The Court Archive:
Supreme Court Building Tours

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When tourists visit the Illinois state capital in Springfield, they often make their way to familiar landmarks associated with Abraham Lincoln, such as the Lincoln Tomb, the Lincoln Home, and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum. In addition, they might visit Frank Lloyd Wright's Dana-Thomas House or tour the impressive State Capitol building. Yet one of Springfield's most remarkable sites is frequently overlooked: the Illinois Supreme Court Building.

Open to the public and free to tour, the Supreme Court Building offers visitors a unique opportunity to experience the state's judicial history firsthand. Guided tours focus on the second floor, where visitors will see the Supreme Court courtroom, the Attorneys Room, the former Appellate Court courtroom, the Law Library, and the Learning Center. Since the opening of the Learning Center in 2023, the Illinois Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission has made a concerted effort to expand public engagement, particularly among middle and high school students. At the same time, a growing number of civic organizations, bar associations, and historical groups have taken the opportunity to see this hidden jewel in Springfield.

Several tours recently are noteworthy. In March 2026, the Illinois State Bar Association (ISBA) hosted its annual statewide mock trial competition at Lincoln Land Community College, which brought nearly 55 high schools to Springfield. At the suggestion of McHenry County Circuit Court Judge Michael Chmiel, who also serves on the ISBA's Civics Education Subcommittee, 16 of those schools toured the Supreme Court Building. Illinois Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission staff members Samuel Wheeler and John Lupton led the tours, engaging students with discussions about the Court's history, function, and role in state government. Not surprisingly, the students had many thoughtful questions about the judicial system and its relevance to our everyday lives.

The March term of court also welcomed several groups who not only toured the Supreme Court Building but were also able to watch oral arguments. Students from Bunker Hill High School and the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign watched arguments during the first week of term,

while the Saint Louis University School of Law's Friday Sandwich Review Society saw arguments during the second week of term.

The Illinois Supreme Court continues to encourage the public to explore its historic building and learn more about the importance and operations of the judicial branch. The Illinois Supreme Court Historic Preservation Commission is happy to offer guided tours to individuals and groups. Please contact Samuel Wheeler at samuel.wheeler@illinoiscourthistory.org for more information.