

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Richard J. Carlson
Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Illinois Statecraft – *Jim Thompson* Oral History project
Interview # IST-A-L-2015-017

Richard J. Carlson, a member of Gov. Jim Thompson's program staff from 1977 to 1981 and director of the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency from 1981 to 1988, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Illinois Statecraft* – *Jim Thompson* oral history project.

Interview dates & location:

Dates: March 30, April 9, April 14, and April 23, 2015

Location: Carlson Environmental, 65 E. Wacker Place, Chicago, IL

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mike Czaplicki, ALPLM project historian

Transcription by: _____

Edited by: _____

Total Pages: _____ Total Time: 1:04 + 1:47 + 1:41 + 1:50/1.07 + 1.78 + 1.68 + 1.83 = 6.36 hrs.

Session 1: Carlson's Upbringing and Experiences in the 1960s

Session 2: Staff Work for the 1970 Illinois Constitutional Convention

Session 3: Executive Reorganization and the Program Staff during Governor Thompson's First Two Terms (1977-1981)

Session 4: Carlson's Tenure as Director of IEPA (1981-1988)

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on May 12, 2015.

The interview is archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

Transcript
being processed

Abstract

Richard J. Carlson, *Illinois Statecraft*, IST-A-L-2015-017

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: Richard J. Carlson was born in Chicago on September 19, 1943, to Elmer and Bernice Carlson. His father was a salesman and his mother worked in their home. Carlson went to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, graduating in 1965 with a degree in communication. He stayed at U of I for his masters in journalism (1970) and his PhD in political science (1976). The civil rights movement caught his attention during this time period, and though he decided against joining the 1964 Freedom Summer voter registration drive in Mississippi, he later took part in campus rallies organized by Citizens for Racial Justice.

From 1966 to 1967, Carlson served as a legislative staff intern. His experience in this program proved critical for his future career, especially the relationship he formed with director Samuel K. Gove. Gove eventually served as Carlson's PhD advisor, and he tapped Carlson to help draft a series of background papers, *CONstitutional CONcepts*, for delegates to the 1970 Illinois Constitutional Convention; together they wrote "The Legislature and the Illinois Constitution." Carlson then went to work during the convention as a member of Con-Con President Samuel Witwer's staff.

Initially planning to develop a dissertation topic out of his experience at Con-Con, Carlson shifted his focus to elections while serving as director of the National Municipal League's election systems study. He edited *Issues of Electoral Reform* (1974) for the NML at the conclusion of this project, and then moved to the Council of State Governments. In this latter position he occasionally crossed paths with future Illinois governor Jim Edgar, who worked for the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Carlson moved back to Illinois in 1977 and was hired by Paula Wolff, head of Governor Thompson's program staff, to work on executive reorganization plans. In 1979 his portfolio expanded as he advised Governor Thompson on energy, environmental, and natural resource policy and this experience set him up for his 1981 appointment as director of IEPA. He stayed in this position until 1988, when he left to form a consulting firm, Carlson Environmental. (Carlson should not be confused with Richard W. Carlson, who also served as a legislative staff intern and was director of the lottery during the Thompson administration.)

In this interview, Carlson discusses his upbringing and some of the major events of the 1960s and early 1970s, campus life at the University of Illinois, Con-Con, his role in the Thompson administration, relationships among the staff, life in Springfield, and environmental policy at the state and federal levels. Specific subjects of interest include Sam Gove's influence in policy circles, Sam Witwer's cancellation of John Gardner's address to Con-Con, executive reorganization in the Thompson administration, the role of Thompson's program staff, the complex structure of environmental regulation in Illinois, the importance of the Superfund program, conflict with Attorney General Neil Hartigan, Thompson's Clean Illinois program, and the challenge posed by pollution in the neighborhoods around Lake Calumet.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Richard J. Carlson; Illinois Environmental Protection Agency; 1970 Illinois Constitutional Convention; James R. Thompson; executive reorganization in Illinois; Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980 (CERCLA/Superfund); staff relations, Thompson administration; Calumet Region, environmental aspects; Neil Hartigan; Paula Wolff; Samuel K. Gove

Note to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

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