

LINCOLN LORE

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AMERICA'S MOST IMPRESSIVE MEMORIAL

On February 9, 1911, a commission was created by act of Congress "to procure and determine upon a location, plan, and design for a monument or memorial in the city of Washington, District of Columbia, to the memory of Abraham Lincoln, subject to the approval of Congress."

The original appointees known as the Lincoln Memorial Commission consisted of William H. Taft, chairman, Shelby M. Cullom, Joseph G. Cannon, George Peabody Wetmore, Samuel Walker McCall, Harnando D. Money, and Champ Clark. Henry A. Vale was appointed secretary of the commission. To fill vacancies there were added to the personnel, Thomas S. Martin, Joseph C. S. Blackburn, John Temple Graves, Thomas R. Marshall and Nathan B. Scott.

The Commission of Fine Arts collaborating with the Lincoln Memorial Commission unanimously approved and recommended the Potomac Park site as most desirable for the structure. A design for a memorial submitted by the architect, Henry Bacon, was adopted and he was selected as the architect for the building.

On February 12, 1914, ground was broken for the foundation but no special program was arranged although a small group of spectators were present and a statement of the character and purpose of the memorial was made by Honorable Joseph C. S. Blackburn.

The corner stone was set in place on February 12, 1915, but there were no formal exercises at this time. Senator Blackburn, however, placed within the stone a copper box containing a biography of Abraham Lincoln presented by Robert Todd Lincoln, documents bearing the signatures of the members of the sixty-third Congress, specimens of the currency then in use, a copy of the Constitution and other important papers.

The Conception

When the architect, Bacon, outlined his original plan he said, "I believe that this memorial of Abraham Lincoln should be composed of four features: a statue of the man, a memorial of his Gettysburg Speech, a memorial of his Second Inaugural Address, and a symbol of the union of the United States which he saved." To achieve this objective, a master sculptor, Daniel Chester French, and a master painter, Jules Guerin, were commissioned to collaborate with the master architect.

The Colonnade

The architect's conception of the union of the States is admirably symbolized by thirty-six marble columns representing the thirty-six states in the Union at the time of Lincoln's death. These columns, forty-six feet high, the largest of their kind ever used in building construction, sustain the frieze on which the names of all forty-eight states in the Union are inscribed.

The Three Chambers

The other three objectives of the architect's original plan are achieved by the creation within the memorial of three spacious chambers. The central hall is open on the east and against the west wall is the statue of Lincoln by French. On either side of the central hall are smaller chambers separated from the main enclosure by Greek Ionic columns.

Inscriptions

On the west wall directly over the statue may be observed this inscription:

IN THIS TEMPLE
AS IN THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE
FOR WHOM HE SAVED THE UNION
THE MEMORY OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN
IS ENSHRINED FOREVER

On the south wall of the chamber to the left as one enters the central hall is the famous Gettysburg Speech and on the north wall in the chamber to the right is the text of the Second Inaugural Address. Not only has a hall been provided by the architect for the Lincoln statue but each one of the immortal writings also has been accentuated by a special enclosure.

The Murals

To soften and mellow the interior of the memorial, murals were used. Three years were required to create these paintings which appear on both the side walls above the inscriptions. Jules Guerin, the artist, was the sole executor of the two pieces of canvas which measure sixty feet long by twelve feet high. There are forty-eight figures which stand about eight and one-half feet high. Six groups typify in allegory the ideals in the life of Abraham Lincoln.

The mural over the Gettysburg Address has as its central figure "Freedom and Liberty." The figure to the left represents "Justice and Law," and on the right is depicted "Immortality." Over the Second Inaugural Address the central figure of the mural is "Unity." The group to the left depict "Fraternity" and the figures to the right symbolize "Charity."

The Colossal Statue

The statue of Abraham Lincoln by Daniel Chester French is the outstanding feature within the memorial. It literally dominates the entire interior atmosphere of the building in much the same manner that the memorial itself overshadows Potomac Park and its environs.

The sculptor first conceived a heroic Lincoln in bronze but as the plans for the building grew, plans for the statue also grew until the colossal figure in marble emerged. It is a satisfactory study, indeed, and while majestic in appearance it still retains the humane attributes which were so characteristic of Lincoln.

The statue showing Lincoln seated is nineteen feet in both height and width. If Lincoln were standing, the figure would be twenty-eight feet high. The pedestal on which it rests is ten feet high. The statue is impressively illuminated both night and day.

The Dedication

The dedicatory exercises were held on May 30, 1922, with the chairman of the commission, William Howard Taft, presiding. Among those on the program were Dr. Radcliff, of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church where Lincoln attended, Edward Markham who read his famous poem, "Lincoln, the Man of the People," and Prof. Robert R. Morton of Tuskegee Institute. The speech of presentation was made by Chairman Taft, and President Warren G. Harding, in the main address, accepted the memorial on behalf of the Nation. Possibly the most honored guest present was Robert Todd Lincoln, only surviving son of Abraham Lincoln.