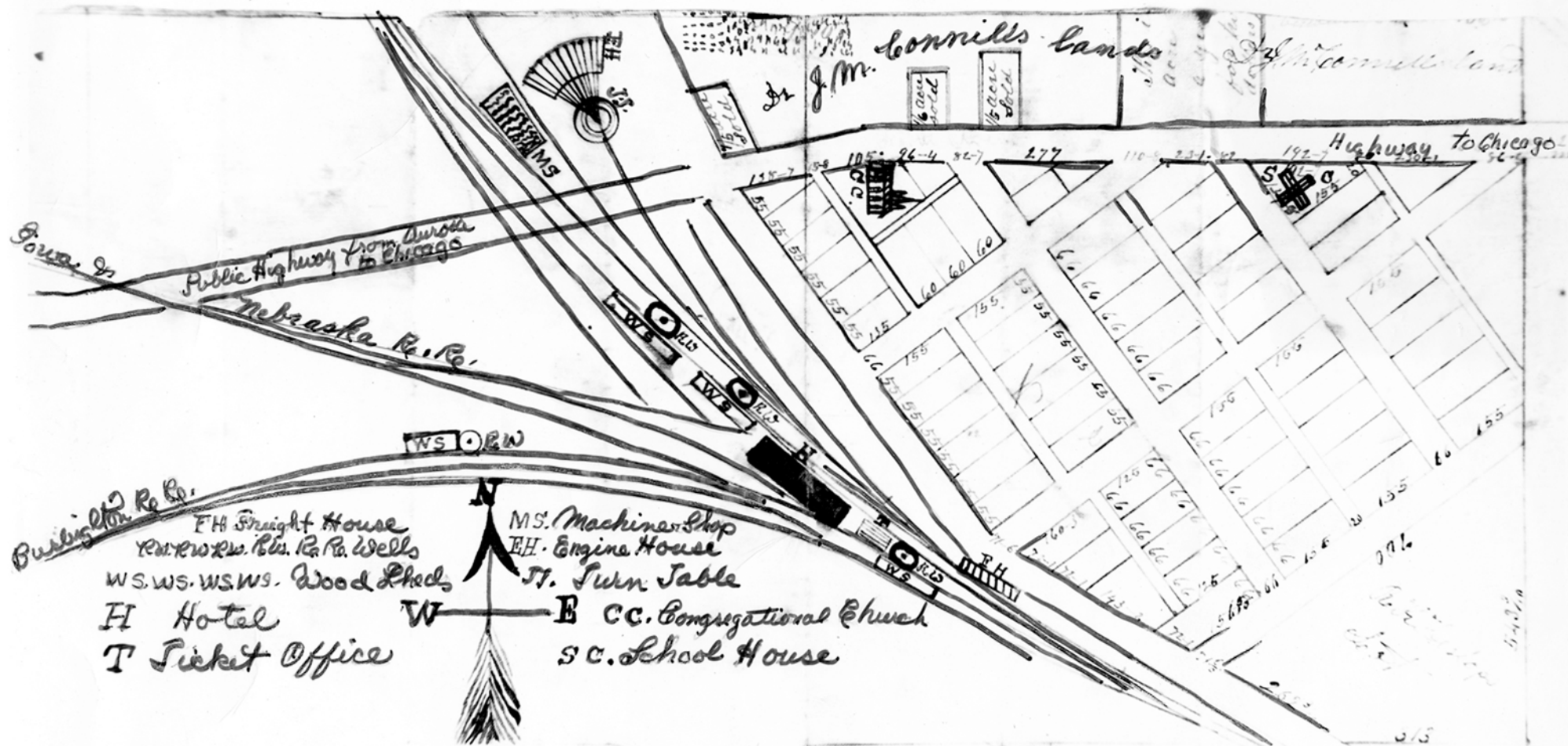
### **Slide 12**

If you compare two maps, one from 1867 and one from 1874, you can see how much the town grew in a very short time. Both maps are in the map kit for students to use.

### **Slide 13**

When you looked at the maps, did you notice that street names have changed? Today’s Main Street used to be called “Depot Street” because it led to the depot, or train station. Washington Street was at one time called “North Street” as it was the northern boundary of the original part of town known as Junction.





Map of  
**TURNER,**  
 DU PAGE CO. ILL.  
 by  
 Thompson Bros & Burr. ELGIN, ILL.  
 1874.

