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## “Now He Belongs to the Ages”: Memorializing Abraham Lincoln

By Jonathan Jeffrey

After Abraham Lincoln was shot on the evening of April 14, 1865, several men carried him from Ford's Theater to a lodging house across the street. Teetering on the brink of death for most of the evening, the Great Emancipator exhaled his last breath at 7:22 a.m. the next morning. Several of Lincoln's cabinet members, including Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, witnessed his demise. With tears of grief streaming down his face, Stanton pronounced: “Now he belongs to the ages.”

As soon as Lincoln's mortal remains were safely interred in Springfield, Illinois, the American people began the process of memorializing the slain president. They first confined their efforts to paper: newspaper and magazine elegies, broadsides, and memorial photographs and engravings coupled with declarations of sincere sentiment. Gradually these expressions metamorphosed into memorials of stone, bronze, and scholarly tomes. These great monuments to the 16th president were about more than memorializing a man; they were meant to perpetuate the ideals he espoused: unity, equality, and opportunity.

Lincoln's Springfield tomb, located in Oak Ridge Cemetery and completed in 1874, stands as one of the president's first memorials. The majority of the other Lincoln shrines found across the country were completed in the 20th century. A degree of healing needed to take place before a Lincoln memorial could be generally accepted, or, in some cases, tolerated. The centennial of Lincoln's birth, celebrated in 1909, was the impetus for a number of memorials to the former president. One of the most significant of that year was the minting of the penny with a bust of Lincoln on the obverse side, replacing the popular “Indian Head” penny. The Lincoln penny was the first U.S. coin to feature a presidential image. Perhaps no other Lincoln memorial

has been so indelibly stamped on a nation's conscience than that of this coin. Since 1909, the U.S. Mint has produced over 288.7 billion pennies, enough to circle the earth 137 times if lined up edge to edge. The Lincoln Memorial was added to the reverse side of the penny in 1959 to honor the sesquicentennial of Lincoln's birth.

Washington, D.C.'s Lincoln Memorial is perhaps the best known physical structure honoring the 16th president. Congress spent nearly fifty years debating over the project's site and financing. Architect Henry Bacon designed the simple Doric temple to honor the Civil War president. The Memorial's 36 Colorado marble columns represented each of the states in the Union at Lincoln's death. Inside, sculptor Daniel Chester French's seated Lincoln has mesmerized millions of visitors. Above Lincoln's head the incised inscription appropriately reads: "In this temple, as in the hearts of the people for whom he saved the Union, the memory of Abraham Lincoln is enshrined forever." A recent Lincoln Memorial guest wrote about her inspiring visit at one of the site's computer kiosks: "This is it! Poignant, memorable, stunning. Appropriate for this remarkable president."

During the 20th century Lincoln became America's idol. His name or image was emblazoned across the country: Lincoln Highway, Lincoln Park, the five dollar bill, the Lincoln Homeplace, Lincoln Square, Lincoln Center, the Lincoln automobile, the U.S.S. Lincoln submarine, Lincoln National [Life Insurance] Corporation, the Lincoln Law Office, Lincoln Logs, Lincoln University, Lincoln Encyclopedia, and the Lincoln bust at Mt. Rushmore. Counties in 19 states were named for Abraham Lincoln as well as dozens of communities. Lincoln, Nebraska was actually named for the president before he was assassinated. Besides these, numerous pieces of sculpture and other forms of public art honored the Civil War president. The amazing facet of this story is that Lincoln memorials continue to be erected, and a

number will be dedicated during 2009, the bicentennial of Lincoln's birth. It appears that Americans will continue to memorialize the spirit of Abraham Lincoln who indeed "belongs to the ages."

Being the home state of Abraham Lincoln, the Commonwealth of Kentucky features an impressive array of Lincoln memorials and it seems appropriate to start at the place of the president's birth, Larue County (Hardin County at the time). Thomas Lincoln paid \$200 for a 348-acre tract of stony land on Nolin Creek in 1808 known as the Sinking Spring Farm. Lincoln and his wife, Nancy, were expecting a child when they moved there. The baby was born on February 12, 1809, as Nancy lay on a pole bed fitted with a mattress of corn husks and covered with bear skins. The couple named their new son for his grandfather, Abraham Lincoln, who had been killed by Indians near Springfield, Kentucky in 1786.

Lincoln's birthplace cabin was used by several families in the fifty years prior to his election as President, when naturally its historical and monetary value increased. In 1861, Dr. George Rodman purchased the Lincoln farm and moved the remains of a log cabin, traditionally thought to be Lincoln's birthplace, to his neighboring farm. In 1895 a New York businessman A. W. Dennett purchased the cabin and returned it to the Sinking Spring Farm, however it was soon dismantled and became a traveling exhibit, displayed at the Nashville Centennial in 1897, in New York's Central Park, and at the 1901 Buffalo Exposition. The cabin then disappeared for a time and eventually ended up in a storage facility on Long Island.

While the birthplace cabin remained in storage, the old Sinking Spring Farm brought national attention to Larue County, when it was sold to Robert J. Collier, editor of *Collier's Weekly*. Collier purchased the property with the intention of creating a monument to honor the former president. To execute this plan, the Lincoln Farm Association was incorporated in 1906.

The organization's single goal was to erect a memorial to honor Lincoln on the 100th anniversary of his birth. The Association attracted a stellar array of celebrities, including Samuel L. Clemens, Samuel Gompers, Jane Addams, Henry Watterson, William Jennings Bryan, and Ida M. Tarbell.

After successful fundraising, the Association commissioned architect John Russell Pope to design the memorial. President Theodore Roosevelt laid the cornerstone in 1909, and two years later, President William Howard Taft dedicated the neo-classical temple. The building sat on a small promontory, approached by a series of 56 steps, one for each year of Lincoln's short life. From 1911 to 1916, the Commonwealth of Kentucky owned the park. Woodrow Wilson signed the legislation transferring ownership of the Sinking Spring Farm to the federal government in 1916. The War Department maintained and operated the memorial until the Department of the Interior assumed these responsibilities in 1933.

Roy Hays, a Lincoln aficionado, was the first person to seriously question the authenticity of the birth cabin enshrined in the granite temple. In 1949, Hays raised legitimate questions about the provenance of the logs used to represent the "authentic" Lincoln birthplace. A dendrochronologist—an expert who dates logs based on a number of factors including age rings—squashed much of the resulting uproar in 2004 when he declared that the oldest log utilized in the current structure dated from 1848. Today interpreters at the Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site refer to the simple structure as the "symbolic cabin." The National Park Service has invested several million dollars over the last decade to preserve the shrine and to build new interpretive exhibits at the Visitors Center for the bicentennial celebration.

Two years after Lincoln's birth, the family moved to a 228-acre farm on Knob Creek,

approximately ten miles east of the Sinking Spring Farm. It was of this farm that Lincoln said he had his “earliest recollections.” He attended nearby “blab” schools, where students learned by memorization and recitation. The Lincolns lived here for five years, prior to moving to Indiana in 1816; their Knob Creek log cabin was torn down in 1870. As a Lincoln memorial this farm has a rather unusual history. Chester and Hattie (Howell) Howard purchased a 308-acre parcel, which included the former Knob Creek Farm in 1928, in order to open a “shrine” to Lincoln. Improvements made to the adjacent road and its designation as 31-E, part of a transnational highway, encouraged them.

Hattie Howard’s family, like many in the area of Lincoln’s birth, possessed a long-time interest in the president’s family. Her brother, Jim Howell, built the Nancy Lincoln Inn—a gift shop and restaurant complemented with picnic grounds and four tourist cabins—just across the parking lot from the Lincoln birthplace memorial. Jim offered Hattie a half-interest in the Inn, but she wanted her own Lincoln site. In 1931, the Howards purchased a single-pen log cabin near the Knob Creek Farm and had it reconstructed on the former Lincoln homesite.

Mr. Howard’s participation in the Lincoln homeplace project was strictly supportive initially, but his interest escalated when he noticed visitors frequently inquiring about available refreshments. With his typical entrepreneurial flair, Chester designed a stylized log cabin restaurant, gift shop and gas station called the Lincoln Tavern. The facility served tourists during the day, but from 9:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. the Lincoln Tavern operated as a full service nightclub, complete with dancing and liquor. It enjoyed moderate success until Larue County went dry in 1942, although dances continued there on a regular basis until 1949. The Tavern gradually evolved into a museum. Despite the lack of authentic Lincoln structures on the property, the geography of the site is evocative of the landscape that Lincoln knew. This fact led director

Stanley Kubrick to film extensively on the site in 1952 when the Ford Foundation hired him to produce the five-part movie biography, *Mr. Lincoln*. Howard family members operated the Knob Creek Farm from its opening as a tourist site in 1932 until 2001, when it was acquired for \$1 million in preparation for turning it over to the National Park Service. Today the Knob Creek Farm is officially administered by the Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site.

Seven miles southwest of the Knob Creek Farm, in Hodgenville's Lincoln Square, sits one of the oldest memorial sculptures in Kentucky. The U.S. Congress and the Kentucky General Assembly commissioned the "seated Lincoln" in 1909 for the centennial of Lincoln's birth. Sculptor Adolph Alexander Weinmann crafted this bronze work which is six feet tall and rests on a twelve-foot granite pedestal.

Lincoln's son, Robert Todd Lincoln, attended the May 31, 1909 unveiling of the Weinmann piece as did ten thousand other reverent onlookers. The sculpture was draped with an oversized American flag, symbolic of the Union that Lincoln had so ardently supported. Just prior to the ceremonial unveiling, hundreds of school children began singing the chorus of "America." "When the banner fell away," reported the *Courier-Journal*, "the statue, senseless though it was, gazed into the faces and inspiration came from the dull eyes as if from [the] living mind that filled its counterpart in the stirring years of the long ago." Lauding the 16th president that day, "long winded but eloquent" *Courier-Journal* editor Henry Watterson noted: "His was the genius of common sense, the soul of common honesty. Knowing the people, he put his hand to the pulse of the nation, judged the distemper and was ready with a remedy."

Ninety-nine years later, on May 31, 2008, Hodgenville officials, with considerably less polemics, dedicated a new Lincoln monument titled "The Boy Lincoln." Installed in front of the Weinmann statue, the boy Lincoln gazes into the face of his adult visage in Hodgenville's

Lincoln Square. The charming piece commemorates the boyhood Lincoln who roamed Larue County's hills and dales. It depicts a seven-year-old Lincoln leaning against a tree trunk, reading a copy of Webster's Elementary Spelling Book. At his feet lies a linen satchel filled with ears of corn as well as a fishing pole. His ever faithful dog, Honey, awaits attentively nearby. The statue's playful stance and subject matter will be treasured by viewers, particularly children. The Daub Firmin Hendrickson Sculpture Group of Berkeley, California, created the design which was selected from a field of over 75 proposals submitted by sculptors nationwide.

Kentucky's Lincoln memorials are not limited to the region around Hodgenville. The west lawn of the Louisville Free Public Library boasts the tallest Lincoln sculpture in the Commonwealth. Dedicated on October 26, 1922 the eleven-foot statute by sculptor George Grey Barnard was donated to the city by Isaac W. Bernheim, a Louisville distiller and philanthropist. Barnard was a bit of a Lincoln fanatic. A native of Indiana and the son of an ardent abolitionist, Barnard grew up hearing praise and honor bestowed upon the 16th president. The garrulous sculptor came to Louisville in 1913 in hopes of locating a model for a planned Lincoln statue. He eventually found a suitable model, but the unusual story surrounding this event was not made public until 1960. After reading a story about Barnard's sculpture in a 1960 *Courier-Journal* article, a woman contacted the newspaper and revealed how Barnard had hired her uncle, Charles Abraham Thomas, as the model. Thomas, a laborer for the Louisville Gas and Electric Company, had answered a newspaper ad placed by Barnard in 1913 and had been selected for the position because of his resemblance to the president as well as his physical proportions. Not only did Charles Abraham share a name with the former president, he also had been born in February in Hardin County, had lived in a log cabin, and had split rails.

Thomas stayed with Barnard in New York City for six months as the sculptor completed



the Lincoln likeness. The period suit worn by model Thomas was purportedly given to him by an elderly woman who donated her husband's wedding suit for the cause. The head of Barnard's Lincoln was modeled after the president's death mask. The original casting of this sculpture was placed be found in Cincinnati's Lytle Park, and a duplicate is located in Manchester, England.

Henry Watterson had been chosen to deliver the dedication speech for the Barnard piece, but he died eleven months prior to the unveiling; the *Courier-Journal* printed excerpts from his manuscript. Sometimes a vociferous defender of Southern rights, Watterson defended his admiration for the 16th president: "Let no Southern man point [a] finger at me because I canonize Abraham Lincoln, for he was the one friend we had in court when friends were most in need; he was the one man in power who wanted to preserve us intact." This magnanimous attitude toward the Civil War president continues to this day and has evolved into a superstition, one which is common regarding pieces of public sculpture, surrounding the Barnard statue. It is believed that if you rub Lincoln's left toe you will have good luck. If anyone doubts that superstition is alive and well, he need only view the well polished toe of Barnard's Lincoln.

Frankfort, boasts the Commonwealth's other significant Lincoln sculpture by Adolph A. Weinmann which is located in the center of the capitol rotunda. James B. Speed, a native of Kentucky and a Lincoln confidant, donated this nine-and-one-half foot tall statue to the Commonwealth. The sculpture, resting on a beautiful green, serpentine marble pedestal, cost \$40,000 to replicate. Sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens executed the original statue in 1887 for Chicago's Lincoln Park. Frankfort, decorated with colorful bunting, welcomed President William H. Taft for the statue's dedication on November 8, 1911, one year after the state capitol was completed. Many people did not realize how close the day came to disaster. Less than a week before the event, the sculpture had been lost in transit from New York to Frankfort. Only

three days prior to the unveiling, frantic transit workers found the sculpture in Lexington where “it had been sidetracked.” “To assure its safe arrival at the capitol”, a special L&N Railroad crew accompanied the sculpture from Lexington to Frankfort.

Perhaps the Commonwealth’s most unusual monument to Lincoln, and without a doubt its most obscure, is found 200 feet above Kentucky Highway 846 near Island Creek in Owsley County. In 1930 Granville Johnson carved this rather crude bas-relief of Lincoln in a boulder of native sandstone said to weigh in excess of 50 tons. A retired teacher in his late 50s, Johnson clambered up the hill every day for about a month to carve the Lincoln likeness with chisels that had been hand forged by his blacksmith father. Apparently Johnson intended to cut through the rock and make a three-dimensional statue, but ill health forced him to stop. Owsley County officials recently purchased the land surrounding the unusual piece and intend to make it a Lincoln heritage site.

One of Kentucky’s newest Lincoln memorials is located near the entrance to the Mary Ann Mongan Library in Covington. Commissioned as part of Covington’s Art of Discovery program, Matt Langford’s life-size Lincoln steadies an axe alongside his right leg symbolizing his dependence on hard work to support himself. Langford felt that the library made a perfect site for the sculpture, as his Lincoln clasps a book in his left hand, a metaphor of the president’s future aspirations. Lincoln, Langford surmised, was “of humble origin, [but] through his work ethic and determination, rose to greatness.” For the plaque attached to the base Langford selected an appropriate Lincoln quote: “I shall prepare myself. Someday my chance will come.” Some might find Langford’s Lincoln “too” attractive, but the sculptor claims: “Lincoln was called the backwoods Adonis in his youth. He had an unusual countenance that people took notice of, but he aged early.” Langford judged Covington the ideal place for a Lincoln sculpture as it marks the

division between North and South.

The largest legacy resulting from the Lincoln Bicentennial celebration in Kentucky will be a plaza/amphitheater located on the Ohio River in Louisville's Waterfront Park. Planned by Louisville's renowned sculptor Ed Hamilton, the park will contain a Lincoln statue as well as a series of bas-relief panels depicting scenes from the Lincoln era. The Louisville Waterfront Development Corporation secured \$2 million in state funds for the project, and it is to be dedicated in February 2009. For the plaza centerpiece, Hamilton has crafted Lincoln seated along the riverside. He clasps an open book in one hand; his other hand is extended as if he is inviting a passerby to engage in conversation. In order to capture a believable Lincoln, Hamilton collected scores of photographs of the 16th president and of Lincoln sculpture and had them enlarged and hung on the walls of his studio for study and inspiration. The bas-relief panels will feature scenes related to enslavement, the Civil War, and a lusty, youthful Lincoln. The central sculpture itself is intended to commemorate a younger Lincoln. Sculptor George Barnard's Lincoln at the Louisville Free Public Library often inspired Hamilton. "As a young kid I used to go see the statute of Lincoln...he was so big and tall and had big hands and big feet," recalled Hamilton. He also admits, as do thousands of other children and adults, that he rubbed Lincoln's foot for good luck as he passed by.

Public memorials are created for the purpose of commemorating greatness and inspiring others to it. Surely the Commonwealth's Lincoln memorials accomplish this goal; they reflect on a man with high ideals and encourage viewers to internalize those same qualities. A sculptor, builder, or author would be pleased to learn that their work had achieved so noble a purpose.

Sidebar (We could expand on any of these if necessary)

#### Other Notable Lincoln Memorials of Kentucky

Lincoln Homestead State Park near Springfield. This park contains the original home of Lincoln's mother, as well as replicas of the 1782 cabin and blacksmith shop where his father was reared and learned his trade as well as the home of Mordecai Lincoln, the favorite uncle of the President.

Lincoln Marriage Temple in Harrodsburg. Located in Old Fort Harrod State Park, the Temple built of local brick enshrines the log cabin in which Rev. Jesse Head presided over the marriage of Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks.

Lincoln bust at the J. B. Speed Art Museum in Louisville. A beautiful bust of Lincoln by Versailles native Albert P. Henry is on display. Lincoln actually sat for Henry as the sculptor produced a plaster model that he used later in executing the marble bust.

Lincoln bust at the Old State Capitol in Frankfort. A bronze bust of Lincoln by renowned sculptor Robert Berks is located in the rotunda. Berks's textured style is well known and presents a striking contrast to more traditional cast bronze sculpture.

Sarah Bush Johnston Lincoln Memorial in Elizabethtown. Constructed of vintage logs, this reproduction cabin was dedicated in 1992 to the memory of the step-mother of President Lincoln. She married Thomas Lincoln on December 2, 1819.

Lincoln statue in Springfield. Sculptor Paula B. Slater's 10-foot tall bronze of Lincoln is the centerpiece of a plaza adjacent to the new Washington County Judicial Center in Springfield. The monument also features a plaque imprinted with a reproduction of the Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks marriage bond. [The sculpture will be unveiled on February 12, 2009.]