

Securing Lincoln's Indiana Legacy

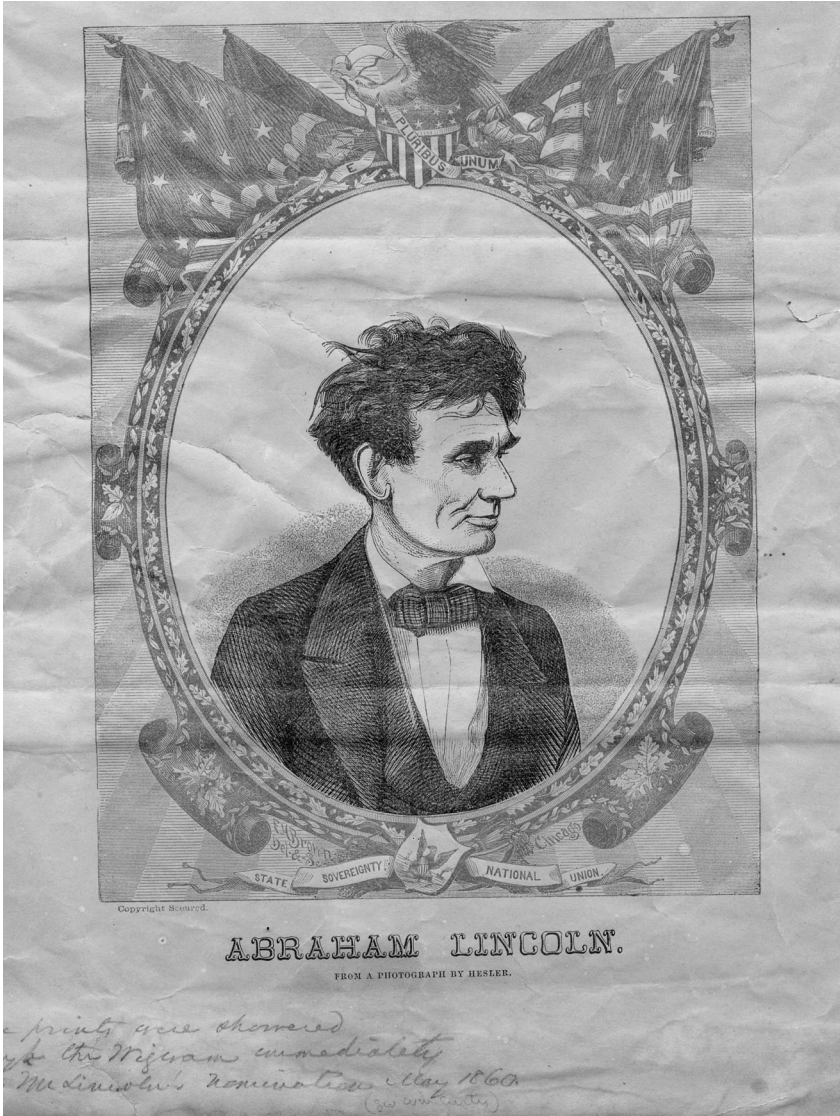
Saving the Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

COMMENTS BY IAN ROLLAND, MICHAEL WESTFALL,
JEFFREY R. KRULL, AND BARRY DRESSEL

For their 29th annual meeting in February 2009, the Indiana Association of Historians convened in Fort Wayne, Indiana, with the conference topic "Lincoln's Legacy." During a roundtable session on Saturday, February 28, five men spoke on "Saving the Lincoln Museum's Collections for Indiana."

When Lincoln Financial Group announced plans to sell the contents of its Lincoln Museum, housed at the former headquarters of Lincoln National Corporation in Fort Wayne, a coalition from the state, city, and private enterprise formed to purchase the collection and keep it in the state of Indiana. Despite keen competition, including some of the nation's premiere institutions such as the Smithsonian, the Indiana group was successful. Each speaker in the roundtable detailed their particular role in the campaign.

The length of the session did not permit a verbatim transcript of all of the comments, so the *IMH* has asked participants to summarize their remarks for our pages. The illustrations for this article are drawn from the portion of the collection now held at the Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne. The editors thank Jane Gastineau of the ACPL for her inestimable assistance in obtaining the images that follow.



Abraham Lincoln, from a photograph by Alexander Hesler (Chicago, Feb. 28, 1857). Woodcut engraving by E. H. Brown. The first known separate-sheet print portrait of Lincoln was issued for the Republican National Convention in 1860. According to *Harper's Weekly*, the 9 x 12-inch sheets were "showered through the Wigwam immediately after Mr. Lincoln's nomination" in May 1860. Harold Holzer has said this is one of the rarest images of Lincoln.

Courtesy of Allen County Public Library.

IAN ROLLAND, FORMER CEO, LINCOLN NATIONAL CORPORATION

As Chairman and CEO of Lincoln National Corporation, I was faced with the decision regarding the proper use of our large collection of Lincoln artifacts, memorabilia, manuscripts, and books. At the time, the museum was housed in our corporate headquarters, a site with limited accessibility for the public.

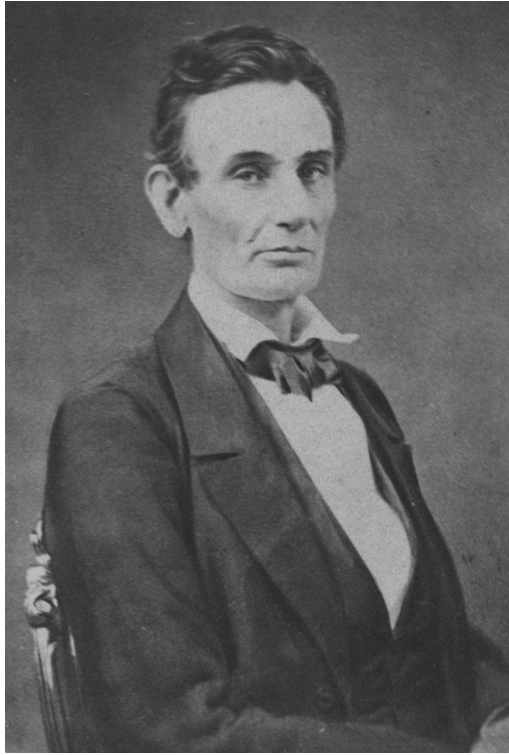
After conducting surveys, meetings, and gathering community input, the Corporation invested \$6,000,000 to build the Lincoln Museum in downtown Fort Wayne. First opened to the public in October 1995, the facility drew 40,000 visitors each year and also served as a destination for researchers, scholars, and authors.

In the spring of 2008, the Lincoln Financial Group, now headquartered in Philadelphia, announced that the museum would be closed on June 30 of that year. Public reaction in Fort Wayne, ranging from anger to disappointment, was immediate and extremely vocal. Lincoln Financial Group announced that the collection would be donated to an appropriate site. Forty institutions were represented at the first meeting in Philadelphia, including such “heavyweights” as the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian. Instructions were given as to the procedure required to present a site as a favorable repository for the collection.

Representatives from Indiana determined to pool our assets and submit a collaborative plan. The basis for our proposal was the concept that the collection would be given to the State of Indiana. All three-dimensional artifacts would be housed at the Indiana State Museum in Indianapolis, while all two-dimensional material (books, photographs, manuscripts, etc.) would remain in Fort Wayne at the Allen County Public Library.

The Indiana delegation was informed later in 2008 that, along with Springfield, Illinois and Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, the Indiana proposal was chosen for the “final three.” Visits were arranged, more information was provided, and we were extremely gratified when the announcement was eventually made that the Indiana Plan had been selected, and that the collection would remain in the state where it had been housed since 1928.

Our work had just begun!



Photograph of Lincoln by Samuel M. Fassett, taken in Chicago on October 4, 1859. According to Fassett's partner, Mary Lincoln "pronounced [it] the best likeness she had ever seen of her husband." This carte-de-visite version has been retouched.
Courtesy of Allen County Public Library

MICHAEL WESTFALL, FRIENDS OF THE LINCOLN MUSEUM

When the announcement was made by the Lincoln Financial Foundation, the Friends of the Lincoln Museum was faced with a decision—who would we back, or would we wait, let it all play out, and then support the new custodian of the museum assets?

There were a variety of viewpoints on the board and, after the public announcement, from the community. Within Fort Wayne and the immediate region there was a feeling of local ownership for the collection. A few people wanted to attack "The Lincoln," as it was locally

known. Suggestions, such as moving the collection to a local shopping mall, or simply storing it in a nearby warehouse, were brought forward. Few people understood the curatorial responsibilities attached to ownership of the collection and fewer still understood the origins, exact nature, and size of the collection.

The position that rapidly rose to the surface was that as a supporting organization, the Friends group's main purpose was to encourage whatever was best for the collection. We were Friends of the Lincoln Museum first, not necessarily friends of Fort Wayne or of Indiana. As it would eventually turn out, all three positions were fortunately possible.

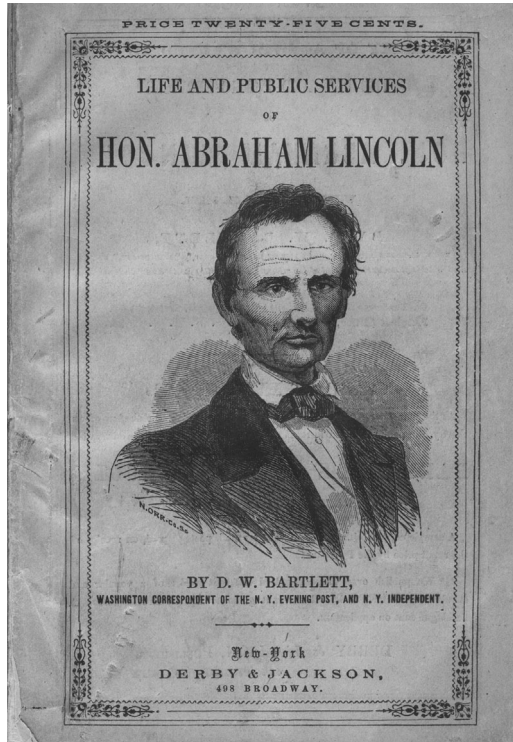
It was clear from the beginning that the Allen County Public Library (ACPL), if they had access to the collections management staff from the museum, could easily and readily handle the two-dimensional collection. Unfortunately, the Lincoln Financial Foundation had already said that they were not interested in dividing the collection. The ACPL could not manage the three-dimensional collection, and there was no partner in Fort Wayne ready to take on that role.

It was at this time that the Friends received a call from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources that the Indiana State Museum was interested in establishing a partnership with the ACPL and presenting a joint proposal to the Lincoln Financial Foundation.

This was an idea that the Friends of the Lincoln Museum could endorse and get behind. If successful, this proposal would keep the archival collection in Fort Wayne, where it could help strengthen—and in turn be strengthened by—the ACPL's internationally recognized genealogy collection. It would also allow the three-dimensional collection to be located in Indianapolis at the State Museum, which had the resources to care for the collection and simultaneously increase the public's ability to interact with it. The state of Indiana, through the Department of Natural Resources, would own the collection in its entirety and develop a loan agreement with the ACPL to house the archival portion of the collection.

The next three months were spent with the Friends acting as coordinator (and sometimes cheerleader) in drafting what became a truly dynamic and, in the end, winning proposal for Indiana to be the new custodian of the Lincoln Museum collections.

The process was not without a bit of internal agony. But, there was never any disagreement that threatened the coalition's existence. The group worked together in crafting a dynamic proposal benefitting the



D.W. Bartlett, *The Life and Public Services of Hon. Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 1860)

This is one of several hurriedly prepared campaign biographies of Lincoln, who was not widely known when he became the Republican presidential candidate in May 1860. This 150-page version was later supplemented with a brief biography of Lincoln's running mate, Hannibal Hamlin of Maine, and a selection of Lincoln's speeches to create a longer 354-page version.

Courtesy of Allen County Public Library

collection and advancing the State of Indiana's standing as a center for Lincoln scholarship.

JEFFREY R. KRULL, ALLEN COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

Community reaction to the news that the Lincoln Museum was to be closed was swift and vociferous. Emotions expressed covered a wide

range, including shock, disbelief, sadness, regret, anger, resentment, and indignation. Even people who had rarely—or never—set foot in the museum lamented its potential loss to the community.

There was near-universal agreement that something needed to be done, that the loss of the Lincoln Museum would be a blow to Fort Wayne. But what to do? Here, it appeared, consensus might be elusive. A few in the community thought the response should be some version of “you can’t do this to us.” They were inclined to confront the company, to argue, to object, even attempt to shame or embarrass corporate management into reversing their decision and keeping the facility open.

Others advocated a somewhat less confrontational approach, involving the development of a very ambitious master plan for a new physical home and organizational structure for the Lincoln Museum. This vision called for either the construction of a new building, or the renovation of an existing building, to house the museum.

Still others rejected both of these ideas, seeking a more pragmatic approach. They reasoned that locking horns with the LNC would be futile at best and could have negative repercussions for the community, in which Lincoln National maintained a significant presence and was a prominent and generous corporate citizen. Furthermore, they believed that the idea of developing a totally new vision and master plan, possibly including a costly, time-consuming capital project, was completely impractical given the announced timetable for the museum’s closing.

According to the pragmatic view, the community’s best chance for achieving a positive outcome would be to work with the company, on their terms, and to make the strongest possible case for retaining the collection locally. Ultimately, this line of reasoning emerged as the consensus view of key community leaders. By the time the Lincoln Financial Foundation announced its plan to entertain proposals from institutions seeking to become the new owners of the collection, the Fort Wayne group had already evolved into a statewide coalition intent on pursuing the prize.

The Indiana coalition’s strategy was based on a thorough understanding of the nature and scope of the Lincoln Museum collection. They realized that the Lincoln Museum was really, at its core, a library. In fact, for many years when the collection was housed in the LNC headquarters building in Fort Wayne, it was known as the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum. The vast majority of the collection is two-dimensional in nature, comprised of books, manuscripts, newspapers, photographs, clipping files, and other documents.

The value of this material is primarily in its intellectual content. The way to derive the greatest benefit from it is to make it widely available to as many people as possible, be they scholars, students, Lincoln enthusiasts, or simply someone with the need or desire to learn about the life and legacy of Abraham Lincoln. And the best way to accomplish this goal of wide accessibility is through digitization and distribution online.

For this task, the Allen County Public Library was uniquely qualified. The library, which had previously established a partnership with the Internet Archive to set up a regional digitization center at the main library building, has the capacity to digitize millions of pages per month, and to handle rare, fragile, and odd-sized materials.

Of course the collection also contains some remarkable three-dimensional artifacts, items requiring the care and attention of highly skilled museum professionals. The Indiana State Museum has the facilities and staff to preserve, exhibit, and interpret this portion of the collection, as well as to expose it to a wide and varied audience.

So the Indiana coalition, in its proposal to the Lincoln Financial Foundation, stressed the unique skills and expertise of its two principal institutions, the Allen County Public Library and the Indiana State Museum. The Indiana group grasped the nature of the Lincoln collections and presented a detailed plan for exposing the rich content of that collection to the widest possible audience of potential users.

BARRY DRESSEL, FORMER DIRECTOR, INDIANA STATE MUSEUM

When the staff at the Indiana State Museum heard in early 2008 that the Lincoln Financial Foundation had decided to close the Lincoln Museum in Fort Wayne and donate the collection to an institution better equipped to showcase and use it, our initial reaction was sympathy for Fort Wayne's loss and for the dislocation of professional colleagues. We were concerned that with Lincoln Financial Group now headquartered in Philadelphia and the certainty of fierce national competition, no single institution in the state could persuade them that the collection, assembled in Indiana over the course of many decades, should stay in a state where Lincoln lived and was molded. We were, however, determined to play a part in whatever effort was mounted to keep the collection.

It certainly wasn't that Indiana lacked resources with which to work. In Indianapolis we had the Indiana Historical Society, with its own

Lincoln collection, plus archivists and paper conservators. The State Library and State Archives were an additional cache of technical expertise and important historical collections. The State Museum had a new building, with fine gallery and storage space, plus exhibition specialists and objects conservators. In Fort Wayne, the Allen County Public Library offered a very large library system with superb research capabilities, including the ability to digitalize large collections. So we had many of the pieces that turned out to be congruent with what the Lincoln Financial Foundation sought from the institution to which they would donate the collection.

The problem was, those pieces were not in one institution, or even in one city. We knew in general that any number of institutions—in Illinois, in Pennsylvania, in Washington, D.C.—could offer what we could, along with considerable prestige and, in some cases, existing collections or Lincoln expertise. We were not sure that the simple fact that we were in Indiana wasn't a disadvantage. An Indiana coalition, headed by the State Museum and the Allen County Public Library along with the Indiana Historical Society, the Indiana State Library, and the State Archives as supporting partners, resolved to submit a proposal that could make us a finalist among the more than forty institutions expressing interest. Once on any final list, we could then leverage the fact that both the State Museum and the Allen County Public Library were new and impressive facilities. We also decided to analyze and specifically address each aspect of the Lincoln Financial Foundation's Request For Proposal and to exceed their key expectations. Most importantly, we would demonstrate how any characteristics that could be perceived as drawbacks were instead advantages.

The proposal we submitted emphasized the following points:

- The capabilities of the Allen County Public Library gave us the real potential to offer a digitized, online version of the Collection to a global audience.
- The State Museum would mount a major Lincoln exhibition every three years that could travel to other organizations and would designate a “home gallery” for the collection, named for the Lincoln Financial Foundation.
- We would raise money to endow the collection, thus assuring stability, accessibility and care.
- The very fact that the collection was sought by institutions possessing no other major Lincoln holdings meant that the collection would maintain its identity as a gift of the Lincoln Financial Foundation.

- The Indiana State Museum and the Allen County Public Library are multidisciplinary institutions, and would bring new audiences to the collection.
- The relationship between the Allen County Public Library and the State Museum would form a unique partnership that could act as a model for other symbiotic collaborations, with each institution's area of expertise maximizing the use of the collection.

This proposal, meticulously organized and lucidly written by the Museum's grants officer, performed exactly as intended. The proposal made the Allen County Public Library/Indiana State Museum Collaborative a finalist, and the site visits went quite well. The very fact that neither institution had substantial Lincoln collections (thus giving the Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection unique prominence), coupled with the State Museum's ability to name a gallery for the Lincoln Financial Foundation and the ACPL's capacity to rapidly digitize tens of thousands of historic documents and books were all significant strengths.

Overall, however, my perspective is that this was a taskforce of people—from Indiana state government, from Fort Wayne, from the Allen County Public Library, and from the State Museum—who worked well together and, under the assumption they were underdogs, provided a comprehensive response to the Lincoln Financial Foundation's RFP. The proposal we submitted was, we were later told, "head and shoulders above the others."

We got the collection.

