

Chief Shabbona's Sojourns with the Vial Family of Flagg Creek in Lyons Township,

Cook County, Illinois

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As Illinois entered statehood in 1818, the majority of its population was confined to the counties south of a line from the Wabash River west to Alton on the Mississippi River. American settlers were restricted to lands available for sale by the General Land Office, as large land tracts north of this region were still occupied by several Native American tribes. The frontier endured in the northern two-thirds of the state as the Indian fur trade continued to dominate the region under the emerging American Fur Company with its headquarters located at Fort Dearborn in Chicago.¹ Not until the defeat of the Sauk Indians in the Black Hawk War of 1832, followed by the Chicago Treaty of 1833 between the United States and the Potawatomi, Ottawa, and Chippewa Indians, did the frontier period effectively cease. In Chicago, the government negotiated the sale of the remaining Indian land cessions in northern Illinois, and distributed payments to white settlers and fur traders for damages caused through Indian depredations for claims going back to the War of 1812.² The pioneer period did not begin in earnest until the subjugated removal of Native Americans occurred as they settled on reservations west of the Mississippi River.

Immediately, American settlers migrated from eastern states to settle northern Illinois. Joseph Vial (Figure 1) became one of the earliest pioneers to settle Lyons Township, in Cook County, on the outskirts of Chicago in 1833 (Figure 2). Vial represented a new class of “Yankee” farmers, citizens from New England who possessed the skills and capital to invest in land and to generate a livelihood from it. The Vial’s epitomized the Yankee invasion of the 1830s and 1840s: they valued hard work, thrift, and order, they believed in progress, and were aggressive businessmen. Like many New Englanders, the Vial’s brought with them a strong sense of mission and an underlying commitment to community.³ Throughout his lifetime, Joseph Vial engaged his family in many pursuits, not only in farming by growing crops and

raising livestock, but his cabin also operated as a stagecoach stop, a post office, and a tavern. Furthermore, the Vials significantly contributed to emerging social institutions engaging in politics, government, education and religion in Cook County. The history of the Vial Family reveals the relationships they formed with friends, neighbors, business partners and civic leaders, notably those few who remained after the close of the frontier and the many who appeared throughout the pioneer period.

Joseph Vial was born in Rhode Island in 1791. He is descended from one of the oldest families of New England with representatives of the Vial name living in Rhode Island and Massachusetts.⁴ Joseph Vial earned a reputation as a civil engineer, skilled mechanic, and also operated a merchandise store.⁵ In 1807 Robert Fulton employed Vial to build the first steamboat, the *Clermont*, on the Hudson River in New York.⁶ Afterward, Joseph married Louisa Smith and moved to Chester, Orange County, where their oldest sons were born; Samuel on July 21, 1819 and Robert on April 9, 1824.⁷ In 1825 the Vials moved to Elmira, New York, where Joseph operated a store selling dry goods.⁸ In the fall of 1833 Joseph Vial emigrated from Elmira to Chicago.⁹

By the fall of 1833 Chicago's population was at three-hundred and fifty; mostly soldiers and officers stationed at Fort Dearborn, along with storekeepers, merchants, doctors, lawyers, hotel-keepers, and persons engaged in the declining fur trade.¹⁰ Joseph Vial traveled to Lyons Township and built a log cabin, sixteen feet by sixteen feet, near Flagg Creek on Plainfield Road.¹¹ The one room, single pen, cabin was built upon a traditional English square floor plan which was introduced to America as a frame structure by English colonists.¹² The cabin's walls were built to support side facing gables; the walls extend parallel with the ridge pole. The walls were secured by joists and the roof was supported by rafters. A fireplace and chimney were built

at one gable-end and an entry door was placed at a right angle in the front wall parallel with the ridgepole (Figure 3). The pitched roof provided space for installing a second floor used as a berth for sleeping. The berth was reached by climbing wooden pegs driven into the wall logs.¹³ In November Vial subscribed to the *Chicago Democrat* newspaper, and accompanied by a merchant named 'Little,' they walked to Ottawa, then to Peru, where he traveled by steamboat on the Illinois River to Peoria and spent the winter. In the spring of 1834, he acquired 270 acres around his cabin in Lyons Township.¹⁴

The only settlers in Lyons Township were two fur traders, David and Bernardus "Barney" Laughton, who settled on the west side of the Des Plaines River north of the Chicago Portage in Lyons,¹⁵ and Elijah Wentworth Jr. Wentworth was born in Lincolnville, Maine, on March 30, 1803. He arrived in Chicago in 1830 and was elected Cook County's first coroner in 1831. In 1833 Wentworth established the Black Horn Tavern on Plainfield Road east of Flagg Creek.¹⁶ The Laughton family had a long-established relationship with the Potawatomi Indians during the American fur trading era. In 1818 David Laughton and John R. Smith operated a trading post on Harsens Island, on the St. Clair River, adjacent to Walpole Island on the Michigan-Canadian border.¹⁷ Soon after, the Laughton's and their uncle, Jacob Harsen, followed the Potawatomi to northeastern Illinois, led by Shaw-waw-nass-see who settled at the Little Rock Village on the Kankakee River.¹⁸

In 1823, David Laughton was hired by the American Fur Company under the direction of John Kinzie, and was granted a license to trade along the Vermillion River.¹⁹ Also, Jacob Harsen was granted a license to trade along the Kankakee River.²⁰ By 1824, David Laughton was married to Wais-ke-shaw, the daughter of Shaw-waw-nass-see.²¹ In 1825, Barney Laughton was operating a trading post in Grand Detour on the Rocky River in Michigan, but by

1826 he joined Jacob Harsen in the fur trade on the Kankakee River.²² In 1827 the Laughton's resided on the Des Plaines River and continued their operations during the waning years of the fur trade. Eventually, they began supplementing their income by selling merchandise, operating a tavern, and a small lumber mill.²³ In 1830 Barney Laughton married Sophia Bates of Vermont, the sister of Mrs. Stephen Forbes, the first regular school teacher in Chicago. Juliette A. Kinzie wrote about Sophia Laughton in her book *Wau-Bun*, describing her loneliness and hardship of being the wife of a fur trader on the frontier.²⁴

Joseph Vial's migration route and mode of transportation from the East is not known. Since 1825 the Erie Canal was the most common route people traveled on west from Albany, New York, or by land on the Genesee Pike to Buffalo.²⁵ In 1825 Congress appropriated \$30,000 for the survey and construction of roads and canals, and one-third of the funding was allocated to the Chicago Road, which was built between Detroit and Chicago for military purposes.²⁶ Initially, the Sauk Trail traversed the region from Detroit to Rock Island on the Mississippi River, and was used by the Sauk Indians in contacting the British at Fort Malden until the Black Hawk War of 1832.²⁷ Survey and construction of the Chicago Road began in Detroit, it closely followed the route of the Sauk Trail; however, the road only progressed with the settlement of each adjoining region not reaching western Michigan until 1832.²⁸ In 1833 steamboat transportation began on the Great Lakes from Buffalo to Chicago with three ships conducting round-trip excursions on Lakes Erie, Huron and Michigan, a mode proving faster and more efficient than land transportation of the period.²⁹ On July 25, 1834 Louisa Vial with her two sons, Samuel and Robert, arrived at Chicago aboard the side-wheel steamboat *Uncle Sam* sailing from Detroit; the ship dropped anchor one mile off-shore from Fort Dearborn, and they were greeted by Philo Carpenter aboard a launch boat while Joseph Vial waited on shore.³⁰

The Vial's found the Illinois prairies to be the most fertile of any land in the nation; here farmers could make a profit from the enormous yields it produced. John Williams, a farmer from Albany, Coles County wrote, "My advice to farmers in the east is, to leave their rocks and hills, where they are just grubbing out a living, and come on to these splendid prairies, as they lie all ready for the plough, and where everything which the farmer plants yields such an abundant return."³¹ Robert Vial stated, "When father came west, he was merely looking for good farm land, and not for speculation."³² Eventually, agriculture dominated the region, as the Illinois-Michigan Canal and the Erie Canal swamped eastern markets with western grain; farmers on marginal land in the East were forced to give up or move their livelihood to the Midwest.³³

Joseph Vial kept a diary compiling six volumes consisting of daily entries written from 1833 to 1853. The journals provide details of events he observed concerning family life, the weather, astronomical phenomenon, and other activities concerning internal improvements, agriculture, business, social and government affairs. On May 9, 1835 Vial wrote, "Finished my fence 3820 rails,"³⁴ and on August 2, 1835 he wrote, "Samuel went to Chicago horseback with Post Office Petition."³⁵ His journals were preserved and were often cited by his descendants. In 1930 Robert C. Vial, a grandson, described where Joseph planted his first crops, "The first land in this vicinity to be planted for a crop was south of Plainfield Road and west of Wolf Road. The native sod was plowed with a one-horse plow. With a hoe, holes were cut in this overturned sod and kernels of corn dropped in by hand for a corn crop. Grass for curing into hay for winter feed for the horses, cattle and sheep was cut with a scythe, raked by hand and pitched into stacks. The first cow on this farm was purchased in the spring of 1835."³⁶

Before the Illinois-Michigan Canal's completion in 1848, people living in the scattered but growing settlements between Chicago and the Illinois River depended on primitive roads and

trails to deliver farm products to market, receive mail service, and for stagecoach transportation. Joseph Vial's cabin was located on Plainfield Road, a former Potawatomi thoroughfare known to the early settlers as the "high prairie trail." This trail ran from Chicago to Ottawa, crossed the Des Plaines River north of the Chicago Portage, and then passed through Plainfield, Plattville, Lisbon and Holderman's Grove. In 1831 the Cook County Board authorized the construction of Plainfield Road. On January 1, 1834, Dr. John T. Temple began operating the first mail and stagecoach service on Plainfield Road. From Chicago, Temple's first stage-station was located twelve miles west on the Des Plaines River at Barney and David Laughton's Tavern, where Charles Fenno Hoffman, a native of New York, stopped overnight on January 15.³⁷ In April of 1834 both of the Laughton brothers died within a week of each other. David died on April 12, and Barney died one week earlier.³⁸ Joseph Vial noted in his diary on Sunday April 13, 1834, "Went to Scotts at Funeral of Lawton."³⁹ Stephen J. Scott had taken charge of Laughton's Tavern in late 1831 and stayed on until mid-1834.⁴⁰ Afterward the Vial's cabin became a stagecoach station; they tended to the horses, and provided meals for the operators and passengers traveling between Chicago and Ottawa. Joseph Vial and Dr. John T. Temple remained business partners and friends for many years.⁴¹ To facilitate his enterprises, Vial frequently corresponded with family members and business associates in Elmira, New York, concerning trade in dry goods and rum for his stagecoach station and tavern.⁴²

The construction phase of the Illinois-Michigan Canal (1836-1848) stimulated the industrial development of northern Illinois; it provided a better market for the region's products and reduced the cost of imports, which increased rents and property values. Also, by linking the Great Lakes with the Mississippi Valley, the canal reduced the prices of New York merchandise to the region beyond Chicago, and increased the price of its farm produce.⁴³ Although the Panic

of 1837 temporarily halted canal construction, the Vial's prospered during this period. Joseph Vial wrote on November 22, 1838, "Sam'l started for canal 20 bushels of potatoes."⁴⁴ Vial wrote on May 7, 1839, "Went on Canal with Boon & Hubbard."⁴⁵ He was referring to Dr. Levi Day Boone and Gurdon S. Hubbard. Boone came to Chicago in 1835, and in 1836 he entered into a partnership with Dr. John T. Temple excavating two sections of the Illinois-Michigan Canal.⁴⁶ In 1836 Gurdon Hubbard was appointed commissioner of the Illinois-Michigan Canal and owned a meat packing house in Chicago.⁴⁷ Hubbard and Boone became friends; both voted for John H. Kinzie for mayor of Chicago, who opposed William B. Ogden in 1837.⁴⁸ In 1843, Samuel Vial worked as a laborer for Sylvester Marsh in a meat packing house on Kinzie Street near Rush Street in Chicago.⁴⁹ Presumably, Samuel was earning money to purchase his own farm land; Joseph wrote in his diary on June 16, 1843, "Sam'l said he should work no longer unless I deeded him some land. Said Boons gave his son a farm."⁵⁰

The Vial's participated in politics and engaged in leadership positions within Cook County government. Joseph Vial hosted the first Democratic Convention of Cook County at his cabin on July 4, 1835.⁵¹ Samuel remembered the convention lasted all day; many delegates from outlying districts in Du Page and Will arrived late, as far as forty miles away; delayed by bad roads and swollen streams caused by heavy rains.⁵² Additionally, Joseph was appointed postmaster; though intermittently depending on the route of the mail service, and served as Justice of the Peace for four years.⁵³ On May 2, 1850 Lyons Township was organized after the election of its first officers. From the 1850s to the 1880s both Robert and Samuel served as elected officers and appointed officials of Lyons Township. Samuel was elected to the following township positions: collector, supervisor, pound master and assessor; as well as being appointed to the highway commission. Robert was elected to the township positions of clerk and

supervisor, and was appointed treasurer of township schools, a position he held for forty-two years.⁵⁴

The development of education and public schools in Illinois was significantly influenced by citizens engaged in agriculture. In 1843 Joseph Vial was Vice President of the Union Agricultural Society's Cook County Bureau.⁵⁵ Since 1841 The Union Agricultural Society produced a very influential periodical *The Union Agriculturalist* renamed *The Prairie Farmer* in 1843 under the leadership of John S. Wright. He was a tireless worker in the field of education, as editor of *The Prairie Farmer*; he was considered the largest single force in bringing about legislation for the free school and for a teacher training institution in Illinois.⁵⁶ Vial worked under John S. Wright and in 1843 the Vial's built the first schoolhouse in Lyons Township; Samuel, with a friend, cut and hewed logs for the framework.⁵⁷ Joseph wrote several entries in his diary. March 15: "Saml hauled sills for schoolhouse," April 12: "Robt. and I worked on schoolhouse," April 30: "Meeting first time in schoolhouse."⁵⁸ The schoolhouse was located on Elijah Wentworth Jr.'s farm in section 20, township 38 north, range 12 east of Lyons Township.⁵⁹ The first school teacher was Margaret McNaughton, a native of Aberdeen, Scotland. Samuel met Margaret and they were married on November 19, 1846 and had five children: Jennie, George, Joseph, William and Louisa.⁶⁰

Chief Shabbona of the Potawatomi Indians was an enduring friend of the Vial Family of Lyons Township (Figure 4). In 1903 Caroline M. McIlvaine, Librarian of the Chicago Historical Society, wrote "Shabbona was perhaps the most widely known and universally respected Indian of the Illinois frontier, and in many respects the most noted Indian of his time, though the contemporary of Tecumseh, Red Jacket, Black Hawk, and Keokuk."⁶¹ William Hickling of Ottawa, Illinois was a close acquaintance of Shabbona who frequently visited him at his home,

and wrote, “Shabbona told me he was born near the Maumee River in Ohio, about the year 1775.”⁶² In 1836 Nehemiah Matson interviewed Shabbona with the assistance of his son, Smoke, at Bureau Creek and was given a birth date of “1775 or 1776;”⁶³ however, Shabbona’s birth place remains controversial as William Hickling stated that he was born near the Maumee River in Ohio, whereas Nehemiah Matson’s translated statement of Shabbona’s birth place to be on the Kankakee River in Illinois.⁶⁴

Shabbona’s Father was of Ottawa descent and his Mother was a Seneca.⁶⁵ Caroline McIlvaine wrote that Shabbona was the grand-nephew of Chief Pontiac, which was noted by Frederick W. Hodge of the Smithsonian Institute.⁶⁶ Additional members of Shabbona’s family included a brother, Mukonse, who became a Baptist Preacher,⁶⁷ and a sister, Mannabenaqua; she married Jean-Baptiste Beaubien and they had three metis children: a daughter Marie, and sons Charles and Medard (Medore) Beaubien. Unfortunately, Mannabenaqua died before the War of 1812 and Jean-Baptiste Beaubien moved his family from Detroit to Chicago.⁶⁸ Shabbona’s ties to the Beaubien family of Chicago remained steadfast for the remainder of his life; not only as a beloved uncle, but also through familial participation in treaty negotiations between the United States and the Prairie Band of the Potawatomi Indians during the relocation period of the 1840s.

The identity of Shabbona’s father remains a mystery. He has been described as an Ottawa War Chief who fought alongside Chief Pontiac during his Rebellion against the British from 1763 to 1765, and was mentioned to be one of the commissioners representing his tribe at the Treaty of Greenville on August 3, 1795. Moreover, he made a speech during the treaty proceedings and was considered a person of more than ordinary ability.⁶⁹ Shabbona’s father played an influential role in his son’s early political life. Based on one account by Juliette A. Kinzie from a conversation she had with Shabbona, as early as 1795, he and his parents lived in

the vicinity of Detroit. Accompanied by his father, Shabbona was taken to an interview with General Anthony Wayne, who commanded American forces to victory in the Battle of Fallen Timbers. He described the General with great animation as “small in stature, but full of energy and vivacity-with eyes that flashed fire, yet with a pleasant smile-and not withstanding his moderate height, a most commanding presence.”⁷⁰ On August 13, 1796 General Wayne arrived at the military post in Detroit, and took command of the region by receiving formal capitulation from the British of all military posts located on American land along the border with Canada. He departed from Detroit on November 17, and sailed on Lake Erie to Presque Island, where he unexpectedly died on December 15.⁷¹

Just prior to 1750, a group of Potawatomi, Ottawa, and Chippewa Indians from the Detroit region formed the “Three Fires Confederacy” and relocated to the western shores of Lake Michigan including the Chicago area. Eventually, they became known as the “United Band” of the Potawatomi, Ottawa, and Chippewa or the “Prairie Band” of the Potawatomi by the United States Government.⁷² Also, Potawatomi began moving into northeastern Illinois from the Green Bay region early in the eighteenth century. Potawatomi villages contained numbers of Chippewa and Ottawa Indians who were linguistically and culturally related.⁷³ According to a letter from Francis R. Howe of Porter Station, Indiana, a grandniece of Shabbona, “About the year 1800 an extended hunting excursion brought him [Shabbona] from the Ottawa country into the Potawatomie hunting grounds, where he was kindly received by Chief Spotka and his family.” Shabbona married Spotka’s daughter, Wiomex Okono, and resided at their village on the upper Illinois River.⁷⁴

Shabbona visited the Vial's homestead on three occasions, possibly more, spanning several decades. Samuel Vial (Figure 5) recalled one occasion when Shabbona visited their family:

“He [Shabbona] was in the battle where old Tecumseh was killed, and I never can forget how vividly he portrayed what happened in the famous fight to a crowd of settlers at my father's house one bright moonlight night.”⁷⁵

While as a young Chief, Shabbona came under the tutelage of two Ottawa prophets, who instructed the Indians in a new system of religion, of whom he traveled with throughout the West, acquiring knowledge of the territory and made the acquaintance of many chiefs among the different tribes. In the summer of 1807 Shabbona met Tecumseh on the Wabash River and spent time conferring with him at the Shawnee Village.⁷⁶ In 1810 Tecumseh traveled to Shabbona's village at the headwaters of Big Indian Creek, to seek converts among the Potawatomi in joining a pan-regional alliance of Native American tribes to oppose the westward expansion of the United States Government.⁷⁷ In 1800, President John Adams appointed William Henry Harrison as Indiana Territorial Governor, and he served throughout Thomas Jefferson and James Madison's administrations. Under specific directives from President Thomas Jefferson, Governor Harrison engineered plans to extinguish Indian land claims in the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys through land cession treaties with the tribes in order to secure American territory west to the Mississippi River, which initially was deemed as a means of national security against a foreign threat from France.⁷⁸ From 1804 to 1809, Governor Harrison negotiated eight Indian treaties and amassed 29,719,530 acres in Indiana and Illinois.⁷⁹

During the War of 1812, Great Britain relied upon its alliance with the Native American tribes in capturing American forts in the Northwest Territory;⁸⁰ however, the British military was unable to establish a sustainable campaign against American forces or maintain its supply

line on the Great Lakes. After the British fleet was destroyed in the Battle of Lake Erie by the American Navy on September 10, 1813, General Henry Procter informed Tecumseh of his plans to abandon Detroit and Fort Malden, and withdraw to Niagara.⁸¹ Procter's actions divided Potawatomi leaders but Shabbona, Mad Sturgeon, Billy Caldwell, and other warriors continued their support of Tecumseh. American forces led by General William Henry Harrison pursued General Procter and the 41st Regiment. Under obstinate pressure from Tecumseh, Procter engaged the Americans at the Battle of the Thames. The conflict was brief, Procter hastily retreated from the battlefield, American forces quickly surrounded his regiment and Tecumseh was killed in heavy fighting.⁸² Immediately, Indian warriors abandoned the conflict, including Shabbona, who met with General Lewis A. Cass in Detroit, and vowed never to take up arms against the Americans again.⁸³ Shabbona's repeated assertion of Colonel Richard M. Johnson dispensing the fatal shot that killed Tecumseh in the Battle of the Thames on October 5, 1813 is cited by many early settlers whom he conversed with in later years; however, the event remains a controversy.⁸⁴ Although Johnson is largely credited for killing Tecumseh, he never publicly admitted to it, and there are contrary reports that Tecumseh was shot by another soldier.⁸⁵ Gurdon Hubbard, a long-time friend of Shabbona, often conversed with him on the subject of Tecumseh's death:

“It has been reported that Shaub-e-nee said that Tecumseh was killed by Col. R. M. Johnson. This, I am convinced, is a mistake, for I often conversed with him on that subject, and he invariably said that balls were striking all around them; by one of them Tecumseh was killed and fell by his side; that no one could tell who directed the fatal shot, unless it were the person who fired it; that person was claimed to be Johnson.”⁸⁶

Shabbona's second visit with the Vial's occurred in early December 1845 on his return trip from Washington, D.C. Shabbona traveled to Washington, D.C., as part of a larger

delegation of Potawatomi leaders including: Waubonsie, Half-Day, White Pigeon, Miahmis, Lequahkinne, Keah, Wamunawet, and Loshminne; with their attorney, Richard S. Elliott, accompanied by three translators: Medore B. Beaubien, William Holliday, and Pierre Le Clere to negotiate the Treaty of Council Bluffs, Iowa.⁸⁷ The delegation was in Washington, D.C., from October 24 to November 26, and on November 25, they negotiated with President Polk and received an offer of \$850,000 in exchange for 5 million acres of Iowa territory.⁸⁸ The Potawatomis were granted 576,000 acres (30 square miles) in northeastern Kansas and migrated to their new reservation in 1847.⁸⁹ On November 24, U.S. Senator Lewis A. Cass of Michigan introduced Shabbona to President James K. Polk at a reception in the Capitol Building.⁹⁰ Samuel Vial recalled:

“The old fellow went to Washington once, and when he came back he stopped with us for a few days. We had an old map of the country and Shabbona traced on it the route by which he went. To imitate by what means they traveled he would pouf-pouf for a steamboat, imitate the motion of a horse loping, to show when they went on horseback, and so on. Finally he came to a standstill. He curved his arm and ran it along the table. We didn’t understand, and he looked puzzled. Suddenly his eye lighted up, he seized a small dinner bell we had, curved his arm, and ... ran along the door he tinkle-tinkle-tinkled with the bell. He meant that it was in a sleigh. He had no word to describe it as he had never seen one before.”⁹¹

Shabbona’s third visit with the Vials occurred on the day following a trip to the Rice Theater, where he reported seeing actors portraying American Indians on stage. Samuel Vial stated:

“In later years, when Chicago began to be a live Western town, some enterprising fellow started a cheap theatre. They had several Indian characters in the play, and one night Shabbona went. He was over at our home the day following and it was really very amusing to hear and see him. He was thoroughly disgusted with the stage Indians. Shabbona had very long black hair, and whenever it got into his eyes or about his face with a single toss of his head he would throw it all back. The stage Indians used their hands to brush their hair back, a thing no real Indian ever did and it was at once noticed by the old chief.”⁹²

The history of Chicago theater,⁹³ particularly the Rice Theater,⁹⁴ indicates one play “Chicago in 1812” or “The Massacre of Fort Dearborn” depicted actors wearing Indian costumes. The play was performed on December 19-20, 1856, and was advertised before as well as during its run:

“The New Historical Drama of “Chicago in 1812,” or the “Massacre of Fort Dearborn,” is to be performed tomorrow evening at Mr. Rice’s Theatre, for the Benefit of Mr. J. H. Wright. It will be produced with new costumes, and new scenery painted by Mr. R. S. Smith. Among the latter is a beautiful view, by moonlight, of Fort Dearborn and the Lake Shore, as they appeared in 1812. The play is founded upon Major Richardson’s celebrated historical romance of Wau-nan-gee. Every citizen of Chicago will wish to witness this dramatic embodiment of the thrilling scenes of its early history.”⁹⁵

“Chicago in 1812” was performed at the second Rice Theater. The owner, John B. Rice built the first Rice Theater in 1847; it was a wooden structure that caught fire during a performance on July 30, 1850. The fire started in Mr. Kelly’s stable on Dearborn Street and spread to twenty buildings destroying half a city block.⁹⁶ The second Rice Theater opened on February 3, 1851. The theater was designed by the architect John Van Osdel; it was a brick building with an eighty foot frontage that stood on Dearborn, between Randolph and Washington Streets, and seated 1,400 people.⁹⁷ Van Osdel used galvanized iron for the roof and on the cornices on the front of the building.⁹⁸ The theater’s wooden interior was elaborately decorated. It had gas lighting, two saloons and a stage forty feet deep; seating was arranged by location with orchestra seats, a first circle and parquet, a family circle, a gallery, and three tiers of box seats. The Rice Theater was considered the only creditable playhouse in Chicago for the mid-nineteenth century.⁹⁹

The play, “Chicago in 1812,” is based on the historical romance *Wau-Nan-Gee* written by Major John M. Richardson (Figure 6). Richardson, born in Canada, joined the British 41st Regiment at the age of fifteen. He was garrisoned at Detroit when Mrs. Margaret Helm arrived from Michillimackinac under British guard, several months following the Fort Dearborn attack,

where he admired her.¹⁰⁰ Coincidentally, Richardson was in the Battle of the Thames on October 5, 1813 accompanying the 41st Regiment and surrendered to the U. S. Army. He was among a group of prisoners encircling a campfire the evening following the battle, as word circulated through the encampment of General Harrison's acknowledgment of Colonel Richard M. Johnson's role in the death of Tecumseh.¹⁰¹ Richardson conducted research for his novel, *Wau-Nan-Gee or The Massacre at Chicago: A Romance of the American Revolution*, while in Windsor, Ontario. His sources included: *Narrative of the Massacre at Chicago, August 15, 1812, and of Some Proceeding Events* (Chicago, 1844); written by Juliette A. Kinzie, the story was told by Margaret Helm, her sister-in-law, and added to by her husband, John H. Kinzie Jr., who was about nine years old at the time of the massacre, and by her mother-in-law, the widow of John Kinzie; and "The Account of the Massacre" by Lieutenant Linai T. Helm (1814-15) written for Judge Augustus B. Woodward of Detroit, who allowed Richardson to read the manuscript.¹⁰²

Shabbona's attendance at the Rice Theater in December of 1856 for the play, "Chicago in 1812," was an apropos event in his personal life. He played a key role in protecting the lives of John Kinzie, his wife, and four children after the Battle of Fort Dearborn. Under Black Partridge's leadership, Shabbona, Waubansee, Keepotah, and another Indian guarded the porch of Kinzie's house protecting the family from further harm from hostile Indians.¹⁰³ Shabbona was drawn to Chicago over his loyalty toward John Kinzie, a British fur trader who was well known among the Potawatomi, Ottawa, and Chippewa Indians.¹⁰⁴ John Kinzie resided in Detroit prior to moving to Chicago, and participated in the treaty proceedings at the Treaty of Greenville in 1795.¹⁰⁵ It is quite possible that Shabbona had a relationship with John Kinzie before migrating to northern Illinois in 1800.

In the later years of his life, Shabbona traveled throughout northern Illinois visiting many of his old friends. John H. Kinzie received a visit from Shabbona in July 1852 his first visit to Chicago in sixteen years.¹⁰⁶ In 1855, Shabbona was seen at the Wells Street Station admiring the steam engine named after him by the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad,¹⁰⁷ and in 1856 he secured a free pass to ride on the Illinois Central Railroad to Kankakee.¹⁰⁸ From 1855 to 1859, Mark Beaubien worked as the Lighthouse Keeper in Chicago.¹⁰⁹ Many Indians, including Shabbona, traveled to Chicago to draw their pay from the federal government, and afterward they went to visit Mark Beaubien. In 1856, Frank Gordon Beaubien was a young boy of five years of age. His father would place him on top of a table, and play the violin, as Frank danced for the Indians. Frank received maple sugar and a pair of moccasins from Shabbona for the dance.¹¹⁰ Shabbona's relationship with the Vial Family; like with many of the early settlers throughout northern Illinois, was an enduring friendship spanning several decades. Thirty years after Shabbona's death in 1859, Samuel Vial said:

“I remember old Shabbona, the head chief of the Potawatomes, very well. He was about the noblest specimen of an Indian I ever saw. Physically his form was perfect, and his face not only expressive of strange character but of a wonderful intelligence. It was through his efforts that his tribe remained quiet during the Black Hawk war.”¹¹¹

For many years Joseph Vial's home was a regular place for the preacher circuit riders performing Sunday services. Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Baptist and Methodist were equally welcomed, and if no preacher appeared, one of the neighbors or the stage-house keeper would read biblical scripture. Among the preachers who conducted services were Peter Cartwright and Jeremiah Porter.¹¹² In the fall of 1831, Jeremiah Porter was assigned Chaplain at Fort Brady in Sault St. Marie, Michigan. In the spring of 1833 the garrison was transferred to Fort Dearborn. On June 26, Porter organized the first Presbyterian Church in Chicago.¹¹³ It was

not uncommon to see people ride from distances of twenty or thirty miles away to attend these praise meetings.¹¹⁴ Joseph Vial began organizing regular prayer meetings at his home; the first prayer meeting was held on April 21, 1839 with twenty people attending.¹¹⁵ Four years later, the Lyonsville Congregational Church was formed on May 14, 1843; Joseph Vial recorded in his diary: “Wells preached formed church.”¹¹⁶ Puritan ideals survived in Congregationalism and Unitarianism and like so many New Englanders of the period, the Vials embodied this tradition of faith.¹¹⁷

While living on their homestead in Lyons Township, Joseph and Louisa Vial had a daughter, Martha, and another son, Nathaniel. Joseph died in the fall of 1853 at the age of sixty-two, and Louisa died in 1856.¹¹⁸ Misfortune befell Nathaniel; he was murdered on the road from their home to Chicago in 1858.¹¹⁹ Martha married J. L. Wells in 1858; he was a widower with two children and they had two children and lived on a farm in Lyons Township.¹²⁰ Robert Vial (Figure 7) remained on the original homestead farming well into his nineties. He married Mary R. Ketchum and they had seven children: Mary, Robert, Edmund, Frederick, Eugene, Robert C., and Alice.¹²¹ Samuel Vial’s wife, Margaret, died in 1856; he then married a widow, Gertrude North, who had two daughters, Sarah and Jennie. Samuel retired from farming in 1874 and built a home in La Grange. Gertrude died in 1879 and both of her daughters, Sarah and Jennie, lived with Samuel until his death on October 17, 1911.¹²²

The early Pioneer period created social networks that forged relationships between citizens of unpretentious character. Joseph Vial and his family developed relationships with persons who were prominent figures in the early history of Chicago, including Gurdon S. Hubbard, Philo Carpenter, David and Bernardus Laughton, Elijah Wentworth Jr., Dr. John T. Temple and Chief Shabbona. Furthermore, the Vial’s demonstrated civic values by developing

relationships with citizens interested in advancing business enterprises, and by participating in the burgeoning institutions of government, education, and religion within Cook County. Joseph Vial's relationships with John S. Wright and Jeremiah Porter greatly influenced him in building the first school and church in Lyons Township with the assistance of his family and friends. Joseph Vial's diary provides a distinct view of what his life resembled while living on a farm in Cook County before the advent of the industrial age.

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Figure 1: Joseph Vial

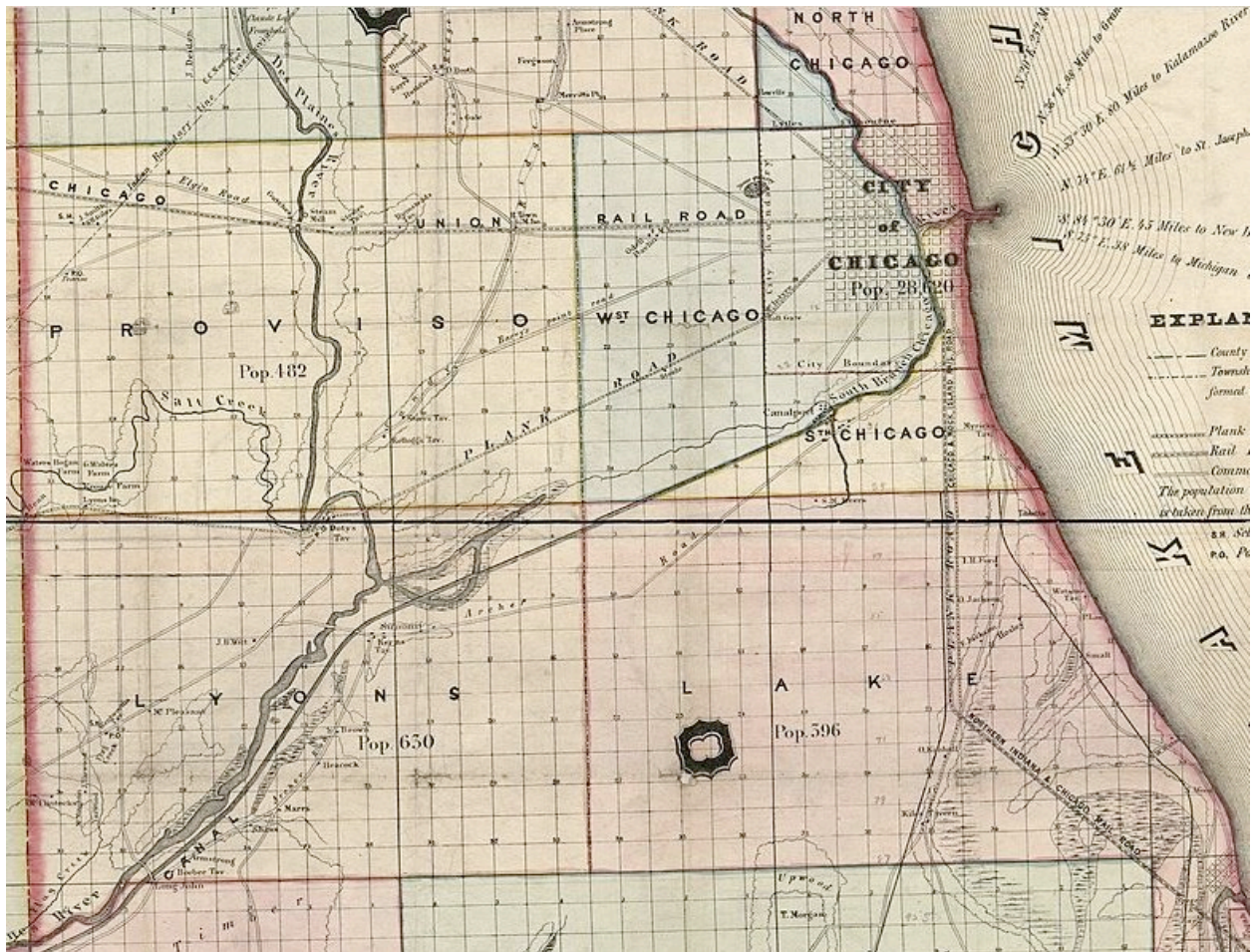


Figure 2: Lyons Township, 1851 Rees Map

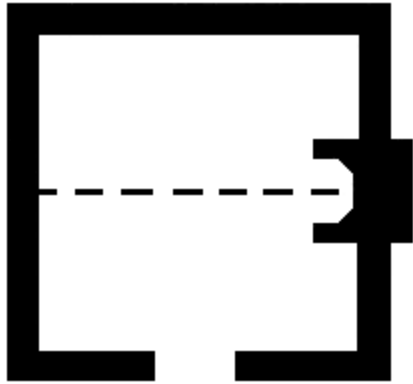


Figure 3: English style single pen cabin floor plan



Figure 4: Chief Shabbona



Figure 5: Samuel Vial



Figure 6: Major John Richardson



Figure 7: Robert Vial