

For Immediate Release:

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Jesse White Announces 21,000 Historic Photos Now Accessible Online

Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White announced today that the Illinois State Archives has placed more than 21,000 historic photographs from the Eddie Winfred “Doc” Helm Photo Collection online. The photos are from the 1940s to the 1980s.

“Doc Helm served as the state photographer from 1941 to 1992 and he took photos of historic and day-to-day events at the state Capitol in Springfield and throughout the state,” said White. “However, because the Archives only had the negatives of these photos, the collection has rarely been seen. This new online collection will change that.”

White, who serves as the State Archivist and the State Librarian, said the Illinois State Archives received a \$60,000 grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) in 2020 to scan the photographs, create a finding aid for them and place them online for public use. The photos are now on the Illinois Digital Archives website that is operated by the State Library.

The grant funded the purchase of a scanner and the salaries of contractual workers, most of whom were masters-level students from the University of Illinois-Springfield History Department. Included in the photographs are pictures of at least six U. S. presidents on visits to Springfield (Presidents Harry S. Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter and Joe Biden, who at the time was a U.S. Senator), as well as Illinois politicians and government officials. There are also photographs of the state fair, local parades, state institutions and visitors to the state Capitol, including school groups, fraternal organizations and celebrities.

White noted that one benefit of the grant was the Archives’ staff learning all that the collection contained. For example, when the grant began, Archives’ staff estimated that there were 21,000 negatives in the collection; however, the collection contains more than 40,000 negatives, almost twice the size of the original estimate.

The funding for the project came from the NHPRC’s Access to Historical Records Grant, which promotes access to records that highlight a better understanding of our state’s or country’s democracy, history and culture.

The collection is available on the Illinois Digital Archives website at <http://www.idaillinois.org/digital/collection/DocHelm/search/>. The photos are searchable in several ways and are available for download free of charge. If there is a need for better quality scans for a publication, please call 217-782-4866.



U.S. Senator Joe Biden at Springfield Capital Airport with State Senators Charles Chew (L) and Phil Rock (R) in 1974.



Governor Otto Kerner signs Civil Rights legislation while flanked by legislators.



1960 self portrait of Doc Helm with his trusty camera.