

# LINCOLN LORE

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## A MEMORIAL TO LINCOLN'S CULTURE

The Abraham Lincoln Memorial Garden in the capital city of Illinois is a living tribute to America's most illustrious personality. The sixty acres within its boundaries surround Lake Springfield, southwest of the city, for which the body of water is named. It is just on the outskirts of the municipality and can be reached over highway 66. There are three entrances with a rustic shelter at the main approach. Well marked trails allow the pedestrian to observe the most interesting exhibits of nature's development.

The Springfield Civic Garden Club first proposed the memorial in 1932 and the Garden Club of Illinois agreed to sponsor it as a major project with Mrs. T. J. Knudson as chairman of the special committee. In the fall of 1936 Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts planted there acorns gathered from twenty-eight different states. After several years of intensive development the area was turned back to the city in 1949, although the garden club still serves in an advisory capacity.

The memorial feature has found expression through the plantings and culture of flowers, vines, shrubbery and trees known to the pioneers. The lower levels along the lake have offered ideal locations for a profusion of blossoms and the banks and higher levels have become a native arboretum. The annual wild flower day held by the local garden club has done much to encourage the development of the park by the setting out of plants indigenous to central Illinois.

The fact that the garden is a cultural project is in harmony with Lincoln's concepts as he was always interested in agriculture and especially in the growth and development of vegetation. At the Wisconsin State Fair in 1859 he said: "The soil has never been pushed up to one half its capacity" and then continued with this observation, "Every blade of grass is a study; and to produce two where there was but one, is both a profit and a pleasure."

A recent movement associated with the reservation has been the formation of the Abraham Lincoln Memorial Garden Foundation with Mrs. Knudson as the resident chairman and the organization looks forward to an adequate financial support of the enterprise. The editor of *Lincoln Lore* was invited to address this newly organized group at their annual banquet at Springfield on the evening of May 4 and for the first time became interested in the purpose of the memorial project. While preparing his remarks the thought occurred that while the garden with its primitive atmosphere might well memorialize the coming of the pioneer Lincolns to Illinois the gardens might also invite a more significant symbolism—the cultural growth of Abraham Lincoln himself.

Nearly every phase of Lincoln's development has been explored except his readjustment to the new social atmosphere which Springfield provided. He was born in Kentucky in a sparsely settled part of the country. He resided in the Indiana wilderness through his fourteen formative years. During the first seven years in Illinois he lived in communities which offered little in the way of cultural opportunities. At twenty-eight years of age he reached Springfield, the center of culture in the state, with little or no training in the behavior of a polite society.

One person, more than all others combined, was responsible for Lincoln's social adjustment and it was a fortunate moment indeed when he was introduced to Mary Todd, daughter of Robert Todd, president of the Bank of Kentucky. The name of Todd is a familiar one in the history of Illinois. Col. John Todd, brother of Mary's grandfather Levi Todd, was appointed by Patrick Henry in 1778 as the Lieutenant-Governor of the newly established County of Illinois, then part of Virginia. Nine days before Abraham Lincoln was born Illinois Territory was set apart and Ninian Edwards, whose son married Mary Todd's sister, was made territorial governor.

Mary Todd came to Springfield, Ill., from Lexington, Kentucky where her grandfather Levi had been one of the founders of Transylvania University, the oldest institution of higher learning west of the Alleghany Mountains. Here she had completed courses in two different schools for young ladies and was highly educated, Lexington then being called the "Athens of the West." It is doubtful if Abraham Lincoln ever met a more highly cultured woman than the one he was to marry within three years after they first met.

It was in the home atmosphere which she created about him where he first learned about those little niceties in circles of refinements. Here also he took under her informal tutorage a required course in the fundamentals of liberal arts. Mary helped him to mend his manners and to mind his P's and Q's in a new order of refinement which he had never before experienced. He may not always have been a willing student as his political opponents made capital out of his marrying into a fashionable constituency.

Mrs. Lyman Trumbull, wife of the Illinois senator, wrote back to Springfield from Washington in 1855 to one of her friends: "I have seen a great many prominent women since I came here, but I have not met anyone . . . as pretty a talker as Mary Lincoln." To be a fine conversationalist was one of the most desirable attainments for women among the social graces of the day.

Possibly the nicest compliment that was ever paid to Lincoln's social status was made by Edward Everett, former president of Harvard University, and the very embodiment of refinement himself. He commented on Abraham Lincoln's behavior at a banquet they attended in the home of Col. Wills at Gettysburg on the eve of the dedicatory ceremonies. There were also present on the occasion foreign ministers, cabinet members, senators and governors, but Everett concluded: "In gentlemanly appearance, manners, and conversation the President was the peer of any man at the table." This was indirectly a tribute to Mary Todd Lincoln who took Lincoln out of a drab and uncouth environment and dressed him up, taught him social graces and improved his diction.

The women of Illinois are to be commended in their efforts to create a place of natural beauty at Lake Springfield which will honor not only the pioneer efforts of the Lincolns and the Todds in the early Illinois country, but which will also symbolize the cultural growth of Abraham Lincoln himself which took place in the city of Springfield.