



# Lincoln Presidential Library's Oral History Program Reaches 1,000 Interviews

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SPRINGFIELD – The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Oral History Program has recorded its 1,000<sup>th</sup> interview, reaching a milestone that few oral history programs anywhere in America have achieved.

The interviews, totaling more than 2,900 hours of conversation, include veterans telling war stories, farmers talking about rural life, activists recalling civil rights battles and athletes sharing moments of victory and defeat.

Among the treasure trove of memories are 275 interviews with Illinois veterans, 268 about education, 215 on Illinois government and politics and 88 related to agriculture. Audio from every interview is available online at [www.OralHistory.Illinois.gov](http://www.OralHistory.Illinois.gov), and many are accompanied by a video, photos, and full transcripts.

“Personal memories add powerful information to our understanding of history. It’s vital that we capture them for future generations,” said Dr. Mark DePue, director of the Oral History Program. “Our goal has always been to collect and preserve high-quality, in-depth interviews and to maximize their accessibility.”

New material is added to the program’s website almost every day. An exciting new addition is a section featuring the [many interview excerpts](#) about President Barack Obama’s time in Illinois. The program also offers resources to help teachers use oral histories in the classroom – for instance, in discussions about Truman’s decision to use the atomic bomb or how Title IX expanded opportunities for female athletes. The [newest lesson plans](#) help teachers conduct their own oral history project in the classroom.

“The Oral History Program at the Lincoln Presidential Library is a truly extraordinary resource for anyone interested in Illinois and its rich, diverse history,” said Dr. Holly

Kent, who teaches oral history at the University of Illinois Springfield. “Centering voices which all too often go unheard in larger historical narratives, the oral histories invaluable help us to better understand the full complexity of the state and the many fascinating people who have shaped it.”

The Oral History Program launched in September 2006 and has grown to be an unmatched resource for Illinois history. DePue himself has collected nearly 60 percent of all the hours of interviews, but he is quick to share credit with the many interns and volunteers who have participated over the past decade and a half.

“I have so many interviews that I loved doing. The best part of the job is definitely getting to know these amazing people and hearing their stories,” DePue said.

Among his favorites:

- [Vince Speranza](#), who served as a paratrooper in World War II
- [John Borling](#), a POW in the Vietnam War
- [James R. Thompson](#), the colorful governor of Illinois for 14 years
- [Jim Edgar](#), another of Illinois’ respected senior statesmen
- [Maija Devine](#), who endured the Korean War as a young girl and later emigrated to the United States
- [Maybelle Blair](#), a pitcher in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League
- [Orion Samuelson](#), WGN’s legendary voice of agriculture for over 50 years
- [Ron Thunman](#), who commanded an attack submarine trailing Soviet subs during the Cold War

The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum uses a combination of rigorous scholarship and high-tech showmanship to immerse visitors in Lincoln’s life and times. The library holds an unparalleled collection of Lincoln books, documents, photographs, artifacts, and art, as well as some 12 million items pertaining to all aspects of Illinois history.

For more information, visit [www.PresidentLincoln.illinois.gov](http://www.PresidentLincoln.illinois.gov). You can follow the ALPLM on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).