The recent authorization of increased license fees provides cause to reflect on 106 years of hunting license history.

**Licenses Speak Volumes**

Phil Houser’s collection of 106 years of Illinois hunting licenses started when he set aside his first license, purchased in 1963 at the age of 10. Each year, he saved his license and his father’s, and over time picked up a few from friends or while visiting a sports show. Only recently did he start a concerted effort to fill in the gaps.

Many see the pages of Houser’s binders as a collection of personal memories from strangers. Faceless people residing in distant corners of the...
The license fee—$1—was first printed on the 1914 hunting license. Only once in Illinois’ history has the license fee decreased—in 1935 the fee was reduced to $0.75. A year later, a $0.25 clerk’s fee was implemented, raising the price back to $1.

The price doubled in 1945, and in 1954 an increase in the issuing fee brought the price to $2.25. Subsequent increases occurred in 1957 ($3.25) and 1979 ($7.25).

Two versions of the 1905 license were printed, the result of a mid-year change in the Illinois state seal. The wooden ship was replaced with a steam ship, the horse-drawn plow with a tractor and the eagle pose redesigned. In 1913 the seal was changed again—back to the original design.

A distinct change in license size occurred in 1916, and that style remained fairly consistent until 1950 when the style used until 1989 was developed.

From that expenditure. It allowed him to put food on the table during the Depression and wartime rations. He valued the time spent and miles walked with family and friends, and passing hard-earned knowledge of the hunt and wildlife to the next generation. Some watched as Illinois’ prairie-chicken population plummeted, yet were there to celebrate the long-anticipated return of the white-tailed deer and wild turkey.
The federal duck stamp was implemented in 1934 and cost $1. Stamps were printed in various monotones through 1958, when full-colored stamps were introduced. Many consider the 1934-1936 federal duck stamps the most famous, possibly because for those three years hunters were not required to sign their stamp. In addition to being historically significant as the first full-color stamp, the 1959 version is the only federal duck stamp to include anything other than a duck or goose (a dog).

“Distinctive marks,” such as tattoos, were noted on the personal information required on early licenses. Starting in 1956, hunters were encouraged to note their blood type.

DOC recognized the opportunity to collect harvest information from sportsmen in 1941 when licenses included detachable “Kill Cards.”

Licenses became a vehicle for spreading important messages in 1937 when “Be Cautious Prevent Fires” appeared on the back side. The following year the message was changed to “Help Prevent Forest Fires.”

Study each page of the binders closely and a surprisingly rich historical record of Illinois unfolds. Reading between the pages, stories emerge of war and peace, advances in technology and the structure of Illinois government. And, the books tell tales of the evolution of our understanding of managing natural resources.

“If it has to do with hunting or fishing and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources I probably have some...
Illinois implemented a $5 state duck stamp in 1975, with an increase to $10 in 1990. The combination Sportsman’s License became available in 1979, allowing those who hunt and fish to purchase one license at $11.25 (a $0.50 issuing fee in 1980 raised the fee to $11.75; an increase in 1982 brought the fee to $13.75 and in 1994 the fee was raised to $19.25). The sportsman’s license also included the salmon stamp, introduced in 1976 at a price of $2.

Illinois introduced two new stamps in 1990—the Pheasant Stamp and the Furbearer Stamp, both at $5. Three years later, those stamps were merged into a $5 Habitat Stamp. The Salmon Stamp evolved into the $6 Lake Michigan Trout and Inland Trout stamps in 1994.

The most important license in Phil Houser’s collection always is his own. This dedicated outdoorsman bought his first hunting license in 1963.

type of collection put together,” Houser remarked. “I enjoy everything about hunting and fishing, and things like licenses and stamps and pins are such an integral part of the sport.”

Houser enjoys studying the licenses and learning what each can reveal. “There’s a lot of history about the state that people don’t know, but can discover when they really look at all the information in these books,” Houser concluded.