



Prairie Justice: A History of Illinois Courts under French, English, and American Law

Roger L Severns

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A concise legal history of Illinois through the end of the nineteenth century, *Prairie Justice* covers the region's progression from French to British to early American legal systems, which culminated in a unique body of Illinois law that has influenced other jurisdictions. Written by Roger L. Severns in the 1950s and published in serial form in the 1960s, *Prairie Justice* is available now for the first time as a book, thanks to the work of editor John A. Lupton, an Illinois and legal historian who also contributed an introduction.

Illinois' legal development demonstrates the tension between two completely different European legal systems, between river communities and prairie towns, and between agrarian and urban interests. Severns uses several rulings—including a reconstitution of the Supreme Court in 1824, slavery-related cases, and the impeachment of a Supreme Court justice—to examine political movements in Illinois and their impact on the local judiciary. Through legal decisions, the Illinois judiciary became an independent, co-equal branch of state government. By the mid-nineteenth century, Illinois had established itself as a leading judicial authority, influencing not only the growing western frontier but also the industrialized and farming regions of the country. With a close eye for detail, Severns reviews the status of the legal profession during the 1850s by looking new members of the Court, the nostalgia of circuit riding, and how a young lawyer named Abraham Lincoln rose to prominence.

Illinois has a rich judicial history, but that history has not been adequately documented until now. With the publication of *Prairie Justice*, those interested in Illinois legal history finally have a book that covers the development of the state's judiciary in its formative years.

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