



Prairie Pages

Vol. 1 # 4

Education Services

Illinois Historic Preservation Agency

Government



Illinois' first state capitol was this rented house as Kaskaskia.

Illinois became a state in 1818. Illinois has had three capitols. The first was located in Kaskaskia, an old French village. It had been the capitol since 1809 when Illinois was a territory. In Kaskaskia, the state conducted business in a house rented for \$4 a day. There were twenty-nine members of the Senate. Illinois' first governor was Shadrach Bond, a southern Illinois farmer. He was paid a salary of \$1,000 a year. In 1818 Kaskaskia was the most important city in the state. The village no longer exists. In the 1890's the Mississippi River destroyed the town by flooding.

In 1820, the capitol was moved closer to the center of the state to Vandalia. Vandalia was home to three statehouses. The first was destroyed by fire in 1823. The second was poorly built, and after twelve years people refused to enter it. Construction on the third building began in the summer of 1836. The workers tried to finish quickly. When the legislature met in December, the plaster on the walls was still damp.



The third state house at Vandalia cost over \$20,000 to build. The community raised most of the money for construction.

Springfield became the third capitol of Illinois in 1839. A new state house on the square was completed in 1841 and cost \$260,000. During the Civil War the government of Illinois rapidly expanded and outgrew the building. In 1888 a new state house was built several blocks away. It cost \$4.5 million. It is the state house used today.

There are three levels of government that affect people in Illinois: national, local, and state. The President of the United States and the Congress run the national government.

Local government is run by people with their own community. Mayors, city councils, county boards, village and school boards, library districts, park boards, and airport authorities are examples of local governments.

State government is divided into three separate units or branches: legislative, executive, and the judicial. State government has many responsibilities. It works with local government to provide for schools, police, and the welfare of the people in the state. The people pay for these services through taxes. Taxes are paid on property, income, gasoline, food, clothing, and many things we buy.

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The group of people who make the laws in Illinois is called the General Assembly. The General Assembly is divided into two houses—the House of Representatives and the Senate. Members of the General Assembly are elected by the voters of Illinois.

Springfield became the third capitol of Illinois in 1839. This is the earliest drawing of the Old State Capitol, made in 1856.



EXECUTIVE BRANCH

The executive branch of government sees that the laws are followed. Six officials are elected to positions in the executive branch. They are the governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, attorney general, treasurer, and comptroller.

Governor

The governor is the chief executive of the state. The governor makes sure that laws are enforced and works with the legislative branch to make new laws and to decide how the state will spend its money.

Lieutenant Governor

The lieutenant governor helps the governor and would take over the governor's job if the governor was unable to work.

Attorney General

The attorney general is the state's lawyer. He issues legal opinions when needed and helps protect the state's citizens against fraud and environmental hazards.

Secretary of State

The secretary of state keeps all the official records of state government. This includes all records on driver's licenses.

Comptroller

The comptroller keeps track of the state's money.

Treasurer

The treasurer invests the state's money in banks.

JUDICIAL BRANCH

The judicial branch is responsible for deciding disputes between people and punishing criminals. Illinois has three levels of courts. The first level is called the circuit court.

The decision of the circuit court is not final. Every person has the right to have another trial called an appeal. These retrials are conducted by the appellate court. The appellate court is the second level of Illinois' court system.

The highest court in the state is the Supreme Court. There are seven judges who work at this court. They make the final decisions on cases.



Construction began on the current state capitol in 1868. It took over twenty years to finish.

All three levels of government (federal, state, and local) work together. The government makes decisions that affect our lives. Voters elect government officials.

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