

Migration from England to Illinois

Name	Date	From	Settled
Hugh Calkins	1638	Cheshire, England	Plymouth, MA
	1640	Plymouth, MA	Green Harbor, MA
	1641	Green Harbor, MA	Gloucester, MA
	1651	Gloucester, MA	New London, CT
	1659	New London, CT	Norwich, CT
Samuel Hugh Calkins	Abt 1697	Norwich, CT	Lebanon, CT
Stephen Calkins	Abt 1738	Lebanon, CT	Sharon, CT
Elijah Calkins	Abt 1780	Sharon, CT	Dutchess County, New York
Luther Ebenezer Calkins	Before 1800	Sharon, New York	Saratoga, New York or Milton, New York
Elijah Selby Calkins	Before 1818	Saratoga, New York	Mexico, Oswego, New York
	About 1825	Mexico, Oswego, New York	Ontario, Canada
	1880	Ontario, Canada	Hampshire, Kane, IL
Luther Calkins*	1855	Ontario, Canada	Hampshire, Kane, IL
*Luther arrived in Illinois first, but Elijah Selby was the oldest generation to move to Illinois.			

Hugh Calkins (1603–1690)

The Calkins migration story begins with Hugh Calkins, born in 1603 in or near Hatton, Waverton, Cheshire. He came of age during a period of deep religious ferment, when Puritan ideas emphasizing Scripture, moral discipline, and godly household order were spreading through the rural parishes surrounding the city of Chester.

In the early seventeenth century, Hatton lay in a quiet, fertile stretch of countryside just a few miles from Chester's cathedral center. This was a long-settled agricultural landscape of open fields, hedged pastures, and modest farmsteads: stable on the surface, yet increasingly restless beneath.

Daily life followed the rhythms of farming and parish worship, but religion was not merely routine. Chester, unusual for a northern English city, had become a center of Puritan preaching and influence, and its sermons, lectures, and printed ideas reached outward into surrounding villages such as Waverton. Many rural families attended the parish church as required, but listened closely for preaching that emphasized Scripture, moral discipline, and the ordering of a godly household rather than ceremony. Among yeoman and tenant families, these ideas took root, shaping how parents raised children and how communities judged conduct.

By the 1620s and 1630s, this reformist spirit was under growing strain. National church policy demanded greater conformity, and ministers with Puritan leanings were increasingly silenced or removed. At the same time, families in places like Hatton faced mounting economic pressure. Land was harder to obtain, rents were rising, and younger men saw fewer paths to independence.

Although the countryside appeared stable on the surface, many sensed that the future would offer fewer opportunities than in the past.

In this setting, news of New England carried particular power. The promise was for land of one's own, churches organized by shared belief, and communities ordered around the same moral seriousness Cheshire Puritans already valued. For someone raised near Chester—close enough to feel its religious energy, far enough to live a farming life—New England towns looked familiar in spirit even before they existed in fact.

Migration to New England

Hugh married Ann Eaton around 1625, and by the late 1630s they were raising a growing family. England at this time offered diminishing prospects: increasing pressure for religious conformity, limited access to land, and narrowing opportunities for younger families. Like many Cheshire Puritans, Hugh decided to leave for America.

In 1640, Hugh, Ann, and their eight children immigrated to North America, settling first in Ipswich, Massachusetts, where Hugh was awarded land. Ipswich offered both economic opportunity and religious stability, and the family became part of a growing Puritan community rooted in agriculture and church life.

By 1650, however, Hugh and his family entered a new phase of migration, moving with John Winthrop, Jr. to New London, Connecticut. Winthrop envisioned a different kind of Puritan settlement than Massachusetts Bay offered. By the 1630s and 1640s, Massachusetts had become crowded and tightly regulated, with limited room for expansion or economic experimentation. In contrast, New London's deep-water harbor on the Thames River offered strategic advantages for trade, shipping, and regional defense, while allowing for a more moderate and flexible religious culture.

Winthrop's migration was deliberate. He brought organized groups of families and skilled settlers to establish a stable, economically viable community, strengthening the political and commercial future of the Connecticut Colony. Hugh Calkins became an integral part of this effort. In New London, he served as a Deacon in the First Church of Christ, assisting the minister and helping administer the sacraments—an indication of his standing, piety, and leadership within the community.

Founding Norwich, Connecticut

By 1659, New London itself was becoming more settled, and the familiar pressures of land division began to reappear. That year, Hugh Calkins joined a group of settlers who moved inland to newly purchased territory acquired from Indigenous peoples and established Norwich, Connecticut. Hugh was granted one of the thirty-five original home lots that formed the nucleus of the new town.

For Hugh, the move to Norwich represented both opportunity and continuity. It allowed him to secure land ownership, participate as a founding resident in a carefully planned community, and provide long-term prospects for a growing family. The relocation was not a rejection of New London, but a deliberate extension of the same social, religious, and economic world—carried

inland as families moved together to recreate familiar institutions of church, town governance, and communal responsibility.

This move established a pattern that would characterize the Calkins family for generations. When land became crowded and future prospects became limited, they migrated collectively to new places where stability could be rebuilt. Hugh Calkins's relocation from New London to Norwich marks not only the founding of a Connecticut town, but the beginning of a multigenerational migration strategy that shaped the family's history from New England to the Midwest.

Samuel Hugh Calkins (1663–1755): Expanding Inland in Connecticut

Born into an established New England town, Samuel Hugh Calkins began his married life to Hannah Gifford in Norwich, Connecticut. By the late 1690s, however, Norwich was no longer new. Land was increasingly subdivided, and opportunities for sons to establish independent farms were decreasing.

Around 1697, Samuel made the short but meaningful move from Norwich to Lebanon, Connecticut. By then, five children had already been born, and more were expected. Although the journey covered only a dozen or so miles inland, it required care and planning for a family with young children, livestock, and household goods. Traveling along rough cart paths and forest trails, the family likely took one or two days to complete the move, carrying tools, bedding, seed grain, and essential supplies. Children walked much of the way, already accustomed to shared labor.

Lebanon offered what Norwich no longer could: room to grow. It was a newer settlement, with land still available for clearing and farming, and the promise that sons could one day remain nearby rather than be forced outward too soon. The first months demanded hard work—establishing shelter, fencing fields, and preparing land for crops—but this was familiar labor, undertaken with experience and cooperation. Hannah had to establish a household in this new territory.

This move was one of foresight. Samuel relocated his family at the moment when growth required planning, following a pattern already established by earlier generations: migration not as escape, but as continuity.

Stephen Calkins (1706–1781): Founding a New Town at Sharon

Stephen Calkins was raised in Lebanon, a town shaped by families like his own—large, agricultural, disciplined, and deeply rooted in church and militia life. By the 1730s, Lebanon was well established. Farms were productive but increasingly divided, and men with multiple sons faced a familiar problem: how to provide land and opportunity for the next generation.

Stephen married Mary Curtiss, and they began their family in Lebanon, welcoming their first two sons there. As his household grew, and as it became clear that many more children would follow, Lebanon no longer offered sufficient room to sustain the future he envisioned.

The Move to Sharon (c. 1738)

Around 1738, Stephen made a decisive move westward to Sharon, Connecticut, a newer town on the colony's frontier. This was not casual relocation. Sharon offered large tracts of land suitable for farming and future division among sons. Stephen became an original proprietor, receiving early land grants and helping establish the town itself. Life in Sharon demanded hard work. Land had to be cleared, roads laid out, and local governance organized. Yet Stephen and his family were not inventing something new; they were rebuilding a familiar social order in a new place.

The move from Lebanon to Sharon—approximately 60 miles, likely requiring at least a week of travel—was a regional migration, not a local one. Wagons carried tools and household goods; children walked much of the way. Upon arrival, the family faced the demanding work of clearing land, building shelter, and securing food. Mary had the demanding work of creating a new home for the family. The reward was space for the future, allowing multiple households to remain nearby as sons reached adulthood.

Family Life, War, and Service

Stephen's household was exceptionally large even by colonial standards. By his first wife he had nine sons and one daughter, with at least five children born with his second wife. Such a large family required constant labor, discipline, and cooperation. Sons learned early to farm, clear land, and serve the community; daughters managed households that were economic units as much as homes.

These values were tested during the American Revolution. All nine sons served in some capacity, and Stephen himself served as a minute man, even at his advanced age. For Stephen, military service was not abstract patriotism but an extension of the responsibility he had assumed when founding Sharon and raising his family there.

Elijah Calkins (1740-1814): Leaving Connecticut

Elijah would have been a young child when his family moved to Sharon, but he likely remembered the travel and the hard work starting out in the frontier. He spent his entire adult life in Sharon, a town his father, Stephen, had helped found. By the time Elijah was raising his family, Sharon was no longer frontier. It was a mature agricultural community, with cleared farms, established roads, churches, and militia traditions.

Elijah married Mehitabel Heath, and they raised an exceptionally large household there—fourteen children, nine sons and five daughters. Life revolved around: mixed farming (grain, livestock, hay), constant household labor shared by parents and children, and community ties shaped by church attendance and civic duty.

The Revolutionary War formed the backdrop of Elijah's middle years. With his father and brothers deeply involved in militia service, Elijah lived in a culture where family, land, and defense were inseparable. Sharon families did not think of war as distant—it affected their daily lives.

Move to New York (c. 1780)

By about 1780, Elijah faced the same dilemma that had confronted earlier generations—too many sons and not enough land. Sharon's farms had been divided for decades, and even a prosperous holding could not support nine sons establishing households nearby.

Post-Revolutionary New York offered a solution. Dutchess County, New York lay just west of Connecticut, with fertile land, expanding settlements, and legal stability following the war. It was a natural next step for Connecticut families seeking room without abandoning familiar farming methods or social customs. Elijah's move was calculated, delayed until his children were old enough to contribute, and timed to take advantage of postwar opportunity.

The move to Dutchess County, New York was approximately 50 miles, a journey of at least a week. The move would have been physically exhausting, but it was not unfamiliar. Elijah and his children came from generations accustomed to clearing land, rebuilding homes, and cooperating as a unit. Women were used to beginning again on the frontier. Migration was a family enterprise, not an individual adventure.

Aftermath and Legacy

Although Elijah later died in Sharon, Schoharie County, New York, his move to Dutchess County marked a turning point. It carried the Calkins family out of Connecticut for the first time and set the pattern for later westward movement into central and western New York—and eventually the Midwest.

Luther Ebenezer Calkins (1766-1813)

Luther Ebenezer Calkins represents the point at which a long New England migration tradition fully merged with the post-Revolutionary American frontier. His life shows why this family continued to move—almost generation by generation—out of a deeply ingrained strategy for survival, independence, and continuity.

Life in Sharon, New York

Luther raised his early family in Sharon, Schoharie County, New York, an interior farming community settled largely by families from Connecticut. Sharon in the late 1700s was still semi-frontier: farms were productive but labor-intensive depending heavily on children's labor. By the time Luther married Cynthia Wood and had their first three children, Sharon was becoming crowded with large families just like his own. Land was finite, farms were being subdivided, and opportunities for sons to establish nearby households were decreasing—exactly the pressure his father and grandfather had faced before him.

Move to Saratoga County (Before 1800)

By the 1790s, attention had shifted northward. The region around Saratoga County was opening rapidly after the Revolution. Several factors made Saratoga attractive: it had newly surveyed, affordable land; fertile soil suited to known farming methods; and access to the Hudson River for markets.

Luther already had a growing family—eventually nine children (five sons, four daughters). Moving early ensured that his sons would grow up where land was still available. So, the family moved approximately 75 miles from Schoharie County to Saratoga County. The trip likely took 10-12 days traveling by wagon or ox cart along rough roads and river paths. When they arrived at their destination, a familiar routine took hold: clearing forests, building a cabin, and planting crops. The Calkins family had once again established a farm in a place that had enough inexpensive land for a large family. The price was hard work for Luther, Cynthia, and their children.

Elijah Selby Calkins (1793–1883)

Elijah Selby Calkins embodied the fullest expression of the family's migration tradition. Before 1816, he and his wife, Betsy, moved from Saratoga County to Mexico, Oswego County, New York, part of the rapidly developing interior frontier. Around 1825, Elijah and Betsy, their four young children made a decisive move to Ontario, Canada, Betsy's birthplace, which was on the other side of Lake Ontario. Canada offered affordable land, familiar British legal structures, and family connections through the Allen line. There, Elijah's family grew to fourteen children, evenly divided between sons and daughters.

Late in life, around 1880, Elijah and Betsy made one final migration—not for land, but for family. They moved from Ontario to Hampshire, Kane County, Illinois, joining their eldest son, Luther. This journey, likely made largely by rail, closed the long arc of movement begun in seventeenth-century England.

[Elijah and Betsy's life are described more thoroughly in the Biographical Sketches.]

Luther Calkins (1816–1890): Establishing the Illinois Home

Luther Calkins completed the westward journey in 1855 when he moved from Ontario, Canada to Kane County, Illinois. Unlike earlier generations, Luther migrated toward established family resources. His wife's father, Benjamin Samis, already owned a farm there. By 1860, Luther lived adjacent to Benjamin Samis and worked his farm, which he and his wife later inherited. Luther and Sabrina raised five children—all born in Canada—and Illinois became the place where this migration story ends.

