

### *Prairie State Bicentennial with Kay Smith*

This Dec 3, Illinois will celebrate its 200<sup>th</sup> birthday. Two hundred years ago our state was lightly settled with emigrant farmers. The Potawatomi, Sauk, Kaskaskia, Kickapoo, Shawnee and the Ottawa still lived and hunted in the territory however their departure would soon be complete under the Indian Removal Act of 1830.

I was born in a farm house in 1923, at home, as were my three brothers and two sisters. Growing up on the edge of a huge prairie owned and farmed by German immigrants, I came to love the light, color and design of the landscape.

Now at 95, as Artist Laureate of Illinois, an honor given to me by the Lincoln Academy in 1994, for “professional achievements and contributions to the betterment of humanity”, I want to share my admiration of Illinois with you.



*Homestead of the Artist by Kay Smith*

Farmers usually owned no more than 12 to 13 acres of land to feed their families because thick ancient turf would break their plows into pieces. It was not until John Deere invented the steel plow shear in 1837 that Illinois became the bread basket of the world as farmers were able to increase their acreage for production.

The land this home stands on was part of a land grant filed by my great grandmother in the early 1870s. The original house was built of logs. This painting is an example of life on the farm during that period. In the background you can see the root cellar used to store fruits and vegetables during the winter and as shelter during tornados in the spring. The small building in front of the cellar was our smoke house. Here we butchered our own meat, salted it down and hung it to cure. My grandfather inherited the land and it is he and my grandmother, who we see standing in front of the house with their sheep dog Carlos.

My mother grew up in this house, married and raised her children here. It is located near historic Vandalia, the second capitol of Illinois, carved out of the primeval forest that stood 44 feet above the Kaskaskia River about 65 miles northeast of St. Louis.

to be continued ---Kay Smith