

Illinois History and Lincoln Collections

Annual Report, FY21 (July 1, 2020–June 30, 2021)

Prepared by Krista Gray, Archives Program Officer

I. Unit Narrative

The Illinois History and Lincoln Collections acquires, preserves, and provides access to both print and manuscript materials documenting the history of Illinois as well as Abraham Lincoln's life and legacy. The IHLC holds approximately 36,000 volumes of cataloged print materials, including books, periodicals, and pamphlets, dating from the late 17th century to the present. In addition, the unit holds over 1,000 manuscript collections dating from the early 18th through the 21st century that range from single-item collections to those spanning several dozen cubic feet. We respond to reference and photoduplication requests from around the country and the world to provide access to our collections.

During the 2021 fiscal year, the IHLC continued to adjust to the circumstances of the pandemic. Staff overall worked a hybrid schedule throughout the entire fiscal year, with some part-time hourly staff beginning to work all or nearly all of their shifts onsite starting in May 2021. Due to our small space, the IHLC reading room was closed to researchers until late June 2021, though we were able to host some researchers in the larger University Archives or Rare Book & Manuscript Library spaces in the fall and spring semesters. We handled a large number of reference-quality reproduction requests for researchers unable to come in person during this time and continued to work toward enhancing the online descriptions of our collections as well.

1. Major Activities and Accomplishments

Enhanced descriptive access to materials in the unit's archival and manuscript collections

- Converted 33 finding aids to a more consistent, searchable, and navigable format.
- Conducted a review of collection descriptions for materials related to Abraham Lincoln and revised half or more of these (this project accounts for the bulk of the collection description revisions noted below).
- Added 26 new collection descriptions to our Manuscripts Collections Database. Many of these were FY20 or FY21 acquisitions whose arrangement and description was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Improved existing descriptions for 78 collections and added revised inventories/container lists for 42 collections in our Manuscripts Collections Database.

Furthered remote access to collection materials

- Added digitized content to 12 collections in the Digital Library. Ten new digitized collections were added, along with additional materials from two collections that had been in the Digital Library previously.
- Collaborated with colleagues in the Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Digitization Services, and Acquisitions and Cataloging Services to prepare files and metadata for the Alton Telegraph Printer's Scrapbook of printed ephemera from mid-nineteenth-century Alton, Illinois, for the Digital Library.
- Processed requests for reproductions of over 100 folders or items for patrons (88 within IHLC, 12 with Digitization Services, 2 with the Internet Archive scanning center, and 1 with RBML).

Implemented Aeon for managing requests for collection materials

- Collaborated with Atlas Systems staff and Special Collections division members to adapt and customize Aeon to support units beyond RBML.
- Fully implemented Aeon for IHLC in mid-June.

2. Major Challenges

As in past years, the climate control in the IHLC stacks remains a challenge. We again used multiple dehumidifiers for significant portions of the year to keep humidity levels reasonable and to reduce the risk of mold growth. Overall, due to the less-than-ideal temperature and humidity levels over the course of the year, all three of our stacks areas (addition 2 and 3 on deck 7 and addition 2 on deck 8) were rated as being “ok” for natural aging and all three were also rated as “risk” for mechanical damage (out of a three-level rating scale: "good," "ok," and "risk") by the algorithms in the eClimate notebook system used for tracking and evaluating the preservation qualities of the spaces’ environmental conditions.

The pandemic also continued to constrain and reshape the focus of our work over the FY21 fiscal year due to varying levels of on-site staffing and restrictions on in-person access to our collections for researchers.

3. Significant Changes

Unit operations

The amount of staff working on-site varied over the course of the fiscal year due to the pandemic. We gradually increased our on-site work over the course of summer 2020, but then decreased this in November as per campus instructions. Some but not all staff increased their on-site presence again at the beginning of 2021 depending on the nature of their work. During this fiscal year, we had at least one person on-site to check on the unit practically every work day, though their amount of time in the unit varied by their work and risk assessment, especially during the height of the pandemic in Illinois. We were able to work on a number of tasks and projects remotely, and strove to provide strong service to patrons and researchers remotely throughout the year, within our staffing constraints.

Personnel

Allison Kilberg left her position as the Lincoln Collection Research Specialist in January 2021. Jessie Knoles was hired in to fill this role after completing her master’s from the iSchool and began in May 2021.

Service profile and programs

Due to the pandemic, the IHLC did not begin hosting in-person researchers in our reading room until the end of June. We collaborated with the University Archives to provide an in-person researcher with access to a couple of our collections in the fall semester, and with RBML to host a couple appointments in the spring. However, we mainly focused on fulfilling access needs through reference-quality PDFs of documents and collaborating with Digitization Services for higher-quality images.

4. Contributions to Library-wide Programs

Reference, research consultations, and other information services

- The IHLC responds to reference questions from a variety of sources, including University of Illinois faculty, staff, and students; academic researchers and students from other institutions; individuals researching genealogy or family history; authors conducting research for both fiction

and non-fiction books; and others. In this pandemic year, we offered reference-quality digitization at much higher level than normal and also provided more hands-on research assistance for researchers contacting us.

- During the 2021 fiscal year, the IHLC fulfilled an estimated 88 requests for scans of materials for about 57 patrons. This is nearly three times as many requests as were fulfilled in FY20. Approximately 7 additional digitization requests for 12 folders or items of IHLC materials were referred to the Digitization Services unit, and 1 was fulfilled through the Rare Book & Manuscript in-house on-demand digitization workflow.

Instructional services

- To support a primary sources final project in Prof. Oberdeck's HIST 273 Illinois History class, IHLC prepared a guide to digital primary sources in Illinois history and also arranged for some additional sources to be digitized to fill out some of the themes of the class. The Archives Program Officer for IHLC presented to the class over Zoom on how to navigate these online databases and find various primary sources.

Scholarly communications and publishing

- Digitized items from at least two collections, the Arthur E. Bestor Research Collection on Communitarianism and the Clarendon Van Norman Jr. Collection of Ephemera were featured in scholarly publications this fiscal year (based on permissions requests).
- IHLC staff also assisted a researcher with finding a higher-quality public domain image of an eighteenth-century map at another repository (we had only a low-quality reproduction in IHLC).

Collection management

- Acquisitions: Some highlights from FY21 included a small collection of letters regarding Lincoln-related artifacts to Herbert Fay, curator of Lincoln's tomb; two published Lincoln Day speeches, one by Booker T. Washington, and another on "A woman's view"; and a letter by a doctor describing the Camanche tornado and its aftermath in June 1860. We also acquired a variety of nineteenth and early twentieth-century imprints and printed ephemera on various aspects of Illinois history and life in Illinois during these time periods.
- Preservation: The IHLC continued to collaborate with colleagues in the Preservation Services unit to assess and improve the preservation conditions of collection materials. The main projects for FY21 were the continued treatment of a Civil War diary and an early nineteenth-century record book written with ink gall ink. Other conservation projects included flattening several fragile folded documents for safer handling and better access and rehousing a Civil War-era flag. We were also able to outsource the treatment and digitization of a photo album depicting rural life in south-central Illinois that was discovered with extensive mold damage several years ago.
- Archival Collections Processing: Work continued on arranging and describing new archival collections (including those which fell into the backlog during the first year of the pandemic), as well as enhancing descriptive information available online through the IHLC Manuscript Collections Database, both for PDF finding aids and collection-level descriptions.

Digital Content Creation

- Over the course of FY21, Digitization Services handled digitization of 24 folders or volumes from IHLC. About 50% of these were for patron requests, about 30% were digitization projects, and about 20% were for potential use in a digital exhibit.
- In addition, 1 book (published in 2005) from IHLC was digitized through the ETAS workflow, and 2 books were digitized for patrons through the Internet Archive scanning center.

Organizational development and training

- The Archives Program Officer for IHLC participated in the 3-day intensive DEIA and group communication skills pilot training program with the rest of RBML staff in early March 2021.
- IHLC staff participated in Aeon training led by Katie Gillespie at Atlas Systems in June 2021 in preparation for our adoption of the system.

Diversity, Equality, Inclusion, and Accessibility

- In an effort to increase access and representation in our collecting initiatives, we prepared our submission form and supporting FAQ pages for the “Collecting COVID-19 Stories in Illinois” project in Spanish as well as English.
- In March, the unit began working with members of Jewish communities in central Illinois to explore establishing an archival home for the records of these communities at IHLC, in collaboration with the Illini Hillel Cohen Center for Jewish Life and professors in the Program for Jewish Culture & Society. The initial donation of collection materials was finalized in June, along with planned financial donations to support hiring a graduate assistant to arrange and describe the materials.

Outreach and Public Engagement

- In Fall 2020, Allison Kilberg curated a digital exhibit on the 1860 and 1864 presidential elections, “The People’s Candidate: Lincoln’s Presidential Elections.” Some of the items included in the exhibit were also featured in a STORIED post on mail-in voting: “Delivering the Vote: How the Civil War Shaped Mail-in Voting Today,” after the author reached out to us to learn about Civil War mail-in voting.
- IHLC staff continued to create blog posts on materials and topics represented in our collections, albeit at a smaller scale than in the past. In FY21, we published four blog posts.
- The IHLC continued to engage with followers on its three social media accounts (Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram) to increase the visibility of the unit and further engagement with Illinois history and Lincoln. Our followers have increased on all platforms, but precise data is not available for Facebook or Instagram. We gained 148 followers on Twitter during FY21.
- Throughout the fiscal year, IHLC reached out to a number of organizations and groups throughout the state to promote our collecting project that aimed to document Illinoisans’ experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Claire Weibel was awarded a library marketing grant to also advertise on Facebook to further expand our reach in the state. Running from February 2 to March 4, our ad reached over 17,000 people and generated over 200 link clicks.

5. Progress on Unit Annual Goals for FY2021

Improve access to materials in archival and manuscript collections (SD1: "Optimize discovery of, and access to..."; SD3: "Provide access to collections...")

- Continue work on the finding aid conversion project to enhance existing descriptive information about archival collections available in the IHLC Manuscript Collections Database (Archon) to improve access and discovery – *The conversion process was completed for 33 finding aids.*
- Continue to reduce the backlog of unprocessed archival collections and additions, as well as working to optimize the workflows used for processing new acquisitions of manuscript collections – *26 new collections were processed by the end of the fiscal year.*
- Review and assess subject headings used for Lincoln-related archival and manuscript collections – *110 additional subjects were added to 39 Lincoln-related archival collections.*
- Revise Lincoln-related archival collection descriptions for improved consistency and clarity – *Approximately 60% of collection descriptions within Lincoln-related archival collections were revised in FY21.*

Further descriptive access for our print collection (SD1: "Optimize discovery of, and access to...")

- Assess Lincoln catalog records and develop and implement plans to enhance descriptive access to these materials – *This work is still in process.*
- Explore using collection headings or other catalog access points to provide additional provenance information for certain collections and donors that have been key to the development of the collection – *We did not reach this stage of the project in FY21.*
- Develop new workflows for cataloging rare print materials for IHLC during the pandemic – *We ended up not having staffing capacity within IHLC to handle developing new workflows for remote cataloging work, but restarted our previously developed cataloging workflows in June 2021 and got 27 items cataloged through our rare books workflow in the last month of FY21.*

Refine and improve procedures for acquisitions and collection development (SD1: "Implement sustainable approaches to collection development policies"; SD3: "Provide access to collections...")

- Define areas of collecting focus for the unit and guidelines and priorities for acquiring materials in different areas – *We made substantial progress on this work in FY21. It should be on track for completion in FY22.*
- Conduct research and analyze the development of the Lincoln collection since the founding donation of books from Harlan and Henrietta Horner in the 1950s to inform future collecting priorities and areas of focus – *Assessment of internal records in the Horner Papers (MS 1200) and the Lincoln Room Records (MS 928) was completed and complements ongoing work to address collection development with Lincoln-related books and archival collections.*
- Continue to develop and implement a collecting project to document Illinoisans' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic – *This project was launched in July 2021 with a submission form and supporting pages (in both English and Spanish) on the IHLC blog website. We continued to reach out to potential contributors over the course of FY21 and were also awarded a marketing grant to advertise over social media.*

Continue to increase digital access to our archival and manuscript collections, especially to facilitate learning and engagement with primary sources worldwide (SD1: "Optimize discovery of, and access to..."; SD2: "Strengthen collections in all formats..."; SD3: "Provide access to collections...")

- Continue to identify collections for digitization that will provide remote access to primary sources for students and researchers for a variety of themes and topics in our holdings – *We*

identified 7 collections to have digitized in fall 2020 that connected to different themes in Illinois history. We included the first 6 of these on our primary sources guide for Prof. Oberdeck's Illinois History class (the 7th wasn't completed until later in the fall). In 2021, Digitization Services lacked the capacity for additional digitization projects from IHLC but were able to process some large patron scanning requests for us.

- Explore methods to enhance access and discoverability of our digitized content – *Due to limited time and resources amid other projects and responsibilities, we opted to continue in our previous practices for now rather than exploring new methods.*

Increase visibility of, and engagement with, our collections (SD3: "Implement library outreach...", "Provide access to collections...")

- Explore new opportunities to feature our collections in ways that educate and engage our audiences and increase the unit's visibility in the context of the current circumstances of the pandemic and staff resources – *In summer 2021, work began on developing primary source sets drawn on materials in our collections for potential use in the context of middle or high school classrooms.*

Contribute to implementing and enhancing digital systems for access to special collections materials (SD1: "Optimize discovery of, and access to..."; SD3: "Provide access to collections...")

- Implement the Aeon request account system for Illinois History and Lincoln Collections materials and contribute to expanding Aeon to University Archives as well – *After working closely with our Aeon concierge at Atlas Systems to customize forms and workflows for our needs, IHLC officially started using Aeon as our request management system in mid-June 2021.*
- Implement features in Archon to facilitate Aeon requests and other improvements to promote a better user experience for researchers and to provide staff with needed information in Aeon – *This feature was added to Archon and turned on in conjunction with the move to Aeon in mid-June 2021. Development to better facilitate working with individual barcoded boxes will continue in FY22.*
- Collaborate with others in the division and the library to improve Primo's features and limitations with regard to special collections materials – *A scoped search version of Primo for Special Collections was launched in fall 2020. More work is still needed to better optimize Primo for use with special collections and this will continue in FY22.*

6. Unit Annual Goals for FY2022

Improve access to materials in archival and manuscript collections (SD1b: "Optimize discovery of, and access to..."; SD3c: "Provide access to collections...")

- Arrange and describe first accession for the Central Illinois Jewish Communities Archives (CIJCA)/Mervis Archives.
- Collaborate with faculty in the Program for Jewish Culture & Society about a potential class that may conduct oral histories for the CIJCA (also SD2c: "Strengthen collections in all formats..." and SD4c: "Build active, sustainable partnerships").
- Develop a processing and access plan for the COVID-19 project materials collected.
- Improve access and preservation conditions for unusually sized materials in several large archival collections.
- Continue the barcoding and rehousing project for archival collections to improve physical control and access over the materials.

- Develop plans to increase intellectual and physical control over our unprocessed collections.
- Increase physical and intellectual control over the content of our oversized flat materials in archival collections.
- Develop a plan to complete the rehousing project for small collections begun by a practicum student in summer 2019.

Refine and improve procedures for acquisitions and collection development (SD1a: "Implement sustainable approaches to collection development policies"; SD3c: "Provide access to collections...")

- Finish drafting a collection development policy for IHLC.
- Develop a web page with information on our acquisitions procedures for potential donors to reference.

Continue to refine our use of technologies and digital systems to support public services and access to our collections (SD1b: "Optimize discovery of, and access to..."; SD3c: "Provide access to collections...")

- Continue to implement new workflows for Aeon to better serve researcher needs.
- Assess our collections in the Digital Library to identify collections and materials that might benefit from the new OCR feature in the Digital Library to support keyword searches within compound objects.

7. Support needed for these specific goals & the unit's overall mission

The greatest need is consistent, permanent staffing support. During FY21, IHLC continued to have only one full-time employee and no permanent hourly wage budget. Hourly wage support is critical for fulfilling the goals of the IHLC, as well as maintaining basic unit operations. Relying heavily on allocations of temporary funding for hourly employees to maintain basic unit operations is far from ideal and makes longer-term planning difficult. Our graduate and undergraduate student positions have been key for sustaining both the ongoing work of the unit as well as for our new outreach and digitization initiatives. The ability of the unit to pursue its mission more fully, however, will continue to be constrained by a heavy reliance on temporary student staffing without a permanent, predictable wage budget and/or a second full-time employee on staff.

8. Number of Graduate Assistants/Hourly

FTE:

- Graduate assistants: 0.25
- Graduate hourly: (about 0.8 FTE for summer, 0.3 FTE for fall, and 0.34 FTE for spring)

Head count:

- Graduate assistants: 1
- Graduate hourly: 2 for summer 2020; 1 (not double counting the GA) for fall 2020 and spring 2021; 1 for summer 2019

9. Funding sources for Graduate Assistants/Hourly

Graduate assistants:

- State funds: 0.25 FTE

Graduate hourly:

- State funds: 0.3 FTE for fall 2020 and spring 2021; 0.375 FTE for summer 2021
- IHLC endowment funds: 0.1 FTE for spring 2021
- Barcoding project funds: 0.1 FTE for summer 2021

10. Major Responsibilities and Contributions Made by GAs/Hourly

Graduate assistant:

- Composed social media posts to promote Illinois history and the IHLC on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and the IHLC blog.
- Assisted with preparing resources for Illinois History class session on finding digital primary sources.
- Created metadata and composed collection descriptions for digitized materials to go into the Digital Library.
- Gathered materials and conducted research to support the division-wide virtual exhibit on the 1920s.
- Contributed to the preparation of a 90-second video overview of IHLC for incoming library GAs.
- Provided reference services to remote researchers.

Graduate hourly employees:

- Processed archival collections, including processing new accessions and those from the backlog; reprocessed existing collections to improve access to materials; and reviewed and improved access and preservation for partially processed collections.
- Identified finding aids for conversion, converted finding aids, and reviewed finding aids converted by student assistants.
- Created metadata and composed collection descriptions for digitized materials to go into the Digital Library.
- Helped select and review archival materials for digitization.
- Conducted research and analysis to support drafting a collection development policy for IHLC.
- Contributed to the assessment of potential new acquisitions.
- Composed social media posts to promote Illinois history and the IHLC on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and the IHLC blog.
- Provided reference services to on-site and remote researchers (primarily remote).

II. Statistical Profile

1. Facilities

User seating (reduced due to the pandemic and social distancing):

- 1 seat at the table in the reading room

Hours:

- Summer II 2020: n/a (closed to the public due to the pandemic)
- Fall 2020: n/a (closed to the public due to the pandemic)
- Spring 2021: n/a (closed to the public due to the pandemic)
- Summer I 2021: n/a (closed to the public due to the pandemic with the exception of the last week of June when we were open by appointment only)

2. Personnel

Professional staff (1 FTE total)

- Krista Gray (Full year): Academic Professional, 1.0 FTE

Academic Hourly Staff (0.7 FTE for summer II, fall, winter, and summer I)

- Allison Kilberg (July 2020-January 2021): 0.7 FTE
- Jessie Knoles (May 2021-June 2021): 0.7 FTE

Graduate Assistants (0.25 FTE total for the academic year)

- Calla Sundin (August 2020-May 2021): academic year at 0.25 FTE

Graduate Hourly Staff (about 0.8 FTE for summer, 0.3 FTE for fall, and 0.34 FTE for spring)

- Jessie Knoles (July 2020-May 2021): about 0.3 FTE for summer 2020, about 0.25 FTE for fall 2020, 0.29 FTE for spring 2021
- Calla Sundin (August 2020-May 2021): about 0.05 FTE for fall, winter, and spring
- Hailey Vasquez (May 2021-June 2021): about 0.5 FTE for summer

Student Assistant Staff (about 0.3-0.9 FTE, varying by semester)

- Hailey Vasquez (July 2020): about 0.5 FTE for summer
- Amina Malik (July 2020-September 2020): about 0.2 FTE for summer and fall
- Caitlin Lopez-Battung (full year): about 0.15 FTE for summer 2020, about 0.2 FTE for fall, 0.3 FTE for spring, and 0.37 FTE for summer 2021

Extra Help Staff (0.49 FTE, full year)

- Claire Weibel (full year): 0.24 FTE
- Courtney Smith (full year): 0.25 FTE

Hourly wage budget (used to fund both student and graduate hourly positions) for FY21: \$14,517 (academic year 2020-2021, \$10,2470; summer 2021, \$4,270). This supported approximately:

- Summer 2020 (July-August): 0.3 FTE of grad hourly support
- Fall 2019: 0.3 FTE of grad hourly support & 0.2 FTE of student hourly support
- Spring 2020: 0.3 FTE of grad hourly support & 0.3 FTE of student hourly

- Summer 2021 (May-June): 0.375 FTE of grad hourly support

3. User Services

Gate Count

Note: Our Desk Tracker statistics for sweeps week in fall and spring reflect the fact that IHLC was closed to the public until the last week of June. Numbers below reflect actual counts for the fiscal year, primarily in alternative (larger) spaces outside of IHLC.

- Fall: IHLC was closed to researchers; 1 research visit hosted in University Archives Search Room
- Spring: IHLC was closed to researchers; 2 research visits hosted in RBML Seminar Room
- Annual count: 4 visits total (1 visit in UA in fall, 2 visits in RBML in spring, 1 visit in IHLC in late June)

Circulation

Note: All IHLC materials are non-circulating. Any circulation statistics generated by Alma therefore do not present an accurate picture of the nature of circulation in the IHLC and are not reported here.

Internal statistics for retrieval requests:

Requests for:	Books and other print materials	Manuscript collections	Microfilm reels	Total
On-site researchers	1	15	0	16
Remote researchers	20	68	1	89
Subtotal (on-site and remote researchers)	21	83	1	105
Staff use for outreach events/projects	24	17	0	41
Internal staff use (e.g., processing)	37	97	0	134
Subtotal (IHLC staff)	61	114	0	175
Total	82	197	1	280

Reference interactions (from DeskTracker, as reported during FY21 Sweeps Weeks)

- Fall: 6 total/week (6 email)
- Spring: 2 total/week (1 email, 1 phone)
- Annual extrapolation: 128

Presentations (from the Instructional Statistics database)

- Number of presentations to groups (synchronous): 1 (it was live zoom session, but also recorded for students to be able to watch later, so a hybrid of synchronous and unknown asynchronous participation)
- Number of presentations to groups (asynchronous): 1 (same class as noted above; see note)
- Number of participants in group presentations (synchronous): 1
- Number of participants in group presentations (asynchronous): unknown (see note above)

4. Other Statistics

Archival processing (internal statistics)

Work completed to improve access to archival collections in our Manuscript Collections Database (Archon) during FY21, arranged by type of work completed:

Type of processing work completed	Number of collections
New in archon (added this fiscal year)	22
New in archon (collections that were in Archon previously but with an empty scope note)	4
Now published (previously hidden; now open with few changes to original description, etc.)	3
Revisions to scope note (note: due to change in data collection method, this includes both extensive edits and minor ones)	78
Added inventory (collections without an attached PDF finding aid previously)	0
Revised inventory (includes inventories with updated, more accessible formatting)	42
Total	145

Note: some collections had multiple types of work completed and will appear in more than one category. The total represents the total collections added, updated, or edited during this fiscal year.

Progress on collections processing and researchers' access to collections descriptions online, based on data exported from the IHLC Manuscript Collections Database (Archon):

Collections with:	As of June 30, 2020	As of July 1, 2021
Descriptions that are publicly available in Archon	92.6% (989 collections)	92.6% (1,009 collections)
Basic records only (publicly available); no description	2.5% (27 collections)	2.1% (23 collections)
Draft descriptions, hidden from the public	3.7% (40 collections)	4.0% (44 collections)
Basic records, hidden from the public	1.1% (12 collections)	1.3% (14 collections)
Total	1,068	1,090

Items added to Alma by item type

Item type	Count
Book	109
Issue	56
Manuscript	4
None	3
Total	172