

[Call for Papers/Presentations \(Spring 2023\)](#)

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Call for Papers

Date:

April 22, 2023

Location:

Illinois, United States

Subject Fields:

Local History, Rural History / Studies, Urban History / Studies, Immigration & Migration History / Studies, Demographic History / Studies

At the Crossroads of the Urban-Rural Divide: A Conference on Northern Illinois History and Cultural Heritage

Conference Date: Saturday April 22, 2023

Location: Northern Illinois University campus in DeKalb, Illinois

The Regional History Center at NIU Libraries invites proposals for papers, sessions, panels, and multi-media presentations for a conference exploring the urban-rural divide in the context of regional history and cultural heritage in Northern Illinois. Identified in recent scholarship and commentary as perhaps the most consequential political fracture line in American society, the urban-rural divide has factored into national identity, governance, and public policy since this country's founding. The Northern Illinois region—representing a swath of land north of Interstate 80 and extending west from Chicagoland to the Mississippi River—offers numerous opportunities to understand how historic change and continuity have shaped the current political and ideological dynamic playing out across the United States. Collectively, the region exemplifies the tension and conflict of the urban-rural dichotomy, where the influence of a major metropolitan agglomeration looms large over the individual communities and interests found within.

As the urban, suburban, and peri-urban landscape expands, the resulting demographic and cultural variance reconfigures traditional patterns and notions of political affiliation, cultural expression, community values, and shared experience. In other words, the fracture lines become less clear and conventional wisdom about the divide is continuously tested and reformulated. This conference seeks to temporarily shift focus from topics well-covered in historical discussions about Illinois to bring attention to community stories and historical narratives that are frequently

overlooked and underappreciated yet have profound implications for the trajectory of this state and nation. Like many other rapidly changing regions, Northern Illinois represents a crossroads with a unique history that can inform our present and future understanding.

The conference organizers hope to engage a diverse audience of scholars, practitioners, students, hobbyists, community leaders, and others to examine the urban-rural divide through a regional and local lens. We invite proposals from professionals and amateurs across disciplines that address some aspect of this urban-rural dynamic in the context of Northern Illinois history and culture. The presentation format is open and both group and individual session proposals will be considered. We welcome topics that include (but are not limited to) the following areas:

- Historic political and ideological tensions between town and country
- Labor and opportunity in the post-industrial global economy
- Indigenous history, culture, and knowledges
- Suburban sprawl, rural contraction, and evolving land use
- Race, justice, and diversifying communities
- Immigration, migration, and demographic shifts
- Gender, sexuality, and women's history
- Technology, climate change, and environmental history
- Radicalization, polarization, and rural/urban decline
- Memory institutions, community identity, and the telling of local/regional history
- Historiography trends, gaps, and discourses
- Teaching regional and local history at the elementary, secondary, and college levels
- Historic people, places, and events in regional popular culture or folklore
- Institutional networks, historic tourism, and the heritage industry
- Documenting and curating local and regional history

For the purpose of this conference, the Northern Illinois Region is defined by the NIU Regional History Center's geographic collecting scope, which encompasses the northernmost counties in the state of Illinois outside of Cook County. Preference will be given to presenters and topics originating within this approximate geographic region. However, there is no residency requirement and topics outside of the geographic focus will be considered if the proposal aligns significantly with the

other thematic elements of the conference.

Proposals should include contact information, presentation/paper title, and a 200-300 word abstract that describes your topic and how it will be presented. These can be submitted to Associate Professor Bradley J. Wiles at bwiles@niu.edu. The deadline for proposals is November 30, 2022, and all individuals submitting proposals will be notified with an acceptance decision by December 31, 2022.

Contact Info:

Associate Professor Bradley J. Wiles, Head of Special Collections and Archives Dept., NIU Libraries, Northern Illinois University, 217 Normal Road, DeKalb, Illinois, 60115, 815-753-9392, bwiles@niu.edu.

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<https://library.niu.edu/university-libraries/collections/rhc/index.shtml>