



Horse Barn

Perry Farm Park and Durham-Perry Farmstead

*Bourbonnais Township Park District
459 N Kennedy Drive Bourbonnais, Illinois 60914*

The Perry Farm Park officially encompasses 169 acres in total, but the 25 northeastern acres that are inside Kennedy Drive, Perry Street, and the main park drive have been designated as the Durham-Perry Farmstead. Included within the historic farmstead are the: farmhouse, barns, farm buildings, animal pens, gardens, Centennial Orchard, Durham Memorial, and Millennium Garden. The Perry Farm Park and Durham-Perry Farmstead are a part of ongoing preservation efforts by the Bourbonnais Township Park District.

The artifacts of the Perry Farm Park and Durham-Perry Farmstead represent a heritage by Thomas Durham and David Perry. Thomas Durham was a Virginia Quaker who settled with his family on the farm in 1835. Durham's son-in-law was David Perry and he was a Vermont stone mason, lumber mill operator, and farmer.

The Durham-Perry Farmstead was one of the first pioneer settlements in the Kankakee River Valley. Thomas Durham, David Perry, and Lomira Perry were each significant contributors to the political, educational, and economic institutions of the valley. The farmstead and the Perry Farm Park are vivid reminders to the public of a rich local history.

Facts of Note:

Current Owner: Bourbonnais Township Park District

Original Owner and/or Builder of the Farmstead: Thomas Durham

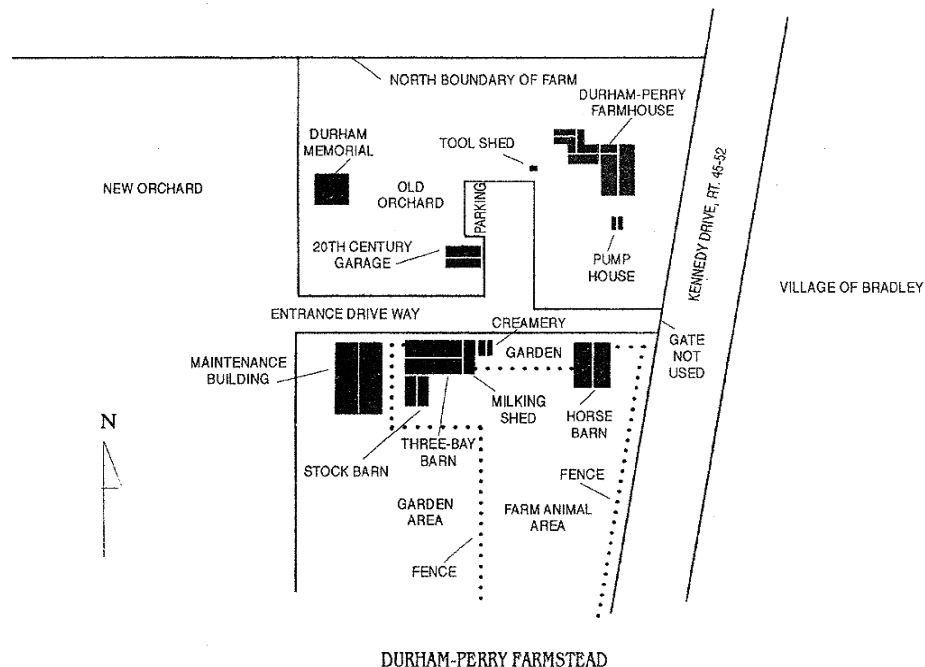
Year the Farmhouse, Three-Bay English Barn, and Horse Barn were built:
1840

Title of the Quilt Block on South Side of Horse Barn: Shutter

Historic Landmark:

- The State of Illinois and the National Park Service of the United States Department of Interior announced the listing of the Durham-Perry Farmstead in the National Register of Historical Places on March 31, 2006.
- The Durham-Perry Farmstead became the third Kankakee County Historic Landmark on February 13, 2013.

The farmhouse is open during regular business hours of the Bourbonnais Township Park District. The farm buildings are open during special events and during the annual Durham-Perry Farmstead Open House. If the farmstead buildings are closed, informational signs around the park and farmstead encourage self-guided tours of the grounds.



This plan drawing shows the farmstead as it appears today. Drawing is not to scale. The farmstead occupies only the Kennedy Drive frontage of the 169 acre farm now called the "Perry Farm Park." It is administered by the Bourbonnais Township Park District.

THE DURHAM-PERRY FARMSTEAD



The Farmhouse

The Durham-Perry Farmstead was established in the 1830s by Thomas Durham (1784-1854) making Durham the first non-Native American settler of the property. The original 1830s home likely began as a one and one-half story log cabin but transitioned into an I-shaped English tidewater style two-story home after improvements in 1840. Thomas Durham and his wife Margaret (c.1796-1882) had twelve children, but some of the children died in infancy. Martha Durham (1826-87), who was one of the twelve children, and her husband David Perry (1806-87) remodeled the I-shaped house after Thomas Durham's death in 1854.

The Perrys purchased the farmstead in 1866. The upper level of the improved 1840s farmhouse contains much of the original woodwork, architectural hardware, and Norfolk door latches. The lower level retains the many features of its 1855 to 1870s remodeling. The structure of the farm house is much like other houses of its day with a stone fireplace, spacious living area, small kitchen and second level. Several artifacts from the late 1800s and early 1900s are on display in the house.



The Three-Bay English Barn

The two barns on the Durham-Perry Farmstead farm were built around 1840 and are believed to be about the same age as the original part of the wood frame farmhouse. One barn is a three-bay English barn (pictured above) and the second one is a horse barn (see page 1). Although several structural changes have been made in the three-bay English barn, the design is typical of barns from the mid-1800s.

Timber frame construction was used to build both barns. The three-bay barn has hand hewn timbers, while mostly hand sawn timbers were used for the horse barn (see web link below). The different materials used indicate that the horse barn was likely built sometime after the English barn, and timber was used from a nearby mill or another location. Other farm buildings that were built later include the concrete block milk house, white wood frame pump house, red wood framed garage (1922), and red wood framed tool shed.

See:

<http://www.reclaimeddesignworks.com/design-inspiration/whats-the-difference-between-rough-sawn-hand-hewn-and-re-sawn-beams/>

THE HISTORY OF THE DURHAM-PERRY FARMSTEAD AND THE PERRY FARM PARK

Until 1816, the Illinois Territory was sparsely settled with much of the population living in the southern part of the state. The conclusion of the War of 1812, however, caused Native American Potawatomi of the territory to relinquish claim of large tracts of lands. With these newly available land areas, immigrants began pushing northward from southern areas.



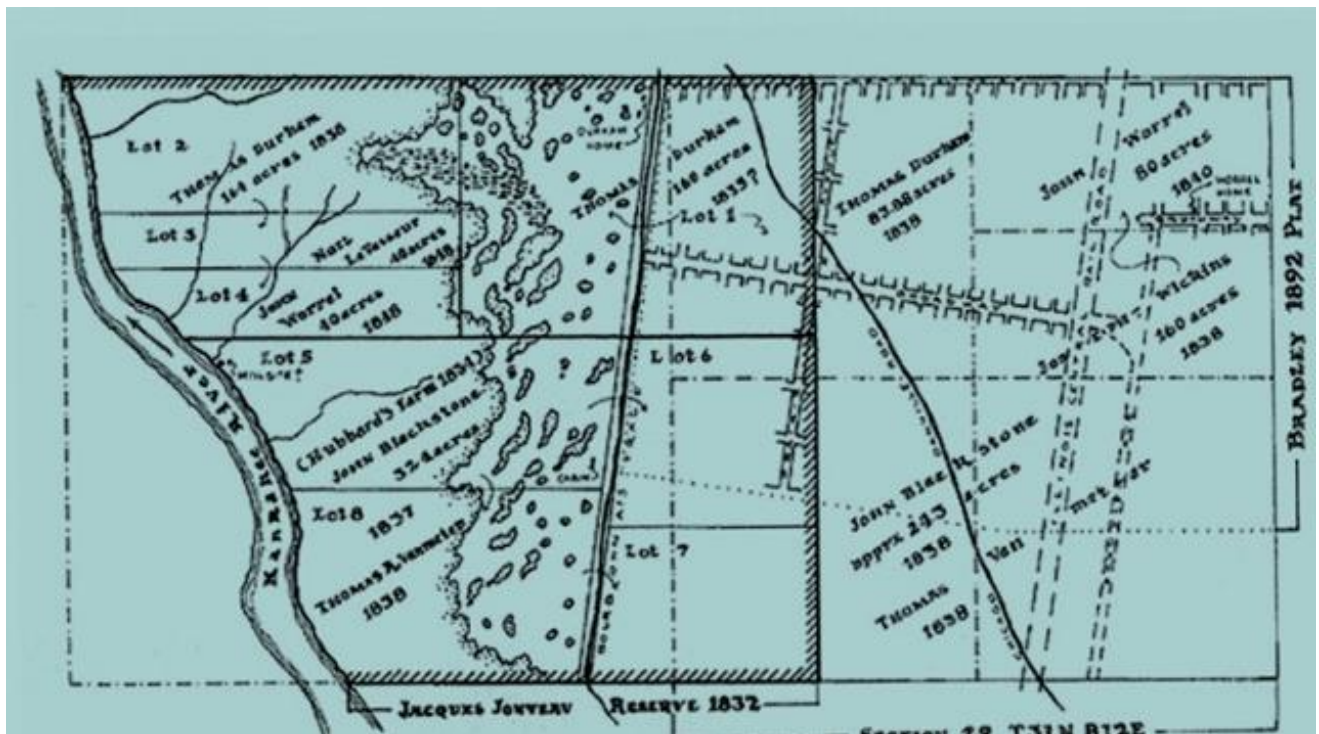
Current Perry Farm Prairie

For Virginia-born Thomas Durham (1784-1854), the urge to move north may have been motivated by his Quaker background and his dislike of slavery. In the early 1800s, Durham moved his family among various locations from Virginia to Tennessee; then to Terre Haute, Indiana; then to Danville, Illinois; and finally to Bourbonnais Grove, Illinois. On one of his mid-1830s trips between Danville and Chicago, Durham camped at a place called “Twin Oaks” (the current Perry Farm Park). “Twin Oaks” was designated as the name due to two large burr oak trees which stood next to each other. One of the two trees still stands south of the farmhouse adjacent to the west side of what was called the Bourbonnais Road/Trace and southwest of the junction of the Chicago-Danville Road.

Durham was amazed at the beauty of the land between the Bourbonnais Road/Trace, Bourbonnais Creek, and river. As a result of this land discovery, Durham purchased about 160 acres of the Jonveau Reserve known as “Twin Oaks” from Gurdon Hubbard in 1835. The acreage he purchased extended from the prairie on both sides of the Bourbonnais Road/Trace to the wet prairie or marsh located west of the Bourbonnais Road/Trace to the Kankakee River.



Gurdon Saltonstall Hubbard at age 28 in 1830



This map shows the original Jonveau reserve and Durham’s ownership of acreage (at top left of map).

In 1838, Durham purchased another 164 acres extending his property 83.88 acres to the east and to the hardwood forest and limestone canyon on the west. The canyon is now commonly known as the “Indian Caves” and is located at the point where the Bourbonnais Creek enters the Kankakee River.



“Indian Caves” on the Perry Farm



View from mouth of Bourbonnais Creek with Indian Caves in background



Northwest view of Kankakee River at the mouth of Bourbonnais Creek

Durham married Margaret “Peggy” (Wyly) Durham (1796-1882) in 1811. When the couple arrived in Bourbonnais Grove with their children, the family was welcomed by the Potawatomi with a wigwam of boughs which served as an early shelter for the family. Durham opened 20 acres for cultivation in 1835 to begin his farming venture.



Restored Prairie at Perry Farm Park

In 1836, parts of Cook and Iroquois Counties became Will County, so the Durham farm became part of the Rock Village Precinct

of Will County. Durham was elected Rock Village Precinct commissioner in 1836 for a two year term. During Durham's tenure as a commissioner, a log school house was built in 1837 and was located just north of the junction of the Chicago-Danville Road and Bourbonnais Road/Trace. The log school, a 20' x 20', 1 ½ story building, served students from 1837 to 1848.



Will County Precinct Commissioner Thomas Durham greets students and parents as the log school house opened in 1837 (sketch by Vic Johnson).

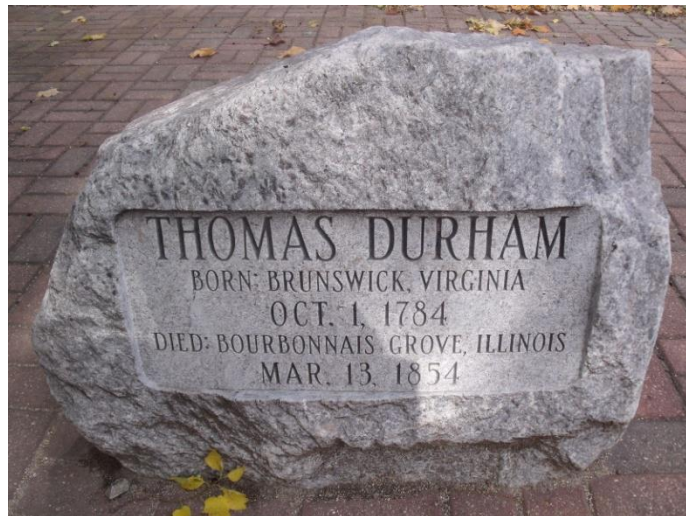


Remnants of the log school in current Bourbonnais (moved in 2011)

During his tenure as commissioner, Durham petitioned that the Bourbonnais Road/Trace (now Route 102) become a state road. In

1849, Durham became postmaster of Bourbonnais Grove. He remained in the postmaster position until the 1853 incorporation of Kankakee County.

Thomas Durham died on March 14, 1854 and was buried on the farm. As the first "American-born" settler in Bourbonnais Grove, Durham distinguished himself from the many French-Canadian settlers who were living in Bourbonnais Grove. Thomas Durham is buried on the Perry Farm with a modern grave marker identifying the location.



*Thomas Durham's Grave Marker in Millennium Garden
on Durham-Perry Farmstead*

Durham's sons took over the farm and had various businesses in Kankakee. By 1866, they had fallen into financial difficulty and wanted to sell the farm. Their brother-in-law David Perry surprised them by purchasing the farm with cash. One story claims that David Perry tossed his wallet full of cash on the table and said "I can lend a hand". Perry had married Martha Durham on January 1, 1845 and they resided just east of the Durham farmstead. The Perrys moved into the farm house and took care of Margaret "Peggy" Durham until her death in 1882. David and Martha Perry had four children.

David Perry was a carpenter and stone mason from Vermont and moved to Momence in 1838. He later moved to Bourbonnais Grove in 1840. Perry built a lumber mill and dam on the Kankakee River just upstream from the mouth of Bourbonnais Creek which made local lumber

available. Builders would no longer have to travel to Chicago to purchase lumber. David Perry not only farmed, but also served as Kankakee County Treasurer from 1853-59. He died on May 26 1887 at the age of eighty years and left the farm to his wife. When she died six months later, the farm passed to their only surviving child, Alvah (1850-99).

On June 1, 1891, Alvah sold 76 acres of farmland east of the Bourbonnais Road/Trace (Kennedy Drive) to John Hardebeck for the plat of North Kankakee (later renamed Bradley). The last heir to the farm was Alvah Perry's daughter Lomira (1887-1961). In a newsletter article of the Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society entitled "The Perrys of Bourbonnais Grove", local historian Vic Johnson wrote:

"She graduated from high school in Chicago, and went on to earn a Master of Arts degree and a Ph.D. in History from the University of Chicago. Lomira became a teacher and the Dean of Girls at Kankakee High School. She was a member of the Kankakee Woman's Club, the Coverlet Guild of Kankakee, and the DAR. Upon retirement, Lomira returned to live in Wilmette. In Wilmette, she attended the Hyde Park Baptist Church of Chicago and belonged to the Conference of Club Presidents of Wilmette. At the time of her death [on December 29, 1961] Lomira was the sole surviving member of her family. . . Lomira's will left in trust to the Illinois Department of Conservation the farm that had been the home of the Durhams and Perrys for some 125 years" (Le Journal du Village, Winter 2009, 5).

After Lomira's death, tenant farmer Francis DuVoisin occupied the house until the 1980s. Lomira's Last Will and Testament left the farm in trust to the Illinois Department of Conservation. The state of Illinois then awarded the Perry Farm to the Bourbonnais Township Park District in 1988. On March 31, 2006, the state of Illinois and the National Park Service of the U.S. Dept. of Interior announced the listing of the Durham-Perry Farmstead in the National Register of Historic Places.

LOMIRA PERRY'S WISH FOR THE FUTURE



Lomira Perry

Lomira Perry (1886-1961) was the granddaughter of David Perry and the great granddaughter of Thomas Durham. She was the last descendant of her family line and owner of the land once owned by Durham. Lomira had a special vision for the future of the property now known as the Perry Farm and Durham-Perry Farmstead, and her vision eventually became a reality. When the State of Illinois inherited the 169-acre piece of land from Lomira's will upon her death, plans for the property's future were uncertain. The will stipulated that if the State accepted the property, at least 40 acres were to be used for a park and have the name "Perry" in part of its name. Questions then arose from the community such as: "Who would maintain the property?" and "Would it be developed or left in its natural state?" The possibilities were endless, but Ms. Perry had pointed the direction in her will.

The struggle for control of the Perry Farm rose to the surface in the *Daily Journal* (May 9, 1985) article entitled, "There's a Will: Way Sought to Get Perry Project Untracked," that addressed the issue between two different groups. In the article, the Kankakee County Convention and Visitors' Bureau and the Bourbonnais Township expressed opposing ideas for the development of the property. According to this article, "The land was willed to the State [of Illinois] by Lomira Perry to be used as a park and recreational facility, kept in its natural setting with a part to be developed commercially to finance the natural and recreational portions."

Bourbonnais Township feared that the development of the land would over-commercialize the area and make residents unhappy. Township supervisor Larry Power told reporters, "I still have a gut feeling there are people who want it [the Perry Farm] developed commercially, and the residents already said they don't want that."



The future chosen use of the current Perry Farm was uncertain.

Kankakee County Convention and Visitors' Bureau president Doug Neison and executive board member Francis Ciaccio told *The Daily Journal* in the same article, "The Convention and Visitors Association feels strongly that the properly structured setting – let's say an authentic Indian village or French settlement or working farm or a combination – would bring, literally, hundreds of thousands of visitors here."

The Illinois Department of Conservation decided in November of 1985 that it was willing to give the Perry Farm to a new park district representing the Bourbonnais Township area. The declaration was favorable to the township, but the decision was opposed by the Kankakee River Valley Forest Preserve (KRVFP), which was formed in 1986 to protect area forest lands in their natural forms. The KRVFP felt that such a development fell under its own jurisdiction because of the plans to have a park district maintain a natural and historic preserve with public recreation space.

The Department of Conservation required a full land usage plan to be submitted for approval before it would transfer ownership to a local governmental body. The KRVFP still had a chance to obtain the land by submitting a better development plan to the Department of Conservation.

Creating only a nature preserve was not what the majority of community residents had in mind by forming a park district. In response to a *Daily Journal* survey of community desires, the newly created park district (the Bourbonnais Township Park District or BTPD) developed a proposal based on results setting aside a portion of the property as a nature preserve. The BTPD expanded Ms. Perry's wish of forty acres being set aside as a park into plans for the entire 169 acres being used as a park.

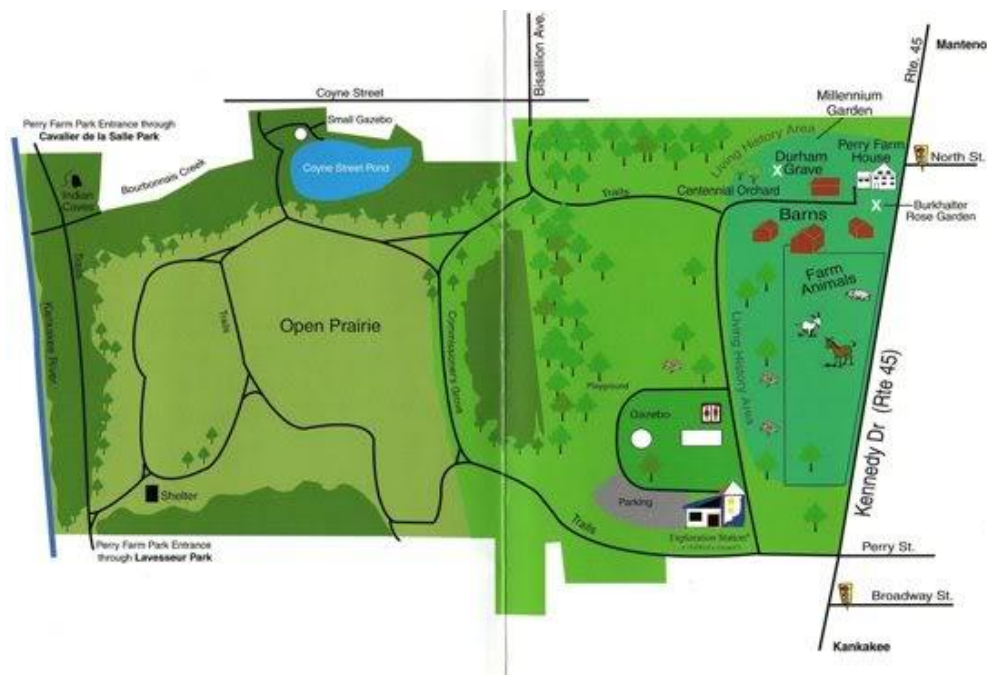


Kankakee River near the entrance to the "Indian Caves"

In the *Daily Journal* (March 29, 1987) article, "Can Forest Preserve, Park District Share Perry Farm Future," Illinois Association of Park Districts Executive Director Ted Flickinger said, "They're [a forest preserve and a park district] not designed for the same purposes. A forest preserve is a resource management agency. It's more geared to the preservation of land. They're not into building recreational facilities like a park district [is]." The same article said, "The park district has informed the State that it is committed to protecting, preserving and developing the Perry Farm as a recreation facility consistent with park purposes [and] without any

commercialization of the property." The BTPD sought to realize Lomira Perry's dream and to comply with the terms in her will.

After a long struggle, the BTPD was awarded the property by the State of Illinois after being in existence for only a year. Mark Steffan, the Bourbonnais Township attorney, said in an editorial letter of the November 3, 1986 *Daily Journal*, "The Department of Conservation has stated that "the idea of a park district has been studied, and it was felt that this would be the most feasible method of obtaining the capital and the operational funds necessary to preserve the Perry Farm as open space for recreational use only."



Map of Current Perry Farm Park and Durham-Perry Farmstead

When Lomira Perry died in 1961, she willed lifetime farming rights to Francis DuVoisin. DuVoisin had been a close friend of the Perry family since his family moved to the area in 1924 and the back section of the farmhouse had been DuVoisin's home for 66 years. An agreement was reached with Mr. DuVoisin for the park district to purchase his lifetime estate interest in the property. DuVoisin decided that it was best to think of the Perry Farm's future.

In 1989, the Bourbonnais Township Park District took over title to the property. However, Mr. DuVoisin was still granted the use of "Francis'

Garden” on the property near the barns. He and his wife, Anne Marie, could be found working many mornings and his famous hollyhocks could be enjoyed by many visitors to the property.

The park district has met and surpassed its goals for realizing Lomira Perry's vision for the Perry Farm. With trails through beautiful natural scenery near the flowing Kankakee River, the open spaces for recreation, the restored and preserved farm house and barns, the Exploration Station®...(a children's museum) and a large biological and geological area, one can appreciate the outstanding work made possible by the formation of the park district.



Inside the Horse Barn during annual Durham-Perry Farmstead Open House

THE DURHAM-PERRY FARMHOUSE MUSEUM

The Durham-Perry Farmhouse serves as a museum and visitor's center while also providing classroom and office space for the Bourbonnais Township Park District. Information about park district programs and special events as well as other recreational opportunities and community events is available in the farmhouse. Registrations for park district classes and recreation programs are accepted during office hours.



Kennedy Drive view of the Durham-Perry Farmhouse

PERRY FARM LIVING HISTORY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Bourbonnais Township Park District's Perry Farm Living History Advisory Committee was instrumental in establishing parts of the farmhouse as a museum and pursuing national, state, and county historic landmark status for the farmstead. The Perry Farm Living History Advisory Committee is made up of local residents dedicated to preserving the history of the Perry Farm Park and the Durham-Perry Farmstead. The mission of the Perry Farm Living History Advisory Committee is to educate the public about this historic site. **Anyone interested in joining this advisory committee may call the park district at (815) 933-9905.**

Volunteer contributors to the information and images in this written work include:

Vic Johnson

*Perry Farm Living Advisory Committee members Dr. Jim Paul and Daron Kinzinger
Francis DuVoisin (as consultant)*

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