This is the first of a two-part essay exploring the historical landscape of the Governors State University (GSU) campus.

Introduction
To a casual visitor or to a student, the experience of the Governors State campus might be very like the map available on the GSU website (govst.edu). It shows a collection of buildings, roadways, parking lots, ornamental plantings, monumental sculptures and the like. But this built environment is only a small part of the entire 780 acre campus landscape, and it encompasses only a part of the diverse ways in which land is used. Much of the campus reflects its past history as well: what we see today is embedded in a still-visible historical matrix.

And we have the documentation to reconstruct the historical GSU landscape at two pivotal points in its past. The first is 1834, the year of the Public Land Survey of Monee Township in which GSU is located. This survey took place before the arrival of the settlers and the landscape described was one of native plant communities as yet unmodified by euro-American agriculture. The second is 1873, in the heart of the agricultural period when, by happy coincidence, were produced both a detailed plat map of area landholdings and an equally detailed assessment of the real and personal property of area residents. The juxtaposition of the two allows for a unique view of the farming landscape at a time when the diversified family farming practices of the 19th century had not yet succumbed to the market driven mono-cultures of the modern era.

1834
The Historical Context
The early 1830’s were tumultuous years for the lands of the upper Midwest. It was the time of the Black Hawk War and the time of Indian Removal. In 1833, by the Treaty of Chicago, the combined nations of Potawatomie, Ottawa and Chippewa ceded their lands in Illinois to the United States and agreed to move to territories reserved for them west of the Mississippi River. What would become Monee and surrounding townships, up to that time Indian Territory, were part of that cession. The purpose of the survey of 1834 was to lay out township and section lines so that these lands could eventually be put up for sale to settlers. Although the survey party may not have recognized it, this was a bittersweet moment - those few weeks in July, 1834 - when they were describing a natural landscape soon to disappear, a disappearance that would be as profound as the disappearance of the native peoples who up until then occupied that world. Yet at the same time, their survey was preparing the way for a new beginning: the transformation of the landscape by plow, axe, cow.

The Survey
The basic unit of the survey was the township, a square 6 miles on a side. The interior of the township was divided into sections, each one mile on a side, encompassing 640 acres, and numbered sequentially from one to thirty six. The surveyor, as part of his instructions was required to describe the vegetation and other natural features encountered as the section lines were laid out. The GSU campus, 780 acres, occupies al-
most all of Section 10 in Monee Township and an additional piece in Section 15, adjacent to Section 10 on the south (Figure 1). In laying out the section lines, therefore, the surveyor walked the perimeter of what would become the GSU campus, describing the landscape along the way. In addition to the surveyor himself, the survey party consisted of a fore chainman, a hind chainman, a flagman and an axeman/mound builder. The axeman cleared the way in woodland and built the mounds for survey stakes in prairie. Fore and hind chainmen carried the chain, 66 feet long, which was used to measure distance. There are 80 chains to the mile.

Figure 1
Plat map of Monee Township in 1834 based on field notes and sketches of Deputy Surveyor D. A. Spaulding. Site of the future GSU campus-Section 10 and part of Section 15—shown in bold. Thorn Grove—today Thorn Creek Nature Preserve—occupied 4 sections in the northeastern part of the Township; Raccoon Grove, 4 sections in the south.
The Land

Here are the descriptions of section 10 as seen from the boundary lines:
West line, from south to north:
South half: “Level wet Prairie, too wet for cultivation”
North half: “Land dry and rolling — good soil fit for cultivation”

East line, from south to north:
A “large hollow” in the south half. The rest of the land is described as “High dry rolling Prairie, good soil
fit for cultivation. Corner on high Prairie.”
The “hollow” is the valley of Thorn Creek as it flows northeast across section 10
The “corner on high Prairie” is the present day intersection of Stuenkel Road and University Parkway

North line, from west to east:
“Land gently rolling, good soil fit for cultivation”

South line, from west to east (this line lies ¼ mile north of Dralle Road):
West half: “Level rich Prairie fit for cultivation”
East half: “Gently rolling fit for cultivation”

While traversing the east half of this line, the survey party crossed “a small drain, runs North, some bushes
along the bank and a small grove of Oak bushes north of the line.” The small drain is Thorn Creek still fur-
ther upstream, closer to its headwaters.
The oak grove, which still exists, is an outlier of the more extensive woodland, Thorn Grove, lying further
to the east.

With the exception of the valley of Thorn Creek and the small oak grove, the GSU campus was indeed a
landscape of prairie.

The Surveyor’s description of the prairie seems at first laconic, especially if compared to the rather more
fulsome descriptions of waving grasses and gay floral displays we have become used to, but on further
consideration his lexicon of adjectives, though simple, have elegance and power: high, dry, rolling, gently
rolling, level, rich, and the phrase this corner on high Prairie have an evocative quality all their own. It is
symbolic of this pivotal moment in history that each description of the native landscape is followed by an
evaluation of its potential for cultivation.

While laying out section lines within the interior of Thorn Grove, just to the east of section 10, the sur-
veyor notes, again with a poetic turn of phrase: “Timber White Oak, Black Oak and Hickory. Very hand-
some growth of timber as far as I can see…” But continuing his agricultural perspective, he typically de-
scribes the forest soils as “thin, broken, not fit for cultivation.”

The Surveyor

The man responsible for these descriptions was Don Alonzo Spaulding, both chief surveyor and fore
chainman of the survey party. A mathematics teacher who had emigrated to western Illinois from Vermont
in 1817, he was already a prominent surveyor when he received the contract to survey Monee Township,
having surveyed throughout much of Illinois. He was admired for the quality of his work, and eventually
rose to high position in the office of the Surveyor General of the United States.
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D. A. Spaulding was more than a surveyor; he was also an actor in the historic dramas unfolding in mid-nineteenth century America. Not only did he have a contract to survey lands ceded by Native Americans under the treaty of Chicago, but he was also a principal surveyor of many of the lands in northeastern Illinois which were reserved for Indians by the same treaty. Among the parcels he surveyed was Raccoon Grove, originally a reservation set aside for the 5 daughters of Monee, an Ottawa, the wife and partner of the well-known trader Joseph Bailly.

He played a role in American history in other ways. His farm in Madison County, just south of Alton, Illinois was a way station on the Underground Railroad for slaves escaping to freedom across the Mississippi River from Missouri. His donation of 60 acres allowed for the establishment of Rocky Fork, a pioneering African-American community located about a mile from the Mississippi.  

He was a well-known supporter of women’s suffrage as well. 

It seems somehow fitting that the man who provided us with the first written description of what would become a university campus, was not only a good naturalist with an eye for landscape, but was also involved with the three principal social issues of his day: native American policy, abolition and women’s rights.

And he was an admirer of Thorn Creek Woods!

by Jon Mendelson

1 Eric Nicholson of the GSU Library has transcribed the field notes of the Monee Township survey. The notes are available on-line in the GSU archives. Portions of these field notes are on display at the Thorn Creek Nature Center.

2 Spaulding’s role in the Underground Railroad is detailed in an article, “Monument dedicated at Underground Railway entry point” which appeared in the Alton Telegraph of April 14, 2011.

3 His career as a surveyor is summarized on the Madison County Surveyors webpage http://mcsurvey.com.
By 1873, GSU’s pre-settlement landscape of prairie and grove had given way to a fully developed agricultural world of cropland, pasture and orchard. This world is graphically illustrated by two documents, the Monee Township Assessors Record for that year, and an 1873 Plat map of township landholdings. Both of these documents are available online in GSU Library Archives at http://libguides.govst.edu/content.php?pid=45174&sid=1850611.

The Assessor’s 1873 record is particularly detailed compared to other township assessments both before and after this date. The size and value of individual farmsteads were listed, as in other years, but also included, uniquely, were the acreages devoted to the growing of particular crops, thus providing a wealth of information on land use in this mid-19th century era of mixed agriculture. In addition, under the category “personal property”, the assessment lists the numbers of livestock – horses, cattle, sheep and hogs – on these same farms, adding another dimension to this emerging picture of a living landscape. A portion of a page from the 1873 assessment is shown below as Figure 1.

The plat map of 1873 puts this information in geographic context: Where were these farms? What were their configurations? Where were the house and barn? The orchard? Who were the neighbors? In short, what was the spatial organization of this landscape. The northeastern portion of the Monee Township Plat, including the future GSU campus and a part of Thorn Grove, is shown as Figure 2. A comparison of this plat with the original survey map of 1834 shows how far things have come. (The 1834 original survey map of Monee Township was reproduced as Figure 1 in Winter 2012-2013 edition of Thorn Creek News.)
In 1834, for example, Thorn Grove was identified as “timber” still wild, unsettled land. By 1873 it had been divided into innumerable little woodlots owned by nearby prairie farmers. Many of the present day roads had already been established, including Monee Road, which followed the western edge of Thorn Grove, and both Stuenkel and Dralle roads which today border the campus on the north and south.

In Section 10, the future site of GSU, the unbroken prairie of 1834 was now occupied by all or part of seven farms. The roadbed of The Illinois Central Railroad, laid out in the 1850’s had bisected the north-west corner of the section. Landholding patterns were complex due to this, and to the peculiar configura-

Figure 2: The northeastern portion of the Plat Map of Monee Township 1873. Future Governors State University campus boundary shown in bold outline.
tion of Exchange Road (now University Parkway) along the east boundary of the section, which influenced interior property lines. In addition, five of the seven landowners had property in adjacent sections. I discuss in detail the holdings of three of the land owners, Krake, Stuenkel and Boeht, as representative of the basic land use practices and constraints on the campus-to-be. The land use acreage and livestock totals for all the farmers in Section 10 is presented as an appendix.

The Krake farm was 77 acres in size, including house, outbuildings and a small orchard. The farm occupied the northeast corner of Section 10, a corner described less than 40 years earlier by D. A. Spaulding, the Public Land Office Surveyor, as being “on high prairie”. By 1873, more than half of this piece of prairie was under cultivation: 15 acres in corn, 4 in wheat, and 30 in oats. The remaining acres were in pasture (6 ac) and hay meadow (21 ac), devoted to maintaining the farm’s livestock which at that time consisted of 3 horses, 12 cows and a pair of hogs. Krake also owned 40 acres in Section 2, just down the road from his Section 10 property. This parcel, as Fig. 2 indicates, was partly wooded, the edge of Thorn Grove. In later years it was operated by the Fathers of St. Charles as Camp Pompei, a camp for kids. It is now part of Thorn Creek Woods Nature Preserve.

Henry Steunkel (Stuinkel) was the principal landowner in Section 10 with approximately 320 acres mostly in the north half of the section. As befits Spaulding’s original description of this land as “dry and rolling”, more than two-thirds of Stuenkel’s farm was either in pasture (153 ac) or hay meadow (58 ac), a much greater percentage than that of the Krake farm. Permanent pasture and meadow, moreover, suggest that the Steunkel farm may have provided a refuge for remnants of the original prairie. Stuenkel had correspondingly more livestock grazing his pastures than Krake – 6 horses, 19 cows and a dozen sheep, together with a trio of hogs. Oats, corn and wheat, in that order, were the principal crops grown, as with Krake, but an additional 6 acres were in “other field crops” which at that time would have included barley, rye, potatoes or flax. The farmstead, which was still in existence as late as 1939 but under different ownership, included house, barn and 2 acres of orchard. Ironically, the main GSU building now sits atop its remains.

The A. Boeht farm was located in the southeast portion of the campus, 40 acres in Section 10 and an additional 60 acres in Section 15. The farmstead – house, outbuildings and an orchard - overlooked the valley of Thorn Creek, described originally by the surveyor as a “small drain”. The northern portion of the farm also included the “small grove of oak bushes...” noted in the survey. Thus, the Boeht farm occupied a rather more diverse landscape than the Steunkel or Krake holdings, and this is reflected in land use: in addition to 9 acres of this original grove, 4 acres were in other field products (unspecified), and the remainder was split evenly between permanent pasture, meadow and cropland. Boeht’s livestock was equally diverse: 3 horses, 7 cows, a sheep and a quartet of hogs, which, in my imagination, I see rooting about in his oak woodland.

Ownership of the land has changed many times between 1873 and the establishment of the GSU campus nearly 100 years later. Gone are the Steunkels, Krakes, Kleins, Chadwicks and Boehts, replaced by Hantacks, Urbans, Sztubas and Ruders. But traces still remain. The present day Field Station building, for example, is very close to the original Boeht farmstead; the Conference Center occupies what in 1873 was the site of the Klein house and orchard. But the most enduring legacy of that rural past are the Osage Orange hedgerows, the living fences of the mid-19th century which, before the advent of barbed wire, served to demarcate boundaries, enclose pasture, and protect crops from the ravages of livestock. Remnants of one such hedgerow, which originally separated the Steunkel farm from the Klein’s to the south still exists, serving as a backdrop to the sculpture “Field Rotation”. A second hedgerow, which originally separated (Continued on page 4)
the Krake farm from Steunkel’s, lies on the north side of the main campus lake. Within it today is nestled the beautiful chair, centerpiece of the Martin Puryear sculpture “Bodark Arc”, a reference to bois d’arc, “wood of the Bow” for which use Osage Orange was renowned.

-Jon Mendelson

Appendix: The land use acreage and livestock totals for all the farmers in Section 10, taken from the 1873 Monee Township Assessors Record.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Landowners &amp; acres owned:</th>
<th>Crops</th>
<th>Livestock</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wheat</td>
<td>Corn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steunkel 320 acres</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kracke 77 acres</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goeder 80 acres in S10 &amp; 11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boleit 100 acres in S10 &amp; 15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chadwick 40 acres</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dodge 160 acres in S10 &amp; 15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klein 137 acres in S10 &amp; 9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Elizabeth Clemens and Dorea LaPorte wrote:

Please accept this donation in honor of Margaret Carter who passed away March 10, 2013. She was an avid gardener and lover of birds, having a huge feeder that was as busy as Grand Central Station! And she didn’t discriminate against squirrels either. Margaret will be a part of Thorn Creek Woods forever.”

Thank you