

# Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Michael Wiant

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library  
*Organizations & Agencies-Illinois State Museum Oral History project*

Interview # OSM-A-L-2020-067

Dr. Michael D. Wiant, a former Interim Director of the Illinois State Museum, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Former Illinois State Museum Directors Oral History project*.

Interview dates & location:

Date: December 28, 2020      Location: ALPL Recording Room, Springfield

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mark Flotow, ALPL volunteer

Transcription by: \_\_\_\_\_

Edited by: \_\_\_\_\_

**Transcript  
being processed**

Total Pages: \_\_\_\_\_      Total Time: 2:43 / 2.72 hrs.

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

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# Abstract

Michael D. Wiant, *Illinois State Museum*, OSM-A-L-2020-067

**Biographical Information/Overview of Interview:** Michael D. Wiant was born on March 31, 1949 in Illinois. After a period where he worked as a distinguished field archaeologist, primarily in Illinois, he started a long association with the Anthropology Section of the Illinois State Museum (ISM), including positions as Associate Curator (1983), Section Head (1988), and Curator (1991). He further advanced to become interim director of the ISM's Dickson Mounds Museum (2002) and became the DMM's Director in 2003. When the ISM was closed on October 2015, he accepted the role as caretaker for the Museum system. In 2016, he was appointed ISM Interim Director, serving until December 31, 2017, when he retired. At the time of this interview, he was an ISM/DMM Director Emeritus. (For more information regarding his pre-1983 career, see his interview in the *Historians Speak - Illinois Pre-History* series.)

This interview covers Dr. Michael Wiant's terms as a caretaker (2015) and then an Interim Director (2016-2017) for the Illinois State Museum. At the start of this period, based on a decision by the Governor Bruce Rauner administration, the ISM's budget was slashed, the staff was drastically pared down, and the Museum's buildings were closed to the public. This precipitated additional bottlenecks and challenges, such as the potential loss of the Museum's national accreditation with the American Alliance of Museums, the remaining staff members seeking more stable employment elsewhere, and planning for a state bicentennial exhibit with limited resources. Dr. Wiant discusses how the Museum came to be a target by the Governor Rauner administration for downsizing and closure, and the challenges that presented in maintaining the functionality and viability of the ISM. He also provides insights into methods used to parry both extrinsic and intrinsic institutional challenges. He highlights successes and failures, and also suggests a larger context on why the Illinois State Museum may have been targeted for closure by the Governor's administration.

**Subject Headings/Key Words:** Illinois State Museum closure; Managerial career development; lack of IL state budget; political experience; ISM caretaker responsibilities; staff members positions and options after the ISM closure; national museum accreditation efforts; ISM employee morale; bicentennial exhibit plans; Gov. Bruce Rauner; retirement decision;

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