

LINCOLN LORE

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THE STATUE AT FORT LINCOLN CEMETERY

Memorial Day preliminaries have recalled the proposed dedication on May 30, 1931, of a Lincoln statue on the State House grounds at Providence, Rhode Island. However, the state failed to acquire possession of the statue and now after resting for sixteen years in the foundry where it was cast it recently has been removed to Fort Lincoln Cemetery in Washington, D. C.

The Lincoln Foundation began gathering information in 1930 about sculptors of Lincoln to be used in its well known brochure "Heroic Bronze Statues of Abraham Lincoln." At that time correspondence with Ernest L. Sprague, Secretary of State for Rhode Island, indicated that a statue of Lincoln by Andrew O'Connor was already modeled, ready for casting, and when completed it was to be placed on the State House grounds at Providence. The last paragraph in his letter stated, "It is the intention of the Commission to dedicate this memorial on Memorial Day, 1931, if completed by that time." However the dedication never took place.

The Department of Rhode Island Sons of Veterans conceived the idea of a heroic bronze statue as a memorial to Abraham Lincoln and the Lincoln Memorial Commission of Rhode Island was organized in January, 1914. During the first four months of solicitation \$9,000 was received. Local conditions seemed to make it wise to abandon the campaign for a period and no further solicitation had been organized up to July 31, 1930. However, in the meantime one of America's foremost sculptors, Andrew O'Connor, had been commissioned to do the Lincoln. Further correspondence carried on by the Foundation with Mr. Sprague brought from him on March 7, 1932, this explanation for the failure to dedicate the statue: "The figure has been cast and is at the present time at the foundry of the Gorham Manufacturing Company in Providence. Considerable funds have yet to be collected to complete the payment for this memorial before it can be erected."

In 1940 there seemed to be a revival of interest in the placing of the statue and the members of the Lincoln Memorial Commission of Rhode Island Inc., met with the governor to make arrangements for the completion of the plans and erection of the statue. At this time the Foundation was again corresponding with Providence people interested in seeing the monument put in place and still again in 1946 contacts were made which it was hoped would encourage the final erection of the statue. An article did appear in the Providence Journal for February 12th that year which gave the financial status of the statue at that time. The sculptor had received \$9,000 and the Gorham Manufacturing Co. \$1,000 for casting, leaving a balance due the sculptor or his assignees \$4,500 and the amount in arrears to the Gorham Co. \$5,000.

Latest developments indicate that Rhode Island has not as yet given up hope of having the study by O'Connor placed on the State House grounds and a bill authorizing an appropriation of \$25,000 for the purchase of a replica of the statue has recently passed the lower branch of the Legislature. The statue is a massive study portraying a bearded Lincoln seated on a modernistic bench. He

appears thoughtful and in deep meditation. While the right forearm and hand rests gracefully on the high support of the bench the sculptor seems to have had some difficulty in finding a satisfactory resting place for the left hand. The first study shows it upon his knee but in the finished work the left hand rests by his side upon the seat of the bench. The figure is draped by a heavy cloak.

O'Connor's skill in sculptural art is not unknown to Lincoln students as his heroic standing Lincoln occupies a prominent spot in front of the State House at Springfield, Illinois. The editor of Lincoln Lore has always had more than a common interest in the Springfield and Providence statues because at the time he was attending High School in Holden, Massachusetts, the studio of Andrew O'Connor, was located almost directly opposite the school building. At least one and possibly two of the sculptor's sisters were in attendance there at the time. It was not unusual for the pupils, especially in the summer when much of the sculptor's work was done out of doors, to slip across the street and watch him at his work. A bronze memorial tablet on the school building was executed by him.

State Senator H. S. Magill of Princeton, Illinois, seems to have been the moving spirit in getting underway plans for a bronze statue of Lincoln to be dedicated during the centennial year of Illinois. A competitive plan was inaugurated in the selection of sculptors and fifty-two contestants, forty-nine in the general competition and three by special invitation by the commission, one of which was Andrew O'Connor then studying in Paris. Four of the competitors, including O'Connor, were invited to make enlarged copies of their studies. A study by Andrew O'Connor was eventually given the preference and his statue of Lincoln was dedicated on October 5, 1918.

Apparently the committee which had in charge the granting of the commission for the work contemplated a statue representing Lincoln at the time he left Springfield for Washington to be inaugurated. The press reports state with reference to the Lincoln bronze:

"He is aptly represented in the act of addressing his neighbors and friends from the rear of the train as he was leaving the old Wabash passenger station in Springfield" on his departure for Washington for the inauguration. The statue has always been referred to as the "Lincoln of the Farewell Address," a copy of the address in full appearing on the rear of the large marble slab which serves as a background. The historical accuracy of the statue is somewhat marred by the fact that Lincoln appears as a smooth-faced man when in reality he was wearing the heaviest beard in his whole career when he delivered the famous Farewell Address on February 11, 1861.

Although Lincoln had not started to grow a beard when he visited Providence, Rhode Island, in February, 1860, on that eventful New England trip, it is hoped that if a replica of the O'Connor statue is secured for the Rhode Island State House grounds excerpts from Lincoln's Providence speech will not be associated with the bearded Lincoln.