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**Testimony on June 14, 2007 Supporting the Establishment of  
The Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Act  
H.R. 1625**

Good Morning. My name is Nicky Stratton and I am the Director of the Looking for Lincoln Heritage Coalition, which has been designated in H.R.1625 as the management entity for the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area. I have been with this project, first as Chairman of the Board for 5 years and then as director for almost four years. Since I am actively involved in every aspect of this Looking for Lincoln Heritage Project, and I would like to share a little of our history, as well as provide the justification for creating the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area. Before I start I would like to thank Congressman Ray LaHood and the entire Illinois delegation for their support of this project.

The Looking for Lincoln Heritage Area started in 1998 when the State of Illinois Department of Economic Development began a program to create Illinois heritage areas. We are a not-for-profit corporation governed by a volunteer board of community and site representatives. This heritage area has no impact on public property. We are not interested in managing, owning or influencing the use of public or private lands. All participation is voluntary.

In 2002, members of our board came to Washington to meet with staff from the National Park Service to determine how our project could be recognized as a national heritage area. The information that we gathered during that visit was extremely helpful and provided valuable insights.

The National Park Service challenged us to find a way to use the Lincoln story to create a much broader canvas to interpret Lincoln's nineteenth-century world – in other words, to tell a bigger story.

They also challenged us to complete a Feasibility Study. It was a very important and revealing exercise. In the process we looked at our resources – historic, natural and cultural. We developed significant partners – both public and private. At the same time we traveled throughout central Illinois talking to our constituents to understand how they could interact with the project.

The list of resources we compiled is quite extraordinary. Our heritage area includes well over 30 fully interpreted Lincoln-related historic sites and museums that are open to the public on a regular schedule. In addition, we have over 100 sites on the National Register

of Historic Places. The proposed 42 county area includes 6 rivers, 13 significantly large parks, and more than 50 parks total. We also have a site on UNESCO's World Heritage List and a growing Illinois heritage program that is exploring the Underground Railroad.

Once those resources were identified, we went back to the first challenge from the National Park Service and developed themes that touched on the major issues of Lincoln's America - themes that could be told effectively by using this assemblage of resources. In other words we learned to tell a bigger story – one that interprets Lincoln's nineteenth-century world.

Our Feasibility Study also offers a list of partners in this effort that includes the Illinois Department of Economic Opportunity, the Illinois Bureau of Tourism, the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, the Lieutenant Governor's Office of Rural Affairs and twenty plus organizations, both public and private, that not only support us in the effort to become a national heritage area, but are currently working with us on a number of projects.

As for public participation, we are a grass-roots program. Ask all of the many government officials, chamber of commerce members, historical society committees and individuals that we have worked with over the last nine years. They will tell you that we have their support.

We have community support because they see results. We are working with communities and historic sites to build projects, assist with interpretive programs and develop coalitions and partnerships. We are helping create visitor experiences from wonderful stories that weren't being interpreted. We identified partners and brought them to the table. We are the facilitator for several collaborative projects based on the themes that we have identified. Plus we are marketing those places that are ready for visitors including the Lincoln Home National Historic Site, 14 Illinois Historic Preservation Agency Lincoln Sites and 17 private sites – all open to the public and providing crucial pieces of the Lincoln-era story.

In conclusion, we have completed the National Park Service "Four Critical Steps." We have written a Feasibility Study that successfully addresses all of the ten National Park Service criteria for assessing a potential national heritage area. We have actively and aggressively involved the public, so we can demonstrate widespread public support. We have an impressive list of key constituents including governments, private and non-profit organizations that not only support the creating of a national heritage area, but are actively participating in current heritage area projects.

Finally, I am not here today asking you to help us start a heritage area. We've worked hard to become a heritage area. However, I am asking you to take us to the next step and designate us as the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area.

**Additional Testimony in support of HR 1625  
The Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area  
Containing  
Excerpts from the Feasibility Study**

The proposed Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area had its origins in 1998 when the project was officially designated as one of seven Heritage Tourism programs funded by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs (DCCA). **The Looking for Lincoln Heritage Project set out immediately to identify resources and involve communities in central Illinois where Abraham Lincoln left his traces on the “physical and imaginative landscape.”** Among the sites identified were the Lincoln Home National Historic Site, and many State Historic Sites (managed by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency), numerous sites connected with Lincoln’s work as a lawyer and politician, places and scenes familiar to Lincoln’s family and associates, and a variety of other natural, historic, and cultural resources.

**Representatives from the participating *Looking for Lincoln* communities and sites met to initiate the public planning process and formed Executive and Steering Committees to guide their work.** Committee members hired a part-time staff person to help coordinate the planning process. County and municipal governments became involved with the project. A key participant was the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA), which provided the project with two professional historians and additional leadership through an executive appointed to the planning committee.

**Public involvement was a significant part of the planning process,** which began to shape the initiative. Following a series of local meetings, a vision and goal statement was developed: to provide new insights into Lincoln’s life, work, friends, and family; to preserve and enhance each community’s history and culture; and, to enhance the educational and economic benefit to the public.” It became clear from these initial meetings that the scope of the project should be broadened to emphasize the preservation and interpretation of the natural landscape and the region’s cultural traditions as a natural context for the story of Lincoln and his generation of Americans. This prompted project leaders to begin to explore the concept of National Heritage Areas.

A National Heritage Area was envisioned initially for the central Illinois region, with the National Park Service’s Lincoln Home National Historic Site and the future Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum serving as a central hub for the area. **The concept began to present a picture of what the region and each community and site within the region could accomplish through a coordinated program focused on telling the Lincoln story** and preserving remnants of the physical and cultural landscapes of Lincoln’s America for the education and enrichment of future generations.

***Looking for Lincoln*, as it was now called, compiled an inventory of related resources ... natural, historic, and cultural, created a regional map identifying the proposed boundary for the project,** commissioned a graphic artist to design a logo, and produced an informational brochure.

**During the first year of the public planning process, IHPA historians helped local communities research their connections to Lincoln and his times and to create a database of natural, historical, and cultural resources to be preserved, enhanced, and interpreted.** The project also hired the planning and design firm of Peckham, Guyton, Albers and Viets, Inc., from St. Louis to create an Interpretive Standards Manual and Implementation Plan containing historical criteria and design and construction specifications for a variety of exhibits and wayside signage. As new communities expressed a desire to participate in the *Looking for Lincoln* project, the manual became an important tool in outlining the criteria and standards for participation.

The *Looking for Lincoln* Illinois heritage area was begun eight years ago with an assemblage of Lincoln-related historic sites and resources that allowed the project to make a strong start. Those sites along with the opening of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum and the creation of new sites and collaborative programs assure that this project will continue to grow. ***Looking for Lincoln* has been supported during the eight years of its existence by a variety of public and private resources. The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity provides administrative funding and the Illinois Historic Preservation agency contributes crucial in-kind services including some overhead and significant consulting services. In addition, the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum has partnered with *Looking for Lincoln* on a number of projects.** Other public and private institutions have also contributed. The relationships have developed over the last eight years and *Looking for Lincoln* has become an interregional part of their outreach efforts. This significant level of support has allowed *Looking for Lincoln* to concentrate on working directly with key constituents and to develop and enhance new tourism product, establish collaborative programs and assure the continuing quality standards that has made the effort successful so far. All signs indicated that the support we have been receiving will continue. As *Looking for Lincoln* creates more sites and projects, future stability will be reinforced as the potential for membership and fee for service programs increases.

Over the past eight years *Looking for Lincoln* has continued to refine and extend its public planning process through outreach and participation with local citizens, community leaders, and local governments throughout the central Illinois area, conducting a series of introductory and follow-up planning meetings. The purpose has been to help initiate local public planning process, to share information about the project, and to assure that communities and sites interested in participating will have the tools and information necessary to begin their planning. In some cases the gatherings have been simply informational; in at least three instances *Looking for Lincoln* provided strategic planning assistance; and in other cases, *Looking for Lincoln* representatives presented information to elected officials. In all of these meetings, the importance of understanding and conforming to the standards and criteria developed for the program has been stressed to local leaders so that they can incorporate the standards and criteria in their local detailed planning from the beginning. These outreach and strategic planning meetings with local community leaders continue to be a fundamental aspect of the *Looking for Lincoln* program.

In the early stages, *Looking for Lincoln*, tended to focus on single projects and strategic planning for individual communities. While this approach benefited each participant it tended to isolate the progress to individual areas and consumed a great deal of time. In addition, other communities were not aware of successes because *Looking for Lincoln* was not doing an effective job of communicating that information. And because the effort was not collaborative our partners were not seeing results from the work that was being done. When we tackled the challenge of bringing the Lincoln Douglas Debate communities together we began a successful process that has become a model for future endeavors.

With the Sesquicentennial of the Lincoln Douglas Debates approaching in 2008, *Looking for Lincoln* volunteered to bring the seven debate communities together to discuss the potential of a cooperative effort. ***Looking for Lincoln's* role became that of a facilitator bringing the right players to the table, both public and private**, managing the meetings and offering suggestions without dictating the program. It has been an extremely successful effort for everyone concerned. The communities developed their own project and took responsibility for it, and *Looking for Lincoln* learned a great deal from the experience. This collaborative approach has also encouraged constructive competition among the communities involved which means that ideas tend to be pushed to an even higher level. The result is a plan for achievable and realistic commemoration events that include an analysis of how the arguments were framed during the debates and how the debates influenced thinking on major issues of the time. Finally, each community is planning a legacy project which will improve and enhance their sites to ultimately provide visitors with an educational and informative experience far beyond the current commemorative statues that exist now.

Based on the success of the Lincoln-Douglas debate project, *Looking for Lincoln* has adopted a new approach by focusing on several wide-scale inclusive projects. For example, plans are in process for a program which will include all of the communities within the 8th Judicial Circuit. The Circuit changed during Lincoln's years as a lawyer, encompassing 17 counties in all. The geographic area covers a large part of the proposed National Heritage Area. Communities range in size from urban environments like Springfield and Bloomington to rural settings like Havana and Paris. **While Lincoln the lawyer is the unifying theme of this project, the real opportunity is using this journey to present a much wider story encompassing the culture, environment, landscapes and issues that influenced the people of Illinois in the 19th Century and certainly influenced Lincoln as he traveled throughout Illinois and matured as a political leader.**

Another project taking a new approach involves wayside exhibits. A major part of the original *Interpretive Standards Manual and Implementation Plan* provides specifications and criteria for creating wayside exhibits. The City of Springfield, using additional federal funds, created 41 interpretive storyboards throughout the downtown area to demonstrate to other communities the potential of wayside projects. **The concept is to link Illinois' many Lincoln-related historic sites with a graphic identity that helps**

**visitors visually connect the stories. While these wayside exhibits have a common graphic look, each community can maintain the integrity of their own history.** The graphic panels are designed to tell two stories — one specific to Lincoln and one that puts Lincoln into a bigger context and tells a larger story. Through another federal grant and by leveraging local dollars, we have been able to offer the opportunity to install these wayside exhibits in all of the communities in our project for a significantly reduced cost. It is yet another way of fostering important community relationships.

The goal of the *Looking for Lincoln* project is to help communities recognize, develop and respect their history and to help them find ways to share that history with others. **When the story is told affectively and the interpretation becomes an experience for visitors, then *Looking for Lincoln* begins the marketing process.** In the first year *Looking for Lincoln* started with a simple map, but have now graduated to a visitor guide. The web is also an important component as well as joint marketing efforts with the Illinois Bureau of Tourism. *Looking for Lincoln* relies on cross promoting among sites and particularly with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum and the state sponsored visitor centers. The Illinois Bureau of Tourism has also included us in their public relations activities. We anticipate that this effort will be ramped up as the Bicentennial approaches

**As the *Looking for Lincoln* program has gained experience and momentum, its planning and accomplishments to date have already served to demonstrate the value of this comprehensive project to the entire nation — and indeed the world.** This study documents the feasibility of establishing an Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area. Included are inventories documenting many of the region’s natural, historic, and cultural resources, and an analysis of their potential to preserve and interpret a by-gone era and way of life significant in the development of the United States. The study also identifies a local coordinating entity (Looking for Lincoln Heritage Coalition, a not-for-profit 501(c)3 corporation), defines the area to be included, and documents the support of the project’s partners.

Central Illinois, the heart of the “Land of Lincoln,” still echoes with historic themes from Lincoln’s America. Portions of the natural landscape remain to be preserved or restored. Inherited folkways and cultural traditions are still practiced and transmitted to younger generations. And the burning issues of Lincoln’s day — race relations and national unity amidst social and cultural diversity — remain to be addressed. In short, **much of Lincoln’s nineteenth-century world remains to be preserved, interpreted, and transmitted to future generations in an Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area.**

## MAJOR THEMES

### A. The major issues of Lincoln's America

The major issues of Lincoln's America — equality and race relations, and national unity and the capacity of democratic governments to deal with the centrifugal forces of social and cultural diversity — still define the challenges facing our nation today.

- ***Equality and Race Relations*** Equality and race relations were at the heart of the moral, economic, and social turmoil caused by slavery in Lincoln's America. The inability of democratic government and the political culture of the time to mediate between conflicting moral visions was at the heart of the Civil War. The historic resources that visitors encounter throughout the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area provide a forum for today's Americans to reconsider these vital contemporary issues in a historical context, allowing perhaps for new perspectives and fresh approaches.
- ***National unity and the capacity of democratic government and ideals to deal with the centrifugal forces of social and cultural diversity.*** In many ways, the Civil War resulted from a failure by Americans of that day to overcome the divisive forces of diversity in their culture. Americans today, challenged anew with sustaining a workable political, social, and cultural consensus despite the countervailing forces of diversity, may have much to learn from the attitudes and actions of the Civil War generation. Americans today may contemplate this challenge as they encounter the life experiences of people from Lincoln's era at sites throughout the proposed National Heritage area.

### B. Lincoln's life experience reflects many important themes in the social, cultural, economic, and political history of America.

Historic resources related to these themes are found throughout the entire proposed National Heritage area. But various *Looking for Lincoln* communities, originally designated in the state heritage program, provide examples of how communities can be loosely identified with certain historical themes:

- *Decatur Area — Immigrant Beginnings*
- *New Salem and Petersburg Area — Market Revolution and Economic Transformations*
- *Coles County Area — Importance of Extended Family and Kinship Network*
- *Vandalia Area — Expansion of American Participatory Democracy*
- *Bloomington Area — Frontier Aspirations for Middle-Class Respectability*
- *Logan County Area — The Evolution of American Legal Culture*
- *Springfield Area — Individual Self-Transformation and the "Self-Made" Ethos*

## MAJOR RESOURCES

The proposed Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area is replete with significant natural, historic, and cultural resources.

**Cutting across the physical landscape of the region are three National Scenic By-Ways — the Great River Road, the Meeting of the Great Rivers, and the National Road; a National Scenic River — The Middle Fork in Vermilion County; two National Natural Landmarks and over fifty other state parks, wildlife preserves, conservation areas, and wilderness county park districts.** All of these places preserve portions of the Illinois landscape and afford visitors an opportunity to experience the physical environment of rivers, woodlands, and prairies that were familiar to Abraham Lincoln and his generation of Americans.

**Over a quarter of the 426 sites on the National Register of Historic Places scattered throughout the 42 counties making up the proposed National Heritage Area are related to historical themes from Lincoln’s nineteenth-century America,** including a unit of the National Park System – Lincoln Home National Historic Site, eleven National Historic Landmarks, sixteen State Historic Sites, and a site on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The burning issues of Lincoln’s day -- race relations and national unity amidst social and cultural diversity--still remain, and are confronted in a number of different venues.

**Various sites give visitors insight into important themes relating to nineteenth-century** social, cultural, economic and political history--immigration, economic transformation, kinship networks, political democratization, the rise of middle-class gentility in the American West, the evolution of legal culture, and the American ethos of individual self-transformation. Today’s cultural landscape still reflects nineteenth-century antecedents as people throughout the area continue to celebrate their inherited cultural traditions in religious settings, living history farms and villages, annual commemorative events, celebrations of itinerant lawyer life, recognition of indigenous American Indian cultures, and in sculpture, art, and drama.

**The rich assemblage of resources provides outstanding opportunities to preserve, interpret, and commemorate distinctive historic traditions, customs, beliefs, and folkways that present valuable aspects of American heritage.** They provide outstanding recreational and educational opportunities to the people of the nation and beyond. The people, communities, events, and landscapes of the region reflect continuing ties to Abraham Lincoln’s life and times. Together they bring an immediacy and tangible quality to the powerful Lincoln legacy. Individually and collectively they constitute the Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area, celebrating the land and people Lincoln knew. It is therefore recommended that *Looking for Lincoln* pursue National Heritage Area designation.



### **The proposed Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area:**

- Is undeniably a story with national and international significance
- Offers many Lincoln-related thematic connections that can support a multitude of interpretive and educational programs.
- Is made up of communities that represent distinctive aspects of Lincoln heritage, worthy of recognition and interpretation
- Provides outstanding opportunities to conserve natural, historic and cultural resources.
- Provides the framework of interpreting the American experience of the 19th century at a time that was significant in the development of our Nation.

### **Looking for Lincoln has:**

- Based on the guidance provided by the National Park Service, taken a Lincoln-focused tourism project and shaped a heritage area by expanding that focus to include the forces of the 19th century on Lincoln and his influence on the political, cultural and economic history of America.
- Been supported by Illinois State Agencies including the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, as well as the Lincoln Home National Historic Site. Other supporting public and private agencies can be found in the Addendum to this report.
- Obtained demonstrations of support for national designation from local and state partners and indications of willingness to maintain a working relationship and continue support for *Looking for Lincoln* in the development of a National Heritage Area.
- Through a series of community meetings, local strategic planning exercises and collaborative projects has involved residents, business interests, non-profit organizations, and various levels of government in programs and in the planning process.
- Created a conceptual boundary map which has been shared with and supported by the Public.
- Agreed to continue as the management entity for the proposed National Heritage Area and to manage the process for creating a long-range Management Plan as the first step of designation.

## Looking for Lincoln Participating Communities and Sites

**The following communities and historic sites are currently participating in Looking for Lincoln Heritage Coalition promotional programs**

*City of Beardstown – Cass County*  
Lincoln Court House

*Cities of Bloomington Normal – McLean County*  
David Davis Mansion State Historic Site  
McLean County History Museum  
Walking Tour

*Cities of Charleston and Lerna – Coles County*  
Charleston Debate Museum  
Lincoln Log Cabin State Historic Site  
Reuben Moore State Historic Site  
Shiloh Cemetery State Historic Site

*City of Danville – Vermilion County*  
Dr. Fithian Home  
Vermilion County Historical Museum

*City of Decatur – Macon County*  
Macon County Historical Museum  
Complex

*City of Elkhart – Logan County*  
Under the Prairie Archeological  
Museum

*City of Galesburg – Knox County*  
Carl Sandburg State Historic Site  
Knox College Old Main

*City of Lincoln – Logan County*  
Postville Courthouse State Historic Site  
Lincoln College and Museum

*City of Mahomet – Champaign County*  
Early American Museum

*City of Metamora – Woodford*  
Metamora Courthouse State Historic  
Site

*City of Mt. Pulaski – Logan County*  
Mt. Pulaski Courthouse State Historic  
Site  
Mt. Pulaski Historical Society Museum  
and Welcome Center

*City of Petersburg – Menard County*  
New Salem State Historic Site  
Menard County Historical Society  
Museum and exhibit

*Pittsfield – Pike County*  
The Talking Houses of Pittsfield  
Shasdid House

*City of Springfield – Sangamon County*  
Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library  
and Museum  
Old State Capitol State Historic Site  
Lincoln Law Offices State Historic Site  
Lincoln Tomb State Historic Site  
Lincoln Depot (Great Western Depot)  
Lincoln Home National Historic Site  
Here I have lived walking tour

*City of Taylorville – Christian County*  
Christian County Historical Museum

*City of Vandalia – Fayette County*  
Vandalia Statehouse State Historic Site

***The following sites are part of a special LFL  
Debate Project***

Lincoln Douglas Debate Sites  
City of Alton – Madison County  
City of Quincy – Adams County  
City of Jonesboro Union County  
City of Freeport – Stephenson County  
City of Ottawa – LaSalle County  
City of Galesburg – Knox County  
City of Charleston – Coles County

City of Chicago – Cook County  
Chicago Museum of History

**Public and Private Partners currently involved in Looking for Lincoln Heritage Area Projects**

**Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity**

Jack Lavin, Director

**Illinois Bureau of Tourism**

Jan Kostner, Deputy Director  
Jan Kemmerling, Assistant Deputy Director

**Illinois Historic Preservation Agency**

Robert Coomer, Director  
Paula Cross, Superintendent of Historic Sites  
Thomas Schwartz, State Historian

**Lt. Governor's Rural Affairs Council**

Carolyn Brown Hodge, Director of Rural Affairs

**Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum**

Rick Beard, Executive Director and Director Library Foundation  
Jennifer Tirey, Deputy Director  
Bryon Andreasen, Presidential Library Historian

**Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Foundation**

Susan Mogerman, Chief Operating Officer

**Illinois Bicentennial Commission**

Kay Smith, Director

**National Park Service Lincoln Home National Historic Site**

James Sanders, Superintendent

**Illinois Association of Museums**

Mary Turner, Executive Director

**Illinois Department of Conservation – Illinois State Museum**

Karen Witter, Associate Museum Director

**Illinois Mainstreet**

Wendy Bell, Director

**Knox College Lincoln Study Center**

Rodney O. Davis and Douglas L. Wilson, Co-directors

**Papers of Abraham Lincoln**

Daniel Stowell, Director

**Illinois Department of Transportation**

Terry Fountain, District Engineer

**Illinois Elderhostel – Lincoln Land Community College Senior Outreach**

John Allen

**Illinois Tourism Alliance**

Nina Winston, Executive Director

**Lincoln Douglas Society**

Edward Finch, President

**Stephen A. Douglas Association**

George Buss, President

**The Abraham Lincoln Association**

Dick Hart, President

**Illinois High School Association**

Mary Hickman, Ed.D., Executive Director