ILLINOIS POLITICS IN THE 21st CENTURY: BELLWETHER, LEADING EDGE, OR LAGGING INDICATOR

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An Occasional Paper
Of the Public Policy Institute

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January, 2004

A shorter version of this paper was published in Illinois Issues
November, 2003

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Introduction

During the 20th Century Illinois always enjoyed the status of being a "bellwether" state meaning that it was a microcosm of the nation. Most of the time, "as goes Illinois; so goes the nation," at least in presidential politics. In the entire 20th Century, Illinois failed to vote for the winner only two times. Those were the deviations of voting for Hughes over Wilson in 1916 and Ford over Carter in 1976 (both were Republicans over the Democratic winners). Otherwise we voted for the victors. This was thought to be because we are a big diverse state, well representing the demographic and electoral make up of the United States. We have a large diverse city, sprawling suburbs, small towns, and a large rural population. Just as importantly, we have two very competitive parties. Over the long haul in Illinois electoral history, either party can win in any race or year. Thus, Illinois is always a prize worth competing for, and it has usually been a battleground state.

The competitiveness of Illinois parties is emphasized by the fact that up through the 2002 mid-term elections the state had a 10 to 10 split in the U.S. House delegation and 1 Democrat and 1 Republican in the U.S. Senate. That changed to 10 Republicans and 9 Democrats in the U. S. House after 2002, still very close. The Constitutional officers between 1998 and 2002 numbered 4 Republicans and 2 Democrats. The Illinois House was controlled throughout most of the 1990s by the Democrats while the Illinois Senate was controlled by the Republicans, by a narrow margin, for the entire decade between 1992 and 2002. Only the Governor's office, which the GOP controlled for the 26 years between 1976-2002, is an exception to that rule of very competitive elections in Illinois.

The 2002 Exception

Obviously that competitiveness picture changed with the November 5, 2002 election results. The Democrats enjoyed an unprecedented sweep of all but one of the state's constitutional officers. They took control of the Illinois Senate by a 31 to 27 (1 Independent) margin, and retained control of the Illinois House by a 68 to 50 margin (the largest partisan gap since 1982). All of the Democratic success in Illinois came in face of a national Republican tide that was running in the same election. The success of the Illinois Democrats was presaged by the Gore victory over Bush in 2000 by a margin of more than half a million popular votes. In the first presidential election of the 21st Century Illinois again deviated from the national winner (or at least the Electoral College winner). The Gore victory followed two consecutive Clinton victories in 1992 and 1996 where Clinton ran exceptionally well in the presidential race in Illinois.

What's going on here? Why has Illinois gone from bellwether to deviate case? Is Illinois just that different now from the national norms? Is Illinois leading the nation in a new Democratic era or just lagging a gathering Republican tide because of former Governor Ryan's problems and the Republican Party's internal conflicts? We are not really able to answer that question definitively because our predictive powers are limited; however, we can learn from the recent past where Illinois elections have been, and why, and do some informed speculation about what it means for the future.

The Patterns of the Past

Illinois is a big and complicated state, and it is well known for it Byzantine politics. Nevertheless, there are patterns to Illinois' politics and it is possible to learn from those

regularities, and to discern the general contours of how the state behaves politically. Those patters are stable enough to project them into the future with some confidence.

In the first half of the 20th Century it was simply Chicago versus the rest of the state. When Chicago had the largest proportion of the state's population and the powerful Mayor Richard J. Daley and his organization in place, it made some sense to analyze Illinois politics in terms of a bipolar world. That world passed from the scene by the mid to late 1960s in the wake of massive population changes in the suburbs and population losses in the central city. These population changes were accompanied by U.S. Supreme Court decisions requiring regular reapportionment and redistricting to reflect the "one person one" vote principle. That change led to representation and political power at both the state and federal levels being based on population rather than geography. This created a "tripolar" world in Illinois. Reflecting that new reality, in a now classic article in *Illinois Issues* from 20 years ago Peter Colby and Paul Green wrote the following:

> The changing state population patterns are reflected in changing state vote totals: the Chicago vote is shrinking, the Suburban vote is rising, the Downstate vote remains constant...A higher percentage of Chicago residents are voting Democratic than ever before, suburbanites have maintained a steady pro-Republican percentage, and Downstaters closely mirror the statewide outcome, giving only a slight edge to Republicans (Colby and Green, 1982, 3).

Based on that clear-headed assessment Colby and Green concluded that "Downstate," the 96 counties outside Cook and the Collar Counties, often could be crucial and hold the balance of power in statewide elections. This scenario assumed a strong Democratic vote in central city Chicago, and an equally strong Republican vote in the suburban ring of Cook County outside the

city plus 5 collar counties. Thus, what happened in the other 96 counties "Downstate" could make the difference in many elections. This "tripolar" conception of Illinois politics prevailed for three decades, and it squares with the tremendous importance of geography, culture, history and regionalism in Illinois politics. Alan Monroe writing about the same time as Colby and Green further embellished this theme in his analysis of the relationship between region and partisanship in Illinois. Basically he found that the farther south one went in Illinois the more Democratic the state became, and conversely the farther north, the more strongly Republican the state became. The dividing line was approximately at Springfield. This pattern had been in place since the Civil War (Monroe, 1975, Chapter 6).

Monroe goes on to attribute these marked differences in voting to the combined influence of history and culture in these regions. Southern Illinois was settled originally by immigrants from the South, while the middle and northern half of the state were settled by those from the Middle Atlantic and the Northeastern sections of the United States. David Kenney and Barbara Brown in the leading text on Illinois politics, analyzed those same migration patterns in some detail (Kenney and Brown, 1993, Chapter 1). Thus, the influence of culture and history linger on in Illinois politics although those factors will inevitably decline under the influence of continued population movement and the mass media's pervasive pressure to homogenize us all.

In our assessment of the current political situation in Illinois we start with the Colby and Green and the Monroe scenario but we build on it to bring the analysis into the 21st Century. A combination of population movement, political events and strong personalities combined to create a dynamic electoral "mosaic" which is the Illinois political picture of today.

The Population Movements

In order to assess where political power resides in Illinois currently, one must look carefully at the population trends, at where the voters live. In the 2000 Census data we find the following distribution for the major components:

TABLE 1

	POPULATION	% OF STATE TOTAL	
Chicago: Central City	2,896,016	23%	43%
Suburban Cook	2,480,725	20%	
DuPage County	904,161	7%	
Lake County	644,356	5%	21%
Will County	502,266	4%	
Kane County	404,119	3%	
McHenry	260,077	2%	
"Downstate" 96 Counties			36%

TABLE 2

	Change Between 1990-2000
Chicago: Central City	4.0%
Suburban Cook	10.0%
DuPage County	15.7%
Lake County	24.8%
Will County	40.6%
Kane County	27.3%
McHenry	41.9%
"Downstate" 96 Counties	3.3%

If one compares the 2000 Census Data to the 1990 results, it is clear that central city Chicago arrested their steady decline in population and even gained somewhat in 2000. The

gentrification of the city has paid some population growth dividends. However, the greater growth has been in suburban Cook and the Collar Counties, the most dynamic region in Illinois. DuPage is the largest suburban county (behind Cook); however, the largest percentage of growth was in McHenry, Will, Kane, and Lake Counties, in that order. The other 96 counties have held their own- barely, and had the lowest percentage of growth. Not surprisingly, over the past two decades of growth, political power has moved toward the suburbs- Cook County and especially DuPage County. For most of the decade of the 1990s in the Illinois General Assembly the four legislative leaders consisted of two Democrats from Chicago and two Republicans from DuPage County. Some parts of that equation are now in a period of transition, and that transition, in part, was stimulated by the run-up to the 2002 election. We will present that election in a larger context in the next section. Clearly the diversity of the suburban counties is increasing, and with it comes growing Democratic inroads into the suburbs- especially in Cook and Will counties.

The Data Analysis

In the following section we analyze the results of two statewide races in 2002, the Governor and the Attorney General, and compare them with the same races in 1998. These earlier statewide races are compared to demonstrate both continuity and change. The county is the unit of analysis except in Chicago and Cook County where ward based results are provided.

(See Map 1)

Map 1 provides the 2002 Governor's race results. Map 1 reflects some echoes of the Colby and Green and the Monroe analysis of 20 years ago. That is, the Blagojevich victory was fashioned out of a very strong showing in Chicago (548,035 for Blagojevich to 130,439 for Ryan) and in suburban Cook (356,524 to 305,600).[i] But Governor Blagojevich also enjoyed the assistance of a lot of Downstate Counties. It should be noted that Blagojevich would not have

been the Democratic nominee at all had it not been for his tremendous Downstate margins in the March primary. Counties in the Metro-East area around St. Louis, such as St. Clair, Jersey and Madison, and in deep southern Illinois, such as Randolph, Jackson, Franklin, Saline and Gallatin also turned in large percentage margins for the Democrats in the November election. Other Democratic strongholds were in Rock Island County, LaSalle County, and in parts of West and Central Illinois including: Cass, Fulton, Mason, Calhoun, Greene, Macoupin, Montgomery, Christian and Macon Counties. The rest of the state, particularly central and northern Illinois, was Ryan country, and that is generally where Republicans find their bedrock strength. It is worth stressing how well Blagojevich ran in south suburban Cook County Townships plus Proviso, Oak Park, Berwyn, Cicero, Stickney and Leyden on the west side and Niles and Evanston on the north side. (See Map 2).

As Paul Green pointed out after the 2002 election, the suburban townships were crucial sources of strength for Blagojevich (Green in Neal, *Chicago Sun-Times*, January 6, 2003). Blagojevich took just less than half of the suburban townships (13 out of 30); however, his suburban Cook County vote total exceeded Jim Ryan's by over 50,000 votes. As Green noted, south suburban Thornton Township alone gave Governor Blagojevich over half of his Cook County plurality and Evanston Township on the north, Proviso on the west, and Rich Township on the far south gave Blagojevich a plurality of over 10,000 votes. Many of those suburban townships, particularly the south suburban townships, have become very diverse demographically and economically. In short, they look a lot like the city and are areas of growing Democratic strength. It is only in the far northwestern townships such as Barrington, Palatine, Schaumburg, and Hanover that the Republicans did well and even there Jim Ryan's totals were not up to the historical advantages that Republicans usually enjoyed. (See Map 2).

Jim Ryan, as expected, took the 5 collar counties; however, his margin there was not enough to make up the other deficits. Blagojevich's 2002 victory showed what a strong Democratic candidate can accomplish both statewide and in the Chicagoland area. It also served to emphasize how the suburbs are changing and how they can be a source of help to some Democratic candidates.

Lisa Madigan running for Attorney General very nearly matched the Blagojevich results. She won big in Chicago as expected (522,293 Madigan versus 145,301 Birkett or 76% to 21%). Madigan also did very well in suburban Cook County winning it by 339,739 to 319,720, or a 50 to 47% margin. She also won the same Cook County Townships (except Leyden) as Blagojevich. Lisa Madigan ran almost as well in suburban Cook as Blagojevich did. She carried 12 townships to his 13 total. As Paul Green also pointed out, Madigan won a plurality of 20,919 votes in suburban Cook, giving her a real advantage in her battle with Joe Birkett who was from DuPage County. For Madigan too, the suburbs were a critical piece of the puzzle for her statewide victory (See Maps 3 and 4). Their pattern was also remarkably similar in the 5 suburban counties and Downstate. In fact, Madigan won all the same counties Downstate as Blagojevich- except for 12 counties.[ii] (See Map 5).

Democratic strategists of the future will study carefully the combined Blagojevich and Madigan victory maps to set their own targets, as will Republican strategists who will need to build on the Ryan-Birkett results in 2002, and to expand the Republican base in other winnable counties. What are those other winnable counties for strong Republican candidates? That is the question we address next.

It was only four years previously that the Republicans were victorious statewide in these same two races. In 1998 Republican George Ryan beat Downstate champion Glenn Poshard by

51:48% and Jim Ryan vanquished Miram Santos by a 61:38% margin. These results are depicted in Map 6 and 7. (See Map 6 and 7).

The George Ryan vs. Glenn Poshard results show what a very competitive race- this one won by the Republicans- is likely to look like in Illinois. Poshard ran extremely well Downstate, particularly in his home base of southern Illinois. Ryan ran exceptionally well for a Republican in Cook County, the Collar Counties, and central and northern Illinois. Poshard did not enjoy the level of support in Chicago a Democratic candidate must receive to be viable. If he had, when added to his overwhelming southern Illinois support, Poshard would have beaten George Ryan, and Ryan probably would have avoided the problems he later faced.

Map 7 shows just how well a strong Republican candidate; Jim Ryan in this case, can run. It also indicates the nadir for a Democrat. Santos barely beat Ryan in Cook County and Chicago running ahead of Ryan by 680,701 to 625,188 a margin of 55,513 votes. The Santos results demonstrate where the absolute Democratic bedrock is located. The only other counties she won were the Democratic loyalist counties of Gallatin, Franklin, and Alexander in deep southern Illinois. So, in summary, four elections over the course of four years, 1998-2002, demonstrate pretty clearly the range of Illinois election possibilities. The Republicans were triumphant in 1998 and the Democrats equally triumphant in 2002. There was obviously a shift of votes and voters in the four-year interval and it favored the Democrats substantially. The internal problems of the Republican Party, caught up in Governor Ryan's problems, and the conflicts between George Ryan and Jim Ryan are well known and it is not necessary to recount them here. The events of 1998-2002 show just how quickly a party's fortune, and the electoral map can change in Illinois politics. The currently victorious Democrats in Illinois would do well to study that lesson.

Prospects for the Future

The implication of all this for the future is now worth assessing. Is Illinois still a "bellwether" state? That usage commonly connotes that the state fits closely with the national pattern and reflects national tides. Clearly such was not the case with Illinois on November 5, 2002, on a night of national Republican triumph led by George W. Bush. It is, however, notable, that Democrats also won in the other big and diverse industrial states of Wisconsin, Michigan, California, and Pennsylvania. In that limited sense, Illinois was not a deviate case in 2002.

Two scenarios are possible. One is that the Republican dominance of the national government established in 2002 will last for a while and that Illinois will catch up in 2004 or 2006. If that is the case, then the 1969 prediction by Kevin Phillips of a Conservative-Republican realignment, producing a new Republican majority in the nation will finally come true (Phillips, 1969). Phillips predicted that the South would lead an electoral realignment that would make the Republicans the new majority party. This emerging conservative coalition prediction has long been advanced by a number of practitioners and analysts. Under this scenario, Illinois will ultimately stop lagging behind the national tide and will join the Republican-Conservative majority. Another scenario is presented in a recent book by John B. Judis and Ruy Teixeira entitled, *The Emerging Democratic Majority*, in a conscious take-off from Phillips' seminal work (2002). They argue that a new Democratic coalition from the progressive to moderate side of the spectrum is being formed in the United States. They point out that the states won by Al Gore in 2000 constitute 267 out of the 270 electoral votes needed to win. Furthermore, the diverse urban areas, the places where the post-industrial economy driven by service and knowledge based professionals are where the growth of the 21st Century will be located. (Note that Judis and Teixeria are assessing areas of growth in absolute numbers rather

than percentage growth. The percentage growth areas favor the Republicans). This is what they call "the ideopolis," the generally multi-ethnic, diverse metropolitan areas which transcend city, county, and state boundaries. Judis and Teixeira summarize Illinois as follows:

> In 2000, Gore won the state easily, 55-43 percent, with Nader garnering 2 percent. Democrats have gained ground in the ideopolis around Champaign and in Chicago's outlying "collar" counties, but where Illinois has become irretrievably Democratic is in Chicago and its immediate Cook County suburbs (2002, p. 97).

Even though the Judis and Teixeira book was only published in 2002, its prognostications did not look so prescient for Democrats in the cold hard wake of a resounding national victory for the Republicans in 2002. Kevin Phillips' 1969 prediction of an emerging Republican-Conservative majority was suddenly back in vogue again nationally, and Illinois again appeared to be a deviate case.

It is difficult to predict what the national tides will be and where Illinois will fit in the electoral patterns. There is nothing inevitable about either scenario. Each will depend on the candidates nominated and the skill of their campaigns and the issues and ideas of the moment. In Illinois the immediate future will depend on how well Governor Blagojevich, and the dominant Democratic majority in both the House and the Senate are seen to be governing successfully, i.e. to be handling the state's very real problems, especially the budgetary problems. "Good government is the best politics," and the Democrats will need to ponder that aphorism as they prepare for the 2004 and 2006 elections.

Perhaps the most likely scenario is a middle path between Phillips' Republican majority and Judis and Teixeira's Democratic majority. This "Third Way" would be defined by a continuation of Illinois' highly competitive two-party system and the basic moderation of the

great majority of its people. This Illinois middle way would be marked by a continuation of our recent history where one party wins one election and the other party wins the next- or soon thereafter- and neither party retains its hegemony for very long. It is a scenario which emphasizes the appeal of the issues and personalities of the moment to provide the dynamic for change while relying on the basic competitiveness of the two parties to provide the stability and continuity from election to election. This scenario would also entail Illinois continuing to reflect and react to national tides and world events and would ensure that we remain a battleground state or a bellwether. Given our essential diversity and complexity, this may be the most likely of all the outcomes and one not projected in the more nationally oriented literature.

In future elections in Illinois, Republicans and Democrats alike will start with some basic raw materials, shaped by our history, culture, and geography, from which they will need to fashion a winning state political coalition. Will Illinois get on board and become an integral part of the Republican coalition as we have been at some points earlier in the state's history? Or will the rest of the nation move slowly but inevitably in the direction of the Democrats based on the concept of the "ideopolis" advanced by Judis and Teixeira? It is too early to tell whether we are leading edge or lagging indicator in Illinois, but politics is always interesting and dynamic in the Prairie State.

Substantive Endnotes

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[i] Vote returns are taken from the Illinois State Board of Elections publications and the City of Chicago and Cook County Board of Elections.

[ii] Those counties with a result divided between Blagojevich and Madigan were Winnebago LaSalle, Mercer, Knox, Henderson, Brown, Pike, Jasper, Crawford, White, Clinton, and Jefferson. Blagojevich won 4 counties which Madigan failed to carry and Madigan took 8 counties which Blagojevich did not carry.

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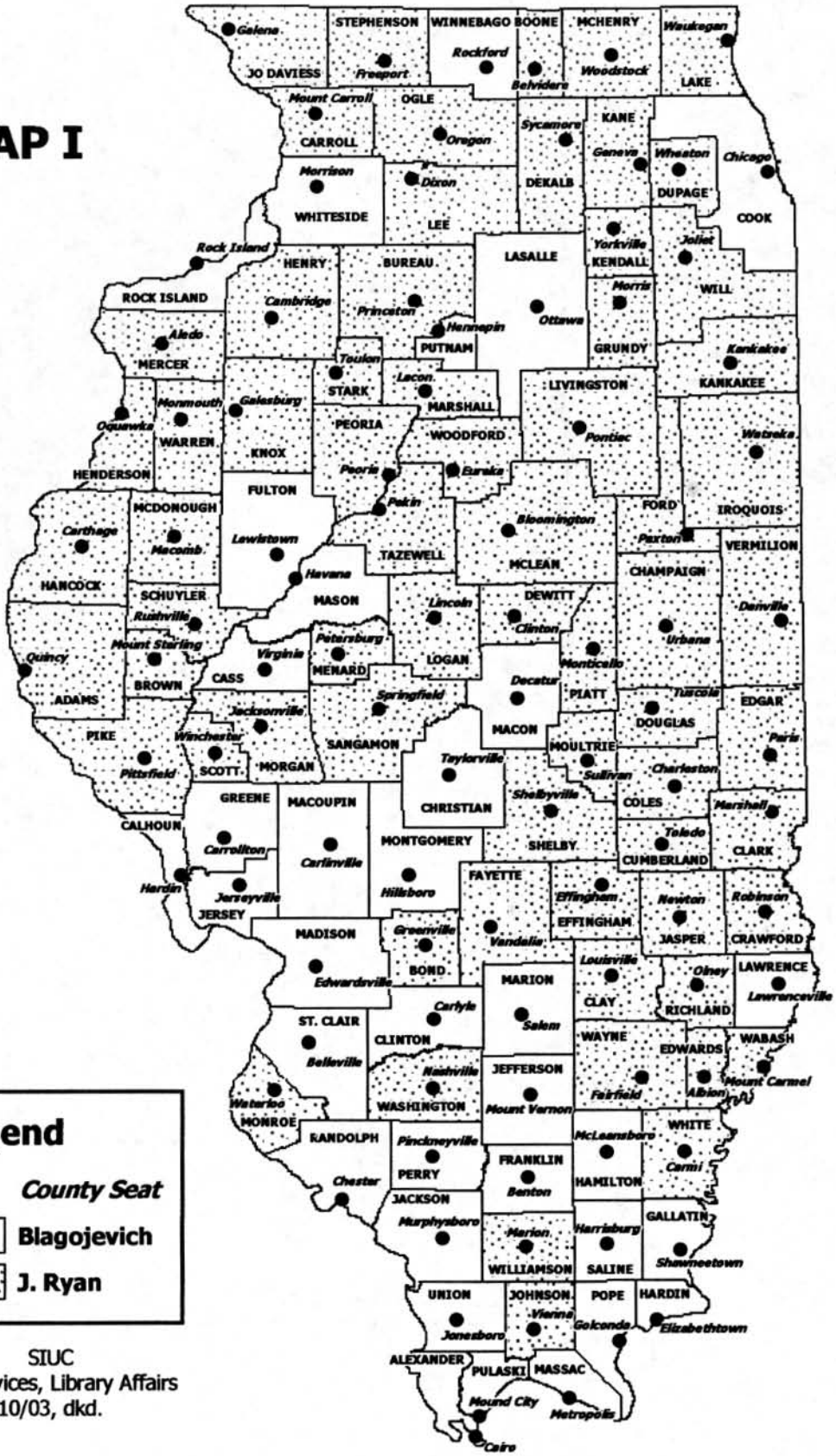
MAP I



Legend

- County Seat
- Blagojevich
- J. Ryan

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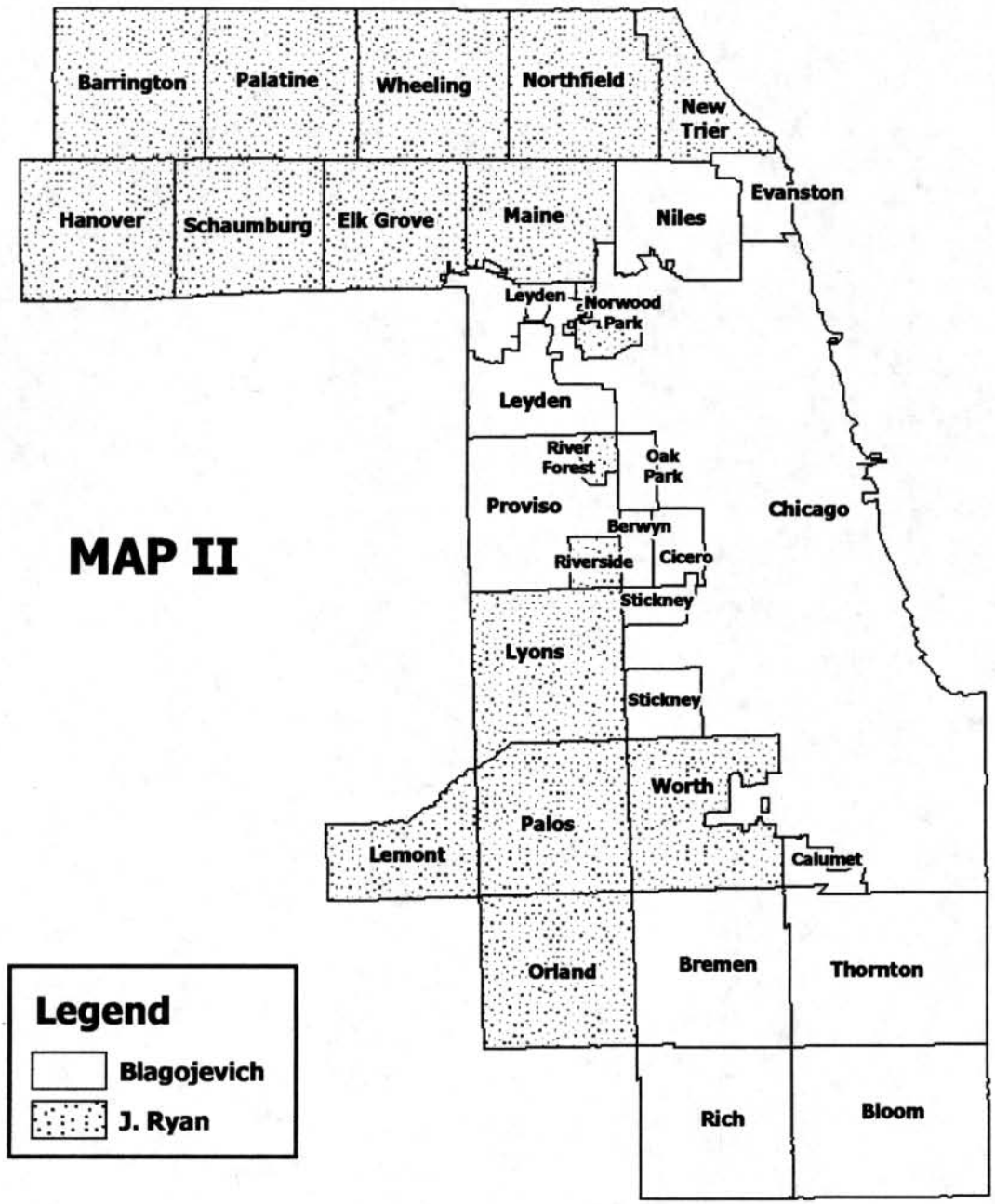
GIS Services, Library Affairs
10/03, dkd.



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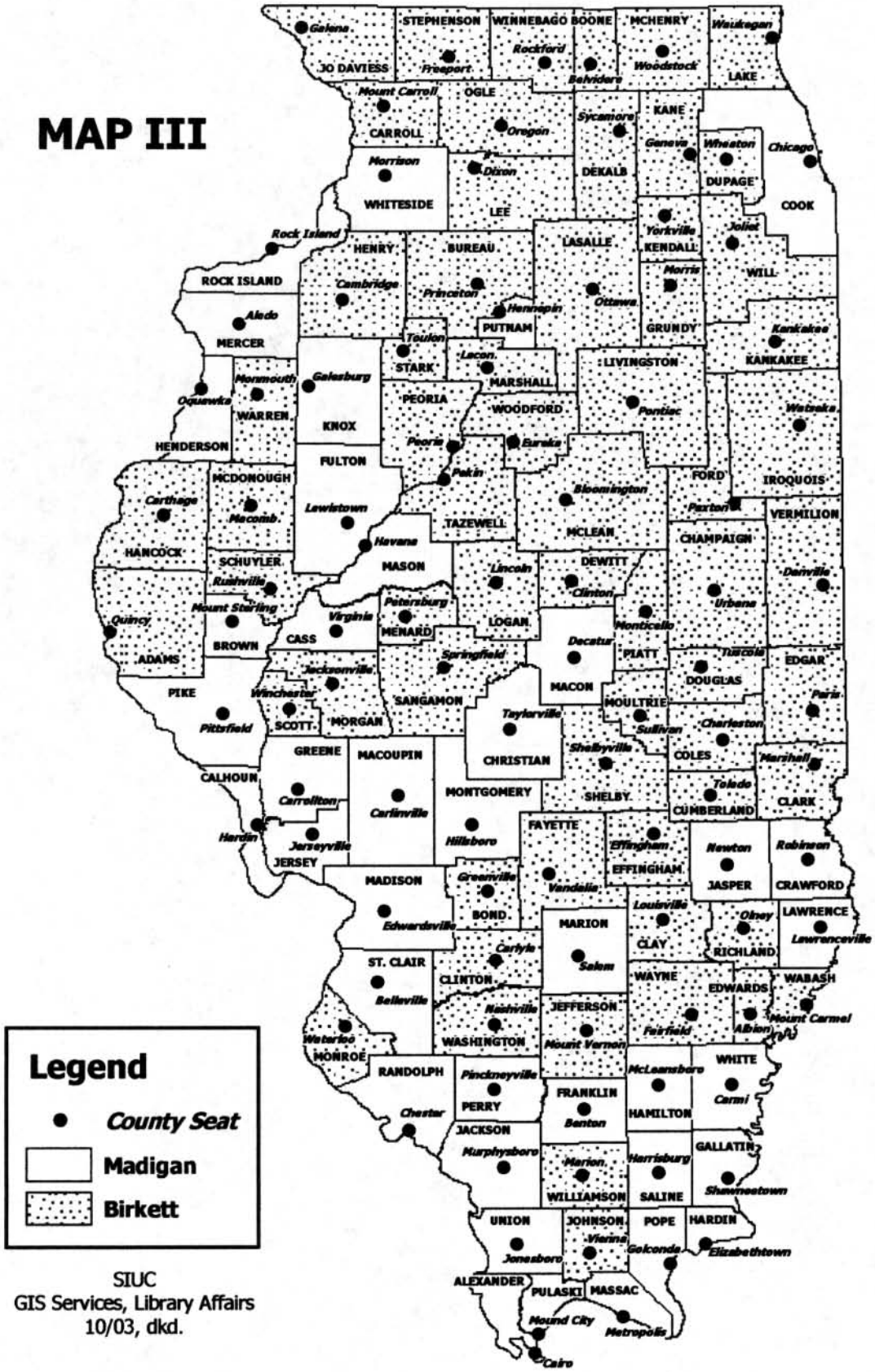
MAP III



Legend

- County Seat
- Madigan
- Birkett

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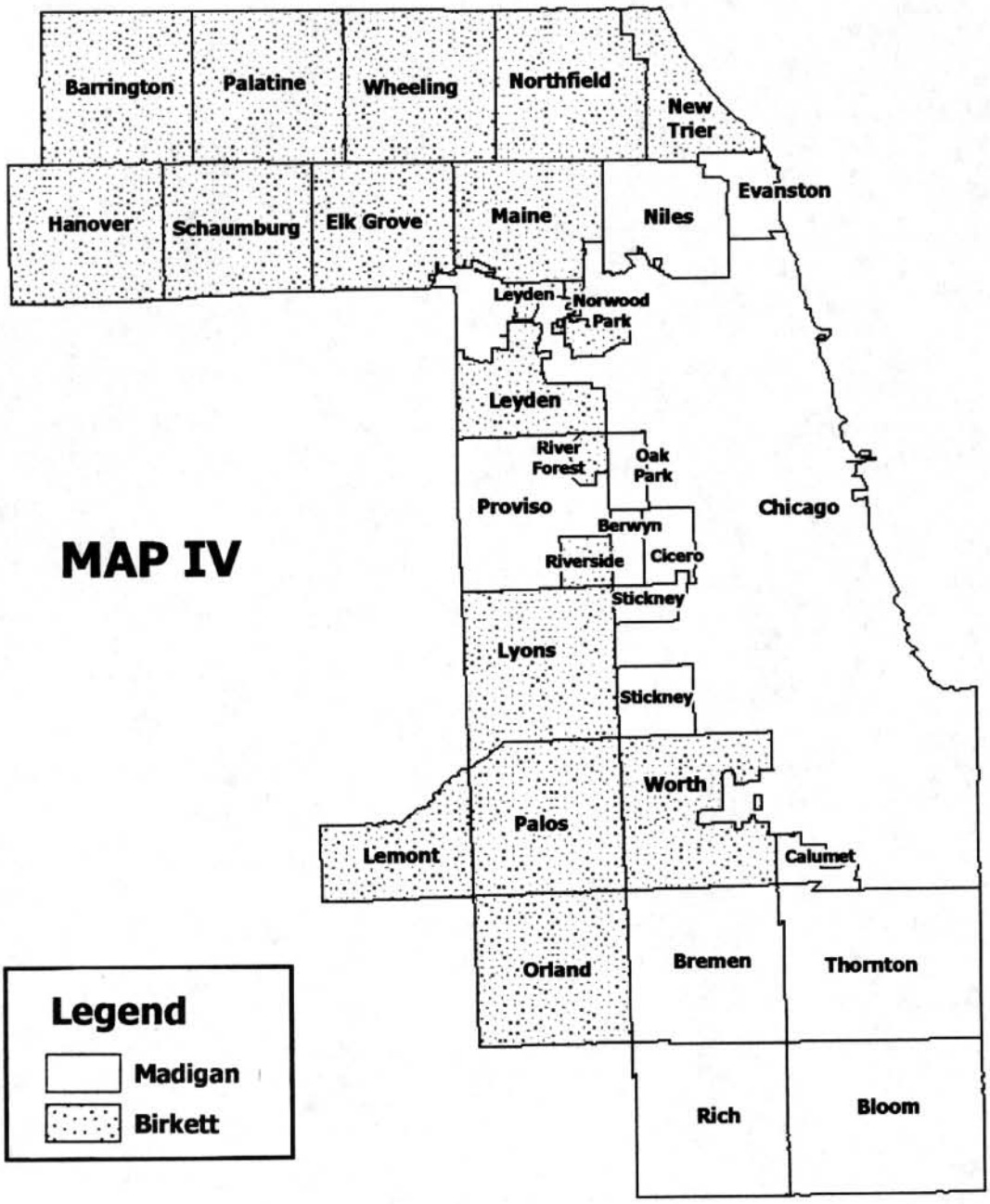

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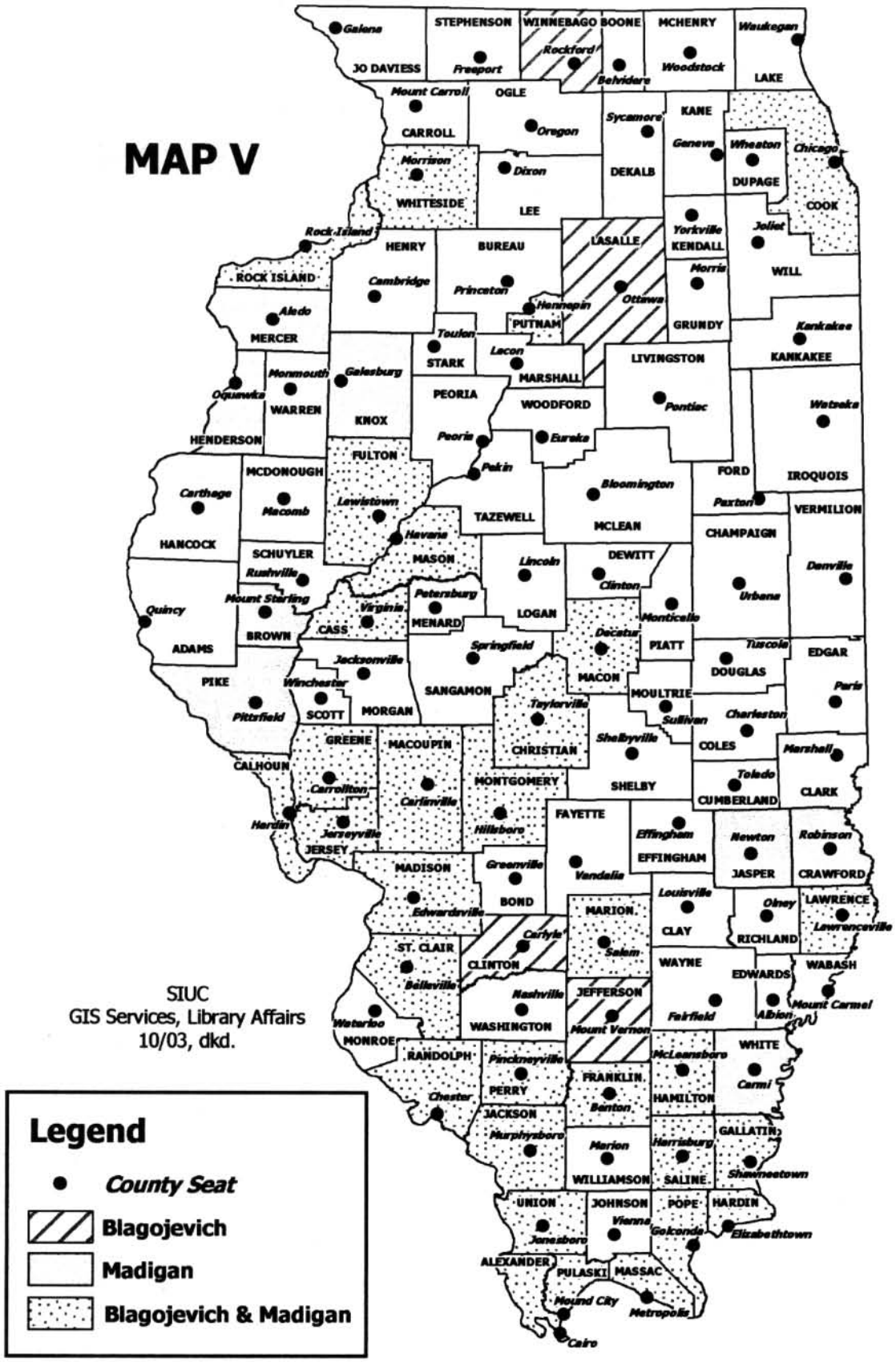
MAP V
Galena
JO DAVIESS
STEPHENSON
Freeport
WINNEBAGO
Rockford
BOONE
Belvidere
MCHENRY
Woodstock
Waukegan
LAKE
Mount Carroll
CARROLL
OGLE
Oregon
Sycamore
KANE
Geneva
Wheaton
DUPAGE
Chicago
COOK
Morrison
WHITESIDE
Dixon
LEE
DEKALB
Yorkville
KENDALL
Joliet
WILL
Rock Island
ROCK ISLAND
HENRY
Cambridge
BUREAU
Princeton
LASALLE
Hennepin
Ottawa
Morris
GRUNDY
Aledo
MERCER
PUTNAM
Toulon
STARK
Lacon
MARSHALL
LIVINGSTON
Pontiac
Kankakee
KANKAKEE
Monmouth
Galesburg
Oquawka
WARREN
KNOX
PEORIA
WOODFORD
Watseka
HENDERSON
Peoria
Eureka
FULTON
Pekin
MCDONOUGH
Carthage
Macomb
Lewistown
TAZEWELL
Bloomington
MCLEAN
FORD
Paxton
IROQUOIS
VERMILION
HANCOCK
Havana
MASON
CHAMPAIGN
SCHUYLER
Rushville
Lincoln
DEWITT
Clinton
Danville
Mount Sterling
Petersburg
Virginia
MENARD
LOGAN
Monticello
Urbana
Quincy
ADAMS
BROWN
CASS
Springfield
Decatur
PIATT
Tuscola
EDGAR
Jacksonville
Winchester
PIKE
Pittsfield
SCOTT
MORGAN
SANGAMON
MACON
DOUGLAS
Paris
MOULTRIE
Taylorville
Sullivan
Charleston
Shelbyville
COLES
Marshall
GREENE
MACOUPIN
CHRISTIAN
CALHOUN
Carrollton
Carlinville
MONTGOMERY
SHELBY
Toledo
CUMBERLAND
CLARK
Hardin
Jerseyville
Hillsboro
FAYETTE
Effingham
Newton
Robinson
JERSEY
EFFINGHAM
JASPER
CRAWFORD
MADISON
Greenville
Vandalia
Louisville
Olney
LAWRENCE
Edwardsville
BOND
MARION
CLAY
Lawrenceville
Carlyle
RICHLAND
ST. CLAIR
Salem
WAYNE
WABASH
CLINTON
Belleville
EDWARDS
Nashville
JEFFERSON
Fairfield
Albion
Mount Carmel
Waterloo
WASHINGTON
Mount Vernon
MONROE
RANDOLPH
Pinckneyville
McLeansboro
WHITE
PERRY
FRANKLIN
Carmi
Chester
Benton
HAMILTON
JACKSON
Murphysboro
Harrisburg
GALLATIN
Marion
WILLIAMSON
SALINE
Shawneetown
UNION
JOHNSON
POPE
HARDIN
Vienna
Elizabethtown
Jonesboro
Golconda
ALEXANDER
PULASKI
MASSAC
Mound City
Metropolis
Cairo
SIUC
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10/03, dkd.
Legend
County Seat
Blagojevich
Madigan
Blagojevich & Madigan


MAP VII
Galena
STEPHENSON
WINNEBAGO
BOONE
MCHENRY
Waukegan
JO DAVIESS
Freeport
Rockford
Belvidere
Woodstock
LAKE
Mount Carroll
OGLE
CARROLL
Oregon
Sycamore
KANE
Geneva
Wheaton
Chicago
Morrison
Dixon
DEKALB
DUPAGE
WHITESIDE
LEE
COOK
Rock Island
HENRY
BUREAU
LASALLE
Yorkville
Joliet
KENDALL
ROCK ISLAND
Cambridge
Princeton
Morris
WILL
Aledo
Hennepin
Ottawa
MERCER
PUTNAM
GRUNDY
Kankakee
Toulon
Lecon
KANKAKEE
STARK
LIVINGSTON
Monmouth
Galesburg
MARSHALL
Oquawka
PEORIA
Pontiac
Watseka
WARREN
WOODFORD
KNOX
HENDERSON
Peoria
Eureka
FULTON
Pekin
FORD
IROQUOIS
McDONOUGH
Bloomington
Carthage
Macomb
Lewistown
Paxton
VERMILION
TAZEWELL
MCLEAN
Havana
CHAMPAIGN
HANCOCK
SCHUYLER
MASON
Lincoln
DEWITT
Danville
Rushville
Clinton
Mount Sterling
Petersburg
Urbana
Quincy
Virginia
LOGAN
Monticello
MENARD
CASS
Decatur
PIATT
Tuscola
BROWN
Springfield
EDGAR
ADAMS
Jacksonville
DOUGLAS
Paris
PIKE
Winchester
MACON
MOULTRIE
SANGAMON
Taylorville
Charleston
Pittsfield
SCOTT
MORGAN
Sullivan
Shelbyville
COLES
Marshall
GREENE
MACOUPIN
CHRISTIAN
Toledo
CALHOUN
Carrollton
Carlinville
MONTGOMERY
SHELBY
CUMBERLAND
CLARK
Hardin
Hillsboro
FAYETTE
Effingham
Newton
Robinson
Jerseyville
JERSEY
EFFINGHAM
MADISON
Greenville
Vandalia
JASPER
CRAWFORD
Louisville
Olney
LAWRENCE
BOND
MARION
Edwardsville
CLAY
Lawrenceville
Carlyle
RICHLAND
ST. CLAIR
Salem
WAYNE
WABASH
CLINTON
EDWARDS
Belleville
Nashville
JEFFERSON
Mount Carmel
Fairfield
Albion
Waterloo
WASHINGTON
Mount Vernon
MONROE
WHITE
RANDOLPH
Pinckneyville
McLeansboro
FRANKLIN
Carmi
PERRY
HAMILTON
Chester
Benton
JACKSON
GALLATIN
Murphysboro
Harrisburg
Marion
Shawneetown
WILLIAMSON
SALINE
UNION
JOHNSON
POPE
HARDIN
Vienna
Elizabethtown
Jonesboro
Golconda
ALEXANDER
PULASKI
MASSAC
Mound City
Metropolis
Cairo
Legend
County Seat
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