“Home Is the Martyr”:
The Burial of Abraham Lincoln
and the Fate of Illinois’s Capital

JEREMY PRICHARD

Abraham Lincoln’s assassination and burial have attracted broad interest from both professional and novice historians alike.¹ Authors of books and articles still find new ways of probing these subjects, many of them spurred by the recent sesquicentennial ceremonies commemorating the two episodes.² The 150th anniversaries also encouraged the public to relive these historic events, from the funeral services at Washington, D.C., and Springfield, Illinois, to events in other cities along the funeral train’s 1865 passage.³ At Springfield, Lincoln’s self-described home, nearly seven thousand visitors and local residents participated in the various citywide events in April and May of 2015 that culminated in the funeral reenactment at Oak Ridge Cemetery. Local businesses profited from the large turnout, and those in attendance experienced a connection with the past similar to that of one visitor from southern Illinois: “Even though it’s been 150 years, it was

¹. The author thanks Jonathan Earle, Sheyda Jahanbani, James Cornelius, Neil Oatsvall, and the anonymous readers for their thoughtful comments throughout the various stages of this manuscript. Credit also goes to Tricia Barbagallo for conducting research at the New York State Library on my behalf.


moving. I got goose bumps when I saw the hearse. I don’t know how to describe it. It was pretty cool.”

And yet, despite the widespread fascination surrounding Abraham Lincoln’s death, many questions linger regarding the process and motivations of his burial in Springfield. Among those are the following: Why did the community, only half of which approved of his presidency, rally behind the city’s efforts to bring his remains home for interment? Why, after promised his bones, were local leaders and residents initially insistent on laying Lincoln’s body near the city’s center and raising a monument over it? And why, after the funeral, did Mary Lincoln continue to threaten removal of her dead husband’s corpse outside the region, forcing the community to accept Oak Ridge Cemetery as Abraham Lincoln’s final resting place? The answers to these queries reveal that Lincoln’s assassination coincided with uncertainty about Springfield’s economic future, particularly the city’s efforts to preserve its state capital designation. The president’s death provided this community with a unique opportunity to reverse its precarious situation: Lincoln could save Springfield in death, just as he had helped save the Union in life. Unfortunately, for Springfield and its leaders, these lofty visions nearly lost them Lincoln’s bones altogether, perhaps leaving unresolved the fate of the martyred president’s hometown.

“Never Did a People Make History So Fast”

When the sad tidings of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln were conveyed upon the wings of the telegraph to all parts of America on the morning of April 15, 1865, there was no place where it fell with such crushing weight as in the city of Springfield, where his trials and triumphs were personally known to all.

—John Carroll Power, Abraham Lincoln: His Great Funeral Cortege, from Washington City to Springfield, Illinois, 1872

On a calm and sunny May morning, three weeks after the most notorious assassination in American history, the body of Abraham Lincoln returned home. Gathered at the Chicago and Alton Railroad Depot

on the third to welcome his remains back to Springfield was a somber crowd of roughly forty thousand—four times the size of the city’s 1860 population, and four hundred times the number who bade him and his family farewell in 1861. Trainloads of visitors continued pouring in the following day, and it was estimated 150,000 people were in town for the funeral services. Springfield was where Lincoln owned his only home and raised a family, a place, he professed before departing in 1861, “I owe all that I have.” The city has since associated its history with the legacy of America’s sixteenth president, and nearly one million tourists descend on the Illinois capital annually to visit Lincoln’s tomb and other landmarks commemorating the man. Lincoln is one of the most iconic figures in American history, but as John Carroll Power’s quote demonstrates, his legacy in Springfield—past and present—is without parallel.

In reality, Lincoln’s relationship with the place he called home before his assassination was significantly more complex than the one portrayed today. For one, he was far from the townspeople’s overwhelming choice for the nation’s highest elected office. Of the city’s 2,721 ballots cast during the 1860 presidential election, Lincoln bested fellow Illinoisan Stephen A. Douglas by a mere sixty-nine votes, barely 51 percent of the town’s popular vote. He won by a smaller margin in 1864—ten votes—against George B. McClellan, a former U.S. Army general with relatively few ties to the Prairie State. Lincoln had even less support outside the city limits, losing the popular vote each time in his own Sangamon County. And though Lincoln won reelection in 1864, the community remained split over his reputation in the months before his untimely death, even within his own Republican Party. Not only that, Springfield at times exemplified the northern political discord of the Civil War era. As the state capital, the city was a

political battleground where the fate of Illinois’s continued wartime participation was repeatedly contested.

Unlike those parts of the North that harbored excessively hostile antiwar attitudes, Springfield’s Democratic Party in general supported the war to end the rebellion. They objected only when the Lincoln administration tied other measures—especially emancipation and equal rights for black people—into the conflict’s overall mission. Dissent strengthened when Union army setbacks filled newspaper columns and reinforced the Democratic view that abolishing slavery only made the soldiers’ task tougher, a reaction shared by many sections of the North.8 In the 1862 midterm election, Springfield’s John T. Stuart—the president’s cousin-in-law, first law partner, former Whig ally, and self-described “intimate friend”—won his district’s U.S. congressional seat as a Democrat campaigning against emancipation, despite vowing that he “would rather aid than embarrass” his longtime acquaintance in the White House pursuing the Confederacy’s demise.9 But this was a minority view within the local party. Most Springfield Democrats preferred that someone other than their neighbor-in-chief occupy the Executive Mansion. At the height of the 1864 presidential campaign, one attendee at a Democratic rally in town—blocks away from Lincoln’s house—carried a sign that read, “We want a man for President, and not a clown who now presides in Washington.”10

In every election between 1860 and 1865, from the presidential contest to the race for local alderman, Springfield Republicans fought vigorously to maintain control over “Lincoln’s Home” while Democrats labored equally as hard to seize it. When Republicans triumphed at the polls, however minimal their success, the sympathetic Daily Illinois State Journal proudly proclaimed, “The home of Lincoln stands true to the Government.”11 When Democrats prevailed, the rival Daily Illinois State Register ran stories reaffirming the community’s political

8. For context on how this sentiment compared with Democratic attitudes across the state, see Bruce Tap, “Race, Rhetoric, and Emancipation: The Election of 1862 in Illinois,” Civil War History 39, no. 2 (June 1993), 101–25.


allegiance to the party with headlines such as “Let the Word Go Out That ‘Lincoln’s Home’ Is Sound” or “the Home of Lincoln Condemns the Proclamation.” On the eve of the 1864 presidential election, the Register urged its readers to action: “Let us carry the home of Old Abe for McClellan. . . . Up boys, and at ‘em! And when the whole city is polled, abolitionism will be completely squelched in Springfield!”

The war’s denouement in early April 1865 gradually began the process of uniting the citizenry. Sarah Gregg, “head matron” of the Camp Butler hospital six miles northeast of the city noted in her April 3 journal entry that the weather’s gloom “is dispelled by the news that Richmond and Petersburg were taken by Grant’s army. The cannon are booming in Springfield and the soldiers running around camp and cheering as though they were crazy, with the flags flying at every headquarters.”

From the governor’s mansion, Richard Oglesby explained that the secretary of war’s dispatch “has electrified our people” as residents began “fireing salutes over the restoration of the Union, and the hearts of our people are throbbing in unison with the reverberation of Grants Artillery.” Celebrations continued through the evening, and city leaders scheduled a formal parade for April 10 to mark the occasion.

On the day of the planned celebration prairie residents received even better news: “VICTORY! LEE SURRENDERED.” Local historian John Power recalled the scene in Springfield resembling a national holiday as “business houses and private residences vied with each other in their display of patriotic emblems.” That afternoon the Pioneer Fire Company launched a last-minute parade unaffiliated with the already scheduled official demonstration. Around the public square, an escorted mule carried a dummy figure clasping a placard that read “Jeff. Davis’ last ride” on the front and “Lee’s End” on the back. In an effort to both acknowledge Lincoln’s historic role in the ceremonies and connect the man to his Illinois home, parade organizers trotted the president’s former horse “Old Bob” in the procession. Bands played through the evening, interrupted only by an occasional impromptu speech or harangue. From Athens Township just outside Springfield,

13. “The Wartime Diary of Mrs. Sarah Gregg,” April 3, 1865, Sarah Gregg Collection, ALPLM.
farmer John Edward Young heard “one continual roar” of cannon, firearms, and patriotic tunes. “Everybody is crased with joy and delight and drunk with excitement,” he reported. Teenage Democrat Anna Ridgely concurred, merely “glad and happy at the prospect of the termination of this awful war.” As one historian put it, “Springfield went to bed drunk with joy.”

Or so one might assume. Not everyone celebrated freely, in fact. As president and commander in chief, Lincoln received a sizable share of credit for ending the war. There were therefore consequences for anyone in Springfield who had been critical of the administration’s handling of the conflict at every step, most notably the Democratic State Register. Furthermore, with a city election scheduled for the following day, wartime partisanship ultimately spilled into the Independence Day atmosphere generated by Lee’s surrender and split the postparade celebrations into separate affairs, with Republicans congregating in front of the statehouse and Democrats moving their festivities to the courthouse. Making matters worse, a group of soldiers tore down the speakers’ platform at the Democratic site and used the wood for a bonfire. Not even mutual satisfaction over the war’s ending could overcome the profound partisanship endured in the previous four years of war.

News later that week began to change the scene. The first reports of President Lincoln’s assassination reached Springfield by telegraph around three o’clock on the morning of April 15. He was officially declared dead a few hours later, after which “all the churches and fire bells [in town] tolled the death knell.” Every place of business closed while crowds swarmed local telegraph stations, waiting and hoping for updates that might contradict earlier reports. Barely had excitement over Confederate defeat subsided before euphoria gave way to “a day of unparalleled gloom,” Anna Ridgely wrote in her journal—“Such a day of gloom I think I never saw.” Soldiers at Camp Butler mourned for days, Gregg noted, and “every one feels as though they

had lost a father.” 20 John Carroll Power recalled “there was no place where” Lincoln’s assassination “fell with such crushing weight as in the city of Springfield.” 21 The city’s postmaster, John Armstrong, agreed: “Never did a people make history so fast, never did a people pass a week of such extremes of joy and sorrow, the Imortal Lincoln is Dead.” 22 In a special Saturday printing of the State Register, even the Democratic editor described Lincoln as “the kindly and indulgent man, beloved by his neighbors” and lamented Springfield’s “loss of the genial and kindly neighbor we once knew so well.” 23

These last three comments highlighted a developing theme demonstrating the town’s collective grief during this national tragedy. Lincoln’s death cemented his national martyrdom, and his emergence as the “Savior of the Union”—combined with a concerted effort to downplay his other common designation as the “Great Emancipator”—erased all prior resentment his hometown ever held against him. His passing largely united the politically divided Springfield community, even though the sudden reverence of area Democrats astonished some Republicans. 24 No wonder residents embraced the

20. Wartime Diary, April 16, 1865, Gregg Collection.
22. John Armstrong to Hon. William Marsh, esq., May 7, 1865, John Armstrong Collection, ALPLM.
23. “The National Calamity,” Daily Illinois State Register, April 15, 1865. “As is known, President Lincoln was not our first choice,” the editor wrote three days later, “but we have watched his recent course and are convinced that his energies were given to restore peace to the country and union to the nation.” Daily Illinois State Register, April 18, 1865, quoted in Power, Abraham Lincoln, 129.
24. “One of the most striking signs of the times is to be found in the remarkable conversions which have taken place since the assassination of President Lincoln. . . . How deep and poignant must be the sorrow of those who, only a few months ago, denounced Abraham Lincoln, in the language of the assassin Booth, as a ‘tyrant’ and ‘usurper,’ we leave our readers to imagine.” “Remarkable Conversions,” Daily Illinois State Journal, May 2, 1865. This phenomenon was not strictly a Springfield development. Across the country, historian John Barr argues, “By identifying him as a martyr-saint in the immediate aftermath of his assassination, the majority of Americans willfully and collectively forgot the controversies and hatred that surrounded the sixteenth president in his lifetime.” Loathing Lincoln: An American Tradition from the Civil War to the Present (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014), 57.

This was especially true in Springfield, as funeral organizers emphasized Lincoln’s role in preserving the nation at the expense of highlighting any connection he had to ending slavery. By minimizing the local black reaction during the preparations and actual ceremony—“Colored Persons” took up the rear during the coffin and funeral processions—white Springfield Democrats were more likely to join their Republican neighbors in promoting Lincoln’s legacy. “Obsequies of President Lincoln,” 1865, Lincoln Collection, ALPLM.
last address he gave before his train set off for the White House four years earlier, now reprinted in both newspapers in the wake of his death: “I must leave you—for how long I know not. Friends, one and all, I must now bid you an affectionate farewell.”

“He Was One of Us”

In following days, store- and homeowners lucky enough to procure black fabric and bunting in the area outfitted their dwellings in all manner of the materials, while a dark banner waved at half-mast from the flagpole atop the dome of the statehouse. Springfield “‘put on sack cloth and ashes’ and went into mourning,” recalled Edward Merritt, “for Abraham Lincoln, her beloved citizen, was dead.”

The “whole city presented a funereal aspect, as if the Death Angel had taken a member from every family,” explained the State Journal reporter. “Never was there a day of such universal solemnity and sadness seen.”

This collective mood strengthened in the ensuing days and weeks. Democratic mayor J. S. Vredenburgh ordered an emergency session of the city council the morning of the fifteenth, underlining in his notice, “We of this City have special cause to mourn, for he was one of us.” Not long after, a city alderman proposed a civic meeting on the steps of the Capitol building at noon “for the purpose of arranging to make the sorrowful occasion a proper one.” In addition to citizens at large, the invitation specifically requested the presence of some of the city’s most recognized and influential individuals: well-known Springfieldians with ties to all branches of Illinois government; residents with national political experience, including local Democrats who had campaigned against Lincoln; Springfield’s business elite; and the city’s top attorneys, counting all three of Lincoln’s former law partners.

The hundreds that gathered around the statehouse expected words of comfort as well as information on how the city planned to observe the moment. Shelby M. Cullom, a Republican ally of Lincoln’s and the Springfield district’s newest U.S. representative, called the ad hoc


28. Records of the First Presbyterian Church, page 3, Lincoln Memorial folder, box 5, ALPLM; “Public Meeting,” April 15, 1865, Lincoln Collection, ALPLM.
meeting to order and offered a few opening remarks: “We are met together to mourn over a great calamity. Abraham Lincoln, your fellow citizen, who went out from this city four years ago, called by the American people to preside over the nation, is now no more.” Next, John T. Stuart, who lost his congressional seat to Cullom in 1864 but would ultimately lead the effort to bury and raise a monument of Lincoln in Springfield, read a list of resolutions reinforcing the former president’s connection to the community, stressing that “his neighbors and friends, without distinction of party” had forgotten past differences after “the unexampled success of our arms” and now stood united behind Lincoln’s “policy of restoration and union.”

The resolutions further tasked the city council to coordinate with the Illinois governor “a view of bringing hither his remains for interment.” Stuart then relayed to the grief-stricken mass his visit to the White House two weeks earlier. Pressing Lincoln about plans after leaving office, the president confirmed to Stuart his expectation “to go back and make my home in Springfield for the rest of my life.”

State Journal raised this same point two days after the assassination, claiming that Lincoln “wished, at the last, to have his body interred here, in the home of his youth, where ‘the most sacred ties of life were assumed.’”31 Other residents also rallied behind this effort and justified their actions on similar conversations Lincoln had had with friends. In 1862 he informed Springfield Baptist minister and former neighbor Noyes W. Miner that he and Mary might do some traveling after the presidency, but that only meant they would “not return immediately to Springfield.”32 Lincoln’s last law partner, William Herndon, fondly recounted the story of the sign outside their shared legal office, narrating Lincoln’s last conversation with his partner before leaving for the White House. “Give our clients to understand that the election of a President makes no change in the firm of Lincoln and Herndon,” the president-elect said, for “if I live I’m coming back some time, and then we’ll go right on practising law as if nothing had ever happened.”33

Not only did residents and town leaders attempt to honor Lincoln’s legacy by associating their community with the martyred president, they also felt entitled to—deserving of, even—some credit for Lincoln’s national fame. In fact, Lincoln stated to the crowd of well-wishers in February 1861 just before departing for the nation’s capital, “To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything.” The Springfield community helped develop and groom this individual, as Lincoln himself apparently attested, and now they intended to take him at his word. They had guided him along in his presidential ambitions, though he garnered only a slender majority of ballots each election. Regardless, the townspeople, with urging from local leaders and the two newspapers, believed it was only appropriate that “this ‘City of the Dead’ should be the final resting place of all that on earth remains of him that is mortal.”34

Incidentally, this effort was already under way in the nation’s capital. Governor Richard Oglesby and a delegation of Illinois politicians arrived in Washington, D.C., on April 14 to personally congratulate their fellow Illinoisan occupying the White House for the rebellion’s recent shattering setbacks. Before the Springfield resolutions reached

them, members of the state’s political leadership met in the Washington chambers of former Illinois governor and current U.S. senator Richard Yates later that morning and likewise concluded to place the remains in “the Capital of the State, so long his residence.” Unable to speak with Mary Lincoln, who remained secluded in her White House room and refused to see all but a select few visitors, Oglesby and a small Illinois faction secured a meeting with Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and presented their case for a Springfield burial. Stanton relayed the request to Mary Lincoln, she ultimately approved, and Oglesby promptly wired the satisfactory news back to city leaders along with word that the funeral train carrying Lincoln’s casket would arrive in Springfield on May 3 after a journey closely retracing the inaugural train’s path.35

At the moment the community learned the burial would take place in Springfield, State Register editor Edward Merritt remarked that the “Capital of Illinois . . . made elaborate preparations for the last offices of the dead. To consummate a becoming tribute of an affectionate people, money, skill, patience, labor, nothing was spared that Springfield’s love offering should be worthy of her great dead.”36 Thus began the course of altering Springfield’s future, even though that process would face further challenges in the weeks ahead.

A Local “Boost”

The most pressing question facing the town was where to bury the remains. Discussed were various options, including Oak Ridge Cemetery, the city’s newest and increasingly preferred burial grounds on the town’s outskirts. But the one suggestion that captured a majority of local support came from Democrat Samuel H. Treat, chief justice of the Illinois Supreme Court, who put forward building a temporary vault on land in the city’s center owned by the prominent Mather family. Not only was this near the commercial and political heart of Springfield, it was also one of the highest points in town. People from nearly every region of the city, perhaps even beyond, would be able to view the vault and a proposed monument built on the spot. Before an announcement was made official, the State Journal determined that the “beautiful square now occupied by the residence of Mrs. Mather” would “probably be selected, as the grounds are singularly

well adapted to the purpose.” Similarly, a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* offered his opinion that “the last resting place of Mr. Lincoln will be the Mecca of millions of people, and for all time the spot will be looked on as almost holy ground.” Its location in the nucleus of Springfield made it “accessible to all classes of people, rich and poor.” Alternatively, he continued, Oak Ridge Cemetery “is distant about three miles, and many times during the year very hard to reach.”

These remarks demonstrate that many in town—Republicans and Democrats, friends and foes of Lincoln alike—had more in mind than properly burying a fallen acquaintance. Understated was a need to promote Springfield’s reputation at a time of growing uncertainty for the city. Earlier that year, a bloc of senators in the state legislature sponsored a bill for the removal of the capital to Peoria. That bill in turn prompted similar bids from other Illinois cities. Therefore, in the three months before Lincoln’s assassination, city leaders grappled with the likelihood that the state capital would be relocated. This was a troubling, though not wholly unexpected, development for Springfield leaders. For five years, town promoters worried their community may have reached its populace peak and become stagnant, or worse, was on the verge of moving in the opposite direction; this despite an imprecise state 1865 census recording a citywide population spike by nearly 60 percent (over five thousand new residents) since 1860. The importance “town fathers” therefore placed on the appropriate location of Lincoln’s remains later that year, even though many still possessed ambivalent views toward him, took on added meaning.

37. “Disposition of the Remains of President Lincoln,” *Daily Illinois State Journal*, April 18, 1865. Speculators also quickly began buying up all available “land surrounding the Mather estate” since “every foot of ground adjacent would have been so much gold.” Not surprisingly, these individuals would soon be frustrated when Lincoln’s remains were placed in Oak Ridge Cemetery. See “From Springfield. The Landsharks Disappointed—Capt. Robert Lincoln—The Appearance of Springfield,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 6, 1865.
39. While sometimes able to account for information that the federal census omitted, state censuses frequently raised questions over accuracy due to their irregularity and the random data they often compiled from state to state. Adding to these suspicious figures, the 1865 records took place with military and war-related personnel streaming in and out of the capital city. Records of the First Presbyterian Church, page 6, Lincoln Memorial folder, box 5, ALPLM. See also J. C. Power, *History of Springfield, Illinois* (Springfield: Illinois State Journal, 1871), 17; *The Charter, with the Several Amendments Thereto; Various State Laws Relating to the City, and the Revised Ordinances of Springfield, Illinois* (Springfield, Illinois: Steam Press of Baker and Phillips, 1865).
also explains why the city’s political and business heads collaborated on this project due to its long-term consequences of positioning their community in an upward trajectory.

Historians refer to this mid-nineteenth century trend as “boost-erism,” and Lincoln’s death occurred at a time when Springfield’s fathers were considering ways to enhance their city. Boosters had a sizeable stake in community expansion and development, sometimes even investing their own time and money. Occurring throughout the frontier and Illinois, boosterism created competitive rivalries with nearby towns and cities. Lincoln was himself a part of this movement. In 1837 he aided in securing the state capital’s removal from Vandalia to Springfield. Afterward, he served as a local trustee and a state legislator with promises of advancing the city’s development. The new capital indeed experienced remarkable growth after becoming the seat of Illinois government. Its centralized location in the state made it a convenient site for conventions, associations, and various Illinois gatherings, political and otherwise. Similarly, an influx of residents and expanded transportation options—most prominently in 1854, when the Illinois Central Railroad connected Springfield to the robust Chicago market—opened new and exciting economic prospects for the largely agricultural community, so much so that one researcher concluded there was an “opportunity to grow” in 1850s Springfield.

Around the time Lincoln left for the White House, however, city leaders had reason for concern. While Illinois as a whole saw its population balloon in the 1850s and 1860s, earning it the unofficial motto the “Empire State of the West,” most of this surge occurred in cities such as Chicago, Quincy, and Peoria. Industrial growth in these areas on the

40. For an excellent example of boosterism, see Don Harrison Doyle, *The Social Order of a Frontier Community: Jacksonville, Illinois, 1825–70* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 18, 225–26. Doyle’s work analyzes the growth and development of Jacksonville, a town thirty miles west of Springfield. He follows the efforts of local boosters to create—but ultimately fail to build—a large city in the emerging Midwest. To achieve this end, boosters set their respective communities against others in the area with the goal of obtaining one or more of such institutions as the state capital, a state asylum, a county seat, railroad lines, and a state university. Any of these, the logic went, guaranteed future stability and possible growth for a city or town.


eve of the sectional conflict provided more job opportunities for those settling in the Prairie State. The Illinois communities of Bloomington, Aurora, Rockford, and Galesburg each had fewer residents than Springfield but still nearly doubled in population between 1860 and 1870.\textsuperscript{43} Illinois’s capital, on the other hand, experienced comparatively minimal growth and “had not grown in anything like its due proportion to the State,” according to local historian John Carroll Power. Along with that, Power continued, the confines of the statehouse in Springfield could no longer accommodate the state’s rapid growth. The increased size of Illinois’s government “had outgrown its public buildings so much that its records were unsafe, and many branches of its official business had to be transacted in rented buildings, where much of its valuable property was exposed at all times to the dangers of destruction by fire.”\textsuperscript{44}

While the country lurched toward disunion, local boosters agonized over how to attract new residents while preventing current ones from moving elsewhere. In 1861, less than one decade after Springfield leaders successfully secured the transfer of a Lutheran university from nearby Hillsboro, a steady flow of weak financial contributions had put the school in a “crisis” with the probability “it will be removed from our midst.”\textsuperscript{45} Recurring droughts in the region likewise hurt an economy still largely tethered to agriculture. The war years similarly brought mixed results. Local businesses profited from wartime mobilization, and the opening of a munitions factory shortly after the surrender of Fort Sumter provided employment opportunities for local women and children whose husbands, fathers, and sons served in uniform. The federal government’s forced closure of the facility after only seven months of operation upset many in the community, from those who anticipated its projected value to the local economy after war’s end to those who depended on the factory’s wages to sustain their families. The war also stunted city development and growth during the four years of fighting, chiefly because of transient soldiers who vandalized and at times disrupted Springfield daily life. These circumstances—compared with other Illinois communities experiencing rapid population growth and benefiting economically from


\textsuperscript{44} Power, History of Springfield, 17–18.

industry and business tied to the nation’s conflict—put the capital city’s fate at risk and local leaders on alert.  

Few state legislators raised the subject of relocating the capital during the war, especially since the city had proven itself a capable military headquarters. Yet in January 1865, with Union military victory virtually assured, state lawmakers returned to the demand for new quarters. “All know what the reasons for moving the Capital were,” one state senator announced after the bill’s introduction, while another added that he “did not care where they took it provided they removed it immediately.” These comments reflected the sentiments of many Illinoisans, whether or not they possessed political connections, that Springfield was unbecoming of a state capital. Guests affiliated with the legislature regularly bewailed the lack of city upkeep; its hotels were deemed “inferior” in relation to their “exorbitant charges”; it was, according to one visitor in 1865, “a most abominably hateful place.” The city, according to the Chicago Tribune, had succumbed to the dismal fate of once-respectable towns granted the statehouse: a population that had forsaken its “former character of honest industry” and whose economy now relied disproportionately on “boarding the Legislature a few months of the year and the public officials the remainder.”

While the proposed bill of relocating the capital surprised few in Springfield, it still commanded everyone’s attention. In early February 1865, State Journal owner Edward L. Baker informed his partner William Bailhache, currently serving as a quartermaster for the U.S. Army, “The Capital is still here but there is a devil of a pressure to take it from us.” One merchant even took advantage of the headline-grabbing topic by incorporating it into the following advertisement:

“THE REMOVAL OF THE STATE CAPITAL.—While everybody’s mind seems to be agitated on the all absorbing topic of the day—the
removal of the State Capital—we take pleasure in allaying the fears of the timid by assuring them that the project can not meet with success, and the State Capital must remain where it is, for our wise legislators must know that nowhere in the State can they be so well and reasonably supplied with good and fashionable Clothing and Furnishing Goods as at the large and well known establishment of Wolf & Bergman, North side Public Square, next door to National Bank.”

Joking aside, the city realized the sincerity of these relocation attempts. Not long after the assembly announced the removal bill, the editor of the State Journal expressed his reassurance that property owners in town had “at last aroused from their Rip Van Winkle sleep” and set in motion a bill to incorporate the Springfield Hotel Company. “Several public spirited and wealthy individuals . . . are beginning to take pride in the prosperity of our city,” the editor cheerfully concluded, “and are willing to use their means for its advancement.”

But had it come too late?

This was the setting in Lincoln’s hometown before the momentous national events of that following April, and why his eventual death meant more than simply honoring the “Savior of the Union” or appeasing the town’s sense of entitlement. Lincoln’s tragic passing also brought an unintended sense of hope. The city’s fate was in jeopardy, and securing the slain president’s final resting spot might bolster Springfield’s reputation and make it an attractive option when the state legislature determined where to build the new Capitol building. And while possessing Lincoln’s remains and retaining the capital were obviously the town leaders’ preferred outcomes, the city might still bear the loss of the new statehouse only if his bones could be returned for burial.

52. The city council presented its application for a new statehouse—to be located on the Mather lot—to the General Assembly in 1867. State legislators selected Springfield’s proposal on February 24, 1867, and construction began later that year. Workers completed the project in 1888. For more on the subject, see John Moses, Illinois, Historical and Statistical, 2 vols. (Chicago: Fergus, 1892), 2:768.
glimping a monument, and its close proximity to the railroad “would be convenient of access to visitors,” a point not lost on community boosters in their quest to draw tourism to the region. Illinois’s first two capitals, Kaskaskia and Vandalia, struggled to attract new residents after the legislature left town. To avoid a similar fate, Springfield’s fathers began associating their insecure city with the martyr Lincoln.

The primary group behind this effort was the newly organized National Lincoln Monument Association. Officially formed April 24, 1865, and composed of Lincoln’s former political and personal friends—self-described men “who had long known, loved and honored him living” —the fifteen members took on fund-raising responsibilities for the eventual tomb. Not every individual was a Springfield resident, but all agreed that the Illinois capital deserved the opportunity to house a national shrine to the “Savior of the Union.”

After a committee charged with selecting the grounds for interment unanimously approved the Mather lot proposal, the community promptly raised $50,000 for the land “and other lots adjoining” while the city council appropriated an additional $20,000, primarily from bonds, to cover the funeral expenses. A local mason and bricklayer even offered to construct the vault free of charge. This most historical burial was also an opportunity to present the capital city’s attractive features while highlighting Lincoln’s deep connection to the community. In addition to the two prospective burial sites, funeral arrangement advisers created several committees charged with beautifying and appropriately attiring the town ahead of the tremendous throng expected to descend on Springfield. Without surprise, volunteers paid


54. Minute Book, April 24, 1865, National Lincoln Monument Association (microfilm), 2, ALPLM. My thanks to Glenna Schroeder-Lein for locating this collection and informing me that it had been reproduced on microfilm.


55. Springfield, Ill., City Council Bond Register, 1837–1886, & City Ordinances for Bond Issues (n.d.), 96; Records of the First Presbyterian Church, page 5, Lincoln Memorial Folder, box 5, ALPLM; “President Lincoln’s Last Resting Place—the Ground Selected,” Daily Illinois State Journal, April 21, 1865; “From Springfield. Arrangements for the Final Obsequies,” Chicago Tribune, April 26, 1865.
most attention to the former Lincoln Home and the statehouse. The latter, an edifice that state lawmakers only months earlier derided as inadequate, was strikingly adorned and “draped for the solemn occasion from foundation to dome.”56 As volunteers furiously labored to meet the rapid deadline, word quickly spread that many of those plans would need to be changed or scrapped altogether. As it turns out, nobody had considered where Mary Lincoln expected to see her dead husband laid to rest.

“Battle of the Gravesite”

The widowed First Lady was, naturally, still despondent in the wake of the assassination. She absented herself from the planned memorial service in Washington on April 19 and again refused to leave her bed when the Funeral Train set off from the nation’s capital two days later. Despite urging from her eldest son and others, Mary had no desire “to go back to Springfield.”57 As a result, Mary initially preferred to see her deceased husband buried in either one of two places: the empty crypt prepared for George Washington’s body located in the U.S. Capitol, or somewhere in Chicago, her next home after departing the White House.58 She granted a Springfield burial after reassurances from city leaders there that the remains of their son Willie, who died in the White House in February 1862, would accompany the traveling party and be interred there as well. When she settled on Springfield, Mary Lincoln’s main concern was that her immediate family—her husband, herself, and her sons—would eventually be buried together.59

She nearly reversed her decision upon discovering Springfield leaders intended to place Lincoln’s corpse in a specially designed tomb in the town’s center. Mary Lincoln understood that the vault (and the eventual monument raised over it) would contain only her husband’s remains, thus separated from her and their children. This was, of course, the design of Springfield’s leaders. What others have referred

to as the “Battle of the Gravesite” was a contest over Lincoln’s body and, consequently, the rights to his legacy. Residents believed they had a civic right to the martyr’s remains, particularly since they had molded the man into the virtuous icon he would become in death. Mary countered that, as widow, she should ultimately determine the final resting place of her dead spouse, a socially accepted norm at the time. Thus ensued the contest over Abraham Lincoln’s bones.60

In contrast to the expectations circulating around Springfield over where to bury Abraham Lincoln, Mary Lincoln had a different recollection of her husband’s preferred funeral arrangements. In a private moment they each shared while visiting Virginia toward the end of the war, Abraham gestured toward a peaceful spot of land along the James River and said to his wife, “You are younger than I, and you will survive me. When I am gone, lay my remains in some quiet place like this.” Not only did Oak Ridge fit this description, but Mary also referred to this particular conversation—similar to what Springfield leaders had done—to prove Abraham Lincoln entrusted his wife to select his appropriate final resting place. In fact, she partly agreed to a Springfield burial since Oak Ridge Cemetery’s rural features contrasted with the bustle of the downtown district. Finally, Oak Ridge Cemetery could hold her entire family—three of whom were now dead—together again at some point.61 Mary’s directives were simple: if Springfield wanted her late husband’s remains, she would determine their placement. “Lincoln might be Springfield’s local hero and Illinois’s first President,” historian Jean H. Baker pointed out, “but he was Mary Todd’s husband.”62


61. Robert Lincoln, the only son to reach adulthood, was buried in Arlington National Cemetery per his widow’s demands. The Lincolns’ second son, Edward, died in 1850 just shy of his fourth birthday and was buried in Springfield’s Hutchinson Cemetery, a few blocks from the Lincoln home. Little Eddie’s remains joined Willie’s and his father’s in the temporary vault in 1865, roughly the same time other bodies were removed from Hutchinson Cemetery and reinterred in Oak Ridge Cemetery. Harry E. Pratt, “Little Eddie Lincoln—’We Miss Him Very Much,’” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 47, no. 3 (Autumn 1954), 304–5.

Five days before the funeral train’s scheduled arrival in Springfield, Mary enlisted the help of her closest family and friends to make her intentions clear. From Washington, D.C., her cousin John B. S. Todd sent a telegraph to John T. Stuart, de facto head of the Monument Association, expressing her fixed determination “that the remains of the President shall be deposited in Oak Ridge Cemetery, and nowhere else—see that this is done.” Todd sent a follow-up warning to Stuart two days later with nearly the same wording and, for good measure, sent another message to Clark M. Smith, Springfield storeowner and Mary’s brother-in-law, reiterating her demand “that the remains of the President are placed in the vault of Oak Ridge Cemetery and nowhere else.” She also coaxed Anson G. Henry, her personal physician and one of the few Springfield friends to stay beside her after the assassination, to write a letter echoing those sentiments as well as offering her first threat: “If her wishes and directions in regard to her Husband’s remains are not complied with, she will remove them to Chicago next June,” lining up with her planned move there. As her biographers and others have noted, Mary Lincoln refused to bow to Springfield’s male cabal masking itself as the self-professed National Lincoln Monument Association.

What those same historians overlook, however, is an attempt to understand how her demands obstructed the city’s vision of a more prosperous future. Already up against a swift timeline before the funeral train’s arrival, these messages put the Monument Association in an unenviable predicament. After receiving the first telegraph, John T. Stuart replied to secretary of war Edwin Stanton on April 29 that its members “instruct me to say that the wishes of Mrs. Lincoln shall be complied with.” Burial preparations immediately shifted to Oak Ridge, but the immense number of tasks added by the location change proved impracticable. Therefore, the next day, Stuart wired back that progress on the Mather lot tomb had in fact “gone too far to

63. John B. S. Todd to John T. Stuart, April 28, April 30, John B. S. Todd to Clark M. Smith, May 1, 1865, John B. S. Todd Collection, ALPLM; Anson G. Henry to John Williams, May 1, 1865, Anson G. Henry Collection, ALPLM.


be changed,” and it was best to stick with the original plans. Springfield’s newly sworn-in mayor moreover suspended “all work, and preparations in Oak Ridge Cemetery for the reception of the mortal remains of our late President Abraham Lincoln, until further orders.” This prompted the above-mentioned letter-writing campaign on Mary Lincoln’s behalf insisting that arrangements “must be changed” or the city jeopardized its chances of acquiring Lincoln’s remains at all.66

The Monument Association instead modified its strategy. First, the group conceded to Mary Lincoln’s requirement to hold the funeral ceremony at Oak Ridge but then planned to transfer the tomb to the Mather land and follow through with its original plans. Unfortunately for its members, the Lincoln family got wind of this ploy. Three days before the funeral, Robert Lincoln wired Governor Oglesby the following message:

There seems to be a disposition at Springfield to disregard my mother’s wishes in regard to the interment. Both the temporary and final interment must take place in the Oak Ridge Cemetery. We have reasons for not wishing to use the Mather place for either purpose and we expect and demand that our wishes be consulted.67

The Monument Association again begrudgingly agreed “that the Oak Ridge Cemetery at Springfield be the permanent burial place.”68

But there had been no mention of the monument, so the group next conspired entombing the remains at Oak Ridge yet still raising the great memorial on the Mather spot. Its members continued collecting funds “under the impression that the proposed monument is to be public,” displayed in an open space such as a downtown area, and


67. Robert T. Lincoln to Richard J. Oglesby, May 1, 1865, Lincoln Collection, ALPLM. Robert originally had to persuade his mother to lay his father’s remains in Springfield instead of Chicago. She conceded, but only on condition that she determine their precise placement in town. I have uncovered no other explanation for why Mary Lincoln felt so strongly against the Mather Lot burial, other than it would hold only her husband’s remains. The closest evidence that the former First Lady had ulterior motives can be found in Hannah Lamb Palmer’s account. In 1922 she wrote that progress on the Mather land halted “when Mrs. Lincoln interfered for personal reasons.” John M. Palmer, “The Illinois State Capitol Grounds,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 15 (Oct. 1922–Jan. 1923).

not in a private cemetery. Furthermore, some affluent speculators had purchased lots in the square solely to reap the financial spoils from the expected economic windfall awaiting the region. Losing out on those purported profits that the Mather location offered was too risky to consider. Therefore, the Monument Association actually determined it improper to build “a National Monument to Mr. Lincoln upon” the private grounds at Oak Ridge Cemetery.69

Not only that, Springfield leaders publicly rebutted claims that the downtown premises lacked similar bucolic features as at Oak Ridge. The Monument Association, like many in the community, was certainly aware of the national trend away from inner-city burial sites in favor of rural cemeteries. Nothing better illustrated that recognition than James C. Conkling’s dedication of Oak Ridge Cemetery’s opening in 1860, an event Springfield’s most prominent citizens attended, including Abraham and Mary Lincoln. In his address, Conkling emphasized the openness and natural element of the new grounds. The project also attracted widespread local support by connecting with the city’s booster efforts. “Far away from the haunts of busy life; far distant from the ceaseless rush of active enterprise; far removed from the giddy whirl of fashion [and] folly,” the area was the most appropriate setting for “the City of the Dead.”70 Not five years later, Lincoln’s death proved an exception to this worthy farewell. Conkling, a former Springfield mayor and original member of the Monument Association, voted unanimously with his associates to house all that remained of Abraham Lincoln in the Mather lot, thus rendering a clear verdict against Oak Ridge. Beyond

69. “The Lincoln Monument. When Shall It Be Erected!” New York Times, June 16, 1865; “Special Dispatch to the Chicago Republican,” Daily Illinois State Journal, June 12, 1865 (emphasis added). The Monument Association also resisted Mary Lincoln’s instruction that the deed to the plot be made in her name, believing “that the title should be either in the National Monument Association, or in the State, or in the General Government, and not in any one individual.” See “Special Dispatch to the Chicago Republican,” Daily Illinois State Journal, June 12, 1865.

70. “Address delivered by James C. Conkling at the dedication of Oak Ridge Cemetery, May 24, 1860,” James C. Conkling Collection, ALPLM. Charles H. Lanphier, longtime Democratic editor of the State Register, persuaded the city council in 1855 to purchase seventeen acres of undeveloped land north of town for the purpose of a new cemetery. That a newspaperman who spent his career challenging Republican policies proposed a cemetery that would hold the remains of the nation’s most recognizable Republican and attract visitors from across the world was but one of the ironies of this episode. See Thomas J. Craughwell, Stealing Lincoln’s Body (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 2007), 22.

For more on the nineteenth-century movement toward rural burials, see David Charles Sloane, The Last Great Necessity: Cemeteries in American History (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), especially chapter three.
that, they also praised the former location’s charming grounds and, according to the *State Journal*, how a “growth of natural forest trees gives it an air of rural beauty nowhere surpassed.”

These latest developments again failed to alter Mary Lincoln’s resolve. Upon learning of this most recent scheme, Robert once more clarified he and his mother had promised Lincoln’s body to the city “on condition that if a Monument is erected by the Citizens of S[pringfield], it shall be placed on the lot. As the cemetery is the proper place for a funeral monument.” Not only did her demands force a myriad of last-minute changes to the already expedited funeral plans, but they also posed a threat to the city’s long-term goals.

Moreover, Mary Lincoln’s steadfastness resulted in increasingly hardened local attitudes against the widowed First Lady and former Springfield inhabitant. She was already far less popular within the Springfield community than her husband, particularly over the course of his presidency. When the family moved to the White House in 1861, Mary Lincoln rapidly distanced herself from the Illinois community where she had lived for more than twenty years. This rupture only perpetuated the antipathy between the two parties in the wake of Abraham Lincoln’s assassination. Her insistence on Oak Ridge incited the town’s “rage” against her, according to Henry P. H. Bromwell. The Charleston, Illinois, native witnessed some of the last-minute funeral preparations and overheard “all the hard stories that ever were told about her are told over again.” He told his family back home, “She has no friends here.”

Julia Kirby traveled from Jacksonville to attend the services and still counted many friends from her time in Springfield as a youth. In a letter to her brother, she explained, “It seems strange that Mrs. Lincoln should act the way she has after all they have done,” referring to the city’s progress on the Mather lot’s burial arrangements. “The vault is complete and Abraham Lincoln engraved in the arch over the door, and a lovelier spot could not be found in Springfield.” Some questioned whether Mrs. Lincoln ought to have “the absolute right to take his body where she pleases”; others opined, “it is not to be doubted that Mrs. Lincoln’s wishes should be acceded to.” That said, Springfield was “the scene of [Abraham Lincoln’s] early struggles,

72. Robert T. Lincoln to John T. Stuart, May 8, 1865, Lincoln Collection, ALPLM.
73. Henry P. H. Bromwell to family, April 30, 1865, in Harry E. Pratt, ed., *Concerning Mr. Lincoln: In Which Abraham Lincoln Is Pictured as He Appeared to Letter Writers of His Time* (Springfield: Abraham Lincoln Association, 1944), 129.
74. Julia D. Kirby to Joseph Duncan, May 7, 1865, ibid, 133.
of his trials and his triumphs,” and only in the heart of the city, not outside of it, “should stand his loftiest, most enduring monument.”

Having so far failed to change Mary Lincoln’s disposition, the Monument Association’s final opportunity to claim authority over the body’s placement occurred after the funeral services. The sense of entitlement over Abraham Lincoln’s legacy combined with mutual frustration over Mary Lincoln’s unwillingness to concede to the town’s intentions had intensified since mid-April. Residents therefore rationalized that, on arrival, the casket and its sacred contents became property of the city. At that point, Springfield could simply follow through with its original designs. After Robert Lincoln—the only immediate family member to make the journey and attend the burial ceremonies—handed over possession of the key to the temporary vault securing Lincoln’s coffin, Monument Association president and Illinois governor Oglesby expressed the shared view that “Springfield claims [Abraham Lincoln] as her own, and will not give him up.”

At the very least, the city intended to take advantage of the Mather site’s ideal setting in some capacity. Work on the downtown lot indeed resumed after the funeral, as did the Monument Association’s fundraising efforts to solicit subscriptions from various national organizations, including U.S. soldiers and sailors, schools, religious institutions, and fraternal societies. Within a mere few days of paying their final respects to Abraham Lincoln, many in the city had convinced themselves the monument, if not the interred remains, would ultimately end up near the City Square. “Abraham Lincoln’s name is a household word, and his fame is the nation’s,” one anonymous individual claimed. Hence, the writer continued, “it would be appropriate that the Mather block be retained, and thrown open as a park, and that there the great national monument be built.” One week after the funeral, the State Register reported, “thousands and thousands of citizens [had] visited the tomb recently erected upon the ‘Mather lot’” and overwhelmingly expressed admiration at “the beauty of the place chosen by the city authorities . . . and from whence was to arise a suitable memorial to the

75. Jesse W. Fell to S. M. Cullom, June 1, 1865, O. M. Hatch Collection, fund-raising correspondence, ALPLM; “President Lincoln’s Burial Place,” Daily Illinois State Journal, May 9, 1865.
76. Plummer, Lincoln’s Rail-Splitter, 111. Oglesby made this comment the evening of the funeral.
77. J. T. D., “Proposed National Monument to Abraham Lincoln at Springfield, Ill.,” Scientific American 12, no. 23 (June 3, 1865), 357. The Lincoln Collection in the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library contains originals of the numerous fund-raising circulars sent by the National Lincoln Monument Association.
dead.”79 On May 17, the rival State Journal confirmed the Monument Association, “in accordance with the almost unanimous desire of the friends of President Lincoln,” declared its intent to build the structure “on the Mather Square . . . undoubtedly the most desirable [site] in the vicinity.”80 The question that remained was, could the city proceed without Mary Lincoln again discovering the Illinois capital’s aim?

The long-suffering widow assumed the matter had been decided after settling in Chicago in late May, nearly three weeks following her dead husband’s burial at Oak Ridge. She soon learned otherwise on her return to the Midwest. She quickly gained a better sense of the schemes developing in Springfield that contradicted her demands. Incensed by what she learned from the Illinois newspapers, she broke her practice of having close family and friends communicate with the so-called Monument Association on her behalf. In response to the group’s apprehension over building the shrine on private rather public property, Mary wrote directly to Governor Oglesby: “My wish to have the Monument, placed over my Husband’s remains, will meet the approval of the whole civilized world.” She also gave the Monument Association a June 15 deadline to provide her a “favorable answer” of its ultimate intentions.81 Soon after, reports leaked that Governor Oglesby and former Illinois secretary of state Ozias M. Hatch intended to travel to Chicago and personally petition their members’ case to her, hoping to dispel the presumption that the Mather lot location appealed only to locals. Learning of their visit beforehand, however, Mary Lincoln rebuffed their presence by instead sending Robert to intercept them and conveying a note reaffirming her stance: “If I had anticipated so much trouble, in having my wishes carried out, I should have readily yielded to the wishes requests of the many and had his precious remains, in the first instance placed in the . . . tomb prepared for Washington the Father of his Country and fit resting place for the immortal Savior and Martyr for Freedom.”82 No longer, it seems, was Chicago the obvious destination for Lincoln’s bones, but that was hardly Springfield’s main concern.83

81. Mary Lincoln to Governor Oglesby, June 9, 1865, Lincoln Collection, ALPLM. The first deadline warning came in a June 5, 1865, letter, also to Oglesby.
82. Mary Lincoln to Richard J. Oglesby, June 10, 1865, Lincoln Collection, ALPLM. Two days later, Oglesby and Hatch professed “serious regret” that their travels “found its way into the newspapers before we had an opportunity to see and express to you our views and motives.” R. J. Oglesby and O. M. Hatch to Mrs. Mary Lincoln, June 12, 1865, Minute Book, National Lincoln Monument Association (microfilm), ALPLM.
83. See also “Special Dispatch to the Chicago Republican,” Daily Illinois State Journal, June 12, 1865. “Mrs. Lincoln has written a letter to the National Monument Association,
Jesse W. Fell believed in the sincerity of Mary Lincoln’s threats. The longtime friend and political ally of Abraham Lincoln from Normal, Illinois, actually met with the widowed former First Lady before the deadline, and in a lengthy letter explained his assessment of the situation to the Springfield Monument Association. Admittedly having “expressed a preference” for burial in the downtown plot, Fell went on to explain “why this matter of location should at once be settled, and settled too, as I now think in favor of the Oak Ridge Cemetery.” He genuinely believed the Lincoln family “and many others will make violent efforts to carry” their patriarch’s remains away if their demands were again ignored, including the monument’s placement. But Fell also offered his impression of regional attitudes by way of his role as monument subscriptions collector for McLean County. Residents there, as with most others throughout the state, sided with Springfield in the matter, aware of the benefits Lincoln’s bones brought to the entire area. But Fell pointed out that, due to uncertainty resulting from the Illinois capital’s feud with Mary Lincoln, some organizations had suspended all contributions to the monument fund for fear that the body and shrine “may go elsewhere than at or near your City.” “Would it not better accord with Mr. Lincoln’s tastes,” he pointed out, “to be buried among his old friends in a quiet pleasant place, rather than by himself, in the heart of [a] crowded dusty City[?]” Others, Fell observed, questioned whether Springfield’s fathers had lost sight of the original aim to honor Lincoln by prioritizing the “almighty dollar.” He relayed that the Monument Association’s perception was “in danger of degenerating into a mere money making or speculating scheme” and thus providing the general public a notion that there was “more to the enhanced value of town lots, than to the dictates of patriotism.”

The evening before the deadline, every member of the Monument Association gathered in Springfield and voted, eight to seven, to accept notifying them that unless the monument were erected over the President’s remains at Oak Ridge, and a deed given her of the lot on which it was to be placed, she would accept a proposition for the removal of the remains to Washington.”

84. Jesse W. Fell to S. M. Cullom, June 1, 1865, O. M. Hatch Collection, fund-raising correspondence, ALPLM; Even for those unable to look past economic incentives, Fell concluded, “it might be well to suggest, that many thousands nay—millions of people will stop & spend a day at Springfield, if the Monument were at Oak Ridge, who, otherwise would pass along the cars, satisfied with a mere R.R. glance of the Structure.” In other words, he argued, a shrine constructed inside the cemetery might prove more valuable to the city’s future prospects after all. See also Thomas Schwartz, “The First National Abraham Lincoln Monument Association, Part 2,” June 22, 2011, From Out of the Top Hat: A Blog from the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library & Museum, http://www.alplm.org/blog/2011/06/the-first-national-lincoln-monument-association-part-2/.
Mary Lincoln’s proposal. Having few remaining options, a bare majority had “definitely decided to erect the National Monument . . . over his remains at Oak Ridge.” The seven who cast ballots against the terms—an assortment that included even some Springfield residents—likely did so as a symbolic gesture considering there was no apparent alternative option. If nothing else, they perhaps took solace knowing that Mary Lincoln received a breakdown of how each member voted. Writing on behalf of the group, John T. Stuart notified Mary Lincoln that the group had ultimately accepted her terms, as did “our citizens generally, most of them cheerfully but others reluctantly, and with many regrets.” At minimum, the State Journal concluded, Springfieldians should be satisfied “that the place on which the monument is to be erected is now definitely fixed” and hope that those “who loved Mr. Lincoln so well will continue their liberal subscriptions” to its magnificent construction. The city’s fate now hinged on this last juncture.

“The citizens of Springfield had exerted a tremendous undertaking over the previous two months, welcoming home and laying to rest the body of Abraham Lincoln. Decades later, one young resident recalled “the terrible days” volunteers withstood before the Funeral Train’s approach. Likewise, a carpenter visiting from Alton described spending “two days and one night to complete the work in time,” and “when through, we were a tired lot.” The caravan transferring the president’s remains from Washington greeted a mournful and exhausted populace amidst a sea of signs welcoming their Lincoln home. John Edward Young, the farmer from nearby Athens Township, believed Springfield had every right to be proud of its efforts. The “magnificent and solemn pagent” that was the funeral service was worth all the time—expense and trouble that it cost to witness it.”

86. The National Lincoln Monument Association’s Minute Book lists each member’s recorded vote with no further details. Minute Book, June 14, 1865, National Lincoln Monument Association (microfilm), 24–25, ALPLM.
87. John T. Stuart to Mary Lincoln, June 14, 1865, Stuart-Hay Collection, ALPLM.
89. Mary Miner Hill recollections, March 21, 1923, Mary Miner Hill Collection, ALPLM.
The same might be said two years later when, after years of threats to move the capital elsewhere, the Illinois state legislature approved construction of a new capitol building in town. One state senator in favor of the capital city’s bid admitted, “When the remains of Lincoln were brought home to Springfield, that settled the question of the location of the capital forever.” One of his colleagues agreed, arguing that the city, “whatever it may have been heretofore,” had instantly “become historic ground.”

It was here that the best, and purest, and noblest of our late American Statesmen had got his growth in public life. Here was his residence: there is his grave, and this place has become sanctified by his associations, so that it would be desecration to remove the state house from the place that was illustrated by the life and sanctified by the grave of Abraham Lincoln.

One Chicago Journal correspondent’s earlier hope that Illinois’s “lawmakers may for all time assemble within the shadow of his tomb” would become reality. Alternatively, the rival Chicago Tribune lamented that allocating a new statehouse in Springfield was akin to committing “the State indirectly, but firmly, to the proposition of making Springfield the permanent seat of Government.” The city had averted the misfortune of Illinois’s two previous state capitals, Kaskaskia and Vandalia.

But its short-term results were mixed. In 1872, as construction on the new statehouse was still in infancy, a correspondent for the Chicago Tribune alleged, “Springfield is slowly, but perceptibly improving. Having secured the State Capitol beyond the probability, if not the possibility, of removal, the attention of her citizens has been turned to more profitable pursuits.” The establishment of a watch-making factory and a rolling-mill contributed to this economic growth. These successful ventures, the columnist concluded, had sparked an interest in additional “industrial enterprises.”

On the other hand, due to the fallout over where to bury Lincoln’s body, the city failed in its quest to become an instant tourist haven. Donations to the Monument Association never recovered once the group confirmed the remains and the planned edifice would forever

reside in Oak Ridge Cemetery. The crawling pace at which funds arrived delayed construction on the monument, and few tourists had any interest visiting a temporary receiving vault. Sojourns to Springfield picked up modestly after the National Lincoln Monument was officially dedicated in 1874, nearly a decade after its conception. Yet the Oak Ridge spot remained a bitter subject within the region, even prompting state lawmakers in 1899 to consider replacing the fragile and flawed structure with a “grand and enduring” one situated in the center of Springfield “with the living,” and “not in a cemetery among the dead.”

In the early twentieth century, as roads across the country improved and as more Americans acquired automobiles, tourism to national historic landmarks ballooned. Springfield benefited from this cultural transformation, especially ahead of both the centennial of Lincoln’s 1809 birth and the fiftieth anniversary of the American Civil War. Sightseers could pay their respects at the Lincoln Tomb at Oak Ridge Cemetery and learn about the former president’s pre-White House life by visiting sites around the city associated with his name. From that point forward, the community made better efforts to link Springfield’s history with its former neighbor, an endeavor that continues to this day. And while Lincoln’s contemporaries had hoped to exploit that relationship in the Civil War’s aftermath, they nevertheless sowed the seeds for later generations to pursue that connection. At the very least, possession of Abraham Lincoln’s bones salvaged Springfield from an unknown fate. The martyr had come home.