

# LINCOLN LORE

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## EARLY CONGRESSIONAL ATTEMPTS TO MEMORIALIZE LINCOLN

It is doubtful if there has been authorized by Congress, in all its history, a memorial enterprise which has received such generous approval of the masses, as the Lincoln Shrine at Washington. However, this achievement was not realized without a long season of effort extending over half a century, during which time many projects were considered and rejected, until finally the present impressive memorial was erected.

Thirty years ago, Honorable William W. Griest, of Pennsylvania, prepared for reading in the House of Representatives, a compilation of bills which had advocated some Lincoln memorial project, and it serves as the source of information on which this monograph is based.

Before the year of Lincoln's death had drawn to a close, a resolution was submitted in the House, by Elihu B. Washburn, asking that a joint committee be appointed to consider and report, "by what token of respect and affection it may be proper for the Congress of the United States to express the deep sensibility of the Nation to the event of the decease of the late President Abraham Lincoln."

From the time of this early attempt on the part of Congress to call attention to the appropriateness of memorializing Abraham Lincoln, many important resolutions were placed before the House which would pay tribute to the name of the Emancipator.

### *Lincoln Territory*

One week after the suggestion was made on the floor of the House, that Lincoln should be memorialized, the first specific resolution for honoring Lincoln was submitted. It favored the naming of one of the new western territories for the martyred President. Resolutions with a similar appeal appeared periodically for more than twenty years.

### *Lincoln Statues*

Mr. Ingersoll, who presented one of the early resolutions with respect to Lincoln, submitted on January 22, 1866, another resolution asking a report on the "propriety and cost of procuring a marble statue of the late President to be placed in the capitol." A contract for a statue of Lincoln was made by Vinnie Ream and it was subsequently dedicated.

In the month of May, the same year, Mr. Ingersoll reported a bill establishing Lincoln Square, now known as Lincoln Park, and situated on East Capitol Street, between Eleventh and Thirteenth Streets. A bronze statue, "The Emancipation Group," by Ball, was erected there.

### *Lincoln Monument Association*

When the fortieth Congress convened, in 1867, a bill was introduced, proposing the incorporation of a "Lincoln Monument Association" with the purpose in view "to create a great national memorial." After this proposal there seems to have been a general shifting of interest to the National Lincoln Monument Association at Springfield, Illinois, and a willingness on the part of Congress to support such an effort.

### *Lincoln's Birthday*

Possibly the attempt to make the birthday of Lincoln a national holiday called for more resolutions than any other project relating to the President. The forty-fourth Congress was presented the first resolution which not only asked for a declaration of February 12 as a national holiday, but urged that the national flag should float at half mast "on the 14th day of April, the day on which Abraham Lincoln was killed." [Lincoln did not die until April 15.]

### *Carpenter Painting*

On February 1, 1878 Congress accepted the gift of the famous painting, "The Signing of the Emancipation Pro-

clamation" by Carpenter, which painting was a gift from Mrs. Elizabeth Thompson. This has become recognized as one of the outstanding historical paintings at Washington.

### *Petersen House*

A significant resolution was offered on January 31, 1893 asking for an appropriation of \$55,000 "for the purchase and repair of the house in which President Lincoln died and memorials for said house." This was the primary effort which finally ended in both the acquisition of the house and also the purchase of the Oldroyd collection of Lincolniana displayed there.

### *Lincoln National Soldiers' Home*

An early effort to interest Congress in marking the birthplace of Lincoln in Kentucky by erecting a monument did not seem to gain much favor in the forty-ninth Congress. Ten years later in 1897 a bill was presented "to purchase the birthplace of Abraham Lincoln" and "the erection thereon of a national soldiers' home as a monument to his memory to be known as the Lincoln National Soldiers' Home."

### *Gettysburg Address*

The first attempt to make some recognition of the Gettysburg Address was advanced on January 25, 1897, when the House received a bill from the Senate, calling for the erection of a statue of Lincoln at Gettysburg. That year an appropriation was made for a tablet at Gettysburg containing the famous address.

### *Centennial Memorials*

Anticipating the centennial of Abraham Lincoln's birthday in 1909, all kinds of recommendations began to find their way before Congress. The purchase of a portrait, the erection of a statue, furnishing schools with Lincoln busts, and the purchase of a colossal bust were some of the suggestions. One of the most interesting suggestions inspired by the Centennial, was a resolution to "erect a replica in bronze in the city of Washington, D. C., of the log cabin in which Lincoln was born."

### *Postage Stamp*

The Centennial year also encouraged Congress to order the issue of "a special Lincoln postage stamp" and also "to print the Inaugural Address of Abraham Lincoln." The two-cent postage stamp issued at that time was embellished with a bust of Lincoln by St. Gaudens on a red background. The bill was approved on January 22, 1909.

### *Memorial Highways*

When the question of a national memorial began to be agitated with more fervor, the building of a Memorial Highway from Washington to Gettysburg, in memory of Lincoln, was urged. Later on a resolution was offered to construct a "Lincoln Memorial Highway from Boston to San Francisco."

### *The Lincoln Shrine at Washington*

Undoubtedly it was the enthusiasm engendered by the Centennial celebration throughout the Nation on February 12, 1909, that was responsible for the new effort to memorialize the martyred President, born in a Kentucky cabin, and which culminated in the building of the beautiful Lincoln shrine at Washington. The sixty-first Congress should receive the credit for putting through the first definite legislation providing for a commission to secure designs and plans for the project: William H. Taft, Shelby M. Cullom, Joseph G. Cannon, George Peabody Whetmore, Samuel Walker McCall, Hernando D. Money and Champ Clark, constituted the group to be known as the Lincoln Memorial Commission, and the resolution appointing them was approved on February 11, 1911.