
ILLINOIS BLUE BOOK

For more than a century, the *Illinois Blue Book* has been the official publication about state government. It was first published by the Secretary of State's office in 1900 and published every two years from 1903 to 2013; the book is a key reference source for an individual writing about Illinois history, government and institutions.

According to the State of Tennessee's Blue Book, the term "Blue Book" dates back to the 15th century, when England's parliament kept its records in large volumes covered in blue velvet. Since then, the phrase has been used as the title of many different government publications. Most states print a Blue Book or similar publication, such as a state government handbook.

There were several predecessors to the *Illinois Blue Book*. These were generally known as legislative manuals or legislative directories. The earliest legislative directories were authorized and paid for by the General Assembly and were published in 1861, 1863 and 1865. In 1867 and 1869, John R. Howlett compiled privately issued directories.

The Secretary of State's office became involved in printing legislative directories in 1870. At the time, Secretary of State Edward Rummel stated his intention for the directory to be an annual publication; however, another directory from the Secretary of State's office did not materialize until 1877, when Secretary of State George Harlow published an "Official Directory" for the 30th General Assembly. In the interim, the General Assembly authorized a handbook in 1873 for the 28th General Assembly. Private individuals published legislative manuals in 1875 and 1877. Secretary of State Harlow published directories in 1877, 1879 and 1880. Harlow's directories did not contain pictures and were not yet referred to as "Blue Books."

In 1877, the same year as Harlow's first legislative directory, Springfield's M.G. Tousley & Company published a legislative manual. This book was more thorough than the official state directory and featured sketches of buildings and individuals. It contained city directories for Springfield and Sangamon County as well as advertisements for businesses in Springfield.

The General Assembly authorized another legislative manual in 1883, and the Secretary of State's office published manuals in 1887, 1891 and 1893. No copy of a legislative manual, either public or private, has been found for 1889. In 1885, D.W. Lusk published a private legislative directory. Newspaper publisher J. L. Pickering of Springfield published "The Legislative Souvenir of 1893," which contained information on state government and the 38th General Assembly. The publisher's 1895 book entitled "Directory of the Illinois Legislature of 1895," was larger than its 1893 predecessor and Pickering acknowledged that he owed a debt of gratitude to Secretary of State Harlow's 1880 legislative manual. Pickering continued to print and circulate legislative manuals for 1893, 1895, 1897 and 1899.

In 1893, publisher J. Babeuf issued "The Souvenir Album, Legislative Manual of the 38th General Assembly." Unlike Pickering's manual, this publication exclusively focused on the General Assembly. It was roughly half the size of an average book. In 1897, Milton R. Lombard and the Springfield Publishing Company produced a large book of biographical sketches of state officials, members of the state Legislature and select staff entitled "Men Who made the Fortieth General Assembly of Illinois." In 1898, H.B. Meyers and Company of Chicago published the first legislative directory that used the name "Blue Book."

Similarly to other privately published manuals of the 1890s, this book contained pictures and engravings. Advertisements were also featured in this publication. In 1897, both the Secretary of State's office and the General Assembly produced legislative directories.

By 1900, Secretary of State James Rose published a "List of State Officers of the State of Illinois," which was the predecessor to the modern state-issued *Illinois Blue Book* and which, for the purposes of this article, is considered the first *Illinois Blue Book*. The Illinois State Archives has the second edition of the book, published in February 1900, leading to the assumption it was originally published in 1899. Other than the title page, the manual contained no pictures and, as a state publication, it featured no advertisers. A list of state publications in the 1900 book described the *Blue Book* as an "occasional" publication.

In 1903, Secretary Rose produced the first official state-issued *Blue Book*, entitled "Blue Book of the State of Illinois." This edition contained photographs of legislators and statewide officials. A list of state publications in this book now reported that the *Blue Book* was a biennial publication.

While the exact contents of *Illinois Blue Books* have changed throughout the years, generally they contain biographies of state officials and information about state and local government agencies and institutions. *Blue Books* also feature information about political parties, new laws and legislation, political districts and legislative apportionments, election and referendum results, state symbols and statistics about the state's population and economy.



The publishing of *Illinois Blue Books* dates back to the 19th century. Despite their name, for special occasions these historical books have featured different colored covers. The size, shape and length have varied throughout the years as well.

Earlier *Blue Books* contained more information regarding political parties than present-day *Blue Books*. Past *Blue Books* include articles about state and national party conventions and the texts of state party platforms. Democratic Secretary of State Harry Woods dedicated the 1913 *Blue Book* to controversial former Democratic Governor John Peter Altgeld. In the 1919 edition, Republican Secretary of State Louis Emmerson praised retiring Republican Governor Frank Lowden in the book's preface with the words, "When he became Governor of Illinois, he did so with the definite purpose to lead the state to great achievements and he has accomplished his purpose remarkably well."

Early copies of the *Illinois Blue Book* often contained synopses of legislation passed by the previous session of the General Assembly, as well as complete rosters of all sessions of the General Assembly; Illinois' congressional delegations; constitutional officers; and judges of the Supreme, Appellate and Circuit courts. For many years, *Blue Books* listed officers and addresses of private organizations such as the American Legion, Kiwanis clubs and chambers of commerce.

Secretary of State Rose noted in the 1905 *Blue Book* that much of the content was "necessarily a repetition of former issues as future issues will be a repetition of this." However, *Blue Books* also contained original articles about Illinois and articles specific to their time. The 1919 *Blue Book*, for example, featured articles about the state's 1918 Centennial observances, the state's involvement in World War I and the new Illinois Administrative Code.

The 1900 *Blue Book* contained 463 pages. By the late 1920s, the number of pages in a *Blue Book* had expanded to more than 1,000 pages. Secretary of State Emmerson noted in the 1927 *Blue Book* that "although primarily a manual of the State government the *Illinois Blue Book* is no longer confined to the narrow channels of current governmental information." In 1933, during the height of the Depression, Secretary of State Edward Hughes cut more than 200 pages from the *Blue Book*, reducing its size to 794 pages. It increased to more than 1,000 pages for the 1935 edition, but has only had more than 1,000 pages in one instance since that year, in the 1963 edition. The *Blue Book* has averaged 600 pages or less in length since the 1970s. Each *Illinois Blue Book* since 1900 has featured a blue cover with the following exceptions: the 1976 issue has a white color to commemorate the nation's Bicentennial; the 1999-2000 issue features a gold cover to commemorate the millennium; and the present issue, which is scarlet in honor of the state's Bicentennial.

For more than a century, the *Illinois Blue Book* has operated as a reference source for those serving the state in various capacities. However, it has also evolved into an important archival resource. Each issue of the *Blue Book* offers a distinct snapshot of the people, institutions, culture and issues that engage the state during a particular time period. The state did not issue a 2015-2016 *Blue Book* and even that can be said to be reflective of the difficult budget constraints Illinois has faced in recent years. The *Illinois Blue Book* returns in 2017-2018 to honor the Bicentennial anniversary of Illinois and continue a valuable archival service.

All *Illinois Blue Books* can be viewed through the Illinois Digital Archives, (<http://www.idaillinois.org/>) provided by the Illinois State Library. In addition, in 2010 the *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* published an index of articles that appeared in the *Illinois Blue Book* from 1900 to 2009.

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