

LINCOLN LORE

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SPRINGFIELD'S LINCOLN MEMORIAL CENTER

Although as much as one-half of Abraham Lincoln's life was spent at different periods in Kentucky, Indiana, and the District of Columbia, he is most often associated with Illinois where he lived for twenty-eight years, seven in the rural sections of the state and twenty-one in Springfield. When Secretary of State, Charles F. Carpenter took office in January 1953 he designed an insignia for Illinois which contained a white silhouette profile of Lincoln on a green map of the state. At the top of the drawing was placed the word ILLINOIS and under the profile the inscription LAND OF LINCOLN.

At the 1953 General Assembly of Illinois, Senator Fred J. Hart prepared a bill which would require this insignia to appear on Illinois motor vehicle license plates, but the bill was amended so that the insignia might be used at the discretion of the secretary of state. The fact that the plates carry the inscription "Land of Lincoln" has given the slogan wide publicity. A more recent bill introduced by Mr. Hart on January 25, 1955 and known as Senate Bill No. 29 states, "The slogan 'Land of Lincoln' is designated and shall be known as the official slogan of the state of Illinois."

One can immediately observe how greatly this slogan is to increase an interest in the Lincoln shrines and sites of historical importance in the state of Illinois. Already there has been a well directed effort to improve and make more accessible the Lincoln treasures which are now in possession of the state.

For many years the Lincoln Tomb at Springfield has been and still is the mecca for all Lincoln students visiting Illinois. During the custodianship of both Mr. Oldroyd and Mr. Fay there was an informal display of curios at the tomb which created much human interest but greatly detracted from the beauty and dignity of the shrine. Upon the reconstruction of the monument the curios were removed and the aesthetic values of the memorial were greatly enhanced. However, the unconventional exhibits once enjoyed especially by collectors and students are now gone.

Closely associated with the tomb is the original home of the Lincoln family on Eighth Street where they lived for seventeen years. It was from this residence that they went to the Executive Mansion. A restoration program at the home covering a period of five years and costing \$60,000 has been in process. Richard Hagen, historical consultant to the Illinois Park and Memorial Division, has directed the improvements. A formal opening was held on February 12 and for the first time the second story of the house has been opened to visitors which adds greatly to the human interest value of the shrine. The total of 400,000 people who visit the home annually should be greatly accentuated by the completion of the improvements.

In respect for George Washington, Americans have made Mt. Vernon one of the most revered residences in the nation. Exponents of the democratic way of life have set apart Thomas Jefferson's Monticello as one of the show places of the nation. Admirers of Andrew Jackson point with pride at the preservation of the Hermitage. Yet Abraham Lincoln's humble dwelling is seldom associated with those other outstanding shrines of the country. Here is a home that does not represent the colonial period or a location where several generations of a family might have resided on the same lands. The Lincoln Home in Springfield is the terminal dwelling of a family that for seven generations moved westward, and including the District of Columbia, sojourned in seven different commonwealths.

There appeared in a current magazine article some time ago a statement of a tourist who had visited the shrines of great Americans but admitted that when he touched any spot related to Lincoln he experienced a sensation not felt at other historical sites. He seemed to get beneath the material things observed and every possible means should be put forth to create in the minds of those who visit the Lincoln home in Springfield the same feeling as reported by this impressed tourist when he touched historical scenes associated with the Lincoln family.

Now that the Lincoln Tomb has been rebuilt and enriched and the Lincoln home redecorated and refurbished, an association has been formed for the purpose of creating a nation-wide interest in developing adjacent to the Lincoln home an area to be known as the Lincoln Memorial Center. The project calls for the acquisition of one-half block on the east side of Eighth St. between Jackson St. and Capitol Ave., which land is north of the Lincoln home, also one-half block on the west side of Eighth St., between Jackson St. and Capitol Ave., this tract to be used for service facilities such as a souvenir shop, rest rooms and parking spaces. On the northwest corner of the lot complementing the home which stands on the southwest corner, a museum and library building is contemplated which has tremendous possibilities for creating a predominant Lincoln information center.

A former governor of Illinois, Henry Horner, presented to the state in 1940 what is said to have been the largest personally owned collection of Lincolniana in America. It became the property of the Illinois State Library and supplemented the already fine Lincoln library then in possession of the state. Lack of exhibit space, however, as well as a division of interest in other important historical projects in Illinois has not allowed the collection of Lincolniana to be adequately displayed. Access to the room now set aside for the collection is not so convenient as the approach to either the tomb or the residence.

If the museum and library contemplated at the Springfield Memorial Center could be utilized to display this magnificent collection, the project would have still further appeal to Lincoln students in general. With this great collection of Lincolniana housed adjacent to the Lincoln home and with convenient parking facilities tourists would at last have a perfect set up for visiting Springfield, capital of the "Land of Lincoln."

On Lincoln's Birthday just past, the very day on which the refurbished Lincoln home was opened to the public, the committee proposing to direct the financing of the center began the serious business of raising the \$1,000,000 required to carry out the proposed plans. Nation wide recognition was given to the effort over the American Broadcast network Sunday evening, February 13, on the Paul Harvey news program. The theme of the appeal was "Stop Hiding That House," the inference being clear that the place that Lincoln owned and lived in during most of his married life had been somewhat obscured in its local setting by the unattractive environment in which it is located.

At one of the preliminary meetings of the planning committee it was suggested that inasmuch as the \$5.00 bill carries a picture of Abraham Lincoln, such a piece of currency might be designated an appreciation gift. For instance, if all the students of Abraham Lincoln in America were to forward to Lincoln Memorial Center Association, P. O. Box 211, Springfield, Ill., such an appropriate contribution the entire sum would be realized.