

ILLINOIS AMERICA 250 COMMISSION
COMMISSION MEETING
July 21, 2025, 2:00 p.m.

Webex

Attending: Officer: Chair Gabrielle (Gabe) Lyon; **Commission Members:** Jenn Edginton, Lindsay Laren, Sara Phalen, Gerald Savage, Dick Simpson, and Senator Doris Turner; **State of Illinois employees:** Alex Frank, Meghan Lindstrom, Mahi Patel, Joel Sachnoff, George Sisk, and Matthew Sprinkle; members of the public: Erin Drain and Mary Smith.

I. Welcome

Chair Gabe Lyon called the meeting to order at 2:03 p.m.

II. Roll Call

Meghan Lindstrom called the roll and the majority of a quorum was present. George Sisk reminded the Commission that a meeting can be held with the majority of a quorum but no substantive actions could be taken, including any voting.

III. New Business

Chair's Update

Gabe reminded the Commission that there would be no meeting in August due to the Illinois State Fair, where the Commission will be running a booth in the Governor's Tent. She stated that she will send proposed dates for future meetings through the end of the calendar year and recommended that one of the meetings be held in-person.

Gabe reported that she is working with Joel Sachnoff and the Governor's team to fill the open seats on the Commission.

Gabe reported that the Commission had brought several State agencies formally onboard and would provide more details on them at the September meeting.

Gabe shared her screen and presented a slideshow for the Commission. She reminded the Commissioners that the countdown to the 250th anniversary was now less than 365 days.

Gabe shared a slide listing the Commission's priorities: engaging youth, promoting local commemorations, uplifting local stories and places, and

recognizing service. She encouraged the Commissioners to regularly check the website and social media platforms to see the local stories that are being shared nearly daily.

Gabe shared a slide that identified the dates of the Illinois State Fair and the proposed dates for the monthly meetings through December.

Gabe shared a slide with a map of Illinois with numerous markers identifying locations. She explained that the purple markers identified America 250 related sites while orange marked partner organizations. She stated that the Commission would send out invitations to any partner organization to join a standing meeting starting in September.

Gabe stopped sharing her screen and invited the Commissioners to ask questions about the map.

Dick Simpson reported that he had attended an education summit run by the Smithsonian and learned that the Colorado's 250th commission planned to add 150 new historical markers to sites, to celebrate Colorado's 150th anniversary of statehood. Dick recommended the relevant State agency be consulted about creating a similar program in Illinois. Jenn Edginton stated that the historical marker program is not by a State agency but by the nonprofit Illinois Historical Society directed by Bill Fury. Gabe stated that she had intended to contact Bill about America 250 and could propose this idea.

Dick asked how many organizations have partnered with the Commission. Erin Drain stated there are 65 established but several still in the process. She clarified that the map does not yet include the America 250 communities.

Sara Phalen asked if organizations being added to the map is part of a reciprocal arrangement and if there were other practical uses for the map. Gabe explained that organizations are invited join a promotional partnership where partners contribute their America 250 event information to be shared with the public on the Commission websites and social media accounts while partners agree to include the Illinois America 250 logo and promotional materials for relevant events, conversations, and exhibits. Gabe explained that the map was meant to be an internal document to help the Commission identify gaps before preparing for highly targeted outreach.

Sara asked if there were ways for the Commissioners to stay more involved with the shift away from the Working Groups, such as promoting the

Commission when invited to give presentations. She also asked what the end goals for the Commission were after the shift in priorities. Gabe encouraged all Commissioners to look for promotional opportunities and encouraged them to reach out to her once they are identified so she can ensure they have the most updated information and media language. She also clarified that the Commission had shifted from a creator of programs to a promoter and clearinghouse of ongoing events and activities.

Gabe stated that a link to the map would be sent to all Commissioners.

State Fair

Gabe invited Erin and Joel Sachnoff to provide any updates about the Commission's presence at the Illinois State Fair. Erin shared that there are still many opportunities to assist the Commission to share their work in the Governor's Tent. She also shared that physical copies of the Commission's general flyer and sign-up forms were prepared for distribution along with pocket copies of the Declaration of Independence. Jenn provided some practical advice for working shifts at the State Fair.

Dick suggested contacting the University of Illinois at Springfield to enquire if any faculty, students, or interns would be interested in staffing the table. Joel thanked Dick for the suggestion and stated he would reach out to the University to gauge capacity and interest.

Doris Turner offered to have interns from her office volunteer at the table.

Commissioner Updates

Gabe invited Dick to share the work he has done for the Commission in higher education. Dick reported that he had worked with the faculty at the University of Illinois Chicago and the Board of Directors of the Society of Midland Authors to create an America 250 book list. The list currently consists of 35 proposed books from college level to young adult and Dick had already shared it with Lindsay Laren who had been spearheading the library efforts. Dick suggested the list also be shared with the other Commissioners so they could reach out to their networks to identify more relevant books to add to the list, particularly ones focused on local history. He recommended the book list be added to the Commission's website.

Dick also reported that he is working on a speakers bureau and will be reaching out to university partners to gather suggestions. Gabe stated she

would meet with Joel to determine the appropriate way for the Commission to officially recommend speakers.

Dick shared that it has taken a great deal of time to secure higher education's support of the Commission. While he found individuals in university leadership across the state who were excited about the work of the Commission, many could not commit any time or resources due to the recent funding cuts. He stated it was also too late for institutions to create new America 250 themed classes for spring of 2026 as their course lists are already set.

Gabe thanked Dick for his work securing support for the Commission in higher education.

Gabe invited Lindsay to share the work of her library working group. Lindsay reported that her group had planned out the deliverables they wanted to create for the Commission and have split into subgroups to cover different topics relevant to libraries. The four groups are focusing on reading and literacy, programming, Illinois highlights, and local commemorations. They plan to draft ideas and directions for libraries and will continue to refine those until the Illinois Library Association Annual Conference being held in mid-October. Lindsay reported that the library working group intends to create a poster presentation for the conference.

Gabe reminded the Commission that she would be attending the national America 250 meeting in Washington DC the following week along with Michelle Donahoe. She stated the two primary goals for the trip were to represent Illinois in the national America 250 conversation and to gather information about different community-based commemorations and projects that are currently underway. Gabe stated that they would share the information gathered at the meeting at the September Commission meeting but would reach out earlier if they learn of anything time sensitive.

Dick asked if a statewide version of "One Book, One Chicago" could be organized by a collaborative effort between libraries or run by the Secretary of State. Lindsay stated she was unaware if there were any existing efforts to copy the program statewide but shared that one proposal in the library working group was to create a suggested book club framework. The proposed book club would focus on one book each month through all of 2026. Jenn stated that the Illinois State Library is involved with a 250 Committee in Springfield and could be asked to consider such a program.

IV. Old Business

None given.

V. Public Comment

Alex Frank introduced himself as an Illini Science Policy Program scholar with the University of Illinois who is starting his third year with the Lieutenant Governor's office. Mahi Patel introduced herself as a new Dunn Fellow also in the Lieutenant Governor's office. Alex provided a short summary of their work and shared that one of the Lieutenant Governor's priorities is on the tourism opportunities around the Route 66 centennial and America 250 anniversary, especially for areas outside of Chicago. Mahi stated that her current focus is on establishing connections in the eastern part of Illinois.

VI. Adjournment

Sara moved to end the meeting, Gerald Savage seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 2:49 p.m.