

**ILLINOIS STATE MUSEUM
BOARD MEETING**

April 7, 2026, 1:00 p.m.

**Research and Collections Center
1011 East Ash Street
Springfield, IL 62703**

Attending: Officers: Chair Jonah Rice (via Webex), Vice Chair Sara Phalen (via Webex) and Secretary Tamira Brennan; Board Members: John Barker, Leverne Backstrom (via Webex), Wanza Davis, Director Natalie Phelps Finnie (via Webex), and Ashish Sharma (via Webex); Illinois State Museum Society: Vice Chair Candice Trees and Jamila Wicks; Illinois State Museum Staff: Jenn Edginton, Meghan Lindstrom, Meredith Mahoney, Brooke Morgan, and Wes Stoerger; Department of Natural Resources Staff: Jeff Nevins, Russell Orrill, and Steve Vandekerckhove.

I. Welcome

Chair Jonah Rice called the meeting to order at 1:01 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Meghan Lindstrom called the roll and a quorum was present.

III. Approval of the Minutes of February 17, 2026

The Minutes from the February 17, 2026 meeting were presented for approval. Tamira Brennan moved to approve the Minutes, John Barker and Wanza Davis seconded, and the Minutes were approved unanimously.

IV. New Business

Director's Report

Jenn reminded the Board that Leverne Backstrom had chosen to not seek reappointment but would continue to serve on the Board until the Governor's Office filled the position.

Jenn shared that the Illinois State Museum had been awarded an Illinois Association of Museum's Best Practices Award in Community Engagement for the Beardstown project.

Leverne joined the meeting at 1:07 p.m.

Jenn reported that there were problems with Dickson Mounds Museum's sewer system after Eagle Day, which over 600 people attended. Portable toilets were placed on-site for both visitors and staff until the sewer issue is resolved. Jenn also informed the Board that Sara Shaffer-Henry, the new Associate Director of Dickson Mounds Museum, started working in December and is identifying and prioritizing projects at the site.

Strategic Plan check-in

Jenn shared an excel file containing the Illinois State Museum's (ISM) Strategic Plan Implementation Plan and highlighted goals that staff have been making progress on or which were behind schedule.

Jenn shared brief descriptions of the Museum's ongoing and planned educational programs.

Museum History Day coordinator Laura Mitchell had organized the Illinois History Day contests where 750 students were expected to take part. Jenn reminded the Board that more judges were still needed for the contest.

Museum staff will be working in the First Lady's Tent at the Illinois State Fair again although the tent theme has not yet been decided.

Russell Orrill joined the meeting at 1:10 p.m.

Museum staff are also planning a block party in July in conjunction with other state institutions around the Capitol Complex.

Jenn said that the Beardstown exhibit had been completed. Frontline staff were offering visitors surveys to share their opinions of the exhibit along with asking what future exhibits they would want to see at ISM. Sara Shaffer-Henry at Dickson Mounds Museum was also gathering public comments from listening sessions held in the area.

Jenn reminded the Board that the ISM has no staff focused on marketing so she is working directly with the Department of Natural Resource's (DNR) Communications Team for public outreach. She also reported that ISM is working to establish a good working relationship with State Historic Sites and identifying collaborative opportunities such as hosting the Noir 6 art exhibition at the Old State Capitol. "On the Road" programming had also reached over 3000 people in quarter 1.

Jenn briefly outlined the ISM's continuing NAGPRA work. She informed the Board that Logan Pappenfort had been developing a Tribal Advisory Board which he would present to the ISM Board at another meeting.

Jenn stated that ISM staff continued to work with the Museum Society although the progress had not matched the implementation plan timeline. She anticipated that progress would be made soon since the Society Board had approved their new strategic plan.

Jonah thanked Jenn for providing an update on the strategic plan progress and encouraged similar updates at future meetings.

Org Chart Update

Jenn shared the Museum's current organizational chart and highlighted the open positions. Meredith Mahoney and Wes Stoeger were temporarily assigned to fill the Director of Collections and Research and Associate Director of Exhibits positions, respectively. The next positions expected to be filled are the permanent Director of Collections and Research, the Director of Interpretation, and the Historic Sites Registrar. Other positions waiting to be filled included the Exhibit Designer Assistant, a Museum Educator, and a Guard.

Updated policy—Collection Committee

Meredith Mahoney shared information about the ISM's new Collection Committee. A group of Museum staff led by the Director of Collections and Research now meet to review potential acquisitions and deaccessions. If new acquisitions are approved then they are sent to the Museum Director for review. If deaccessions are approved the next step remains approval by the Museum Board. Sara asked if information about the acquisition and deaccession process was available on the Museum website. Meredith stated that the information about the new process was not available but could be added to the website.

Ashish left the meeting at 1:26 p.m.

Fiscal Officer

Jenn introduced Steve Vandekerckhove, the new Fiscal Officer for the ISM and State Historic Sites. He is officially part of DNR's Office of Fiscal Management but has an office at the Museum. He was previously employed at the Governor's Office of Management and Budget where he worked with the

Department of Transportation. Steve stated he was familiarizing himself with the DNR fiscal systems and reviewing the current budget. He advised the Board that the next fiscal year does not come with a huge increase but he is evaluating where the Museum can save money to ensure there are enough funds to allow extra programming.

Exhibit Schedule

Jenn stated that ISM staff are planning out a 3 to 5 year exhibit schedule. She introduced Wes Stoeger who shared an excel file he had created to track all exhibits and changeovers at ISM and Historic Sites galleries.

John left the meeting at 1:36 pm.

Wes stated that the exhibit schedule was built out to 2029 and would help staff organize installation, deinstallation, fabrication, and exhibit planning. He shared that staff were using new gallery names for better clarity and are considering the benefits of hiring outside fabricators. He also provided a brief summary of the upcoming Route 66 exhibit.

V. IDNR Report

Director Natalie Phelps Finnie provided the DNR report. She welcomed Steve to the team.

Director Finnie stated that DNR had been asked to prepare a maintenance budget as well as budgets with funding cuts of 5 and 7 ½ percent. DNR was given the maintenance budget in the Governor's proposed budget that included necessary increases such as the cost of living adjustment. Director Finnie also shared that Historic Sites had been given a \$1 million increase. She also provided brief summaries of the House and Senate appropriation hearings about the budget.

VI. New Business continued

Deaccession Request

Meredith presented a deaccession request for two terracotta architectural medallions from the art collection. The medallions were donated to the Museum as works of Lorado Taft but Art Curator Doug Stapleton had learned they were part of the UIUC's Stock Pavilion until removed in the 1950s during

a building renovation and the University is seeking to recover the missing works.

Jonah asked for a roll call to vote on the deaccession request. The motion was passed unanimously.

Director Finnie left the meeting at 1:50 p.m.

Jenn invited the Board to ask questions about the Director's Report.

Tamira asked why the galleries had been renamed. Jenn explained that most of the galleries did not have official names and previously had been referred to by cardinal directions or by the exhibits they once held, which was confusing for employees hired after the exhibits had been taken down.

Leverne asked what the Museum's America 250 plan was for Illinoisians who do not celebrate 4th of July. Jenn clarified that the ISM was viewing America 250 as more of a commemoration of Illinois and ISM. In the leadup to the summer all galleries were focused on Indigenous exhibits with the exception of the Beardstown exhibit, which features immigrant stories. The America 250 exhibits will be under the new "Land of Stories" umbrella and will feature Route 66, resilient nature, a new Indigenous exhibit by Brooke Morgan, individual community stories, and NOIR at the Old State Capitol. Candice Trees voiced support for Leverne's suggestion and stated she would assist in any way she could to ensure the African American stories are included in ISM's America 250 outside of *NOIR*.

Repatriation notice

Brooke reported that she continued repatriation efforts and had two Notice of Inventory Completions published in the Federal Register. She stated that a full report on the progress would be provided at the next Board meeting.

VII. Society Report

Candice and Jamila Wicks provided the Society report.

Candice introduced herself as the Vice Chair of the Illinois State Museum Society Board and congratulated Steve on his new position and Wes on his temporary appointment.

Candice reported that the Society Board had met the previous night. They intend to move forward with implementation of the Society's new strategic plan and want to discuss it with DNR and Museum staff.

Candice also reported that the Society continues to work with Museum staff on the 1908 Race Riot exhibit. A designer had been hired and the Society was preparing to hire a writer.

Jamila Wicks reported that the Society is once again participating in the “3 Hot Days in August” programming about the 1908 Race Riot in partnership with other area organizations. She described several planned events including a video showing, an update on the National Monument, a memorial for the four individuals who lost their lives, and an essay contest for students.

Jamila also shared how the Society planned to support the Museum’s Route 66 exhibit preparation. A fundraising event has been scheduled at the RLRS hangar and sponsors have been found to support several exhibit features including an American Giant, a Crosley Car, and a diner display. She also stated that the Society had planned two field trips around Route 66.

VIII. Old Business

Jonah asked for old business.

IX. Public Comment

None present.

X. Adjournment

Jonah asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Leverage moved to adjourn, Tamira seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 2:20 p.m.