

# Around the Water Cooler

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## John Marshall professor talks about her book

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Professor Ann Lousin has been on the faculty of The John Marshall Law School since 1975. Prior to that, she served as a research assistant at The Sixth Illinois Constitutional Convention, where she worked on the drafting of the 1970 Illinois Constitution.

She then spent four years on the staff of the Speaker of the Illinois House of Representatives, two of them as Parliamentarian of the House, the first woman ever to fill that role. Now considered the foremost expert on the Illinois constitution, Lousin was recently recognized by colleagues, friends, and some of the 1970 con delegates at a reception and book-signing in honor of her new book on the Illinois constitution. She also writes a column, "Law and Public Policy," for The Chicago Daily Law Bulletin.

### **In one paragraph, can you tell us what your book is about?**

The book is called *The Illinois State Constitution: a Reference Guide*. It describes the history of Illinois constitutional development and then comments on each section of the present constitution, which was drafted and adopted in 1970. I wanted to explain the background of each section and how it has affected Illinois since 1970, especially in the legal and political spheres. Since Illinois became a state in 1818, we have had only four constitutions. The one adopted in 1970 was one of only a few complete revisions of any state constitution in the latter part of the 20th century. Arguably, the 1970 Illinois constitution has been the most successful state constitutional revision in two generations. I believe we succeeded because the delegates at the convention wanted to produce both a good constitution and a constitution that the voters would adopt. Illinois is an incredibly diverse state with many differing points of view on social, political, and constitutional issues. Finding common ground was the key to the convention's success in 1970; that is also why the constitution has worked so well since then.

### **What made you decide to write the book?**

This is one of a series of "reference guides" to each of the 50 state constitutions. The original publishers came to me in 1989 and asked me to write the guide for Illinois. They said everyone they talked to said I was passionate and knowledgeable about the Illinois constitution and should write the book. I readily agreed. Recently, Oxford University Press bought the rights to the entire series to expand their inventory in comparative constitutional law. They recognize that the American state constitutions are the oldest written constitutions still operative.

### **How long did it take you to write the book, and what do you hope people will get out of it?**

I began organizing the book in 1990 and finished it in 2009 — 19 years! The research was quite simple because I have voluminous files on each section of the Illinois constitution dating back to the convention. The task of writing was much harder. I tended to write in spurts — nothing for several months, then I'd send the editor a chapter. The editor was extremely patient even though I offered many excuses explaining my delays. As he said, the work product I did turn in was good. Everybody tells me that the book is well worth the wait; we have sold all but about 20 copies. But I am not sure that I am ready to write a sequel for a while!