The Lincoln Landscape

The Transformation of the Lincoln Tomb

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Abraham Lincoln’s burial place was designed and constructed in an age of sideshows and curiosities. The display of relic collections and memorabilia was an expected part of museums and other public attractions in the late nineteenth century. It was the beginning of the age of tourism, when visitors enjoyed many kinds of local oddities as part of their travel experience. The professionalization of museum and park management was still decades away. Caretakers, rather than curators, were employed to oversee sites such as Lincoln’s New Salem, the Lincoln Home, and the Lincoln Tomb. Although most of the caretakers performed their duties with care and dedication, public expectations began to change, and different management strategies eventually were adopted.

The original design of the Lincoln Tomb was deficient for the security of the president’s remains. It was also structurally unsound and inappropriate to the commemoration of his life. Lincoln’s increasingly elevated status in history necessitated changes to the structure and a radical departure from its original design and use. A decades-long struggle transformed the tomb from an ordinary tourist attraction to a dignified monument honoring the memory of Abraham Lincoln and the symbol that he had become.

The First Monument to Lincoln

Springfield, Illinois, grew rapidly in the 1850s. The Old City Graveyard was closed by mid-decade, and the Hutchinson Cemetery, where Eddie Lincoln was buried in 1850, was rapidly reaching its capacity. In 1855 the city council acquired seventeen wooded acres for a new cemetery north of the city limits. It was expanded the next year, and burials began there in 1858. In the spring of 1860, Abraham and Mary
Lincoln attended the dedication ceremony for Oak Ridge Cemetery; it was just a few days before his nomination for the presidency.¹

Five years later, on April 15, 1865, Lincoln was dead at the hand of an assassin. Two days after his death, “an Illinois delegation” approached Mrs. Lincoln and obtained her permission to have her husband’s body returned to Springfield. A group of citizens at the capital city immediately attended to the work of selecting a site for a fitting monument to his memory. A downtown site known as the Mather Block (on the grounds north of what is now the statehouse) was chosen, and a temporary receiving vault was hastily constructed there. As Lincoln’s funeral train was slowly making its way home, however, the citizens’ group learned that his widow had decided on Oak Ridge Cemetery, two miles north.²

Despite Mrs. Lincoln’s instructions, the citizens’ group, which would soon incorporate as the National Lincoln Monument Association, had every intention of constructing the president’s tomb in the Mather Block. Before Lincoln’s funeral, the vault there was “kept ready” as the group importuned the grieving Robert Lincoln to ask his mother to reconsider. He obliged the committee and sent a telegram to Mrs. Lincoln, who had remained in Washington. He was still awaiting her reply as the funeral procession assembled at the Capitol. As it was ready to leave, he received her telegram. It would be Oak Ridge Cemetery. Lincoln was temporarily interred there in the receiving vault on May 4, 1865.³

On May 11, 1865, a group of fifteen men led by Governor Richard J. Oglesby drew up articles of association as the National Lincoln Monument Association. Article Two stated: “The object of the Association shall be to construct a Monument to the memory of Abraham Lincoln, in the city of Springfield, State of Illinois.” Within two weeks of the president’s funeral, the monument association was busily soliciting funds to pay for the shrine. Circulars were sent to universities and colleges, public schools, and Sunday schools across the nation, asking for donations.⁴ The “Circular to Universities and Colleges” read, in

part: “Did the sun ever look down on such a spectacle as this stricken nation presented, in its voiceless anguish, on the morning of April 15th? . . . No dead President alone could evoke such woe. It was the dead ABRAHAM LINCOLN, the good and true man, more than the Chief Magistrate of the nation, that subdued and melted the national heart and bathed the millions in tears.”

The monument association proceeded with plans for a grand tomb in the Mather Block. News of its activities reached Mrs. Lincoln, who threatened to have her husband’s remains taken to Chicago for permanent burial. Still the Springfield boosters persisted. The angry widow then threatened to have her husband buried in Washington under the Capitol dome, as Congress had wished. By June she had moved to Chicago. Again, the insensitive monument association approached her, traveling to Chicago to make a personal appeal for their downtown plan. She refused to see them. At last, the National Lincoln Monument Association acceded to the widow’s wishes, who was carrying out the wishes of Lincoln himself. Oak Ridge Cemetery would be the site of the Lincoln Tomb.

As fund-raising efforts were under way, the monument association announced in 1868 a design competition for the tomb. One thousand dollars was offered to the artist who designed the winning entry; the winner was to be named in September. In all, thirty-one artists submitted thirty-seven designs. After several days of deliberations, the design of Larkin G. Mead Jr., which featured an obelisk surrounded by statuary, was chosen. Five sculptures and a coat of arms were to be molded and cast for the monument, at a total cost of $70,000. A separate contract was drawn up with architect W. D. Richardson of Springfield for a foundation and superstructure, at a cost of $136,550. The City of Springfield donated six acres adjoining Oak Ridge Cemetery for the site of the tomb.

Construction began in September of 1869, and the stone and brick foundation was completed before year’s end. Work on the superstructure continued for nearly two years. The obelisk, constructed of brick and steel with a granite sheathing, was capped in May 1871, just as the terrace and interior rooms were being completed. Tad Lincoln’s remains were placed within the tomb following his death in July 1871, and in September of that year Lincoln’s remains, and the

remains of his sons Willie and Eddie, were moved to the unfinished structure.\textsuperscript{8}

The original monument, with its eighty-five-foot-tall classical obelisk surrounded by a balustraded terrace, was built of Quincy granite and Joliet limestone. An iron spiral staircase within the obelisk led to a platform at the top, where, through circular windows, visitors could enjoy a panoramic view of Springfield and the surrounding countryside. At the base of the obelisk were five pedestals for the Mead sculptures. The pedestals and base of the obelisk were ringed by forty shields connected by raised bands. Each shield was engraved with the name of a state (thirty-seven at the time, with three left blank for future states) symbolizing the indissoluble Union. Below the promenade deck, a memorial room, designed as a “receptacle for articles used by or in any way associated with Mr. Lincoln,” was accessed through a door on the south elevation. The burial chamber, containing crypts for the Lincoln family, was originally accessed through a door on the north elevation.\textsuperscript{9} The Lincoln sarcophagus, at the center of the original burial chamber, was of white marble, with his name surrounded by a carved oak-leaf wreath. Above it was inscribed, “With malice toward none, with charity for all.”\textsuperscript{10}

The dedication ceremony for the Lincoln Tomb was held on October 15, 1874. After a procession to the cemetery, music by a band and a ladies’ choir, and remarks by Governor Richard Oglesby, the Lincoln statue at the base of the obelisk was unveiled. President Ulysses S. Grant then delivered a brief address to “immense masses of people.” He recalled Lincoln’s great struggle to hold the Union together and his unwavering faith in the final outcome of the war. Grant concluded his speech by reminding his listeners of some of Lincoln’s personal qualities: “With all his disappointments from failures on the part of those to whom he had entrusted command, and treachery on the part of those who had gained his confidence but to betray it, I never heard him utter a complaint, nor cast a censure for bad conduct or faith. It

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\item \textsuperscript{9} National Lincoln Monument Association, 2–3; Power, 244; Nathan Glazer, “Monuments in an Age Without Heroes,” \textit{Public Interest} 123 (Spring 1996): 24–25.
\end{itemize}
was his nature to find excuses for his adversaries. In his death the nation lost its greatest hero.”

Those who attended the dedication ceremony saw a monument with only the Lincoln statue and the coat of arms. The other Mead sculptures, four groups of figures representing Civil War scenes, awaited further fund-raising efforts by the monument association. The federal government donated sixty-five cannon—nearly fifty thousand pounds of bronze—to be re-used in the sculptures. Cities that played key roles in the war were invited to provide funding for the sculptures that represented each city’s part in the conflict. New York City, one of the country’s largest seaports, donated funds for the naval group. Pittsburgh, in the iron region, contributed money for the artillery group. Boston raised funds for the cavalry group, and Chicago, despite its terrible fire of 1871, fulfilled its pledges to fund the infantry group. One by one, the Mead sculptures took their places on the monument.

The Memorial Hall Museum

On October 28, 1874, John Carroll Power was appointed the first custodian of the Lincoln Tomb. The monument was opened to the public the following day. Visitors to the tomb first registered their names in Memorial Hall, then exited the main entrance and made their way around the perimeter of the monument. On the north side, they could view Lincoln’s sarcophagus through the iron grille door. “In good weather and bad, in sunshine and rain, each of the thousands of pilgrims who came, stepped up, peered into the semi-darkness, then made way for the one following him,” a state architect wrote seventy years later. It was an awkward arrangement, but it did not deter the many visitors who came from across the country and around the world to pay their respects to Lincoln.

Memorial Hall, the south room of the tomb, was designed as a tiny museum for Lincoln relics. The monument association acquired one of the first artifacts for the collection when it paid $175 for the surveying instruments that Lincoln had used. Other Lincoln items soon occupied the glass-topped display cases, and the collection grew. The room it

occupied, however, was far from ideal for the display of such artifacts. Like the rest of the tomb, it was extremely damp. In an attempted remedy, an interior partition was built soon after the tomb was opened, which made the room very dark. In 1884 a coal-fired steam heater was installed to raise the temperature inside the structure. A crude ventilation system was added in 1887, but the problems continued.\textsuperscript{14}

John Power delighted in his role as custodian and resident expert. He approached each visitor offering information and a guided tour, which he referred to as “my distinctive work.” Power collected a twenty-five cent fee from all adult visitors as they entered Memorial Hall; the money was used for his salary, tomb maintenance, and the purchase of more Lincoln relics. He also sold postcards, pamphlets, and books to visitors, keeping part of the proceeds. The monument association authorized him to “prevent the taking of pictures” of the tomb. Instead, copies of photographs that had been taken under Power’s supervision were sold to visitors, supplementing his income.\textsuperscript{15}

A few visitors who wished to quietly contemplate the meaning of the Lincoln monument found the custodian’s lectures intrusive and unwelcome. Some explained to him that they wanted to “see for themselves” without a guided tour. Others said that the “custodian talks too much.” There were many complaints about the twenty-five cent admission fee. Power’s response to them was that “if there were those who did not care to contribute, the only thing for them to do was to consider it closed and stay away.” To those who thought that the state should be responsible for the upkeep of the tomb, Power replied that “only one in 1,230” Illinois residents visited the monument each year, and the other 1,229 should not be taxed to pay for others’ sight-seeing. A few complaining visitors objected to the array of relics on display in Memorial Hall. Those who called it a “dime museum” were a small minority, however, since displays of such collections were popular in the late nineteenth century. For the time being, the management of the Lincoln Tomb met with the approval of most of the public.\textsuperscript{16}

**Lincoln’s Restless Remains**

It is only by virtue of luck and careful police work that the Lincoln Tomb now contains the remains of Abraham Lincoln. In 1876 a plan was made to steal his body and hide it in a pasture near Mt. Pulaski.

\textsuperscript{14} Booton, 21; Power, 355, 437–40; Thomas Davidson, “The Lincoln Monument at Springfield,” *Western Architect*, 1 (April 1875): 226.
\textsuperscript{15} Power, 345, 378–83, 434–37, 453.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 443, 449–53.
The preparations were about to get underway when one of the conspirators boasted about it to a prostitute in Springfield, who informed the local police. The same plot was then shifted to Chicago, to be carried out by a group of counterfeiters. During the fall of that year, the United States Secret Service placed an agent among them. After a time they revealed to him their plan to steal Lincoln’s body from the tomb, bury it in the Indiana Dunes, and hold it for a $200,000 ransom. The release of a fellow counterfeiter from the Joliet prison would also be demanded. Robert Lincoln, who was informed of the plot, agreed to allow the crime to take place so that the criminals could be caught in the act, arrested, and their counterfeiting activities interrupted. The plotters chose the evening of November 7, 1876, to carry out the scheme. It was an election day, when many citizens stayed out late, thus making their evening movements less conspicuous.17

The conspirators traveled by train from Chicago to Springfield; Secret Service agents were on the same train. That evening one of the agents, four police detectives, and custodian Power hid in the interior rooms of the tomb. “In darkness that could almost be felt,” Power recalled, they waited for nearly three hours. The thieves appeared, and began “sawing and filing” the locked exterior door to the burial chamber. Once inside, they removed Lincoln’s coffin from the white marble sarcophagus, and began to remove the body from the casket. The agent among them, pretending to go for a wagon, signaled the Secret Service officer and detectives. They hurried to the burial chamber, but the thieves had escaped, leaving the body behind. After a ten-day search, the conspirators were arrested in Chicago and returned to Springfield. They were tried and convicted of theft, and sentenced to one year in prison.18

Immediately after the robbery attempt, John Power and other members of the monument association moved Lincoln’s coffin into an interior passageway of the tomb. There, they attempted to dig a new grave but struck an underground spring, which filled the excavation with water. The casket was then hidden beneath a pile of lumber and other materials near the base of the obelisk, where it remained for two years.19

18. Fay, 21; Power, 368–70.
In November 1878 the remains of a prominent New Yorker were stolen and held for ransom. “During the days that followed, the newspapers from coast to coast were filled with this sensational story,” wrote one historian. Fear for the remains of Lincoln were heightened, especially since workers at the tomb had recently learned where his coffin was hidden. In response, nine Springfield men, under the leadership of custodian Power, organized themselves as the Lincoln Guard of Honor. Their main purpose was “to guard the precious dust of Abraham Lincoln from vandal hands.” Their first task was to find a more secure burial place for the casket. As they discussed the matter, Power received an alarming postcard from Chicago: “Be careful—do not be alone—Particularly Thursday night Nov. 21st. C.” Immediately Power and his colleagues gathered, and on the night of November 18 they reburied Lincoln’s five-hundred-pound, lead-lined casket in a shallow grave in the north section of the tomb’s interior. It remained there for eight more years. When Mary Lincoln died in 1882, her casket was placed in the burial chamber during her funeral services, near the empty sarcophagus of her husband. Afterward, her remains were secretly moved to the interior of the tomb and placed next to those of Lincoln in the damp, shallow grave.

The dampness beneath the Lincoln tomb, caused in part by the natural spring flowing through the site, was a problem not only for the burials; it weakened the entire structure by exacerbating the damage from normal freeze-thaw cycles. Just before dawn on February 5, 1884, John Power arrived at the monument. As he prepared for the arrival of visitors, there came “a tremendous crash” from within the tomb. He rushed inside to find that a seventy-foot-long barrel vault, an arched brick tunnel that helped support the structure, had collapsed. Above it, the granite paving stones remained, unsupported, with a twenty-foot space below. Power hastily cordoned off the terrace stairs before visitors arrived. “A child walking on it would have taken it all down,” he recalled. During the summer, the terrace was reconstructed with a copper-covered iron frame for support. The cost was $8,400. It was only the first of larger problems to come.

In the spring of 1885 the National Lincoln Monument Association reorganized as the Lincoln Monument Association and immediately requested maintenance funds from the state legislature. A $10,000


appropriation was made, providing money for the reconstruction of the remainder of the weakened terrace. As it was being rebuilt, a new brick burial vault was constructed.\textsuperscript{23}

In April of 1887 the remains of Abraham and Mary Lincoln were again moved, this time to the brick vault. Before Lincoln’s casket was reburied, it was opened and his remains were positively identified to help dispel rumors that his body was missing. The brick vault was considered “unbreakable” and a safe, permanent burial place. Unfortunately, it was to be another temporary one. The remains of another Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln II (Jack), Robert Lincoln’s son, were interred in the tomb in 1890. This, too, would be a temporary burial.\textsuperscript{24}

**The First Reconstruction**

Throughout the 1880s there was increasing demand for state acquisition of the monument. John Power had harsh criticism for those who wanted to “wrest it from the Monument Association,” calling them the “worst enemies of Springfield.” Mounting maintenance costs, however, and the prospect of a reconstruction of the deteriorating obelisk meant that state control was inevitable. When Power died in 1894, former governor Richard Oglesby was the last living member of the monument association. He deeded the tomb to the State of Illinois in 1895, with the stipulation that a custodian’s residence be constructed and that admission fees and postcard sales be discontinued. The same year, Edward S. Johnson, a member of the Lincoln Guard of Honor, was named the tomb’s new custodian by Governor Altgeld. Johnson’s new residence, a limestone masonry structure just west of the tomb, was completed in 1896.\textsuperscript{25}

A few years later, in 1899, a committee of state legislators was appointed to investigate the structural condition of the monument. They found, as previous inspectors had suggested, that the foundation of the tomb would soon have to be rebuilt. Amid the decision making, the idea for a downtown tomb resurfaced. “Springfield’s wish to have Lincoln sleep on the hill near the heart of town never died,” wrote Lloyd Lewis; a few members of the House of Representatives called

\textsuperscript{23}. Ibid.
for a new monument in the center of the city. The cost of a new tomb, however, would have been far higher than rebuilding the existing one, and the downtown boosters finally admitted defeat.26

A $100,000 appropriation was soon made by the legislature. The funds would pay for the rebuilding of the monument’s foundation—but not the foundation of the obelisk, which had sunk down to bedrock. The footings beneath the terrace, Memorial Hall, and the burial chamber had been built into clay. Since clay is a material subject to swelling and shrinking depending on weather conditions, the entire monument had been rendered unstable. In addition to rebuilding the foundation, the height of the obelisk was to be increased by fifteen feet to improve its appearance. Thus the key feature of the appearance of the tomb—the obelisk—was changed to eliminate a flaw in the original design.27

The Final Burial

Robert Lincoln became director of the Pullman Palace Car Company upon the death of George Pullman in 1897. The burial of the industrialist in Chicago’s Graceland Cemetery was an unusual one, prompted by the extreme hostility of labor organizations and individuals towards him. To prevent the desecration of his grave, Pullman’s casket was buried in a surrounding framework of railroad ties and encased in concrete. Two years later, when President Lincoln’s remains were moved to a temporary vault during the reconstruction of the tomb, Robert Lincoln notified state officials that he would provide the $700 for a similarly secure burial for his father’s remains.28

In May 1901, as the reconstruction was nearing completion, Robert Lincoln met with Governor Richard Yates and officials of the Culver Construction Company in Springfield to arrange for the burial. The grave was to be a ten-foot excavation, with the casket placed inside a new wooden box. Surrounding it would be an enclosure of “heavy flat steel bars,” bolted together, and encased in “Portland cement concrete.” Lincoln, who disliked publicity, requested that the reburial be carried out as quietly as possible. The casket, he said, should not be opened.29

26. Lewis, 287.
27. Hammond, 34.
Later that year, on September 26, state officials, custodian Johnson, members of the Lincoln Guard of Honor, and construction company officials gathered for the final reburial. The continuing rumors about Lincoln’s “missing remains” necessitated the opening of the casket, despite his son’s wishes. After the president’s remains were positively identified for the last time, the steel-caged coffin was lowered ten feet and attached with cement to an underground boulder. The burial-chamber floor was replaced. Lincoln was finally at rest.  

The New Century

As at other historic sites in the early twentieth century, the numbers of visitors to the Lincoln Tomb increased rapidly as more Americans acquired automobiles and as better roads were built. The concentration of Lincoln sites in and around Springfield made the city especially attractive for families seeking excursions with educational value. After the First World War, when the country was embracing its cultural heritage as never before, the symbolism of Lincoln became especially appealing.  

The Illinois Department of Public Works was created in 1917, and its Division of Parks and Memorials assumed responsibility for the Lincoln Tomb. With the new agency came a more professional management of the troubled monument. The experience of the visitor, however, remained relatively unchanged. The iron stairs to the observation windows in the obelisk were still in use. Memorial Hall was becoming ever more crowded with display cases filled with Lincoln mementos. The burial chamber was still reached by the path around the side of the monument. The white marble sarcophagus that was displayed above the concrete vault was typically covered with a profusion of wreaths and flowers. From the ceiling above it, a single, bare electric light bulb illuminated the room.

Custodian Johnson died in 1921. Shortly afterward, Herbert Wells Fay of DeKalb, Illinois, was appointed his successor. Fay was “a noted Lincoln collector” who owned a large photograph collection, making him a logical choice at a time when Memorial Hall was used for the

30. Ibid., 171–74.
display of relics. Fay soon became a popular figure in Springfield. He wrote a column for a local newspaper in which he provided news of visitors to the Lincoln Tomb and details of events there. His collection of Lincoln relics and photographs, housed in glass-topped display cases in Memorial Hall, was the focal point of his lectures to visitors. He encouraged them to ask about the mementos, and when they did, he provided elaborate accounts of how each one was acquired. His entertaining lecture-tour of the tomb “abounded in dramatic incidents,” as Fay retold the story of the attempt to steal Lincoln’s remains. “To those of us who know him,” wrote one admirer, “the venerable Custodian of the Tomb is second only to the shrine itself.”

A growing number of visitors, however, disapproved of Fay’s lectures and relic displays. Many of his mementos and photographs in Memorial Hall were unrelated to Lincoln, including pictures of famous persons and another that was titled “Someone’s dog at the Lincoln Home.” For one visitor, Memorial Hall was “a great accumulation of books, papers, pictures, and knickknacks” that seemed out of place in the tomb. The Hall itself was marred by Fay’s crude placards “posted or pasted on the marble walls.” One of them read “Lincoln’s blood, ask how and when it came here.” Another said, “Ask how Lincoln came to raise whiskers.” Fay’s lectures were, for some observers, merely collections of anecdotes, and those visitors objected to the “merriment and laughter” they elicited. “This custodian wants to tell a lot of asinine folk lore stories,” complained one citizen, who said that Fay would make a “splendid lecturer in a ‘chamber of horrors’ or as a Barker for a side show.” A change was needed, urged one citizens’ group. “Under the existing conditions, is it possible to show that reverence which every true American should and really wishes to show at the tomb of Lincoln?”

Grand Presidential Monuments

The Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., was dedicated on Memorial Day of 1922. The classical Greek marble temple, with Daniel

Chester French’s sculpture dominating its interior, is an awe-inspiring symbol of the republic that Lincoln struggled to save and a beautiful monument to Lincoln’s memory. Custodian Fay was not impressed, however. The Lincoln Memorial “only appeals to the eye,” he said, and like a natural wonder, after it has been seen once, “becomes commonplace.”

Even as the Lincoln Memorial was receiving nationwide acclaim, the Lincoln Tomb was exhibiting noticeable signs of deterioration. “Visitors comment on its condition,” Fay complained. The tomb’s state of disrepair reflected poorly on Illinois, he said, and suggested that the state did not “appreciate its Lincoln advantage.” Fay proposed a remedy for the deficiency and took it to the local newspapers. His idea was a grand one: an enormous new Lincoln shrine near the existing tomb that could be seen from a distance of twenty miles. Fay’s proposed new monument was to be dominated by a towering pedestal surmounted by a huge statue of Lincoln. Together, pedestal and statue would be five hundred feet tall—nearly as tall as the Washington Monument’s 555 feet. Atop the statue of Lincoln was to be “a powerful searchlight to guide air-mail pilots.” The tower was to be surrounded by a huge circular museum complex, interspersed with colonnades and triumphal arches. Within the many rooms would be vast display spaces for Lincoln memorabilia, documents, and photographs, depicting “a panorama of [Lincoln’s] life that would give a patriotic thrill to every visitor.” Unlike the Lincoln Memorial, said Fay, “a thousand visits would not exhaust its thrill.”

Although Fay’s proposed monument would have made a fine showcase for his collection of Lincoln mementos, the Illinois Department of Public Works had other plans for the Lincoln Tomb. By the 1920s Public Works officials had concluded that the relics should be removed from the monument. Without the distraction of the artifact collection, said one state official, “visitors would leave the tomb impressed with the solemnity of the spot and not as they do now with the thought that it is simply a museum.” For the moment, however, the structural deterioration of the tomb was becoming a more pressing problem.

37. Service to Miller, ca. 1925; Cleaveland to H. H. Kohn, 13 February 1929; Service to Miller, 8 July 1926, Lincoln Monument 1922–1929 file.
The Transformation

The sad condition of the Lincoln Tomb was made clear in a March 1929 report instigated by Governor Louis Emmerson and made by the Division of Architecture and Engineering of the Illinois Department of Public Works. Water had done a great deal of damage to the masonry, rusting the anchors that held stones in place, washing out joints, and staining the stone. Many of the stones had been “frozen out” as the water expanded in winter. The iron stairs inside the obelisk were also rusted, and the door to the shaft hung loosely by one hinge. The promenade deck, or terrace, was in bad condition, allowing water to leak into the rooms below, threatening the foundation. The burial chamber showed evidence of the leaks from above it, with streaks of dirt and water marks on the marble walls. The electrical wiring was found to be dangerous; in one area, current flowed through “lamp cord suspended from nails.” The statuary was patched and in need of permanent repairs. The public outhouses that were still in use were unsanitary, “unsightly,” and “inexcusable,” said the report.

The second reconstruction began in the spring of 1930. As the granite facing of the obelisk was removed, it was discovered that the brick behind it had seriously deteriorated. Plans were immediately changed, and the entire monument was dismantled and rebuilt. It was also soon discovered that as originally built, the tomb was “out of square,” with “many inaccuracies” in its construction. It was no wonder that there had been so much water damage and deterioration.

As the reconstruction was getting under way in May 1930, the body of Jack Lincoln was removed from the Lincoln Tomb. Robert Lincoln had died in 1926, and was buried in Arlington Cemetery. The boy’s remains were reburied there, next to those of his father.

The interior of the Lincoln Tomb, as it was originally constructed and used, disappeared during the 1930 reconstruction. In its place, state officials wanted a redesigned interior that could better accommodate “the ever-growing stream of visitors.” More importantly, they wanted the new interior design to “transform the monument into a hallowed shrine.” Memorial Hall and the relic collection it housed would be eliminated. A rotunda would take the place of the little museum. The rotunda, said Harry H. Cleaveland, the director of the

Department of Public Works, would be redesigned as a place of “solemn and imposing dignity, yet not heavy and forbidding.” A door was opened on each side of the rotunda, creating a circular interior passageway through the tomb. The door on the north wall of the burial chamber was converted to a window. The rotunda, halls, and burial chamber were rebuilt, featuring gold and silver-leaf ceilings, marble wall panels and pilasters, bronze shields, and forty-eight gold stars—one for each state. Bronze grille work throughout the tomb was designed using a cornstalk motif to symbolize Illinois. Niches in each corner of the passageway received miniatures of famous Lincoln sculptures, depicting the stages of his life. Bronze tablets containing a Lincoln biography, his Farewell Address to Springfield, the Gettysburg Address, and his Second Inaugural Address were prepared and mounted in the passageway. A bust of Lincoln was mounted on granite near the tomb’s entrance.41

Lincoln’s original white marble sarcophagus, with its inscription “With Malice Toward None, With Charity For All,” was not part of the redesigned burial chamber. It was removed during the reconstruction and placed outside the tomb. Later that year it was smashed by vandals, who carried away some of the broken fragments. The remaining pieces were stored in the interior of the tomb. In place of the old sarcophagus, a large new polished stone of “red Arkansas fossil” was put in place. Its inscription is simply, “Abraham Lincoln, 1809–1865.”42

Inspiration for the redesigned burial chamber came, in part, from the writings of Ida Tarbell, who emphasized the cultural hearths of Lincoln’s ancestors. The governors of those states—Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois—were invited to contribute their state flags for the room. The American flag and the presidential flag, donated by President Herbert Hoover, completed the semi-circle of colors, creating an interesting and meaningful element of the room.43

The changes made to the Lincoln Tomb in the 1930 reconstruction, aside from the structural repairs, were related to the accommodation (or in some cases the non-accommodation) of visitors. The greatest

43. Hammond to Cleaveland, 11 December 1930; J. B. Ely to Emmerson, 14 January 1931; C. B. Hodges to Emmerson, 26 February 1931; Booton, 24.
change—the interior connection—was made to enable visitors to more easily pay their respects to Lincoln in a solemn, dignified setting. In other ways, those related to the entertaining aspects of the monument, visitor accommodation was eliminated. The relic collection was removed, and Fay was instructed to cease his folktales and humorous anecdotes. The popular observation tower was closed. Requests for picnic tables on the grounds were denied. Thus the original Lincoln Tomb was consciously transformed from a typical tourist attraction to a place “worthy of Lincoln.”

At the rededication of the Lincoln Tomb on June 17, 1931, President Hoover delivered an address to a large crowd. The redesign was greeted with the enthusiastic approval of the press and the public. “All is right. All is meaningful,” wrote one reporter. “The spirit of the place is the spirit of dignity, reticence, solemn beauty and eloquent symbolism.” Another was glad that “all those dismal old show cases of trophies and souvenirs” were gone. “I was completely overawed and most deeply impressed with the sublimity of the whole conception,” wrote one citizen. The reassessment of the purpose and use of Lincoln’s Tomb, and its consequent redesign, was a complete success.

Unfortunately, custodian Fay was slow to embrace the state’s new ideas for the tomb. Public Works officials realized that the transition would be difficult for him. Just before the rededication, he was instructed that there were to be no more lectures, “no loud talk,” and nothing to disturb the “quiet dignity and solemnity” of the tomb. “We also especially caution you not to bring into the Tomb any Lincoln memorials or mementos of any kind or character. We want nothing in the Tomb that is not permanently placed there.”

Within a few weeks, however, the relics had reappeared. The marble walls were soon lined with mementos, and an “inner utility corridor,” intended for repairmen’s access, had become a little museum. The lectures had also resumed, and continued amid repeated requests that they stop. Securing the cooperation of Fay, who had devoted so much of his life to his Lincoln collection and his lectures, was a long struggle.

44. Cleaveland to Fay, 24 April 1929 and 8 June 1931, Lincoln Tomb Reconstruction 1931 and Lincoln Tomb 1931–1933 file; Hammond, 36; Booton, 24.
47. L. A. Snider memorandum to C. W. Macardell, 13 February 1932; Cleaveland to Fay, 8 January 1932; F. E. Dowling to Cleaveland, 29 July 1931, Lincoln Tomb 1931–1933 file.
In September 1946, Fay was given a final notice to remove every item of his relic collection from the Lincoln Tomb. Citing the collection as a fire hazard, state officials finally put the relic era to rest. Fay retired two years later, and his son, Earl Owen Fay, was appointed the new custodian by Governor Dwight Green.48

**Administrative Agencies**

Early in 1951 Governor Adlai Stevenson appointed George L. Cashman as custodian of the Lincoln Tomb. The next year state historic sites became the responsibility of the newly created Illinois Department of Conservation. With the new agency came the professionalization of Lincoln Tomb management. Cashman was soon assisted by uniformed employees. The old sign-in system in the rotunda was eliminated, and the decorum of visitors was guided by a sign requesting that silence be observed inside the burial chamber. The following decades were marked by the absence of change at the Lincoln Tomb.49

In 1976 Carol Andrews became the first female site superintendent of the Lincoln Tomb. Although no longer called “custodian,” she assumed a professional management position similar to that of George Cashman. Andrews was the first superintendent to live off-site. The old custodian’s residence, known as “Cashman’s Castle” when he lived there, was converted to office space for tomb management in 1975. In 1980 the newly created the Office of Research and Publications (within the Department of Conservation’s Division of Historic Sites) moved into the “castle.”50

An administrative change in 1985 transferred the Lincoln Tomb to the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, which was established in July of that year. The new agency, designed to showcase state historic sites, streamline their management, and provide technical support for historic preservation, assumed responsibility for the Lincoln Tomb and three dozen other historic sites.51


49. Steckel Parker Architects, 3:2; D. Cashman, 17; G. Cashman to Hubbs, 7 May 1952; G. Cashman to H. Schaefer, 2 September 1952, Lincoln Tomb Miscellaneous file.


The most recent preservation challenge for the Lincoln Tomb is a problem nationwide. In April 1987 the tomb was vandalized during the night. Again in February 1997 the site was defaced with spray paint. Since the second incident, “a twenty-four hour presence” is maintained at the tomb by a private security company.52

The vandals who attacked the Lincoln Tomb were directing their anger at a powerful symbol. A visit to Lincoln’s burial place is not merely a cemetery visit or the paying of respects to a great historical figure. If, as some maintain, there is an American civil religion, the Lincoln Tomb is one of its sacred sites.

The symbolic importance of the site may help to explain why its management has been driven so little by the wishes of the visitors. A parking lot and restroom facility are the only accommodations; the usual visitor center is absent. The popular tourist aspects of the tomb were removed just at a time when tourism to Lincoln sites was on the increase. The Lincoln Tomb, as it was redesigned in 1930 and as it has remained, is a monument not only to Lincoln but to the things he symbolizes.

At other sites, such as Lincoln’s New Salem and the Lincoln Home, Lincoln, the man—citizen, husband, father, neighbor—is represented. Those sites are the people’s places, where visitor accommodation is a key management concern. At the tomb, Lincoln, the symbol—champion of liberty and equality, defender of the Constitution, savior of the Union—is represented. It is a shrine to American patriotism. Lincoln’s final resting place is, by design, less a visitor’s place and more a pilgrim’s place. Most of all, it is truly Lincoln’s place.

52. Wynn, interview.