The mission of the Illinois State Archives is to preserve and provide access to the public records of the state. When it comes to archival access, the words used to describe records matters. The words used, or not used, have the power to find hidden voices and to amplify underrepresented communities or erase them from the historical record. With this in mind, in August 2021, Archives staff began the process of evaluating the language used in the Descriptive Guide to the Holdings of the Illinois State Archives.

The first stage of the evaluation included a comprehensive literature review on reparative description. The continuing COVID-19 pandemic afforded staff the opportunity to participate remotely in multiple online webinars from the Council of State Archivists and the Society of American Archivists. Staff also began establishing community partnerships by reaching out to Illinois State Museum Director Cinnamon Catlin-Legutko and Secretary of State Disability Liaison William Bogdan.

The next phase included evaluating statistical samples of record group and record series descriptions. Data from these statistical samples was used to create a prioritized workflow. Progress was reported to the Illinois State Historical Records Advisory Board (ISHRAB) at its February 17 meeting. In early April, the Archives added a Statement on Language to its website. This statement informs researchers of the types of language they may encounter when using records and the steps that are being taken to address descriptive language that may be harmful or oppressive.

These were just the first steps in a long process that will result in the review and updating of all record group and record series descriptions, as well as a set of standards for the creation of all new descriptions. As the keeper of the state’s public records, the ISA recognizes the responsibility of ensuring that the words we use accurately and respectfully reflect the diversity of the people we serve. For more information or to view the Archive’s Statement on Language visit: ilsos.gov/departments/archives/databases/language.html.

Reparative Description at the Illinois State Archives

The legacy of Eddie Winfred “Doc” Helm

Eddie Winfred “Doc” Helm was the official State of Illinois photographer for over half a century, from 1941 to 1992. Working from the Secretary of State’s office for both Democratic and Republican officeholders, he chronicled state government by taking pictures of notable politicians, celebrities and important events, as well as the day-to-day operations of state government. In the course of his work he also photographed hundreds of ordinary Illinois citizens and events. He left behind a legacy of more than 45,000 negatives, which are housed at the Illinois State Archives.

Helm photographed at least six presidents, several presidential candidates and politicians, and celebrities such as Nat King Cole, Bob Hope and Sammy Davis Jr. The collection includes such diverse images as the governor addressing a joint session of the state legislature during World War II and the first group photo of the newly created Black Legislative Caucus in 1967.

Along with serving as the state photographer, Doc Helm was considered a leading photographer in central Illinois and was arguably the most important African American photographer in the state during the mid-20th century.

His private sector work focused largely on Springfield’s African American community and has been featured in exhibits at the Springfield and Central Illinois African American History Museum, the Illinois State Museum, Bicentennial Plaza in Springfield and in the pages of Illinois Heritage magazine.

(Cont. on pg. 2.)
The legacy of Eddie Winfred “Doc” Helm — (Cont. from pg. 1.)

1. The Illinois Legislative Black Caucus in 1975 featured future Secretary of State Jesse White, future Chicago Mayor Harold Washington and future Senate President Emil Jones.

2. Governor Dwight Green enjoys candy with children at a Christmas party held at the Orpheum Theatre, ca. 1946.

3. Secretary of State Charles Carpentier serves Governor William Stratton and his wife, Shirley Stratton, at the opening of the new state building, now known as the Stratton Building, December 5, 1955.


6. Doc Helm and his assistant Marlon Rose working in the dark room developing photos on March 29, 1960.

7. Archives employee Alvin Rountree views a display case in the Archives building on March 20, 1952.

Doc Helm grant completed

In May 2020, the National Historical Publications & Records Administration awarded the Illinois State Archives (ISA) a $60,178 federal grant to preserve, digitize and provide online access to 21,000 photographs taken by state photographer Eddie Winfred “Doc” Helm. Grant funds were used to purchase a scanner, acid-free envelopes and to hire contractual workers to complete the project. The Archives partnered with the University of Illinois Springfield to recruit current and recently graduated public history graduate students to rehouse the negatives, enter descriptive metadata into a spreadsheet and digitize the negatives. Over the course of the grant period, the Archives digitized more than 45,000 images and created metadata for over 33,000 negatives.

The project was completed in March 2022. More than 22,000 images can be viewed at http://www.idaillinois.org/digital/collection/DocHelm/search/. The Archives expects to upload the rest of the images within the year and encourages anyone with additional information about the images to contact the Archives Reference Unit at 217-782-4866.

Professional development scholarships available to Illinois archivists

The ISHRAB is offering professional development scholarships to Illinois archivists and archival volunteers to attend an archival workshop/seminar of their choice in Illinois (or an online professional archival development course). Awards are available for up to $200 per applicant, per year, and may be used toward the cost of registration, housing and/or travel to the event. This is a reimbursable award and scholarships will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis until the funding is exhausted. Complete information and an application form can be found at ilsos.gov (click on Departments, Illinois State Archives, Illinois Historical Records Advisory Board).

This archival educational opportunity is funded by a State Board Programming grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC).

DATES AND REMINDERS

National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators
2022 NAGARA Annual Conference
“Exploring the Information Wilds”
July 13-16, Salt Lake City, UT
https://nagara.org/AnnualConferences

Society of American Archivists
Annual Meeting
“ARCHIVES*RECORDS 2022.”
August 20-27, Boston, MA
https://www2.archivists.org/

Best Practices Exchange/Council of State Archivists
2022 BPE and CoSA Joint (un)Conference
“Community Approaches to Digital Initiatives”
September 26-28, Nashville, TN
https://bpexchange.wordpress.com/

24th Annual Conference on Illinois History
Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum
October 6-7, Springfield
https://presidentlincoln.illinois.gov/
217-558-0128

Downstate Local Records Commission Meeting
1st Tuesday of the month, 10 a.m.
(unless otherwise noted)
Margaret Cross Norton Building, Springfield
ilsos.gov

Cook County Local Records Commission Meeting
2nd Tuesday of the month, 11 a.m.
Video Conference Room, 9th floor
Thompson Center, Chicago
or Capital City Center, Springfield
130 W. Mason St.
ilsos.gov

State Records Commission Meeting
3rd Wednesday of every month, 9:30 a.m.
Margaret Cross Norton Building
Springfield
ilsos.gov
Following the conclusion of World War I, the Illinois General Assembly awarded Illinois veterans bonus payments for their service. Soldiers, or their beneficiaries, used a detailed form to apply for the pensions and had to provide proof of Illinois residence and proof of service.

These records make for a tremendous genealogical resource; however, a fire in 1934 at the state arsenal where the records were stored destroyed roughly 80% of the records. The fireproof State Archives building was built as a result of the fire and the surviving records stored there.

The bonus applications are a popular research item, but most of them are smoke damaged, singed and brittle. With this in mind, since 2014, the Illinois State Archives has been scanning these records to eliminate the need for staff or the public to handle them. The scanning project is nearing completion. To date, almost 1,300 of the 1,377 boxes containing the records have been scanned. The goal is that eventually a name index of the records will be placed online.

In June, the Illinois State Archives will partner with the Chicago Public Library to offer three classes on the basics of paper conservation. The classes will be held at Legler and Woodson Regional Libraries on Chicago’s west and south sides and the Lozano Branch library in the Pilsen neighborhood.

The purpose of the classes is to reach persons and communities that often do not have access to these types of programs. The State Archives and the Chicago Public Library hope to be able to offer additional classes at different Chicago library locations in the future.

The Illinois Archival Repositories Directory is an online resource that provides Illinois archivists with a way to locate other archivists in the state to exchange ideas and concerns. It also serves as a useful tool for researchers to use when trying to locate appropriate research centers. The directory is available online at ilsos.gov/departments/archives/ISHRAB/archivalRepositories_directory/home.html. The Illinois State Historical Records Advisory Board uses this directory to send news about upcoming grant opportunities and funding possibilities. The directory is searchable by name of repository, region, or name of county or city. To add your organization to the directory or update an existing listing, please complete the printable Submission Form (ilsos.gov/publications/pdf_publications/ard143.pdf) in Adobe PDF format.