

October 29, 2008

To the residents, government officials, and cyber citizens of Lincoln and Logan County, IL:

An Abe Rally-Speech Statue: A Centerpiece of Civic Pride and a Tourist Magnet

I write to suggest a bronze statue of Abraham Lincoln be erected on the west lawn of the Logan County Courthouse. It would be located near the planned historical marker describing Abe's 1858 rally-speech at that site. A statue depicting Lincoln on that occasion would symbolize civic pride in the first Lincoln namesake city and give tourists one more reason to visit the city's historic attractions. The business community would profit.

Statues are one of the most popular, enduring ways for communities to honor their Lincoln legacies and to interest tourists. Readers, who among you has not taken a photo of a Lincoln statue and/or been in one?

In the last few years, new Lincoln statues have been erected in Clinton, Peoria, Springfield, Taylorville, and Vandalia. Metamora is in the final phase of its own Lincoln statue project. Presently Logan County has only one outdoor statue of Abe: the impressive *Lincoln, the Student*, by Merrell Gage (1892--1981) on the Lincoln College campus. The painted Lincoln statue by Max Bachman in the Logan County Courthouse is also distinctive, but is not readily apparent to tourists.

An untold number of Lincoln statues are found throughout the nation and the world showing Lincoln in a wide range of standing and sitting positions, and Lincoln, IL, could be home to an original statue depicting Abe as he appeared giving one of his fiery political speeches during the 1858 senate race against Stephen A. Douglas. During those speeches, Abe was rapidly developing the rhetorical powers that gained him national attention and that propelled him to the presidency two years later. Such a statue would be a perfect complement to the planned historical marker. I suggest a slightly larger-than-life statue of 7' to 9' (the painted Lincoln statue in the Logan County Courthouse is just over 7').

The Lincoln literature contains eyewitness accounts of his appearance and gestures observed during his political speeches. These descriptions could be used by a sculptor to prepare various sketches for those making decisions on the statue's design. A key description was provided by William Herndon, Lincoln's law partner and admirer: "There was a world of meaning and emphasis in the long, bony finger of his right hand as he dotted the ideas on the minds of his hearers. Sometimes, to express joy or pleasure, he would raise both hands at an angle of about fifty degrees, the palms upward, as if desirous of embracing the spirit of that which he loved. If the sentiment was one of detestation--denunciation of slavery, for example--both arms, thrown upward and fists clenched, swept through the air, and he expressed an execration that was truly sublime. This was one of his most effective gestures, and signified most vividly a fixed determination to drag down the object of his hatred and trample it in the dust."

Central Illinois has an internationally acclaimed sculptor who specializes in Lincoln statues: John McClarey of Decatur. According to the Lincoln Online Web site, Mr. McClarey was

commissioned to do Lincoln statues in Charleston, Peoria, Taylorville, and Vandalia. If Mr. McClarey is asked to do this proposed project but is uninterested or unavailable, he could suggest other notable sculptors who could be approached. McClarey is also creating the new Lincoln sculpture to be located at the historic courthouse in Metamora. As of last July, Metamora had raised \$62,000 of the \$100,000 needed.

Metamora's and Taylorville's Lincoln legacies are more limited than those of the first Lincoln namesake city. Lincoln practiced law in the courthouses of those other towns, but he did not christen them nor did he own property in those places nor did he deliver a major political speech in them nor did he have a college named for him in them. If the small towns of Metamora (pop. 2,700) and Taylorville (pop. 11,427) can generate the required funds for Lincoln statues, current and former residents of Lincoln, IL, can surely do likewise.

Fundraising activities in Metamora could be adapted for use in Lincoln. For example, one thing they did was to sell statuette replicas to top-level donors for several hundred dollars apiece. Also, local philanthropic businessmen matched donations from private individuals. Such a namesake city project would be a good way to bring many folks together to work toward a common, noble civic project: cooperation would be needed from city and county officials. Service clubs and student groups could be involved. A stage production of the namesake rally-speech, adapted from the re-enactment script, could be used as a fundraiser.

The "Lincolnites at heart" who conducted the spectacular 1858 Abe rally-speech re-enactment of Oct. 16 demonstrate the kind of dedicated civic leadership that could accomplish a new, magnificent Lincoln sculpture project. It offers is a remarkable, unprecedented opportunity again to celebrate and perpetuate the distinct Lincoln heritage of the first namesake city.

The local Lincoln Bicentennial Commission could spearhead this project in 2009, its second and final year. Main Street Lincoln would be an appropriate organization to administer and complete this project. Main Street Lincoln is affiliated with the National Trust Main Street Center, and one of its Four Main Points includes encouraging "appropriate new construction" such as "parking areas, building improvements, street furniture, signs, sidewalks, street lights, and landscaping [to] convey a positive visual message about the commercial district and what it has to offer." An Abraham Lincoln statue would dramatically enhance the landscaping of the courthouse lawn. Such a statue would also serve Main Street's goal of promoting its district: "selling a positive image of the commercial district . . . and marketing a district's unique characteristics to residents, investors, business owners, and visitors."

"Lincolnites at heart" throughout the nation would applaud this project and contribute to it. What a glorious homecoming it would be for all to attend the statue's dedication and once again hear a band play the rousing school song with the memorable lyrics: "If dear old Abe should return, I know what he would do. He'd say, 'Lincoln, we're proud of you!'"

Please forward, publish, or otherwise distribute this message to anyone who might be interested.

Sincerely,

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Honorary member of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission of Lincoln, IL
<http://www.geocities.com/findinglincolnillinois/abes200th-lincolnil.html>

For photos and descriptions of many Lincoln statues, including those in Illinois, visit
<http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/art/sculpt.htm>.

The National Trust Main Street Center: <http://www.mainstreet.org/content.aspx?page=47>.