# *Excerpts from*

# ***The Illinois Governors: Mostly Good and Competent***

*Revised and updated by Taylor Pensoneau and Peggy Boyer Long*
*Original title: Mostly Good and Competent Men by Robert Howard*

The unwritten job specifications for governor of Illinois call for a melding of the best qualities of a statesman, an administrator, and a politician. The governor should understand what the people want and what they can afford. He or she should act evenhandedly and promptly in establishing priorities and managing the dozens of agencies in an expanding bureaucracy, and he or she should be a leader who can win the legislature's cooperation and the public's support. The ideal person rarely exists.

From 1818 to 2007, 40 men have occupied the office of the governor, with Rod Blagojevich becoming the 40th in 2002. No one pretends that the chief executives represent a cross section of Illinois citizenry. All have been white males. In the state's first 180 years, only two women, Dawn Clark Netsch and Judy Baar Topinka, ran as a major-party candidate for governor, and only one black man, Roland Burris, entered his name in a major party's primary race for the state's highest office. All trace their ancestry to Europe. William H. Bissell and Edward F. Dunn were Roman Catholics, Rod Blagojevich is Eastern Orthodox, and Samuel H. Shapiro and Henry H. Horner were Jews. Otherwise, active or nominal Protestants have had a monopoly on the office.

Yet within this seemingly narrow demographic, the governors have been men of diverse backgrounds, talents, and philosophies.

(*Introduction*, page IX)

This book will acquaint you with the faces and names of the men – good and bad – who have brought Illinois into the new millennium. Today, perhaps more than ever, we face questions about the abilities and the moralities of our elected officials. With every election, we judge how candidates will handle the precarious demands of gathering power, governing efficiently, and retaining personal integrity. And soon, perhaps, the demographics of our pool of chief executives will expand to include women and minorities. But we have no crystal balls to guide us. Instead, our state offers us the lessons of a rich and colorful history punctuated by the life stories of the mostly good and competent men who have been the governors of Illinois.

(*Introduction*, page XII)

George Homer Ryan Sr., the last Illinois governor elected in the 20th century, was a gruff master of old-line politics during his long public career. The ultimate insider, he had the political savvy to achieve much during his one term as governor. But in the end, his conviction for widespread corruption brought personal disgrace and left his Republican Party in shambles.

(*Ryan*, page 305)

Blagojevich did put a stamp on the governorship that was all his own. He was fond of large-scale initiatives, including new programs designed to promote health care.

But some of his proposals achieved mixed success, especially those aimed at combating the budgetary shortfall he inherited. In striving to get what he wanted, Blagojevich could be earthy, even glib. His style resonated with voters, but aroused resentment among legislators and other officials.

(*Blagojevich*, page 315)

And like Howard, we drew on *Illinois Issues* magazine as a source of background information for the Walker Administration through the first year in the second term of the Blagojevich Administration. …She (Boyer Long) and the editorial team had an additional source that Robert Howard could not have conceived of: the Internet.

For fact checking, editors searched for a wide range of information including burial sites, civil war battles, Chicago mayors, and even the history of Mormons in Illinois.

(*Bibliographical Essay*, pages 342-243)