

# Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Cullom Davis

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library  
*Historians Speak* Oral History project

Interview # HS-A-L-2011-037

Cullom Davis, a history professor at Sangamon State University, noted oral historian, and director of the Lincoln Legal Papers from 1988 through 2000, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Historians Speak* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: Sept. 7, Sept. 19, Sept. 22, Oct. 12 & Oct. 24, 2011

Location: Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History, ALPL

Transcription by: Janet Frederick, ALPL Volunteer

Edited by: Cheryl Wycoff and Janice Culp, ALPL Volunteers

Total Pages: 224 pgs    Total Time: 2:37 + 2:02 + 2:45 + 2:08 + 2:11 / 2.62 + 2.03 + 2.75  
+ 2.13 + 2.18 = 9.58 hrs

Session 1: Childhood, education and early career as a historian at Indiana University

Session 2: Davis's involvement with the creation of Sangamon State U. in 1970

Session 3: Cullom Davis's career as director of the Oral History Office at SSU

Session 4: Davis as director of the Lincoln Legal Papers project through mid-1990s

Session 5: Davis as director of the Lincoln Legal Papers project & reflections on career

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on November 19th, 2011.

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

## Abstract

### Cullom Davis, *Historians Speak*, HS-A-L-2011-037

**Biographical Information Overview of Interview:** George Cullom Davis was born on May 2, 1935 in Aurora, Illinois and grew up in Peoria, Illinois, attending public schools and later the Lawrenceville School in Princeton, New Jersey, where he graduated in 1953. He received an undergraduate degree from Princeton University, worked in Honolulu for a time, and then attended graduate school at the University of Illinois, majoring in history. In 1964 he took an assistant professorship of history position at Indiana University, where he became a successful and popular instructor. In 1968, while at Indiana, he earned his Ph.D. from the University of Illinois.

In 1970 Dr. Davis came to Springfield, Illinois, where Sangamon State University, a brand new institution with a mission of being cutting edge in the style of its teaching and education, was being established. He worked as an assistant to the president during the university's formative years and then focused his attentions on classroom teaching. In his first year, Davis also started an oral history program at the university and organized the Oral History Office on campus. He soon developed a national reputation in the oral history community, serving a term as the president of the Oral History Association in 1983-1984. In 1988 Davis changed course and took on the role as director of the Lincoln Legal Papers, a major project dedicated to the collection and publication of the 16th president's entire legal career. The project was being run in conjunction with the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency. Davis also continued his teaching career. He quickly made his mark in the Lincoln scholar community and supervised a staff of assistants that scoured the state, and eventually the nation, searching for Lincoln related documents. The Lincoln Legal Papers collection was published on DVD in 2000. Cullom also retired in the same year but continued in an advisory capacity for several more years as the Legal Papers project transitioned into the Papers of Abraham Lincoln project.

**Subject Headings/Key Words:** Lawrenceville School in Princeton, New Jersey; Princeton University; University of Illinois; Indiana University; early history of Sangamon State University (now UIS); president Robert Spencer; D. Alex B. Lacy, Jr.; Dr. Durwood Long; Dr. Naomi Lynn; oral history; Oral History Association; *From Tape to Type*; Lincoln Legal Papers project; William Beard; Tom Schwartz; Daniel Stowell

**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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