

ILLINOIS' FIRST ROAD THE KASKASKIA – CAHOKIA TRAIL

As we approach 2018, the year Illinois celebrates its Bicentennial, we should reminisce about the early days when the first settlers traversed the midwestern prairies following the paths that had been created by earlier native civilizations inhabiting this region for millennia. The Confederated Peorias originated in the land surrounding the Great Lakes and drained by the Mississippi River; these peoples are the Illinois or the Ilini Indians, The Kaskaskia–Cahokia Trail had an important role in the lives of the Ilini.

When the French created permanent settlements at Kaskaskia and Cahokia, they named these townships after the Ilini Indians who lived there before. Other villages, towns, and settlements grew over the next century dotting the east half of the Mississippi River's floodplain. This first road caused other roads to be developed, eventually leading to Illinois becoming the 21st state in 1818 and Kaskaskia becoming the first capital of Illinois.

The 54-mile trail connecting the two towns starts at the eastern edge of the Middle Mississippi River, follows northerly along a series of limestone bluffs which provided shelter to early civilizations 8000 years ago, traversing a hilly plateau for the last 25 miles. Along the way we find such historic treasures as the Kaskaskia Bell State Historic Site; Fort Kaskaskia; Fort de Chartres, built in 1719; La Belle Fontaine (Bellefontaine), site of the first American settlement in Illinois; Cahokia, a town as old as Colonial Williamsburg with a vertical log church first built in 1699; and many historic dwellings once home to notable French and American settlers.

One of the notable settlers of the area is General Samuel Whiteside, for whom Whiteside County is named. His family settled on the abandoned Flannery Fort site on the Kaskaskia - Cahokia Trail near Columbia, Illinois. General Whiteside served on the commission to select Vandalia for the Illinois State Capital, served in the Illinois General Assembly, and participated in most regional campaigns against native tribes. He commissioned a young Abraham Lincoln as a captain in the militia during the Black Hawk War.

Wolf Koch and his wife **Linnea** travel extensively; their interest in history has taken them to many historical sites in European countries, and now to the Heartland of the US. They have traveled multiple times to the Kaskaskia-Cahokia Trail area in Illinois and Missouri, and have researched and photographed the vertical log buildings which have survived Mother Nature's fury, as well as other historical sites on both sides of the Mississippi. Dr. Koch, a Sterling resident, is a consultant to the oil and petrochemical industry and has been a professor of chemical engineering. Linnea Koch is a graphic designer and photographer, known for her photos of local landmarks and documenting the Whiteside County Barn Tours since their beginning.