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For the RECORD

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Archives sponsors plan for preservation, accessibility of historical documents

Secretary of State and State Archivist Jesse White is pleased to sponsor a three-year strategic plan for document preservation compiled by the Illinois State Historical Records Advisory Board (ISHRAB). "Preserving the Records of Illinois' Past for the Benefit of the Present and the Future: A Strategic Plan" reviews how historical records in the state are currently being identified, preserved and made accessible to the public, and outlines a plan to promote and enhance those practices in a coordinated way.

During 1999-2000, ISHRAB members:

- Reviewed preservation plans produced by other like state boards
- Engaged a consultant to assess Illinois' historical records and make recommendations
- Analyzed results of a 1996 ISHRAB survey of Illinois archival repositories (conducted on behalf of the Council of State Historical Records Coordinators)
- Reviewed ISHRAB's 1982 "Survey and Assessment Report" on Illinois' archival situation
- Held meetings with a professional strategic planner
- Consulted with allied organizations on the draft plan
- Conducted five public meetings statewide
- Reached final agreement on a plan in February 2001

The plan identifies major accomplishments in the areas of document preservation and accessibility as well as concerns within the Illinois historical records community. Accomplishments include the State Archives' efforts to preserve and make state and local historical records more accessible through its seven Illinois Regional Archives Depositories (IRAD) located at universities statewide.

Despite these and other accomplishments, there are several concerns that need to be addressed. Unlike many other states, Illinois has no central state historical/cultural agency charged with promoting the identification, preservation and accessibility of publicly and privately generated historical records of enduring value. There also is no adequate repository for historical records generated by the City of Chicago and Cook County. Additionally, major cultural institutions in Illinois whose missions include making historical records from private sources accessible have faced severe funding constraints, preventing them from adequately fulfilling their missions.

To ensure that Illinois citizens today as well as future generations have access to this invaluable historical information, the strategic plan identifies six major goals to address these concerns:

1. Promote the identification, acquisition and preservation of historical records in all formats.
2. Promote improved access to and increased use of historical records in Illinois.
3. Foster cooperation among individuals and institutions concerned with the collection, preservation, access and use of historical records in Illinois.
4. Promote the knowledge of and adherence to standards of professional practice in the custodianship of historical records.
5. Advocate a heightened awareness of the importance and usefulness of historical records.
6. Advocate adequate funding for the identification, preservation and access of historical records.

Following are critical steps identified by the board needed to be taken toward preserving and ensuring accessibility of Illinois historical records:

1. Identify the means to support existing Illinois historical records repositories, and encourage Illinois organizations and institutions without historical records programs to form viable archives.
2. Promote professional practices among historical records volunteers and administrators, especially those involved with non-governmental records. The State Archives' IRAD system should promote professional practices regionally.
3. Coordinate efforts among the IRAD system and other historical records repositories to expand their collection and preservation of neglected non-governmental historical records pertaining to their respective regions.
4. Advocate to government officials in the City of Chicago and Cook County the importance of establishing an archival repository.
5. Expand the role and responsibility of the ISHRAB to help address the lack of coordination among the Illinois historical records community. An expanded role for the board would require substantial additional financial support from the State Archives to ensure an adequate level of staffing.

Project funding was provided by a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. The ISHRAB is responsible for monitoring the plan's progress, conducting annual reviews and reporting progress to the public.

For more information, visit the Secretary of State's Web site at www.cyberdriveillinois.com, or contact:

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