

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with **Robert Coomer**

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
IHPA Legacy Oral History project

Interview # HP-A-L-2010-026

Bob Coomer, retired Director for the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *IHPA Legacy* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: June 17, 2010 Location: Julie Dirksen's home; 2123 So. Park, Spfld, IL.

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Julie Dirksen, ALPL Volunteer

Transcription by: Susan Burke, ALPL Volunteer

Edited by: Betty Workman & Rozanne Flatt, ALPL Volunteers

Total Pages: 54 Total Time: 0:57 + 1:13/ 0.95 + 1.22 = 2.17 hrs

Session 1: Early career and work with IHPA through Directorship of S. Mogerman

Session 2: Coomer's directorship of IHPA from 2004-2007, & opening of ALPLM

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on Feb 9, 2011.

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

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Abstract

Robert Coomer, *IHPA Legacy*, HP-A-L-2010-026

Biographical information Overview of Interview: Bob Coomer was born April 7, 1945 in St. Louis, Missouri. Bob's family moved to rural Athens, Illinois where he graduated from high school in 1963. He started college in the fall of 1963 at Western Illinois University; however, he was drafted into the US Army during the Vietnam War. Bob returned to WIU in 1968 where he successfully completed his BA degree in Parks & Recreation Administration in 1971. Using G.I Bill benefits, he transferred to University of Illinois-Champaign, and received his MA degree in Parks and Recreation Administration in 1973. He began his career in Dayton, Ohio in 1973 with the Montgomery Parks and Recreation, then moved to Columbus, Indiana, where he worked with Parks and Recreation from 1975-1977. Bob and family moved to Illinois and sold insurance for one year, then returned to a career in Parks and Recreation. He started with the IL Department of Conservation in 1978, ultimately serving as assistant to the bureau chief until 1985.

In 1985, Governor James Thompson created the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA). Bob was transferred over to the new Agency in the capacity of Superintendent of Historic Sites. He was responsible for the initial set up and oversight of the state's many historic sites. Bob worked directly with the newly created IHPA Board of Trustees and initial Director, Dr. David Kenny, to transfer the sites over to IHPA. He has served with all Agency Directors, including Dr. Kenny, Dr. Michael Devine, Susan Mogerman, and Maynard Crossland. In 2004 Coomer himself was named Agency Director. His duties included fiscal oversight; legislative work and Trustee liaison, plus restoration of the historic Journal Register building into IHPA offices, and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum project development and completion. He retired from the agency at the end of 2007.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Illinois Department of Conservation; Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA); Historic Sites; Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library & Museum (ALPLM); Springfield Readiness Committee; Springfield Lincoln Bicentennial Commission; Richard Norton Smith; Rick Beard; Tom Schwartz; Julie Cellini; Govs James Thompson; Jim Edgar; George Ryan and Rod Blagojevich; IHPA Directors Kenney; Devine; Mogerman; Crossland and Grimes.

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