

Interview with Kay Smith
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Interviewer: Newlyn Hosea

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Hosea: This is Newlyn Hosea on March 23, 2010 at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, interviewing Kay Smith as part of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency Legacy Project. Kay, first, thanks for doing this, and I wonder if you would kind of give us a shortened version of the history of Kay Smith before you took on your responsibilities with the Bicentennial Commission.

Smith: Well, Newlyn, it’s great to be here with you to kind of rethink and remember all of the bicentennial moments we had. I was raised in Springfield. My husband and I moved away in 1974. We moved back four years ago after we lived in several different cities. My husband is in the hotel management business, so we moved around. I kind of refer to it as like Army life. Most recently, we were in Baltimore for seventeen years before we moved back to Springfield. So Baltimore to us kind of seems like home. We moved back here four years ago to semi-retire. My husband immediately started working. I immediately started volunteering at the Museum, and that’s how I found out about the opening of the bicentennial job.



Hosea: And how was that listed or how did you hear about that?

Smith: I think I heard about it of word-of-mouth, that I just heard about it, that there was going to be a position. I talked to Tom Schwartz, who was the one spearheading the effort to find a person for this job. It actually went through the normal State channels. I had to get on line for the State website, fill out an application, submit it. A little bit in my favor, I used to work for the State of Illinois in 1969 or '70. So, for some reason when you fill out an application with the State of Illinois, if you're a former employee at that time, it kind of helps, I think, but I don't know that a couple years of service that many years ago made that much difference.

Hosea: Did you have political connections? Did you know people that could help you?

Smith: No, no, no, no, none. No, I'd just been back in Springfield for less than a year when I applied for this job, so there was no political connection. I put in an application, had a couple interviews with Tom Schwartz and Jennifer Tirey, who's the Deputy Director of the Museum, who I was part of.

Hosea: Would you give me that name again?

Smith: Jennifer Tirey, T-i-r-e-y. It was advertised as a contract position, and so contract positions at that time—and I never understood this because I'd never been in any kind of political position before—had to come out of the Governor's office. So, I guess when the decision was made at the Museum/Library level to select the candidate, then that information had to go to the Governor's office, then it took a while for it to come back out approved.

Hosea: And what was your educational background?

Smith: I graduated from Springfield High School. I went to Lincoln Land. I went to Eastern Illinois University. I went to Eastern Montana College. Three different universities, but never had gotten a degree. So, I'm very close, but I just never finished.

Hosea: And where had you worked before?

Smith: My most recent job was with a law firm in Baltimore called Venable. It's one of the top five law firms on the East Coast. They had—probably at the time, four years ago—they had over a thousand employees. I'm sure its larger now and probably over five hundred attorneys. But I was the senior administrative assistant to the managing partner and which was a great place to be. I was the point person for the law firm. I absolutely loved it. It was great.

Hosea: When you interviewed and were talking about this job, how was the job described to you? What were they telling you what you were going to be doing?

Smith: That's a hard one. I can't remember. I think they pretty much said it was mostly organization—organization, coordination were the big things. I think they were looking for somebody who had worked in a field with a lot of different personalities, a lot of pressure, a lot of organizing events, which I did at the law firm. And so they

were looking for somebody like that. I think that's what they were looking for. Not necessarily somebody with an historical background.

Hosea: And what date are we at now, when the interviews and so on took place?

Smith: That would have been in the summer of 2006.

Hosea: 2006?

Smith: Uh huh, 2005, I'm sorry.

Hosea: 2005. And when did you...

Smith: I'm sorry. It was 2006.

Hosea: Okay. 2006. And when did you officially take over? When did you start, what year?

Smith: January of 2007.

Hosea: In January of 2007, when you first sat down in your office and started thinking about this, what did you anticipate doing, or how did you start?

Smith: I had no idea. I really was thrown into something that had never been done before. Tom Schwartz was my immediate supervisor, who I reported to. There had already been a commission established out of the Governor's office for the bicentennial.

Hosea: Do you have the name of that commission?

Smith: It was called the Illinois Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission.

Hosea: Okay.

Smith: It was established, I believe, in 2005. There were about thirty-five, thirty-seven commission members made up of people from the bureau of tourism, from history professors, people who were connected to Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, kind of a wide variety of people that were on that commission. Also on that commission was a lot of ad hoc members, which included the Governor, the Lt. Governor, the State Treasurer, the local representatives, State Representatives, so there was another thirty-five or forty of those on this commission, also, so in total, we had about eighty people.

Hosea: And was this a functioning commission? Did it meet regularly and then started to do some work?

Smith: Yes, uh huh.

Hosea: Now, were you over this commission then or essentially in charge of implementing what they decide?

Smith: I was in charge of implementing what they decided. I was the coordinator. One of the first things I did the first day on the job, second day on the job, was I took the list of all the commission members and just started calling them and introducing myself. And I don't think they even had an idea of what direction they were going. They just were all excited about doing something to celebrate the two hundredth birthday of Abraham Lincoln and they were thrilled to be a part of it. But nobody really had an agenda, or a focus yet.

Hosea: Did the commission have a chair?

Smith: They did. They appointed one after the second meeting.

Hosea: And who was that?

Smith: Marilyn Kushak. K-u-s-h-a-k.

Hosea: And so I would imagine you got together with her very quickly then?

Smith: Uh huh, yep.

Hosea: Did you have a budget or were you supposed to go out and obtain funds?

Smith: The one thing that when they established the Bicentennial Commission in 2005—I think in the next fiscal year—they allotted \$500,000. This was a State appropriation. It was all State funds. So out of that \$500,000 was where my salary came from—administrative costs—which I have to say over the course of the whole bicentennial, our administrative costs were really minimal. But when I started on board in January, it was in the middle of the fiscal year and that \$500,000 had not been spent and the fiscal year was going to end on June 30, and if hadn't been utilized, it would have been gone. So we kind of had to scurry to figure out a good a sensible way to use those funds.

Hosea: When you took over, was there a list of projects that had been decided on already, events, people who were coming, all of this kind of thing?

Smith: No. Nothing. Nothing. A few brain-storming meetings, I think, had taken place, but nothing concrete at all.

Hosea: And so, now did you consider it your job to decide—for want of a better word—or come up with a plan for the program for the bicentennial?

Smith: I didn't think it was my position to do that, but it kind of turned out that it was. The commission was charged with coming up with these plans and events and programs, but it's hard to get thirty or forty people to come together with a focus. And for a while, I think, for the first year, it was hard. What we did at the very beginning, and this was a combination of Tom Schwartz and Rick Beard who was the former Director of the museum, and myself, and also, I believe Bob Coomer, who was the agency director at the time, discussed and decided to have a grant program using these funds that we had, the \$500,000 funding, which turned out to be a fabulous way to kick off the

bicentennial, because we created criteria of what we were looking for to give the grants to. It was to go to all the communities, any community, in the State of Illinois who had a concrete plan or program that they wanted to develop for the bicentennial. So that was a great way to get people aware of the bicentennial and to know that we're here, the commission is here to help you. I think we gave out fourteen or fifteen grants that first year.

Hosea: So you went through an advertisement process and then who reviewed the applications for these grants?

Smith: All the applications came to me. We had established a grant review committee from the commission. I think that we had seven or eight members. Ed Carroll from Heartland Community College in Bloomington was the chair of that committee and he was absolutely fantastic.

Hosea: Carroll who?

Smith: C-a-r-r-o-l-l.

Hosea: And what was his last name?

Smith: That was his. Ed was his...

Hosea: Oh, Ed Carroll, okay. He was the chair of that committee?

Smith: Uh huh, uh huh.

Hosea: So you did some preliminary, or somebody, I assume, did some preliminary sorting and then it went to that committee to finally decide on?

Smith: Right. One of the things that we did at the very beginning, too, was to create a website for the bicentennial commission. So I worked on that. We got that established. We got the word out that the website was up and running and that's how we advertised the grants. People could go to that website and get a grant application. So, we had to create a grant application. We had to create the criteria. We had to establish a deadline for the applications. And then we also had press releases on the grants, too, on the grant applications. I believe we had over fifty applications that first go-around. Now I came on board in January.

Hosea: Of '07.

Smith: And our grant deadline for that cycle, I believe, was April 15.

Hosea: Again, because you had this deadline in June to have this money committed.

Smith: Uh huh. So we have a lot of work between January and April 15. The applications came in. The committee reviewed them. We came up with, I think, fourteen that were awarded.

Hosea: Was there a target date at this point for the events? Did they all have to happen in February of '09 or could they be all during that year?

Smith: Well, there also was established a National Bicentennial Commission and they were housed in Washington; they did have some federal appropriations for their administrative costs. They kind of came out and said that the bicentennial period should be from February 12, 2008 to February 12, 2010. I always thought 2008's too early and 2010's too late. They had a kick-off celebration in Kentucky on February 12, 2008. We just said, "I hope it works out, I hope it's great, but we're going to focus on February 12, 2009." And I think we kind of all agreed from the very beginning that we kind of wanted to own February 2009. Washington, the National Commission, actually wanted to take ownership of that day and do a big event in Washington and we managed to do it here and we got a lot of attention and did a lot of great things.

Hosea: So you were focusing on that month, essentially, from the very beginning?

Smith: We were. Uh huh, uh huh.

Hosea: So early in 2007, then you had awarded these monies to various, to how many projects?

Smith: I think fourteen.

Hosea: Fourteen?

Smith: Uh huh.

Hosea: And did you view this as just the start or did you view this as essentially what was going to be happening?

Smith: That was just a start, that was a start. A lot of those grants in that first round of funding went to the Lincoln-Douglas communities because they had already gotten together and were establishing ways to commemorate the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Lincoln-Douglas Debates.

Hosea: Now you say Lincoln-Douglas communities. What do you mean by that?

Smith: Those are the eight communities where the debates were held.

Hosea: Okay.

Smith: Jonesboro, Quincy, Freeport, Alton, and so on.

Hosea: So they had their own structure?

Smith: They had already started. They had already started planning for this hundred and fiftieth celebration of the Lincoln-Douglas Debates, which would be in the summer and fall of 2008. We kind of looked at that as our kick-off to the bicentennial and a lot of

those fourteen grants went to those communities to help them with their planning for those debate commemorations.

Hosea: And this five hundred thousand was then part of the state budget; that money came from the state?

Smith: Uh huh, uh huh.

Hosea: And then at the same time, I assume you were working up a budget for the next fiscal year then.

Smith: Right. Right.

Hosea: And what were you envisioning for that process?

Smith: Well, a lot of people were really pie-in-the-sky on that. They wanted to ask for five million dollars, and, you know, with the budget the way it was, it's worse now than it was then, but it wasn't great then. So a lot of us met with the legislatures to talk to them about the bicentennial to get them interested and, I think our budget that we presented to them was three and a half million dollars. We got one million.

Hosea: You got one million.

Smith: We got one million. Which was, you know, it was just fine. You know, could have been more, but we made do with what we had and it turned out fine and had another grant cycle for that next fiscal year. We were able to fund, oh gosh, forty-some grants out of that. And that turned into the main focus of the commission, was to support these communities with these grants that we were able to do.

Hosea: Now when you say "we", we met with legislators and so on, who was the functioning core of the leadership of the commission at this point? I assume you were one of those.

Smith: Marilyn Kushak and Rick Beard were probably, and Jerry Blakemore, who was another commission member; they were pretty key in talking to the legislators.

Hosea: And on a day-to-day basis, were these the people you would deal with as you...

Smith: Right.

Hosea: ...encountered problems or had ideas or whatever.

Smith: Uh huh. We had a very good support on the commission from Bill Houlihan, who I think he's a downstate director for Senator Durbin—I don't know if I have his title right or not—he attended most commission meetings. I can't hardly remember very few that he didn't attend.

Hosea: How often did the commission meet?

Smith: Once a month. (Both laugh) I always thought it was too much, but I couldn't convince anybody else of that. But Bill Houlihan was a great support and he was helping people to get in to talk to the legislators about getting money or getting another appropriation.

Hosea: There was no money coming from the federal government to the state for this?

Smith: No.

Hosea: We were on our own in terms of that.

Smith: Uh huh. The National Bicentennial Commission had some funding, but they were using it on their own programs. It did never filter down to the states.

Hosea: Now once you gave a grant to somebody to run a mock debate or whatever,

Smith: Uh huh.

Hosea: Did you continue to monitor and deal with them on the day-to-day practicalities, or did you assume that's their responsibility now and let them carry it out?

Smith: No. It was, when we gave a grant, they had to sign a pretty lengthy agreement. They had to report to me quarterly on their progress, send in copies of invoices; they would call me, periodically and say, "We want to spend a little bit of the money on something and we want to make sure it's in the scope of the grant agreement." And so I'd have conversations like that with them. But there was always follow-up. When they finished and they had expended all of their grant money, they had to do a final report and a final breakdown of a budget, how they spent their money, with back-up to go with it. The first go-around on the grants, I really was thrown in and just said, "Do it." I didn't have hardly any guidance, except I did receive a copy of a grant agreement from the agency, so I just copied it, filled it out and sent it on to the people. I kind of did my own follow-up with them. I mean, I spoke to them, but I was kind of thrown in to just do it and didn't have a lot of guidance on it. I think we did fine. I think everything went according to the way it should, but there was not a lot of agency support on that in the first go-around, or the second.

Hosea: And you then, essentially, approved all the vouchers, the money that actually went out to reimburse these people; you were the one that approved that was a legitimate expense and should be paid?

Smith: Well, what they did was, they got their grant money up front, so they had it in hand, and according to the grant agreement, they had two years to spend it. We kind of were hopeful, in most cases they spent it much sooner than two years.

Hosea: And you felt comfortable with the process that was going on, you were able to deal with this without political pressure or being told what to do essentially? You felt that you were able to make your own decisions?

Smith: Well, the decision had been made by the commission to give the grants, so I just followed up and made sure that the checks were cut, and all the grant recipients received their funds, and that they started their projects, and then I would just follow up. Now I was perfectly comfortable doing that.

Hosea: Now you said the first group of grants was more to these communities, a lot of them, anyway, that had the Lincoln-Douglas Debates.

Smith: Uh huh. Right.

Hosea: Was the second group more focused on events in Springfield and around the library and museum and that situation?

Smith: The second group was. The second group was more around the State of people who were planning like exhibits at a museum or a library for the bicentennial. We gave several to smaller libraries and museums around the state. We had a broad variety of things that we gave grants to. There was a grant to put a new roof on the Lincoln log cabin in Decatur. There was also a grant to Ravinia Festival in Highland Park to help them with their 2009—they were going to celebrate the bicentennial throughout the year with music—so there was that. There was quite a variety. We helped fund WILL-TV do a documentary on Lincoln that was very well done and very popular. WTTW in Chicago did a small documentary and bicentennial minutes on the television, so we helped on that. So it was quite a variety.

Hosea: Now in addition to what you were doing, were there other independent, for instance, the library, the museum, the City of Springfield, there were other independent things going on, I assume that were totally outside of the scope of these grants and so on.

Smith: Uh huh. Uh huh.

Hosea: And did you coordinate with them?

Smith: Yes, I did. Aside from the grants, there was a lot of planning at the museum for what they were going to do for the bicentennial itself. The Lincoln Home, also was.

Hosea: Which is federal, right?

Smith: Which is federal. Very organized about what they were going to do and they did great programming and throughout all of 2009. They did a lot in February of 2009, but they really did it from February of 2009 until December 2009. They had consistent bicentennial programming all the time. They were great. The Old State Capitol and they came up with a lot of programs, and then all around the state people were doing things. It was just remarkable what was going on. People were planning period balls and they were planning symposiums and there was just a lot. In 2008, all of a sudden, probably about the spring of 2008, people just really got on the bandwagon and realized that February was coming close.

Hosea: Now were there organizational meetings in terms of who's going to use what space, when, and this kind?

Smith: In Springfield?

Hosea: Yes, and other communities, too, for that matter.

Smith: In Springfield, we pulled together early on and we did this very casually; we pulled together people from Lincoln Home, the Old State Capitol, the Museum and, I think that was about it, and then a couple people from the commission and myself, to talk about what we could do in February 2009; we were always talking together so that nothing overlapped. The big thing, the great thing about it was that we could share the resources, that if specifically in February 2009, if we wanted Abraham Lincoln here in character, we could have him here, but he could also be at Lincoln's home, he could be at the Old State Capitol. So it was a great open communication to do that.

Hosea: And you felt good about that process?

Smith: That's probably one of the better things I feel really good about, (Hosea laughs) because there was so... the communication between Lincoln home.

Hosea: Who did you deal with at the Lincoln Home, on the federal home?

Smith: Jim Sanders, who was the Site Superintendent who recently retired, and Tim Townsend. One of the first few weeks that I was on the job, Jim Sanders called and asked me to come over and we sat down and talked. He said, "How do we get everybody talking together?" Because I think up until the bicentennial, I'm not sure Lincoln Home and the museum and the Old State Capitol, I'm not sure they ever sat down and really talked to each other about what they were doing. And so that started it, and it was great. It was great. And the Old State Capitol and Lincoln Home still have an ongoing partnership on sharing things, so it was really great.

Hosea: So in some ways, you think this activity actually started a level of communication that wasn't there before?

Smith: Oh, I think, uh huh; I think it did.

Hosea: And that process went smoothly?

Smith: Uh huh, it did.

Hosea: Now during this time, on the state budget things were getting worse and worse and places were being closed and so on; you never had pressure on your budget because it was a grant, it was always just, it stayed the same, it didn't go down?

Smith: Once they committed a million, the second year once they committed a million dollars, that was fine. They didn't have any problem with it. So that was no problem. The third year we tried to get more money and this was the third year that was going to

include, you know, February 12, 2009, we got five hundred thousand dollars. But out of that five hundred thousand dollars on our third year, the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, we gave back three hundred thousand dollars to the agency to help.

Hosea: Three hundred out of five hundred?

Smith: To help keep the sites open. So, on the last year, we were running on fumes. We were on, you know, we had two hundred thousand dollars.

Hosea: No that was used not so much for grants but for banquets and various activities.

Smith: The two hundred thousand dollars?

Hosea: Yes.

Smith: Yeah, yeah, because by the time, a lot of printing costs because we were doing a lot for February 2009. We did do a very few grants out of that two hundred thousand dollars, though. We did. Because it was a real goal and focus of the Commission that this money, this state appropriated money be used and spread throughout the state for all of the communities who wanted to have their own programs. We tried not to spend it all in Springfield, and I think we did a pretty good job of that.

Hosea: So that was one of the emphases, to spread it through the state as possible?

Smith: Uh huh.

Hosea: This is skipping ahead. Was there a report, a compendium that came out of this, is there somewhere you can go to see all the events that happened during that as a result of that bicentennial?

Smith: Every year I had to write a report to the governor's office, just as a summary of what we'd done, how we'd spent the money. Then there's a final report that went, also, and it does give a summary of what went on throughout the year, but specifically in February.

Hosea: Returning to—that's intriguing—the three hundred thousand, where did that idea come from? Was that a directive from the governor's office or did you decide, did the commission decide to do that?

Smith: The director of the agency.

Hosea: The Historic Preservation Agency.

Smith: Of the Historic Preservation Agency.

Hosea: Who was then?

Smith: Jan Grimes. We had a discussion about it. I'm sure she had discussions with other people on the commission about it, but the state was in such dire straits, that you just couldn't take that money when these sites could possibly be closed in February 2009.

It just kind of didn't make any sense. So, it was pretty much a unanimous vote when we did that.

Hosea: So the commission, and you and others felt it was just a necessary thing to do?

Smith: It was just what had to be done. We also had planned ahead for February 2009, in the prior fiscal year, and did give grants to some organizations that were planning events in Springfield for February; so we had a few things already taken care of for February. We could have done more, but we decided that was what needed to be done.

Hosea: Now you had said that Tom was the person you reported to, essentially.

Smith: Uh huh.

Hosea: In terms of the Historic Preservation Agency, is he the one you dealt with most often, or were there other people in the agency that you dealt with?

Smith: He was the one I dealt with most often, and as things got hectic and more crazy towards February 2009, I dealt more with the Director, because she was just so involved in the planning of everything that was going on for the museum and the library and the Old State Capitol.

Hosea: So, I assume came a point in the spring of '08 when the grants had been issued—at this point, the ones that were going to be issued—what was your time going towards at that point, when the grants had been given? Was it follow-up essentially and the details?

Smith: Yeah, follow-up, uh huh. The previous year it had been fourteen grants, now the next year I had forty-some to follow up on, so it was much larger, and the review process was huge because we had close to a hundred applications. The grant review committee: we had to get more members for it because it was just so much to review, so, yeah, it was very time consuming. And then we awarded the grants.

Hosea: Did the awards happen through time, or was there a specific date or time when those were given out?

Smith: We did the grant announcements, I think, February 11, 2008, because we wanted to do them really close to Lincoln's birthday, so I believe it was February 11. But also, the State was starting to have its crunch of problems and we announced it on February 11 or thereabouts, and all the grant recipients knew they were going to get the money. Some of those grant recipients didn't even receive their checks until June, so it took a long time to get those monies out to the communities.

Hosea: So we get the grant money has been decided on and there is a process now of approving vouchers and all of this kind of things. As we get into the summer of '08, actually leading up to the events in '09, what's your main time expenditure there? What are you trying to do?

Smith: Meetings, meetings, meetings, a lot of planning meetings with the museum and the library. We had a group, like I said, a group with the Lincoln Home, it was just talking about how best to do things. We always knew we were going to bring in Lincoln authors on February 12, 2009, so there was a lot going into that, getting them to come, getting acceptances that they would come. They were a big part of the program of the day, so we had thirty authors coming in. Coordination had to be done to get that, to get them here, to make sure they were going to be here. We were planning for the big farewell address performance that was done at the convention center on the morning of February 11. That was huge. I was working with the Illinois Symphony Orchestra. They very much wanted to be a part of the bicentennial, but we were trying to get it so that it was affordable for us to do it. They were very excited about being a part of it and they did bend on their price a little bit. I was so appreciative of that because I really felt like that was kind of my thing. I wanted that symphony orchestra performance that night. I really fought for that.



Fritz Klein as Lincoln helps conduct the Illinois Symphony performance "*Let Freedom Sing*" on February 11, 2009 at the Prairie Capitol Convention Center.

Hosea: On February 11?

Smith: On February 11. Other commission members wanted to bring in something that was really wow and was going to be really exciting, you know, like Bruce Springsteen or somebody like that, and we would have had to charge ticket prices. I was really opposed to having something where people had to buy a ticket to go. And the Illinois Symphony offered that. They came to us and they had such an agreeable price, and the Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau picked up the tab for the Convention Center, so we had it ready. We just... it was there. There were several commission members who didn't like the idea of using the Illinois Symphony Orchestra. They thought it was too high-brow. But I had talked to Karen Deal, and her people and her office, time and time and time again, and knew that it wasn't going to be a high-brow performance. I knew what they were going to do and it was going to be great. And so, I really, really fought for that one. We did it, and we had four thousand people come. It was free and open to the public and it was fabulous, so.

Hosea: We had talked about being free or charging tickets and so on, as part of that grant-giving process. Were there policies of inclusion of minorities, whether or not you pay, whether you charge for tickets and so on, were there policies that were enforced as a part of that?

Smith: No really. No.

Hosea: So it was the judgment of whoever.

Smith: It was the judgment of the grant and review committee upon reviewing these really thorough applications that the grant recipients had to give, that detailed what they were going to do, and so there was enough information to know that was what the commission wanted to support.

Hosea: When you say “very thorough”, what kinds of things did they have to come up with?

Smith: Well, they had to come up with, well, for example, the Lincoln-Douglas debate community of Quincy: they wanted to re-do their debate site that’s in downtown Quincy. You know, they had architectural sketches. They had the landscaping design. They had what was going to be written on the plaque. In Jonesboro, we supported and paid for statues at their site, and they had the description from the—I don’t know if it’s called the masonry company—who did it. They had come up with a smaller version of what the statue would look like, every detail of what it was going to cost. It was pretty detailed, that they needed to provide.

Hosea: And they didn’t just do this; it was required that any plans that were submitted should be in detail?

Smith: Right, right.

Hosea: Not we’re going to build something.

Smith: Right, no, no. They had to know exactly what they were going to build or do, how much it was going to cost, who was going to do it, and so it was pretty detailed.

Hosea: As we go through the summer and start getting into fall and nitty gritty time, were there a lot of last minute, was there any huge last minute thing, that imperiled it, or did you feel things went smoothly from that point on?

Smith: I think it went really smoothly. The thing that, if you want to use the word “imperiled” was that we partnered with the Abraham Lincoln Association on their annual Lincoln Day Dinner, February 12, 2009. We had agreed to do that a long time ago, and we wanted to be a part of it, because we knew it was going to be a big one. So, as planning started for their banquet, ticket prices started to go up and up and up, and not exorbitantly, but they had to go up because it was in a bigger venue, it was going to be nicer, it was going to be better food.

Hosea: Was the President already committed or thinking of being there?

Smith: No. There were many, many, many meetings about who would be the speaker. A lot of names were thrown



about. And then, somebody said, well, this was before the election, so, why don't we ask our two senators to come: Senator Obama and Senator Durbin. If Senator Obama ends up being President, then that's just gravy, you know, that's just great. So that's how they presented it. We want our two senators to be the speakers. From then on, after he became President, Senator Durbin was instrumental in getting the President here, I'm sure, and he did come. But, there was always a big concern of some crisis that he couldn't come and who would be the fall-back speaker, but it turned out, it turned out fine.

But, as the price went up on the ticket for the banquet, I was always so concerned that we had things that people didn't have to pay to go to. We had come up with an idea sometime back, Rick Beard and I actually did, to have a period ball at the museum. We decided to do it the same night as the banquet, but it would be free, so we were offering something free to the people who might not be able to go out and pay ninety-five dollars for a ticket to see the President. The Old State Capitol also did something that night, too, that was open to the public and free. I wanted to have balance. I didn't want it to be all about the gala at the Crown Plaza with the President. It was, so we were able to do some other things free downtown.



Hosea: Since you were a former volunteer, was there a concerted effort to mobilize volunteers to help with all of these things, or the various agencies took care of that themselves?

Smith: No, you know, I had a lot of people approach me, a lot of companies in Springfield approach me and wanted to be a part of the bicentennial, not necessarily with dollars, but they were offering people for volunteering. But, the museum and library's volunteer corps was so excited about being a part of it, and they really wanted to be a part of it, and that's who we used. We couldn't have done it without them. Oh, my gosh. We had meetings, and we had a meeting one time in the evening. I don't know if you were there or not. But we outlined everything that we were doing from February 6 through February 15, I think, 2009, and what we needed volunteers for, and we weren't lacking at all. I mean, they signed up and they came. I mean, we must have had thirty volunteers for the symphony performance, and then they were at the banquet and they were everywhere. They were great.

Hosea: And so you never felt that you had a dearth of volunteers. You were always able to put as many there as you wanted?

Smith: Yes, because they they all wanted to be there, so it was great. It was really great. Linda Bee and Jeremy Carrell - we couldn't have done it without them. They pulled their volunteers together and, it turned out really well.

Hosea: Now, we're into the fall and getting towards the projects as things start to happen. Who are you dealing with mostly at this point, in terms of nitty gritty coordination and so on?

Smith: Well, the Director of the Historic Preservation Agency started weekly meetings for just the IHPA, so there was that. The commission was meeting still regularly.

Hosea: Just once a month or more at this point?

Smith: No, we just did once a month. I was coordinating a lot with Dave Blanchette just to get the word out: press releases, radio interviews, TV interviews, speaking engagements all around of people wanting to know what was going on. By the fall of 2008, we were pretty good with what we knew what was going to happen, plan-wise. We knew the authors were coming. We knew the banquet was going to happen. We knew we were going to have a period ball. The farewell address. The symphony was pretty much down to late fall before we got that finalized.

Hosea: So, do you look back on this as a hectic period then?

Smith: Oh, my gosh. It was very hectic. It was. It was really hectic. People calling me from all over the state talking about what they were doing. I was just on the phone all the time. And it wasn't so much what was happening in Springfield. I was hearing about what was going on around the state, too.

Hosea: In general, was this an exciting, happy time for you, or was it a "when is this going to be over" time?

Smith: It was exciting and it was happy, but it was really, really hectic. A lot of, the biggest concern, I think, was everybody was very, very stressed that the President might not come. I kind of looked at it like, "Oh, my gosh, things will be so much easier if he doesn't come." (Hosea laughs) But I couldn't even go to the events downtown because I went to the Crown Plaza. I had to be out there at four o'clock because of security. So I missed the period ball at the museum. I missed anything that was going on at the Old State Capitol. Lincoln's home had something. I couldn't go to that. But I tell you, it all worked out fine. It all worked out fine. That was probably the biggest concern. Everybody else had their plans. We were moving forward. It was good. It was the hand-wringing about whether the President would come or not (laughs).

Hosea: And I imagine that was a whole different level of security...

Smith: Uh huh.

Hosea: ...when he actually came. The publicity aspect of this—you mentioned this a couple of times—were you in charge or one of the impetuses behind getting word out? Was there an organization set up to, if I were a TV station or radio station and wanted someone to talk to me about bicentennial events, who would I go to?

- Smith: Well, it's always Dave Blanchette, who's the Communications Director for the agency and we couldn't have done it without him. He was fabulous. But we got to the point where he was so busy and I was so busy, he would just tell me, "If WICS calls you and wants to talk to you, just talk to them, but let me know." I think the rule of thumb was that they go through Dave and then Dave filters it out to the right person to talk to, if need be, but it just got to be so crazy, because he was getting inundated with requests. And then people started to know me and then they would just call me directly, and he said, "Just tell me that you've talked to them or something, and that's all we need to know." But it was pretty wild.
- Hosea: And you ended up talking to a number of groups and media type things and all of this kind of stuff?
- Smith: Right. One of my favorites was the Chinese—I think it was the Chinese—public television was here the week of February 2009; they wanted to interview several people, so they came into my office and interviewed me. Then they sent me a DVD of the interview and it was hysterical, because there I am on Chinese television with my speaking English with the Chinese subscript underneath it, saying what I said, but it was... Everybody was really interested.
- Hosea: Now the wind-up. You know, after the events happened and, in general, you regard the events as being successful, I gather?
- Smith: Yeah.
- Hosea: That things went as you had anticipated they would. What was the wind-up process like? When the events had occurred, is it just now filling out forms and giving reports and all of this kind of stuff?
- Smith: I still had grants to follow up on. The grants were still ongoing because the fiscal year wasn't over and, you know, these people still had up through 2009 and even into 2010 to spend their grant, so it was still following up on that. But as far as the hectic pace and everything, it stopped. (Hosea laughs) It just stopped. And I knew it would. It just... it was over. I think a lot of other people thought that it was going to continue, but I never thought that it would. It was; people were geared for February 12, and once it was over, it was done. There were still some programs going on, but not to the extent that it was.
- Hosea: So, some kind of wrap-up things now. In general, you've had kind of an immersion in Illinois State government and processes and so on. In general, do you look back now and view this as a positive thing, a positive part of your life?
- Smith: Oh, definitely, oh my gosh. I never would have thought that I would have been doing something like this. Never. But it was a great experience. But I think, like I've said from the very beginning, I was kind of the proponent; I wanted the communities to be involved. One of the things we did at the very beginning was we had a community conference, and this was probably in the spring of 2007? Yeah. Where we invited communities to come here and, with the help of the then Lieutenant Governor's office

and his staff people, they helped us put together a program that was a workshop on how to plan events and programs and what you might want to do to celebrate the bicentennial. It was great. We had well over a hundred participants that came to the workshop. It was great.

Hosea: And this was the commission and the Lieutenant Governor's office?

Smith: The Lieutenant Governor's office staff people who had been coming to meetings were instrumental in helping me pull this off. So, they got in contact with people within National Historic Preservation agency or foundation and we had their professional people come to facilitate the workshop. It was really, really well done. It was good exposure for the commission because people around the state realized that we were here and that we were here to help them.

Hosea: And you outlined at that point what they should do to get a grant and how they might approach this and various requirements and so on?

Smith: Uh huh. Uh huh.

Hosea: And tell me again when this was.

Smith: That was probably in April of 2007.

Hosea: So you had only been officially on the job for, like four months then.

Smith: Oh yeah, a couple of months. It was a couple of months and we decided that we would do this and we pulled it together and somehow got it done.

Hosea: Do you have any major, "if only we could have's" or major regrets or things you would like to have a do-over on?

Smith: I think people would always... Some people might say we could have used more money, but I think we did just fine with what we had. I really do. I don't really have any regrets. I thought it was everything was great. I think the commission, we probably met too often. I think we could have done without so many meetings, but the people are great, so it was great to see them. The officers of the commission were very helpful when need-be, but pretty much everything kind of came out of my office. I was the one that knew what was going on.

One of the other things that we did—and I was really proud of this, too—is that we did a Lincoln day-by-day in the newspapers. I kind of came up with this idea right at the beginning after talking to Daniel Stowell at the Papers of Abraham Lincoln, that everybody's geared to the websites now, but there's still people out there reading the newspapers, the hard copy black and white newspaper, and wouldn't it be great if we could have a daily input in there of what Lincoln did based on the Papers of Abraham Lincoln's day-by-day program. So, we were able to do that starting in January 2008. We put it out for all the newspapers through the Illinois Press Association, all the newspapers in the state. If they wanted to carry this, this daily insert, we just sent it to

them free. The Journal-Register carried it for well over a year; it was on their second page every day. It said what Lincoln did on that particular day in a given year. We were able to do that because the commission funded in part to the Papers of Abraham Lincoln to have one of their staff people dedicated to this project. I think it was well worthwhile, because it really gave exposure to the bicentennial.

Hosea: Is there any other aspect of that that I haven't asked you about, that was important to you, you want to get on the record, so to speak.

Smith: Well, I think one of the other things to let people know, too, is that because we didn't have a lot of money, it required people really thinking, some really creative ideas, and one of the better ones was doing the "send a birthday card to Mr. Lincoln." We got that out with Dave Blanchette's help. We got press releases out. It was all over the country. I venture to say we had a birthday card from every state in the union; we had over ten thousand we received, and they came to me.

Hosea: You got those? (Laughs)

Smith: I started looking at them at first, but then it was just overwhelming. You just couldn't look at them all. But we had them on display at the Library, at the Union Station, at the Old State Capitol, Lincoln's home, the Springfield Convention and Visitor's Bureau. I got to the point where, through Downtown Springfield, Inc., we just gave them out to all the shopkeepers and said, "Put them in your windows." I mean, we had so many. But it was a great, it was a great way for people to feel like they were part of the whole, the whole thing.

Hosea: Very good. Thank you very much for your time.

Smith: Well thank you.