

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands

Witness Statement

ABRAHAM LINCOLN PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY ENABLING LEGISLATION

H.R. 3084

CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

March 14, 2000

**Susan Mogerman, Director
Illinois Historic Preservation Agency**

ABRAHAM LINCOLN PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY ENABLING LEGISLATION

H.R. 3084

CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

Illinois Historic Preservation Agency Director Susan Mogerman

The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library will appeal to everyone from scholars to schoolchildren attracting visitors from across the nation and around the world. The interactive exhibits and displays will allow children to receive basic information, but they will also allow Lincoln buffs, researchers and scholars to delve as deeply as they would like into Lincoln's life.

The building is being designed by Gyo Obata, the last surviving principal of HOK, the largest architectural firm in the U.S., with a world-wide reputation for excellence. The exhibits are being designed by BRC Imagination Arts of Burbank, California, a firm that is also well-respected around the globe for superb storytelling. Since the exhibits featuring the State of Illinois' Lincoln collection will be the most important part of the visitor experience, we are designing the building from the inside out, rather than building a shell and trying to fit the exhibits inside. In this case, content will dictate form.

The 160,000-square-foot facility will occupy nearly two downtown city blocks on land donated by the City of Springfield. The archival portion of the two-building complex will house the entire 12 million piece Illinois State Historical Library collection, with its world-famous, 46,000-piece Lincoln collection. The archives building will be incorporated into the visitor's experience, affording opportunities to see conservators and other library experts as they work. And plans include a theatrical presentation about historical research featuring holographic images of historical figures highlighting the Library's collections. Though it is still early in the planning stage, you might see the image of a Civil War soldier materialize from a file drawer to read entries from his own diary, or Mary Lincoln describe a letter she had just written to her doctor, or the President himself reading the immortal and healing words of his Second Inaugural Speech - all of these from primary resources contained in our collections.

The visitor experience is intended to serve as the entry point for anyone embarking on the journey of discovery into Lincoln's life--an exciting gateway to learning about the 16th President, encouraging

exploration to the many sites relating to Lincoln's life, not just in Illinois but across the nation.

Visitors will enter a large, open concourse area where living history performances can be staged to draw interaction with the audience. Artifacts and documents from the state's Lincoln collection will be displayed in "The Journey," an exhibit traveling from Lincoln's hardscrabble childhood through the pioneer years, rising above early failures in life, capturing his success as an attorney, bids for political office, the Lincoln-Douglas Debates, personal struggles to define policies that could provide emancipation and still save the Union and finally the assassination and funeral.

While still in the design phase, the Presidential Library's theaters are likely to provide insight into turning points of the Civil War, and examine the important relationships, events and, most importantly, the legacy of Lincoln's life. The center will provide space for public affairs programming, literacy programs, and classrooms to accommodate school groups with a specially designed Lincoln curriculum, internet access, and the latest information processing technology.

The facility will have a retail sales operation and a restaurant for the convenience of visitors, as well as underground parking, much of it lit by natural light from above, will also provide visitor convenience.

We plan cooperative programming with other Lincoln research institutions such as the Library of Congress, and the Library will provide a new venue for traveling exhibits. We anticipate that the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library will be a seven-day-a-week facility, offering frequent evening access for programming and special events.

The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library will not be a shrine to the 16th President. Rather, it will preserve for all time the treasures held by Illinois, making them accessible for the first time on a regular basis to the general public as well as scholars. And it will provide a national forum to examine and debate the fundamental principles of our democratic society and institutions that Lincoln struggled to preserve for future generations. Lincoln understood this concept of preserving something for those who came after him when he said, "the struggle of today, is not altogether for today - it is for a vast future also."

We look forward to breaking ground on the archival building in 2001, with completion late in 2002, and construction on the visitor experience in 2002, with completion in 2003. This schedule would allow us time to get the facility up and running to test and fine tune programs and to be ready to draw visitors from around the world to celebrate the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial in 2009.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present this once-in-a-lifetime project.

#