

INSIGHT

Jesse White · Secretary of State & State Librarian

State Library named after Gwendolyn Brooks

A downpour forced the event inside, but on June 6 the Illinois State Library was officially rededicated and named in honor of the late Pulitzer Prize winner and Illinois Poet Laureate Gwendolyn Brooks. Nearly 400 people watched as Nora Brooks Blakely, the poet's daughter, unveiled a replica of a plaque commemorating the event in the library's atrium. The original plaque is permanently mounted on a marble base near the front entrance of the library.

Secretary of State and State Librarian Jesse White hosted the ceremony. Among the dignitaries in attendance were Gov. Rod Blagojevich, Senate President Emil Jones, Jr., House Speaker Michael J. Madigan and his wife Shirley Madigan, who is chairman of the Illinois Arts Council, and state Rep. Lovana Jones, who was a friend of Brooks. Allison Payne, anchor and reporter for WGN-TV News Chicago, served as master of ceremonies.

The ceremony featured presentations by the Muntu Dance Theatre, the Chocolate Chips Theatre Company, the Abundant Faith Christian Center Choir of Springfield and a tribute by Haki Madhubuti, founder and publisher of Third World Press and founder and director emeritus of the Gwendolyn Brooks Center at Chicago State University.

Brooks, who resided all her life in Chicago and died in 2000, was the first African-American to win the Pulitzer Prize in 1950 for her second published

volume of verse, *Annie Allen*. In 1968, she was named Illinois Poet Laureate, succeeding Carl Sandburg, and served until her death.

"Gwendolyn Brooks was a national treasure who enriched many lives," said Secretary of State Jesse White. "We are proud and honored that she spent her life here in Illinois, teaching and bringing poetry to our schools, hospitals and prisons. It is fitting that her name be permanently attached to the Illinois State Library — a place where anyone can access knowledge and appreciate the contributions of such a gifted artist."

"Gwendolyn Brooks embodied all that poets can do for their communities," said Gov. Blagojevich. "She said for us what we could not say for ourselves. Her poems are about what it's like living in Illinois' many diverse communities." Blagojevich also announced the appointment of a committee to select a successor to Brooks as Illinois

Poet Laureate. State Library Director Jean Wilkins will serve on the committee.

Among her other life achievements, Brooks was awarded the prestigious Frost Medal and National Medal of Arts, named a "Living Legend" by the Library of Congress and a Jefferson Lecturer by the National Endowment for the Humanities, awarded more than 75 honorary degrees, and received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Endowment for the Arts and a National Book Foundation Award for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters. She established the Illinois Poet Laureate Awards in 1969 to encourage elementary and high school students to write.

Brooks married Henry L. Blakely in 1939, and they had two children, Nora Brooks Blakely and Henry Blakely Jr.

The Illinois General Assembly approved HJR 11 this spring renaming the library the Illinois State Library Gwendolyn Brooks Building. The resolution was sponsored by Senate President Jones and House Speaker Madigan.



Secretary of State Jesse White and Gwendolyn Brooks' daughter, Nora Brooks Blakely, unveil a replica of the dedication plaque located in front of the State Library commemorating the renaming of the building in honor of Brooks.

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Gwendolyn Brooks Building dedication



Secretary of State Jesse White called Gwendolyn Brooks “a national treasure” whose poems are some of the most extraordinary literary works of the 20th century.

The Chocolate Chips Theatre Company of Chicago entertained guests by putting one of Brooks’ poems, “Infirm,” to song.

The drums of the Muntu Dance Theatre of Chicago thundered through the atrium of the State Library as the company’s dancers performed.

Lawmakers pass State Library legislation

The Illinois General Assembly passed two bills during the spring legislative session affecting the Illinois State Library. Pending the governor’s signature, both pieces of legislation would take effect in January.

Senate Bill 229 creates the State Library Fund in the state treasury. Moneys received by the State Library from certain sources will be deposited into the fund and used to:

- ☞ increase the library’s collection of books, records and holdings;
- ☞ hold public forums;
- ☞ purchase equipment and resource materials, and
- ☞ provide repair and maintenance of the State Library building and grounds.

Senate Bill 383 creates the Illinois State Library Foundation Act, which authorizes the Secretary of State to create a not-for-profit corporation known as the Illinois State Library Foundation to promote library programs for all types of libraries in the state. The funds would enhance statewide library awareness among the people of Illinois as well as provide grants and gifts to promote library programs.

State Library at the Illinois State Fair

One of the highlights of summer in Illinois is the Illinois State Fair, which runs this year from Friday, Aug. 8, through Sunday, Aug. 17, in Springfield.

The State Library will be represented in several areas on the fairgrounds.

Library employees will occupy a booth in the Secretary of State's tent on the southeast side of the fairgrounds on Brian Raney Ave. Fairgoers can view a replica of the new dedication plaque renaming the State Library in honor of Gwendolyn Brooks as well as pick up a pencil, various brochures and a cold drink of water.



The State Library's Talking Book and Braille Service (TBBS) will have a booth in the Senior Building. TBBS employees will be on hand to distribute bookmark/rulers and answer questions about services available to print-disabled Illinois residents.

The Library's Automation and Technology Division returns to Tech Town this year on Central Ave. with an exciting new exhibit called "Lifelong Learning Can Be Fun!" Among other things, the exhibit will feature a children's educational computer game; access to OCLC FirstSearch, a series of informational databases; information on Find-it! Illinois, the library's Internet portal; and a display of World War II posters from the library's digital archives. Fairgoers also can pick up a Find-It! Illinois ruler and a FirstSearch bookmark and search guide.

People coming from out of town are encouraged to stop by the State Library building across from the State Capitol. Please call 217-782-2994 or 800-665-5576 to arrange a tour of the beautiful facility.

State Library to oversee digital talking book project

The Illinois State Library Talking Book and Braille Service (TBBS) will oversee and participate in a one-year, multi-state pilot project offering digital talking books to visually impaired and physically challenged library users.



Digital talking books from the online Lobe Library will be offered from July 2003 to June 2004 to patrons participating in the TBBS program. Participants will be given a free handheld MP3 type player loaded with a digital audio book, headphones, an instruction sheet and an evaluation survey to use for three weeks. In June 2004, a national electronic book expert will write an evaluation report based upon the experiences of participants to determine if and how the service will be continued and whether it should be expanded nationwide.

"The state of Illinois is honored to be serving as project director for this exciting pilot program," said Secretary of State Jesse White. "Currently, patrons use talking books on cassettes and cassette recorders. Digital talking books will allow users to access more modern and convenient technology. I am hopeful that this program will be a success and eventually allow us to offer digital talking books on a permanent basis."

Three of Illinois' regional Talking Book Centers in Pekin, Carterville and Geneva are participating in the program, along with libraries in Hawaii, New Jersey and Mississippi.

Persons interested in signing up for the pilot program may contact the Illinois State Library Talking Book and Braille Service at 800-665-5576, ext. 5, or psalomon@ilsos.net. For more information about the Lobe Library, please visit www.lobelibrary.org.

Bestselling author Erik Larson to appear at book fair

Erik Larson, whose recent book *The Devil in the White City* spent several weeks on the New York Times bestsellers list, will appear at the Illinois Authors Book Fair, March 26-27, 2004.



Erik Larson
Copyright Roseanne Olson

In *The Devil in the White City*, Larson details the lost history of the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. He tells the stories of two men: Daniel H. Burnham, the architect responsible for the fair's construction, and H.H. Holmes, a serial killer masquerading as a doctor. While the fair ushered in a new era in American history, Holmes marked the emergence of the serial killer. Many reviewers have praised the non-fiction book for its drama and for reading like a mystery thriller.

Larson also is the author of the acclaimed nonfiction bestseller *Isaac's Storm*, the story of a devastating hurricane that hit Galveston, Texas in 1900. His other works include *Lethal Passage* and *The Naked Consumer*. His work has appeared in a number of national magazines, including *Harper's*, *The New Yorker*, *Time* and *Atlantic Monthly*.

A fund-raising dinner for the Illinois Center for the Book honoring Larson and more than 30 other participating authors will be held Friday evening, March 26, at the library. On Saturday, March 27, Illinois authors will sign their books for patrons and conduct workshops and discussion groups for the public. A number of events for children will be held throughout the day of the book fair, which runs from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. For more information, please contact Carole Gair at 217-785-6925 or cgair@ilsos.net.

SAVE THE DATE
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July 29-30

Library System Presidents and Directors Meeting
Illinois State Library, Springfield

August 8-17

Illinois State Library at the Illinois State Fair
Springfield

September 16

ILLINET Network Advisory Council meeting
Illinois State Library, Springfield

September 17

ISLAC meeting
Illinois State Library, Springfield

October 14-18

ILA Annual Conference
Springfield



The June meeting of the Illinois State Library Advisory Committee was the final meeting for five members whose terms have expired. Three of the outgoing members, (left to right) Jane Yoder, Kathleen Zar and Mary Wyly, received thanks and a plaque from State Library Director Jean Wilkins. Donald Burnett and Lydia Acosta are the other two ISLAC members whose terms have expired.

ILLINET NEWS ALERT

The ILLINET/OCLC Services monthly e-journal, ILLINET News Alert, is available at the end of each month at:

www.cyberdriveillinois.com/library/isl/oclc/oclc.html

Click on the ILLINET News Alert link for the latest issue. Each issue contains informative and pertinent articles written by ILLINET/OCLC Services and OCLC staff members.

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