



the

# COOK-WITTER REPORT

Volume 26, Number 3

April 2011

## Museum Launches Former Governor Jim Edgar Oral Histories

**O**n April 8, former governor Jim Edgar, Illinois Historic Preservation Agency Director Jan Grimes, and Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum (ALPLM) Oral Historian Mark DePue officially launched the Museum's Governor Jim Edgar Series of oral histories with a news conference at the Statehouse.

The series is available online at the Museum's web site ([www.alplm.org](http://www.alplm.org)) and features 230 hours of interviews with Edgar and 31 of his former staff

members, political allies, political opponents, and journalists who covered his administration, including: Mike Lawrence, Dawn Clark Netsch, Al Grossboll, Carter Hendren, Kirk Dillard, Phil Rock, James "Pate" Philip, and others. The Edgar series is part of the Museum's overall "Illinois Statecraft" oral history series, which includes interviews with past legislators, former Governor Dan Walker and members of his administration, political journalists, and others involved in state government.



*Former governor Jim Edgar, Illinois Historic Preservation Agency Director Jan Grimes, and Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum Oral Historian Mark DePue announce the official debut of Edgar's oral histories, which include more than 230 hours of interviews with Edgar, his staff and others related to his administration. Photo courtesy of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.*

*continued on page 2*

## Museum Launches...

*Continued from page 1*

# Edgar Quotes

The following are miscellaneous quotes from Edgar's oral histories, available on the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum web site:

- *"Throughout my administration I worried about the budget, I still worry about the budget."*
- *"Personalities and egos are a huge thing in politics, they often determine public policy."*
- *"In the last two years (of my administration) Madigan (Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan) worked with me. In many ways he worked better with me than the two Republican leaders..."*
- *"If I had been governor, there would have been no riverboats in Illinois... (They were approved in 1991 during the administration of Governor James Thompson, Edgar's predecessor.) What was ironic was most of the so-called experts did not think they'd make money in Illinois, they thought the tax was way too high. So we didn't have many people come in and bid for the first round of casino licenses. That's how we ended up with two in Joliet. It makes no sense to have two in Joliet, but we didn't get that many applications that passed the muster on background checks, etc."*

DePue and other Museum staff decided the focus of their oral history program should be Illinois politics, so they organized a bi-partisan panel, including Edgar, former Senate President Phil Rock and others, to recommend what topics to investigate and whom to interview. "After all, this is Illinois politics and there are landmines out there and things to be concerned about," DePue said. They decided to focus on state-level politics, excluding those solely related to Chicago (because Chicago institutions document them). They felt it was unnecessary to include Illinois' federal officials since Congress and the U.S. Senate have oral history programs about their respective lawmakers.

"My goal is to get the complete story of Illinois' political and governmental history from the start of the 1960s and Edgar's career to the present," said DePue. "I believe we've got an excellent start, we have a very complete picture of Edgar's administration. It was Governor Edgar's goal in his oral histories that we focus not just on politics but also on governance, on how good government works."

Currently, the Museum has two series of oral histories online about past governors, Edgar and Dan Walker; it's working on a series about former governor Richard Ogilvie. The oral history program is also exploring some of the bigger events that occurred in the last half of the 1900s, such as the cutback amendment that reduced the size of the legislature and the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment. (Illinois played a key role in that defeat.)

Edgar, a history major in college and lifelong history aficionado, said he feels the Museum's oral history program is so important he contributed \$48,000 from the leftover money in his campaign fund to help "jumpstart" it. That money went toward the expenses of gathering interviews for his series. Currently, Edgar is a distinguished fellow with the Institute of Government and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois at Urbana.

"State government hasn't kept up doing oral history for many, many years. That I think is unfortunate...," Edgar said. "Oral history provides a very important tool as we try to figure out what happened in the past and it gives lessons for the future... Unfortunately, there's not much (written) history of Illinois state government, outside of a few newspaper stories... What people say to reporters when things are happening is not always the real story."

"In this oral history there's an awful lot of time spent (discussing) my early years and you must say 'Why?'," Edgar continued. "I think you have to understand a person's life to understand why they did

*continued on page 3*

## Museum Launches...

*Continued from page 2*

what they did. Very few things are done around here because you are a Republican or a Democrat, contrary to what you might think. It has a lot to do with who you are, where you grew up, how things worked out to impact what happens in public policy. I hope this oral history will give people a better understanding of why we did what we did in the Edgar administration.”

He hopes the Museum will interview other politicians as well, but said that it's important to wait until public figures have been out of office a while and have no intention of running again. By doing so, “I think you'll find there's a lot more candor and it makes it much more relevant,” Edgar said. “In fact, Brenda (his wife) wonders about my candor. She's scared to death (about) what all I've said in this oral history and she probably has a right to be scared,” he said, smiling. “My feeling was, this is history and I need to be as candid as possible.” Every interviewee has the right to approve the transcripts of their oral histories, but DePue says Edgar did not ask anything to be omitted and did not prohibit the discussion of any topics.

The screenshot shows the website's navigation menu with links: HOME, NEWS ROOM, PLANNING YOUR VISIT, FACILITY RENTAL, MUSEUM STORE, EDUCATION, CONTACT, and SUPPORT US. The main header includes 'ABRAHAM LINCOLN PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY & MUSEUM' and 'PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY ★ MUSEUM ★ FOUNDATION'. The featured section is 'ILLINOIS STATECRAFT', which includes a description: 'The story of Illinois politics is not only colorful, but also essential to our understanding of Illinois and its place in the nation and the wider world today. This project focuses not just on politicians, but on journalists, lobbyists, jurists, political aides, friends, relatives and political opponents; in other words, those behind the headlines as well as those who find themselves in them.' Below this are six video thumbnails: 'ILLINOIS STATECRAFT GENERAL INTEREST', 'LEGISLATOR'S SERIES', 'GOVERNOR DAN WALKER SERIES', 'GOVERNOR JIM EDGAR SERIES', 'GOVERNOR RICHARD OGILVIE SERIES', and 'ERA FIGHT IN ILLINOIS'. A sidebar on the left contains a search bar and a list of 'Oral History Projects' including Agriculture in Illinois, Illinois Statecraft, Historians Speak, Veterans Remember, Family Memories, and Springfield African-American History Foundation. It also lists 'Documents and Resources' with links for Copyright | Usage | Privacy and Contact Us.

The Museum has been collecting Illinoisans' oral histories since 2006, when DePue was hired after Dr. Tom Schwartz, a Lincoln scholar and the Illinois State Historian at the ALPLM, pushed for the Museum to hire an oral historian. Historians and others studying the past have traditionally relied on written documents, like letters and journals, to help them understand why people did what they did. But recent events and technological changes have made people,

especially public figures, reluctant to keep such records.

“I pushed to get an oral historian (at the ALPLM) because it is immediately apparent to anyone using political manuscript collections that the candor that used to be expressed in letters and memoranda are invisible now,” said Dr. Schwartz. “Otto

The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum also has online oral history series about : Illinois agriculture, veterans, family memories, and the Springfield African-American History Foundation. Find these, and the Illinois Statecraft oral histories, at

**[www.alplm.org](http://www.alplm.org)**

*continued on page 4*

## Museum Launches...

*Continued from page 3*

Kerner deposited his papers with the library. The late Paul Spence, head of manuscripts, worked with federal prosecutors to find evidence among Kerner's papers that was used against him at trial. The whole Watergate investigation showed the dangers lurking in documents and on tape recordings. By 1980, political figures simply did not express their thoughts or opinions in writing. Oral histories are a way to try to recapture, through recollections, what was often expressed in the written record to reveal the role of ideas, egos, leadership styles, political necessi-

ties, and (hopefully) the candor of a particular time." Because of the advent of e-mail and the Internet, Dr. Schwartz adds that "The future of history is less in the written record but rather in digital media."

DePue hopes that academic institutions, journalists, historians, and authors will use the Museum's oral histories for research and writing. "The real mark of success is when you start having your interviews referenced in books, articles and magazines," he said. Eventually, users will be able to search the oral histories online for certain words or phrases, which greatly improves their accessibility and usefulness.



## Transitions

On March 25, **Governor Pat Quinn** appointed several people to his cabinet. He named **Hiram Grau** to head the Illinois State Police. Prior to his appointment, Grau was deputy chief of investigations for the Cook County State's Attorney.

The governor named **Joe Costigan** to head the Illinois Department of Labor. He had been the Chicago secretary-treasurer of Workers United, an affiliate of the Service Employees International Union.

**John Schomberg**, who had been serving as the governor's acting general counsel, was named general counsel and **Larry Matkaitis** was re-appointed by the governor as the Illinois State Fire Marshal.

**Michael McRaith**, head of the Illinois Department of Insurance, will leave that position in June to lead the new Federal Insurance Office within the U.S. Treasury Department. He will advise the treasury secretary on insurance matters and advise Congress about insurance regulation.

On March 17, Governor Quinn appointed **Gloria L. Materre** to head the Illinois Liquor Control Commission. Materre's predecessor was **Lainie Krozel**, who returned to her prior position as chief of staff for the Illinois Department of Revenue.

**Patrick D. O'Grady**, former Executive Director of the Legislative Research Unit, retired last year and **Alan R. Kroner** took his place on January 1. Previously Kroner had served on the Senate Republican Staff.

**Gary Hannig**, Illinois Department of Transportation Secretary, announced in March that he will retire at the end of the current legislative session.

