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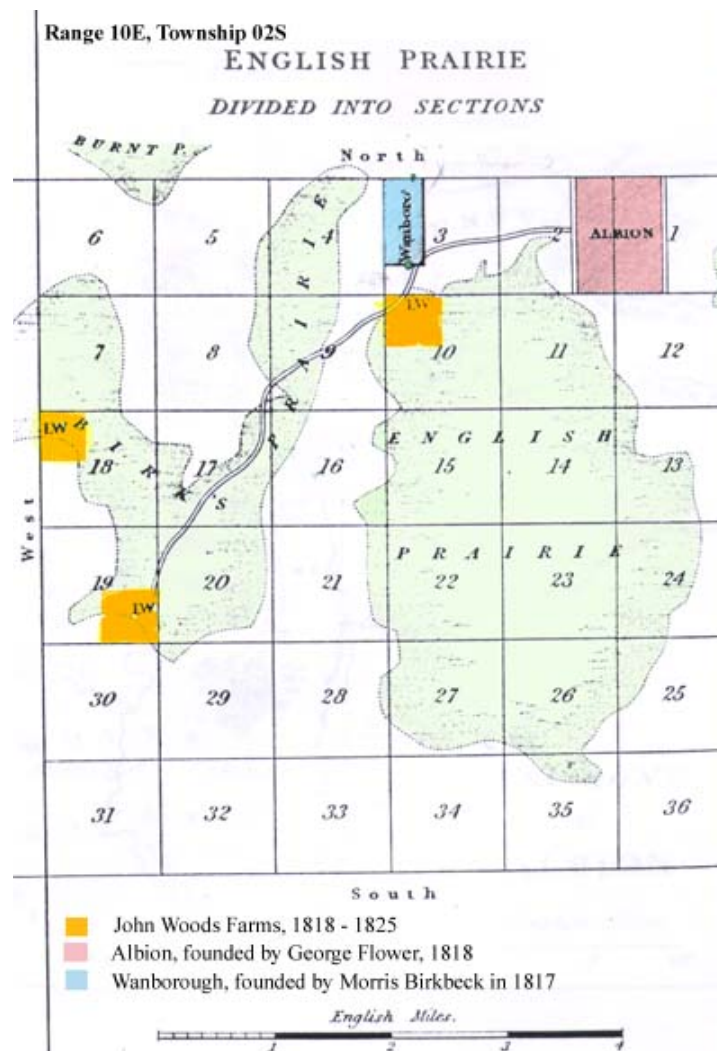
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Wanborough, Illinois

The former village of Wanborough, Illinois, was established in August 1818, by Morris Birkbeck (1764-1825) an English settler who was an early 19th-century Illinois pioneer, social reformer, author, publicist and agricultural innovator. He served briefly as the Secretary of State of Illinois. Wanborough was a center of commerce for his fellow countrymen emigrating to the English Settlement in Edwards County, which was two miles west of Albion, Illinois.





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Birkbeck was born at Settle, England, the son of an influential Quaker also named Morris Birkbeck and his wife Hannah Bradford. By 1794, as leaseholder, Birkbeck was farming an estate of 1,500 acres at Wanborough, Surrey, where he was the first man to raise merino sheep in England. On April 24, 1794, Birkbeck married Prudence Bush, daughter of Richard and Prudence Bush of Wandsworth, Surrey. After ten years of marriage, Prudence died on October 25, 1804, leaving her husband with seven children.

In 1814, accompanied by his friend George Flower, Birkbeck traveled in recently defeated France. His Notes on a Journey through France (1814) revealed a good-tempered, fair-minded observer, well grounded in science and the humanities. A liberal in both politics and religion, Birkbeck found it increasingly irritating to be taxed by a government that denied him a vote because of his religion and also required him to be tithed by a church he did not belong to.

In the spring of 1817, at age fifty-three, together with his associate George Flower and a party consisting chiefly of his children, he emigrated to the United States.

During 1817–18 Morris Birkbeck purchased, both for himself and others, 26,400 acres of public land in what became Edwards County, Illinois (the Illinois Territory at that time). George Flower was busy raising more money and organizing colonists in England. Edward Coles, another London acquaintance, had extolled Illinois' virtues and intended to move to the Territory of Illinois, continued to serve President James Madison.

In 1818 Birkbeck laid out the town of Wanborough. Wanborough included two taverns, a grist mill, two stores, a pottery, a blacksmith, and one of the State's first breweries. The town, however, lasted for only a short time and was abandoned by 1840.

The same year Flower, whose 1500 acres adjoined Birkbeck's, laid out the town of Albion nearby. The English idealists quarreled, in part over Julia Andrews who married Flower rather than the older widower, and never reconciled. The joint area known as the English Prairie Settlement had 400 English and 700 American residents in 1819, but only 800 in an informal survey in 1822.



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In 1819 Morris Birkbeck organized the Agricultural Society of Illinois. Albion's colonists practiced scientific agriculture, improving livestock through selective breeding and writing tracts to inform settlers of ways to improve crop yields. In about 1819 Birkbeck and Flower experienced a falling out, and subsequently transacted all business through intermediaries.

Birkbeck also served as a judge in Edwards County, Illinois. In 1823 Birkbeck, through newspaper articles under the pen name "Jonathan Freeman," helped to consolidate the antislavery forces in Illinois and ensure that it became a free state. In 1824 Coles, who had been elected the new state's second governor, appointed Birkbeck Secretary of State. Birkbeck served for three months, but was turned out when the pro-slavery majority in the state Senate refused to confirm his appointment. Albion also became the county seat, although residents of Mount Carmel across the river attempted to retrieve some court records by force, and ultimately succeeded in splitting off their area as Wabash County, Illinois."

Morris Birkbeck drowned on June 4, 1825, while attempting to swim his horse across the flooded Fox River. Competition from the nearby town of Albion and Birkbeck's accidental drowning in 1825 contributed to the community's demise. A cemetery is all that is left of the village.





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[NOTES]

Birkbeck's Notes on a Journey in America from the Coast of Virginia to the Territory of Illinois (1817) was published in Philadelphia, London, Dublin, and Cork. It ran through eleven editions in English in two years, and was published in German at Jena (1818). His Letters from Illinois (1818), published in Boston, Philadelphia, and London, went through seven editions in English, besides being translated in 1819 into French and German. By directing settlers to the prairie lands of the then west, these books had a wide influence.

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[Letters from Illinois](#). By Morris Birkbeck. Published in 1818