

The Rhode Island Abraham Lincoln

Bicentennial Commission

Final Report

June 30, 2010

February 4, 2010

On February 28, 1860, Abraham Lincoln—a day after he gave the most important speech of his career to that point, at Cooper Union in New York City—took a stroll down Broadway in Providence, Rhode Island. He was fascinated by the shops, the horse-drawn trolleys, the pedestrian throngs, and, coming from the Illinois prairie, the city's bustling waterfront.

Lincoln's speech that night at Railroad Hall turned Rhode Island support from Senator William H. Seward to Lincoln as the Republican candidate for president. Lincoln carried Rhode Island handsomely in both the elections of 1860 and 1864. And Rhode Island troops, the 1st Rhode Island Volunteer Infantry Regiment, were among the first to answer the new president's call for troops after the firing on Ft. Sumter in April 1861.

With the Lincoln bicentennial on February 12, 2009, it was most appropriate, then, that Rhode Island celebrate this good and great man as well as his achievements as a person and statesman.

It was never the intent of the Rhode Island Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission to seek public funds for its activities, publications, and events that would be necessary to remember Abraham Lincoln when we joined some thirty other states and the United States Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission in commemorating Lincoln's 200th birthday.

As this report demonstrates, the Commission was able to accomplish many noteworthy things, including its outreach to school children, and we accomplished our goals with the generosity of many donors who were willing to trust the Commission to celebrate Abraham Lincoln in an appropriate way. We are grateful to these donors.

I thank my fellow commissioners for their good work—all of whom served without compensation and donated their time and resources to making our bicentennial activities such a success.

Abraham Lincoln continues to rank at the top of almost every presidential list because he is perceived to embody our nation's core values—integrity, moderation, persistence in the pursuit of honorable goals, respect for human rights, and compassion. We hope that our efforts have been consistent with recognizing and continuing Mr. Lincoln's legacy.

Yours sincerely,

Franks J. Williams
Chair

Creation of the Commission

The Rhode Island Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission (RIALBC) was created by an act of the State of Rhode Island General Assembly in March 2004 in anticipation of the 200th birthday of President Abraham Lincoln, which would occur on February 12, 2009. The act, which was signed into law on June 26, 2004, by Governor Donald Carcieri, articulated the Commission's mission, its membership, and its powers.

The mission of the RIALBC was “to honor and create activities relating to Abraham Lincoln's visit to Providence and Woonsocket, Rhode Island in 1860, to plan and carry out its own tributes to Abraham Lincoln, and to coordinate those activities with those of the federal government.”

The legislative act stipulated a Commission consisting of twenty-one members, including representatives from the Rhode Island House of Representatives and Senate; local Abraham Lincoln organizations, colleges and universities, historical societies, libraries, museums, and arts commissions; the Board of Governors for Higher Education; and local civil rights organizations.

The powers of the RIALBC included initiating activities in Rhode Island to honor Abraham Lincoln during the bicentennial period, educating Rhode Island citizens about Lincoln's life and times, and seeking grants and philanthropic support for Lincoln bicentennial activities.

The RIALBC met for the first time on April 12, 2005, and several times per year from that date through February 2010. At its initial meeting, the members of the Commission elected the following officers:

Chair:	Frank Williams
Vice Chair:	Sue Stenhouse
Second Vice Chair:	Walter Stone
Secretary:	Randall Rosenbaum

Vice Chair Stenhouse served as the liaison between the RIALBC and the federal Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, and she met several times with that group and other state liaisons to coordinate activities. Lisa Maher served as administrative assistant to the RIALBC.

Of the twenty-one members invited to the first meeting of the RIALBC, about twelve remained active members during the five-year period that the Commission remained in existence.

The act included a sunset clause stipulating that the RIALBC would dissolve on June 30, 2010.

2.0 Abraham Lincoln in Rhode Island

Shortly after its formation, members of the Commission researched Abraham Lincoln's activities in the Ocean State. Rhode Island did not play a major role in the life or political career of Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln set foot on Rhode Island soil three times. His first visit was brief and inconsequential: in September 1848, Lincoln attended the Whig party's convention in Worcester, Massachusetts. After making a speech in Worcester on behalf of Zachary Taylor, the Whig candidate in the coming presidential election, Lincoln traveled by train to New Bedford. En route, Lincoln changed trains in Providence.

Lincoln's second and third trips to the Ocean State took place ten days apart during the late winter of 1860. In February of that year, Lincoln traveled from Illinois to New York to deliver an address at the Cooper Institute in Manhattan. Two years earlier, Lincoln, a Midwesterner with limited experience in national politics, had challenged incumbent Stephen Douglas for his Illinois senate seat. Lincoln lost, but the Lincoln-Douglas campaign attracted national attention, marking Lincoln as an up-and-coming figure in the Republican Party. The East Coast Republicans invited Lincoln to speak on the most compelling issue of the day: slavery. On February 27 at the Cooper Institute, Lincoln, who was already considering a presidential run in 1860, gave a rousing oration, defending his party's position against the extension of slavery and arguing that slavery was not explicitly defended by the U.S. Constitution.

The day after the Cooper address, Lincoln boarded a train with John Eddy, a Providence attorney and influential Rhode Island Republican. Eddy had recruited Lincoln to deliver an address in Providence on February 28. After the eight-hour train ride, Lincoln visited Eddy's home at 265 Washington Street in Providence for dinner. (The home no longer exists.) Later that evening, Lincoln, who was relatively unknown in the Ocean State, gave a speech to a large crowd assembled in Railroad Hall, the large second-floor auditorium of the Union Passenger Depot. (The depot, which burned in the 1890s, resided in today's Kennedy Plaza.)

No transcript exists of Lincoln two-and-a-half-hour speech at Railroad Hall, but newspaper accounts of the day suggest that Lincoln repeated in Providence many of the same points that he had made the day before at the Cooper Institute. Newspaper editors gave Lincoln's oration mixed reviews. The Republican-leaning *Providence Daily Journal* praised Lincoln's honesty, cogency, and wit. The conservative Democratic *Providence Daily Post* called Lincoln "tender-footed" on the slavery question.

After spending the night at the Eddy home, Lincoln, on the morning of February 29, boarded a train for New Hampshire to visit his son Robert at Phillips Exeter Academy. After delivering speeches in New Hampshire and in Connecticut, Lincoln returned to Rhode Island on March 8 to deliver an address in Woonsocket. Lincoln's hosts in Woonsocket were Latimer Ballou, a founder of the Rhode Island Republican Party, and Edward Harris, a Woonsocket wool mill owner who had built Harris Institute and Harris Hall, where Lincoln would speak. (The building is now Woonsocket City Hall.) The

speech was not recorded, but accounts of the event suggest that Lincoln again hammered home the arguments made in the Cooper address. The next day, March 9, Lincoln boarded a train and headed home to Illinois.

Below are additional facts about Lincoln and Rhode Island:

- Lincoln carried Rhode Island in the 1860 presidential election, garnering 12,244 votes to Stephen Douglas's 7,704 votes. He carried the state again in the 1864 election, besting George McClellan, 14,343 votes to 8,718 votes.
- 23,699 Rhode Islanders answered Lincoln's call to service in the Union Army and Navy during the Civil War, more proportionately than other state.
- The only statue of Lincoln in Rhode Island stands in Roger Williams Park in Providence.
- The John Hay Library of Brown University holds the Charles Woodberry McLellan Collection of Lincolniana, the papers of Lincoln's secretary, John Milton Hay (Brown University Class of 1858), and many other important Lincoln papers and Lincoln-related items.

3.0 Activities of the RIALBC

3.1 The RIALBC Web Site

Shortly after its formation, the RIALBC, with pro bono assistance from the firm of Focus Business Solutions, created a web site, reachable at rilincoln200.org, to highlight its mission and activities. The site provided information about the Commission and its members, Lincoln's life, his visits to the Ocean State, the various activities of the RIALBC, and other Lincoln events staged in Rhode Island. The web site also included a speakers bureau, listing the names and contact information of local Abraham Lincoln scholars willing to speak about Lincoln at Rhode Island schools, museums, and libraries.

Malcolm Gear Designers helped the RIALBC design stationery with an appropriate logo for all correspondence.

3.2 Lincoln Events in Rhode Island

During its five-year period of existence, the RIALBC sponsored, co-sponsored, endorsed, supported, and publicized numerous Lincoln-related activities that occurred in the Ocean State during the Lincoln bicentennial period. The Commission's web site listed all Lincoln-related activities taking place in Rhode Island and offered an application for RIALBC endorsement and an explanation of the advantages of such endorsement.

Below is a list of specific events supported in some way by the RIALBC:

- November 20, 2007: press conference announcing the creation of the RIALBC, held at the Rhode Island State House.
- January 2-March 5, 2008: “John Hay’s Lincoln, and Lincoln’s John Hay: Shaping Identity and Public Memory in 19th-Century America,” an Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial exhibit, John Hay Library, Brown University, Providence, RI (see http://dl.lib.brown.edu/lincoln/Lincoln_Hay).
- February 1, 2008-February 28, 2009: “Lincoln Drawn from Life: Five Artists, Six Portraits,” an exhibit at the John Hay Library, Brown University, Providence, RI.
- February 5, 2008 (endorsed): “A Visit and Conversation with Honest Abe: A Monologue by and Conversation with Him,” Jamestown Philomenian Library, Meeting Hall, Jamestown, RI.
- February 12, 2008 (endorsed): “Honest Abe: A One Man Play,” Portsmouth Abbey School, Portsmouth, RI.
- February 17, 2008 (endorsed): The President Abraham Lincoln-Mary Todd Lincoln High Tea at the Governor Sprague Mansion, Cranston, RI.
- February 19, 2008: “A Lincoln Portrait: One-Man Performance by Robb Dimmick,” Weaver Library, East Providence, RI.
- February 19, 2008: “John Hay’s Lincoln and Lincoln’s John Hay,” exhibition and reception with remarks by Frank Williams, John Hay Library, Brown University.
- March-April 2008: “Notes of Praise, Notes of Dissent: Lincoln and His Political Career in Song,” Orwig Music Library, Brown University, Providence, RI (see <http://library.brown.edu/exhibits/notesofpraise.php>).
- April 1, 2008-June 15, 2008: “The Politics of Poetry: Walt Whitman and the Public memory of Abraham Lincoln,” an exhibit at the John D. Rockefeller Library, Brown University, Providence, RI (see <http://library.brown.edu/exhibits/whitman.php>).
- May 22, 2008: “‘Prepared to Do My Whole Duty’: Elisha Hunt Rhodes in War and Peace,” exhibit and lecture at the Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, RI.
- Spring 2008: Restoration of the Abraham Lincoln monument in Roger Williams Park, Providence, RI.

- June 30-July 3, 2008: The RIALBC Institute for Teachers at Roger Williams University, Bristol, RI.
- July 20, 2008 (endorsed): “Lincoln’s War Governor Takes Command Celebration,” Sprague Mansion, Cranston, RI.
- August 12-October 31, 2008: “Child’s Play: Abraham Lincoln in Games, Toys, and Stories,” an exhibition at the John Hay Library, Brown University, Providence, RI (see http://library.brown.edu/exhibits/lincoln_games.php).
- Fall 2008-Spring 2009 (endorsed): Abraham Lincoln Curriculum in RI public schools.
- September 13, 2008 (endorsed): “Lincoln Visits Rhode Island: A Sprague Mansion Celebration,” Cranston, RI.
- October 9, 2008: Doris Kearns Goodwin lecture on Lincoln at Roger Williams University, Bristol, RI.
- October 30, 2008: Abraham Lincoln Monument Dedication, Roger Williams Park, Providence, RI.
- January 5-March 6, 2009: Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Exhibit, John Hay Library, Brown University, Providence, RI (see <http://dl.lib.brown.edu/exhibits.html>).
- January 15, 2009: Reception and Conversation with Frank J. Williams, East Bay Education Collaborative, Warren, RI.
- February 9, 2009: Abraham Lincoln Stamp Unveiling, Lincoln High School, Lincoln, RI.
- February 12, 2009: Brown University announces the release to the public of its Lincolniana at the Brown digital collection, drawn from its McLellan Lincoln Collection (see <http://dl.lib.brown.edu/lincoln>).
- February 16, 2009 (endorsed): Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commemoration, Community College of Rhode Island, Warwick, RI.
- February 27, 2009 (endorsed): “Abraham Lincoln for the Twenty-First Century: A Symposium Honoring the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial,” opening lecture by Benjamin Todd Jealous, President of the NAACP, Brown University, Providence, RI.
- February 28, 2009 (endorsed): “Abraham Lincoln for the Twenty-First Century: A Symposium Honoring the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial,” co-sponsored by the

Department of History and the Brown University Library, John Hay Library, Brown University, Providence, RI (program at <http://www.brown.edu/Departments/History/events/lincoln-symposium.html>).

- February 28, 2009: Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra performance of *A Lincoln Portrait* by Aaron Copland, narration by Frank Williams, Providence, RI.
- March 2, 2009 (endorsed): Abraham Lincoln birthday card signing, Warwick Mall, Warwick, RI.
- September 12, 2009(endorsed): Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Gala, Sprague Mansion, Cranston, RI.
- February-March 2009: “Rhode Island in the Time of Lincoln,” an exhibition at the Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, RI.
- February 12, 2009 (endorsed): Rhode Island Historical Society presents Robb Dimmick, Lincoln impersonator, First Unitarian Church, Providence, RI.
- Spring 2009: Rhode Island Historical Society’s “Rhode Island in the Time of Lincoln,” Woonsocket Museum of Work and Culture, Woonsocket, RI.
- June 13, 2009: Members of the RIALBC march in the annual Rhode Island Gaspee Day Parade.
- September 12-13, 2009: Civil War re-enactment, featuring Lincoln impersonator Phillip Chetwynd, interviewed by Frank Williams, Chase Farm Park, Lincoln, Rhode Island.
- January 18, 2010: Martin Luther King, Jr., celebration, with keynote speaker Frank Williams, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Cranston, RI.
- February 12, 2010: “An Evening with Abraham Lincoln,” featuring Robb Dimmick, First Baptist Church, Providence, RI.
- February 12-March 12-2010 (endorsed): “Abraham Lincoln: A Man of His Time, a Man for All Times,” Gilder Lehrman Institute exhibit, Rhode Island State House, Providence, RI. Opening event on February 24 featured remarks by RI Governor Donald Carcieri, Commissioner of RIDE Deborah A. Gist, and former Chief Justice of the RI Supreme Court, Frank Williams, and participation by students from RI schools.
- May 15, 2010 (endorsed): Train ride with Abraham Lincoln, Providence to Blackstone Valley.

At many of these events, the event coordinators distributed copies of the national Abraham Lincoln Commemorative book, Lincoln recipe cards, and Lincoln bookmarks to event attendees.

In addition to these events, speakers listed in the RIALBC speakers bureau offered lectures on Lincoln at a variety of venues during the bicentennial period, including the following: George Hail Library (Warren, RI), the Rhode Island Civil War Roundtable, Scituate High School, the North Kingstown Republican Party, Narragansett Elementary School, East Bay Education Collaborative, Roger Williams University, AmeriCorps volunteers of Providence College, Lincoln Public Library, Providence Public Library, Lincoln High School, Brown University, Belcourt Castle (Newport, RI), Blackstone Valley Visitors Center, Community College of Rhode Island, East Greenwich Yacht Club, Providence Veterans Administration Medical Center, Hearthside Homestead (Lincoln, RI), International Naval War College Supreme Court (Providence, RI).

3.3 Educational Outreach

The RIALBC made efforts to assist Rhode Island schools develop curricula and stage events to study and honor Abraham Lincoln during the bicentennial period. Rhode Island students took part in many of the events listed above in section 3.2. Two additional RIALBC-sponsored events merit special attention:

- From June 30 through July 3, 2008, the RIALBC sponsored the RIALBC Institute for Teachers at Roger Williams University in Bristol, Rhode Island. Two Commission members, Michael Vorenberg, Associate Professor of History at Brown University, and James Tackach, Professor of English at Roger Williams University, offered a four-day summer seminar on Lincoln for Rhode Island teachers. Nine Rhode Island teachers enrolled in this seminar and brought Lincoln back to their classrooms the following school year.
- With a generous contribution of \$10,000 from the Providence-based law firm of Adler, Pollock & Sheehan, the RIALBC purchased Abraham Lincoln “History Box” curriculum kits for high school history and social studies teachers in Rhode Island public schools. The kits included CDs, curriculum guides, and other teaching aids that could be used to bring Lincoln to life in the classroom.

RIALBC’s partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) was integral to the success of its educational outreach and its various bicentennial activities in Rhode Island. RIDE communicated events and opportunities to school districts (administration and teachers) through mailings and e-mail announcements, effectively spreading the word of RIALBC activities, resulting in an increased turnout at events and participation in projects from educators. RIDE also researched and created a table of free online Lincoln resources and lesson plans and aligned them to the RI Grade Span Expectations for Civics & Government and Historical Perspectives/RI History (Civics GSEs). The table was then posted to the RIALBC web site where it is easily accessible by teachers looking to supplement their curriculum.

In fall 2008 and early 2009, RIDE partnered with RIALBC and the regional educational collaboratives to host “roll-out” events in each region of the state for teachers and administrators. At each event, the Abraham Lincoln History Box was officially unveiled in a presentation that tied it to the newly adopted Civics GSEs. To further aid and encourage teachers in using these curriculum materials as a part of their curriculum, RIDE created a “Concordance to the Civics GSEs” that linked each piece of the Lincoln History Box to the relevant Civics GSEs (which teachers are required to teach). Reports received from teachers hailed the Lincoln History Box as a rich resource that sparked ideas for other Lincoln-related projects in schools around the state.

The efforts of the RIALBC and RIDE prompted a variety of activities by Rhode Island public schools, including the creation of Lincoln books, Lincoln essay contests for which members of the RIALBC served as judges, and full-costume historical re-enactments.

4.0 Fundraising

The legislative act creating the RIALBC contained no provision for funding. Shortly after its formation, the RIALBC obtained 501 (c) (3) status in order to raise funds as a charitable organization. During the period of its existence, the RIALBC raised \$16,000 in funding and received several in-kind gifts to carry out its mission and activities.

The RIALBC acknowledges the following list of donors:

Adler, Pollock & Sheehan
Wendy Allen
Artin Colian, Esq.
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Focus Business Solutions
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The Rhode Island I Foundation
Susan Stenhouse
James Tackach
John Tarantino
Chief Justice Ret. Frank J. Williams

5.0 Conclusion

Operating without a budget provided by the state legislature, relying extensively on a volunteer force of Commission members, the RIALBC was able to accomplish its mission. During the bicentennial period, Rhode Island citizens and, most importantly, its

students had available a variety of activities and events through which they could learn about the 16th President, his time in the Ocean State, and the thrilling historical period during which he carried out his life's work.