Building a Twenty-First-Century Lincoln Memorial: The Digital Revolution in Lincoln Studies Scholarship

SAMUEL WHEELER

During a presentation to the American Historical Association in 1934, historian James G. Randall announced to the world that times were changing—the era of the professional historian in Lincoln studies had finally arrived. He outlined an ambitious research agenda, which guided scholars for much of the remaining century.¹ Many of his protégés adopted Lincoln as their subject and went on to author scores of articles and books, while Randall himself completed a multivolume Lincoln biography that utilized the most wide-ranging source material to date. By the end of his life, Randall marveled at how modernization, in the form of photostats, microfilm, and archival practices, had allowed the professional historians to transform the field.² Like Lincoln, who was the only president to hold a patent for an invention of his own creation and was among the first to take full advantage of telegraphy, Randall embraced new technology.³ While Lincoln witnessed how technology revolutionized warfare, Randall and a new generation of scholars utilized technology to shape modern Lincoln studies historiography.

One hundred fifty years after the end of the Civil War and Lincoln’s assassination, we too are living in transformative times. All of us are witnessing a digital revolution that is changing our daily lives. The field of Lincoln studies is no exception. Digital technology has already made an impact—there are dozens of digital projects online today that have proven extremely valuable to researchers. As a result, Lincoln, in our time, is becoming more accessible than ever.


Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association, Vol. 37, No. 1, 2016 © 2016 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois
Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress

For instance, when Lincoln was assassinated, he left behind an office filled with his personal papers. For the next sixty-one years, Robert Todd Lincoln maintained control over these papers and allowed only his father’s trusted secretaries, John Nicolay and John Hay, access to them as they prepared their ten-volume Lincoln biography. Ultimately, Robert deeded the papers to the Library of Congress on the condition they would not be opened until twenty-one years after his death.4

When Randall penned his essay, the Lincoln Papers were still sealed. He lived long enough, however, to be at the unveiling on July 26, 1947, and spent several months meticulously going through the nearly twenty thousand documents in the collection. In Randall’s estimation, it was a “rich collection,” that was “highly valuable from the historian’s point of view” because it threw “new light upon Lincoln and his associates.” This collection was “the stuff out of which history is built.” Now that the professional historians finally had access to this rich trove of new primary source material, Randall declared that “a new phase of Lincoln studies has begun.”5

Indeed, twenty thousand new Lincoln documents, the majority of which were incoming correspondence, revealed the extent to which Lincoln’s mailbox was always full and usually packed with contradictory advice. After 1947 it became necessary for aspiring authors working on books about Lincoln and his era to spend time with the collection. As a result, the Library of Congress embraced new technology and microfilmed and indexed the Lincoln Papers, which comprised a whopping ninety-seven reels of microfilm. For various reasons, not the least of which that the collection contained many letters from writers who had nearly indecipherable handwriting, historians did not exploit the collection as thoroughly as they might have.

More than a dozen years ago, however, the Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress were digitized, resulting in a collection of black-and-white jpeg images of every document at the American Memory website. In 2002 the Lincoln Studies Center, headed by Knox College scholars Rodney Davis and Douglas Wilson, led a team that

transcribed and annotated approximately half of the collection. With this valuable resource free and online, it is now making its impact on Lincoln historiography. In the twenty-first century, scholars are paying more attention to Lincoln’s incoming correspondence and recognizing that Lincoln’s “political genius” was not created in a vacuum. By analyzing this collection, researchers can identify the names of Lincoln’s most frequent correspondents, as well as the topics they discussed most frequently. Readers can appreciate how Lincoln struggled to keep various political factions satisfied and the level to which his incoming correspondence influenced his outgoing policy decisions.

Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln

Sixty-nine years after Lincoln’s death, Randall understandably complained that there was still no definitive edition of Lincoln’s writings. The Abraham Lincoln Association (ALA) set out to solve the problem. In 1947 the ALA launched one of the most significant projects in Lincoln studies—a definitive edition of all the papers written by Abraham Lincoln under the direction of Roy Basler. For the next five years, Basler’s small team not only utilized cutting-edge technology to complete their work; they relied on it. “Without the modern techniques of photocopying—photostatic or photographic prints, microfilms, etc., our task would have been all but impossible,” Basler later wrote. The end result was phenomenal. Using modern editorial techniques, careful transcriptions, and informative annotations, Basler’s team provided the world with a definitive edition of all known, substantive, nonlegal documents written in Lincoln’s hand from the various archival facilities and private collections throughout the world.

More than a quarter century ago, while researching his masterful Lincoln biography, Randall’s student David Herbert Donald embraced new technology by having a collection of Lincoln’s best-known writings placed on a 3.5-inch floppy disk, making them keyword searchable. Today, researchers need not go to such lengths to do keyword searches. The modern era of Lincoln scholarship has benefitted from the availability of his papers online, allowing researchers to easily access and analyze this valuable resource.

7. Randall, “Has the Lincoln Theme Been Exhausted?,” 272.
searches of Lincoln’s words. The ALA, in cooperation with the University of Michigan, has made Basler’s work freely available online. As a result, Lincoln scholars have made ample use of the keyword search capabilities of the collection. For instance, in one of the most effective studies on Lincoln’s use of specific words, Phillip Paludan examined all of the known examples of Lincoln’s use of the word “democracy.” Though Lincoln used the word 138 times, Paludan found that he did not often use it in a positive sense and was much more likely to use terms like “law” and “constitution” whenever he had the opportunity. This research, which really could never have been done so effectively without having access to a digital version of Lincoln’s words, led Paludan to reexamine well-known Lincoln speeches like the Lyceum Address, in which Lincoln spoke of democracy’s dangers in the form of mob rule, as well as his opposition to Stephen Douglas’s theory of popular sovereignty. Paludan concluded that Lincoln had “an ongoing quarrel with democracy, a lover’s quarrel no doubt but a quarrel nonetheless.”

In addition to Lincoln scholars, other researchers have made innovative use of Lincoln’s words. For instance, when the compilers of a new edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* were trying to find the date of earliest usage for certain words, the online version of the *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* was one of the digital resources they used to see if a word was in common use in the mid-nineteenth century. That is the story of digital history in our time. Such collaborations are delightful byproducts of sharing archives of primary documents freely. Unintended users access the material and find applications for the data that were never dreamed of by its compilers.

**The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln: Complete Documentary Edition**

Despite the strides researchers made by having access to the *Collected Works* in 1953, the collection nonetheless had its limitations. For instance, it was not comprehensive because it did not include documents from Lincoln’s twenty-five-year legal career. As a result,

Lincoln’s life as a lawyer did not receive much attention in Lincoln studies beyond a few well-worn anecdotes about life on the circuit, his humor, or his honesty. In his essay Randall bemoaned the fact that Lincoln’s legal career, particularly his extensive practice before the Illinois Supreme Court, had never been analyzed because the primary document material was not easily accessible. Beginning in 1985, however, participants in the Lincoln Legal Papers project traveled throughout Illinois collecting photocopies of every document pertaining to a legal case involving Lincoln. After fifteen years piecing together Lincoln’s legal career one document at a time, the editors released their database to the world, first in the form of a DVD, but today the database is freely available online to researchers. It includes thousands of legal case descriptions, as well as more than one hundred thousand legal documents, affidavits, court dockets, fee books, newspaper articles, and letters.

More than 150 years after Lincoln tried his last legal case, we are now able to understand the scope of his practice—he was involved in more than fifty-two hundred legal cases, including more than four hundred before the Illinois Supreme Court. The database also dispels many myths. For instance, Lincoln was not predominantly a “railroad lawyer”; just 4 percent of his cases involved railroads, and he represented railroad interests as often as he opposed them. The majority of his cases involved debt collection and resulted in modest five- and ten-dollar fees. Today Lincoln scholars make regular use of the database and, as a result, the historiography has evolved. Recent books, like Mark Steiner’s An Honest Calling: The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln, utilized the database to put Lincoln’s legal career in the proper perspective, while another researcher has said the database is “like an Xbox for historians.” Other scholars, like Stacy Pratt McDermott, used the database as a representative sample in her analysis of midwestern juries. Still others without a specific interest in Lincoln, such as

as researchers of true crime, the legal system, and even genealogy, will likely find other applications for the database.  

**Herndon’s Informants**

Following Lincoln’s assassination, William Herndon devoted several years to researching the life of his former law partner. He personally interviewed and corresponded with everyone he could find who had interacted with Lincoln in Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, and Washington. His research archive grew to include hundreds of pages of correspondence.

Herndon’s interview notes and correspondence are indispensable to understand Lincoln’s pre-presidential life. In all, the collection includes the observations and opinions of more than 250 people, including friends and foes, love interests, relatives, and in-laws—all of whom knew Lincoln before he became mythologized. In the middle of the twentieth century, Herndon’s notes were transferred to microfilm, which preserved the record but proved exceedingly inconvenient for historians to use, due in no small part to Herndon’s atrocious handwriting.

The Lincoln Studies Center at Knox College, however, transcribed and annotated Herndon’s research archive and, in 1998, published their work under the title *Herndon’s Informants*. In 2007 the University of Illinois Press made the entire volume available online, free of charge. As mid-twentieth-century biases against oral history began to erode and computer transcriptions of the documents became free and keyword searchable, Herndon’s research notes made an undeniable impact on Lincoln studies. The Lincoln Studies Center at Knox College is making other essential primary documents available to researchers, including a collection of Herndon’s essays and correspondence.

The end result, particularly if it too will be available in a free, online,

A Twenty-First-Century Lincoln Memorial

keyword-searchable format, will make Herndon’s work even more valuable.

Ida Tarbell Papers

As Randall observed in 1934, Lincoln had been “everybody’s subject” and condescendingly concluded, the “hand of the amateur . . . rested heavily upon Lincoln studies.” There is value, however, in having access to the research notes and correspondence of Lincoln researchers—both the amateur and the professional. A model for such accessibility might be the Ida Tarbell Papers at the famous journalist’s alma mater, Allegheny College, in Pennsylvania. The collection encompasses her professional life as a journalist, author, and lecturer, including several hundred pages of notes she compiled while researching her articles and books on Lincoln. Her notes illustrate that she was a dogged researcher. She corresponded with the major Lincoln biographers of her era and even contacted Lincoln’s surviving contemporaries. By digitizing her research notes, Alleghany College has allowed us to view her notebooks, and in them we can watch her wrestle with the evidence. Researchers have much to benefit from seeing her thoughts about Lincoln in this rough form. It is perhaps the closest we can come to having a candid conversation with someone no longer here who spent a portion of her life studying Lincoln’s era.

Modern researchers would have much to gain if similar digital projects were undertaken for other Lincoln authors, such as Nicolay and Hay, Albert Beveridge, Carl Sandburg, William Barton, Randall, and Donald.

Abraham Lincoln: A Life (2008)

The digital platform offers authors an intriguing opportunity to share their work with an online audience. For example, in 2008, Johns Hopkins University Press published Michael Burlingame’s Abraham Lincoln: A Life. His long-awaited two-volume opus came in at nearly two thousand pages, but the original version was even longer. As a result, Burlingame reached an agreement with his publisher to offer

23. Randall, “Has the Lincoln Theme Been Exhausted?,” 270.
the unedited manuscript—larger in both narrative text and more exhaustive in documentation—online, free of charge. The experiment might well be a model for other scholars to follow. There will always be people who want a hard copy of the book, but online versions, perhaps expanded ones like Burlingame’s or even a collection of the author’s research notes or material “left on the cutting room floor” would be invaluable for researchers. Such an online platform could serve as both the book’s marketing page and a research center, offering readers the opportunity to learn more.

In addition to his three books on Lincoln, Burlingame has edited several volumes of essential primary documents, including works by Noah Brooks, John Hay, John G. Nicolay, and William Stoddard. Such works would be invaluable if they too were transferred to an online format and made keyword searchable, along with other essential primary documents like the Civil War diaries and papers of cabinet members Gideon Welles, Salmon P. Chase, Edward Bates, and possibly other intimates, such as Orville Browning. Being able to search the diaries and papers of a dozen or more Lincoln men simultaneously to see who knew what and when they knew it might provide greater clarity into Lincoln’s decision-making process on a host of major issues from emancipation and civil liberties to voting rights.

Abraham Lincoln Association—Virtual Publications

Out-of-print books offer even more fertile ground for online publication and access. Of course, Google has already digitized several


million books and made them available to the world, but in the field of Lincoln studies, the Abraham Lincoln Association has been a pioneer in making its titles available to researchers. Its website offers researchers access to digital versions of the association’s most popular publications, including monographs and every issue of the *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association.* By posting its peer-reviewed journal online, the ALA is ensuring the world has open, unrestricted access to the most recent developments in the field; online publication is also a great advertising tool for the organization.

**House Divided: The Civil War Research Engine at Dickinson College**

Perhaps the most exciting digital resource available today is Matthew Pinsker’s *House Divided: The Civil War Research Engine at Dickinson College.* The project researchers began by looking at the Civil War era through the prism of Dickinson College in Pennsylvania, from which both James Buchanan and Roger B. Taney graduated. The project has evolved to include a digital research archive with over fourteen thousand images and ten thousand primary documents, as well as a forum for others to showcase their digital research projects. The result is a site that presents a world of possibilities for the future of history education. Indeed, it suggests a future in which it would be hard to imagine a researcher, teacher, or student not engaging in digital history.

Lincoln has been examined in a number of useful ways as part of the *House Divided* project, including through a substantive Lincoln-Douglas debates site, as well as another section that analyzes Lincoln’s writings, which was the product of an innovative online course in partnership with the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History. More than one thousand students contributed to the section that features 150 of Lincoln’s most “teachable” documents, organized around five major themes. More than any other digital project in Lincoln

studies today, the site has embraced a diverse array of digital tools and presentation platforms, including Google Maps, Prezi, Storify, timelines, videos, podcasts, websites, and word clouds. Users can create a digital Lincoln project using whatever format they choose and submit it to the site for possible inclusion in the archive. Already, more than eighty digital projects are devoted to such diverse topics as Lincoln’s sense of humor, the global Lincoln, Lincoln and civil liberties, and the question “Was Lincoln a Racist?” By encouraging students to use digital technology to learn about Lincoln and showcase their research, the project is emphasizing how relevant Lincoln’s legacy is to us, the living, in the twenty-first century.

**Abraham Lincoln Online**

In addition to the sites that offer large collections of primary documents, there are a number that offer small collections of “ministudies” and resources aimed at students and teachers especially. Created, written, and published by Rhoda and Lowell Sneller, *Abraham Lincoln Online* has been around for twenty years and remains perhaps the best central location for all things Lincoln, from breaking news and upcoming events to book announcements and author interviews. The education links to resources like biographical sketches, collections of Lincoln’s words, images, lesson plans, and field trip ideas are tremendously useful to teachers planning to present Lincoln’s legacy in the classroom, as well as to students doing research for classroom assignments.

**The Abraham Lincoln Research Site**

Created in 1996 by former history teacher Roger J. Norton, *The Abraham Lincoln Research Site* is well researched and full of images. Like *Abraham Lincoln Online*, Norton’s site is a portal to dozens of links particularly suited for students and teachers, including a variety of classroom activities and lesson plans. The site also branches off into additional research sites for the Lincoln assassination and for the life of Mary Lincoln.

Perhaps the most compelling site in Norton’s network, however, is a discussion board called the *Lincoln Discussion Symposium*. Comprising more than forty-five thousand posts, the discussion board is divided into nine different forums, allowing teachers, students, researchers, authors, and Lincoln detractors or obsessors to interact. It is a forum for Web 2.0–style collaboration. Researchers routinely pose questions, request copies of primary documents, and otherwise obtain help from folks strategically located around the country.

**Lincoln/Net**

Like other Lincoln-related sites designed for students and teachers, *Lincoln/Net*, hosted by Northern Illinois University, features lesson plans. The site, however, uses Lincoln as a vehicle to examine larger social and political themes from his era. For instance, in addition to Lincoln-centric lesson plans on the Lincoln-Douglas debates, users will also find classroom activities on the songs of Lincoln’s era, nineteenth-century gender roles, the removal of the Cherokee from the East to less desirable land in the West, and a wealth of material on Illinois’s first decade of statehood—a period in which Lincoln and his family were still living in the wilderness of southern Indiana. The site features primary documents and music as well as modern scholarly interpretive materials, including essays and video interviews on topics ranging from the Black Hawk and Mexican Wars to the national political culture in antebellum America.

**The Lehrman Institute**

Of all the educational sites, however, the Lehrman Institute is responsible for perhaps the most diverse collection of sites devoted to students who want to learn more about Lincoln’s life and legacy. In addition to supporting the annual Lincoln Prize, which recognizes the best printed and electronic work on the Civil War and Lincoln, as well as the Hay-Nicolay Prize, awarded to the best doctoral dissertation about Lincoln, the Lehrman Institute has published and maintains eight different websites, such as *Mr. Lincoln’s White House* and *Abraham Lincoln’s Classroom*. Each site offers a world of insight for students, teachers, researchers, and enthusiasts. Like the other

educational websites already mentioned, these sites include lesson plans, documents, essays, and videos.39

Assassination-Themed Projects

Notable attention has been paid to specialized topics, particularly the assassination, as we just lived through the sesquicentennial of that event. Of course, Lincoln was assassinated on Good Friday, died on Saturday, and eulogized throughout the North during Easter services—a day that came to be known forever after as “Black Easter.” Ministers gave voice to the anguish of a nation in mourning and interpreted the meaning of Lincoln’s life and brutal death. Any attempt to interpret the meaning of the assassination for individuals in the nineteenth century must reckon with the sermons that have survived. Emory University has digitized fifty-seven sermons that were published after the assassination in a digital project called The Martyred President: Sermons Given on the Occasion of the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln.40 It is, admittedly, a small sample of the sermons delivered after Lincoln’s death, but the collection reflects a diversity of both denominational outlook and sentiment.

While sermons are an opportunity to interpret the effects of the assassination on nineteenth-century citizens, many other primary documents, such as letters, diaries, newspapers, photographs, and objects like mourning ribbons and funeral programs detail how citizens mourned or did not mourn Lincoln. Ford’s Theatre has launched an online project called Remembering Lincoln: A Digital Collection of Responses to His Assassination to collect such material and offer it to the world free of charge. Newspaper articles reflect everything from the details of the assassination to the way Lincoln appeared in his coffin. Objects like a woven hair locket or a portion of the silver fringe that hung from the funeral train testify to the desire of many for something tangible related to the death and funeral of an American icon.41


It was not just Americans, however, who mourned Lincoln’s death. After the assassination, civic groups, local governments, and heads of state from around the world sent letters of condolence to the United States. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum (ALPLM) owns two dozen such letters, but a digitization project at the ALPLM has scanned 455 of them from all over the world and launched a companion website, *Abraham Lincoln: Citizen of the World*, in which visitors can spin a globe to see the location of each letter and read it. In addition, facilitators of the project contacted modern-day counterparts of the letter writers and asked them to send letters reflecting on the meaning of Lincoln’s legacy to their lives in the twenty-first century. To date, the project has received and made available 149 responses on its website as well.42

**Objects Owned by the Lincolns**

During his lifetime, Robert Todd Lincoln was the protector of his father’s legacy. In addition to closely guarding his father’s papers, he also maintained a rich collection of objects that belonged to his parents. When he died, the possessions were divided between his two daughters, who further divided them among their three children. The last living descendants, Robert’s grandchildren—Lincoln Isham and Peggy and Bob Beckwith—gave many of these objects to friends and admirers, as well as to archival facilities.

Today, objects related to Lincoln are spread throughout the country, but with the advent of the digital age, many repositories have made at least part of their Lincoln collections available to the public in digital form.43 Knowing which objects are available and where they are is a boon to museum professionals, who always seem to be planning new exhibitions. Though objects often have a profound impact on our view of the past, they rarely, however, find their way into scholarly monographs.

For instance, in July 1865, just three months after the assassination, scarlet fever broke out at the hotel in Chicago where Mary, Robert, and Tad Lincoln were living. A fellow hotel resident took Tad to her parents’ home north of the city to prevent his catching the disease.

This database brings together the Lincoln collections at the Indiana State Museum and the Allen County Public Library and has developed a particularly accessible online resource.
show her appreciation, Mary gave the woman a gold combination pen-and-pencil that sat on Lincoln’s desk in the White House around the time of his death. In 2011 “Peggy” Davis donated this family treasure to the ALPLM. The ALPLM collection already contained a quill pen that sat on Lincoln’s desk in the White House the night he died. Born in a log cabin, he had less than a year of formal education, yet by the end of his life he was living in the Executive Mansion and was among the most powerful men in the world. These two extremes—where he came from and what he achieved—were represented on his desk in the form of two writing utensils—one made from a crude goose quill, the other of fourteen-karat-gold. To Lincoln, the opportunity to rise was the quintessential meaning of America, and because slavery denied a man that right, he hated that form of bondage. Two objects in the ALPLM collection suggest he had such tangible reminders on his desk in the White House.

If more scholars knew about Lincoln-related objects and the powerful stories behind them, perhaps such material would appear more frequently in Lincoln monographs; increased visibility would both deepen our understanding of Lincoln’s life and possibly bring to life new stories about the objects themselves. Early in 2015 the Smithsonian American Art Museum launched a drive to create a national art database. Fourteen institutions signed on, including the Princeton University Art Museum and the Yale Center for British Art. I envision a similar project that could unite, in a digital database, all the Lincoln-related objects in one place. A broader project could also include such Lincolniana as prints, broadsides, cartoons, song sheets, statuary, and associated memorabilia.

Chronicling Illinois

Though we are still in the early stages of the digital revolution, many significant resources are available online, and the future only promises to include more. As digital technology evolves, we are limited only by our imaginations. For instance, eighty-one years ago, Randall suggested that Lincoln scholars could advance partly by “collateral

attacks: full-length biographies of those who knew Lincoln would provide valuable insights. He suggested historians start writing biographies of nineteen individuals, including William Herndon, Dennis Hanks, and Leonard Swett. In 1979 Mark Neely suggested more than a dozen additional names. While several of the figures have since received biographical treatment, the life stories of others are yet to be written. The value of these biographies for Lincoln studies, however, lies mostly in their subjects’ interactions with Lincoln, such as the political missions he sent them on, the correspondence shared with colleagues and their wives that offer insight into their unique relationships with Lincoln, and the many roles they played in supporting Lincoln’s climb to the top and maintaining his power during the presidency. While the papers of these collateral figures are scattered all over the United States, a massive digital project could unite the papers of all these Lincoln allies in a fully searchable database. The result would add depth to our understanding of mid-nineteenth-century party politics and to how Lincoln managed patronage, utilized his friends to achieve political ends, navigated the dissolution of the Whig Party, and juggled the disparate factions of the Republican Party.

There are digital projects already achieving some of these goals. The Center for Digital Initiatives at the ALPLM is making selected items from the library’s manuscript and audiovisual departments and all of the library’s finding aids available to the public through its website Chronicling Illinois. In addition, the project has digitized and cataloged more than ten thousand documents from the Yates Family Papers, which includes the Papers of Richard Yates, the Civil War-era governor of Illinois. It has also collaborated with Wabash College to digitize an additional four thousand Yates items. The project has launched an initiative to transcribe the documents using the work of volunteers from all over the world. To date, their Web 2.0 crowdsourcing initiative has transcribed more than thirty-two hundred of the documents, making them fully keyword searchable. In addition to this work, the project has digitized Lincoln’s hometown

46. Randall, “Has the Lincoln Theme Been Exhausted?,” 289–90.
newspaper, the *Sangamo Journal*, from its inception in 1831 through the Civil War. The images are available free of charge through the *Illinois Digital Newspaper Collections*, hosted by the University of Illinois. Now researchers can access the newspaper that chronicled Lincoln’s political career anywhere they have an Internet connection.

**The Papers of Abraham Lincoln**

Since 1953, researchers have had access to the transcribed and annotated *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*; however, the resource has its limitations. For instance, the collection restricts itself to transcriptions and does not include images of the documents themselves. In addition, scores of new documents have surfaced during the ensuing sixty-two years. Moreover, material from Lincoln’s legal career and much material from his legislative and congressional career are absent. Perhaps most concerning to researchers, the collection does not include any of Lincoln’s incoming correspondence.

The Papers of Abraham Lincoln has launched an incredibly ambitious documentary editing project. Not only are they planning to make high-quality digital scans of every document Lincoln wrote or received, they are also transcribing, annotating, and cross-referencing the documents to make the collection especially useful to researchers. They envision a database that may grow to include a staggering two hundred thousand documents.

The project has already enjoyed success. The Papers of Abraham Lincoln has reimagined and greatly expanded on the Abraham Lincoln Association’s *Lincoln Day by Day*, a project launched more than seventy-five years ago. Rebranded *The Lincoln Log: A Daily Chronology of the Life of Abraham Lincoln*, it is a freely accessible, comprehensive, online database that tracks Lincoln’s known activities on each day of his life, complete with hyperlinks to primary documents when available. In addition to creating and sharing this powerful research tool, the project has made new connections between documents. For instance, in 2009, while scanning documents at the University of Chicago, editors found a fragment of paper with math problems on one side and a series of questions and answers on the verso. Having

noticed the fragment fit neatly with a smaller fragment scanned earlier at Brown University, they digitally stitched the two documents together, restoring the context of a near complete page of Lincoln’s copybook, one of the earliest Lincoln documents in existence, dating from the mid-1820s.\textsuperscript{54}

By including the scores of new Lincoln documents that have come to light, his voluminous incoming correspondence, digital copies of the letters themselves, authoritative transcriptions of and annotations for approximately two hundred thousand documents, along with biographies of correspondents, the Papers of Abraham Lincoln will provide users with a research experience that has the power to transform the field. Powerful mapping technology might allow researchers to plot out the locations of the people who corresponded with Lincoln; one might assume there would be a correlation between geography and subject matter or public opinion, for instance. A sophisticated search engine would surely allow researchers to separate Lincoln’s correspondence on the basis of gender, time period, subject matter, and so forth. Of course, much of what we might find buried in Lincoln’s correspondence is difficult to imagine because researchers have never before had the ability to organize this treasure trove of research material, but the possibilities seem endless.

Conclusion

Robert Todd Lincoln lived long enough to see perhaps the greatest monument to his father, the Lincoln Memorial, dedicated in 1922. When he saw the memorial, he is said to have remarked, “Isn’t it beautiful?”\textsuperscript{55} Millions since then have entered the hall and come face to face with Lincoln on a grandiose scale—seated but still nineteen feet tall, bathed in marble, and flanked by the words of his two greatest speeches—the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural. The space was designed for visitors from all over the world to enter freely, read his words, and quietly contemplate the meaning of Lincoln’s life and legacy.

Today, researchers are creating a new, twenty-first-century Lincoln Memorial. Instead of building a Greek temple to contain a marble


statue, researchers are using digital technology to construct virtual archives filled with primary documents that will be accessible, free of charge, to a worldwide audience. The goal today is perhaps similar to the one envisioned by the architects of the original Lincoln Memorial. By pairing the primary documents that reveal Lincoln’s life with powerful digital tools that have the potential to help researchers find patterns in the data, the world will have a greater ability than ever before to interpret the meaning of Lincoln’s life for themselves.