

An open letter to the Logan County Civil War Statue Committee, the Logan County Board, all other citizens of Logan County, and history buffs everywhere

What Would Abe Say About Replacing Logan County's Fallen Civil War Soldier Statue?

*Springfield, MO--April 30, 2010--*Enough is known about Lincoln's thought process that we can usefully speculate on an answer. The committee to replace the statue is in the process of writing a contract with a sculptor to replace the fallen Civil War soldier marble statue with a bronze one. Such a contract will have to be taken to the County Board for approval, and that is like taking a case to a jury. I'm sure lawyer Lincoln would ask how well the case has been made favoring bronze. He was respected for his thorough gathering and analysis of the facts--what lawyers call "discovery"--, and he took the time necessary to arrive at the most logical conclusions.

The statue committee apparently has not considered key information from one of its members, David Doolin (a degreed engineer), and an outside stone materials expert brought in to evaluate the monument. Those sources report that the chemicals used to seal, clean, and maintain bronze are acidic. The supporting stone structures beneath a bronze statue would be destroyed if the chemicals dripped onto them. Those chemical treatments also will not entirely prevent a bronze statue from bleeding green discoloration onto the lower supporting stone structures. An example of this ugly staining problem can be seen on a wall of the Lincoln Christian Church's Fellowship Center (Pekin St. side).

Last May, the committee was on the right track when it unanimously voted for a marble statue replacement. One committee member was quoted in the *Pantagraph* as saying, "We want it to look exactly like it did originally to honor those men who made the decision on the original memorial." Indeed, the sculptor for whom the contract is being written says he can create a marble statue like the original.

After the initial vote, the committee was willing to consider additional information up to a point. A public online poll whose results were intended to be only advisory produced 364 responses (just 1% of the county's population)--with a slight preference for bronze: 54% vs. 46%.

Some on the committee apparently began to express positions based on casual observations and very limited evidence. One committee member argued that a stone statue would begin to show wear after about twenty years. Yet at that point apparently little or no consideration was given to methods of treating marble to maintain it. Another observation was that a bronze statue weighs less than one of stone so the lighter statue would be more suitable for the weathered, possibly weakened base. But no scientific information had then been obtained about whether the base could or could not support another stone statue, or if not whether it could be renovated or would need to be replaced. The statue had not fallen because of faulty support beneath it.

In November 2009, the committee got off the right track when it reversed itself in a five to four vote in favor of bronze; but four committee members were absent. I question whether attorney Lincoln would agree that either the public's or the committee's votes were taken only after all relevant information had been obtained and thoroughly considered. This weak decision involved

heated discussion, and some committee members protested this radical change in the committee's direction by resigning.

Doolin realized that the decision for bronze was made without finding sufficient information about material costs, maintenance costs, durability, and artistic appearance. Doolin has commendably persisted with research in order to get the best possible information and has shared his findings with the committee and with me. None of the news reports I have seen, however, suggest that the committee has taken his full findings into consideration.

Doolin's findings are significant enough that they need to be discussed by the committee and made known to the public because the statue restoration project involves civic pride, historical accuracy, and taxpayer expense. The next few paragraphs summarize Doolin's key findings:

A white marble statue is less expensive to make than a bronze one. Costs for a bronze statue range from \$35,000 to \$80,000, not including shipping, insurance, and installation. Costs for a marble statue range from \$25,000 to \$40,000, not including shipping, insurance, and installation. (In December 2009 the County Board received an insurance check for \$23,650 as a result of the irreparable damage to the fallen statue.)

A white marble statue can be treated to sustain its durability and appearance, and the maintenance costs are less expensive than those costs for bronze. According to committee minutes quoting estimates from the sculptor named in the draft contract, bronze would require an initial sealant costing "\$900 or so." Then an annual preservative wash would be needed at \$300 per year, followed by another "\$900 or so" sealing every ten years.

But remember, according to Doolin's research and the testimony of a stone materials expert, the stone column beneath a bronze statue could be damaged and discolored regardless of the sealing maintenance.

A new marble statue installation would require an initial sealing of several coats covering the entire monument, and this whole process would cost about \$500. Then, as needed every couple of years, the new marble would require sealing. Each of these applications would cost about \$100 to \$150 for the whole monument. Thus, after the initial sealing cost, the ten-year maintenance cost for the white marble would be much less than that for bronze, even if an annual treatment were needed at \$150 each.

White marble has sacred significance for monuments and markers relating to the Civil War and President Lincoln. American white marble is widely used for headstones in U.S. national cemeteries. According to historian Paul Beaver, the Logan County Civil War monument "was like putting up a stone in the cemetery" because most of the dead were not returned home for burial. They had been buried in shallow graves in places like Shiloh and Vicksburg, which are sites of national cemeteries with thousands of white marble headstones. White marble is also the main material of the massive Illinois Memorial at Vicksburg, for much of the interior of Lincoln's tomb, and for the Lincoln statue of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.

White marble is more artistically appropriate for the Logan County statue replacement than bronze. A white marble statue is consistent with the white stone of the supporting column. Additionally, white stone provides more of a contrast to the brown stone of the courthouse in the background and thus has the advantage of greater visibility than a bronze statue would.

A new white marble Union soldier statue would honor all of the county's Civil War soldiers and the wishes of the noble citizens who carefully planned and specified a white marble statue for the original. Planning for the monument our forbearers dedicated in 1869 began just two years after the Civil War ended, so that monument has an added historic significance: it is one of the oldest Civil War monuments in the nation.

Finally, I think Abe would advise the committee, "Ladies and gentlemen, we now have enough information to reach the most accurate, logical conclusion. That is, we need to take a contract to the County Board that specifies a marble statue. While bronze is often appropriate for some commemorations, the capstone monument for Logan County Civil War veterans must be sculpted like the original--with white marble. Let us teach the younger generation the value of preserving history. Let us not re-write history and risk staining it."

The statue committee meets to discuss the contract on Monday, May 3, 7:00 p.m. at the Logan County Genealogical & Historical Society on Chicago Street in Lincoln across from the depot.

If you agree that a white marble statue is the appropriate replacement, please immediately email David Doolin at ddoolin@mail.bradley.edu. Or, write him at 604 Broadway St., Ste. 5, Lincoln, IL 62656. At the Monday meeting he will report on this feedback, and responders will remain anonymous unless they state otherwise.

Sincerely,

D. Leigh Henson, Ph.D.
Professor Emeritus of English
Missouri State University, Springfield
DLHenson@missouristate.edu
Native Lincolnite and honorary member of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission of Lincoln, Illinois

For historical information about the monument, photos of the soldier statue before and after it fell, and an undoctored photo of the stained Fellowship Center's wall, access <http://www.findinglincolnellinois.com/logancocourthousehistoricarea.html#civilwarsoldierstatue>.