Abstract: My research explores the Business Kinship Network of the Great Lakes region prior to the advent of the railroads which made Chicago the transportation hub of the United States. Before this infrastructural improvement gave Chicago a marked advantage in growth over cities like St. Louis, Cincinnati, Detroit, and Milwaukee, the actions of local businessmen who possessed immense regional knowledge were essential to forming an elite business culture with its own unique identity. Many people have written of the importance that eastern boosters and geography played in the formation of the Great Lakes trade center. Instead I explore the crucial role of the regional businessman in settling the Midwest, and the effects of the kinship networks they established on the formation of modern day Chicago and the Great Lakes region as a whole.