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D.C. COURTS TO RE-DEDICATE CITY'S OLDEST LINCOLN STATUE



Photo by Joseph Romeo

WASHINGTON, DC – The District of Columbia Courts will rededicate Judiciary Square's Abraham Lincoln statue, one of the nation's oldest existing memorials to the legendary president, on April 15, 2009. The monument's homecoming will take place one hundred forty-one years to the day after it was originally installed and just one day before DC Emancipation Day.

The iconic statue was moved off-site three years ago to accommodate a major renovation of the Historic Courthouse, which is now nearing conclusion. In preparation for the upcoming reopening of the courthouse, the statue has been meticulously cleaned and restored, and will be re-erected in this bicentennial year of Lincoln's birth.

The first public monument to the fallen President, the statue was created with funds contributed immediately after the assassination through popular subscription. John T. Ford made the largest donation of about \$1,800, which he raised through proceeds from a benefit performance at his theater.

The original unveiling of the statue on April 15, 1868, three years after Lincoln's death, was attended by about 20,000 people (over 20% of Washington's residents), as well as by such dignitaries as President Andrew Johnson and Generals Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman.

The marble statue was sculpted by Lot Flannery, an Irish immigrant who was not an artist by profession. Together with his brother, he owned one of the city's largest stone-carving companies that specialized in tombstones. Flannery's design was unanimously selected by the monument committee, who praised it as the "most spirited" and "an excellent likeness" of Lincoln.

In the life-like statue, Lincoln is depicted as if about to speak, his left hand resting on a Roman fasces, symbolic of the Union. Though the statue was originally set atop a marble column over 30 feet high, the sharp features and deep-set eyes make him recognizable even from a distance.

In 1919, when the courthouse (formerly the District of Columbia City Hall) underwent a renovation, the statue and column were dismantled and put into storage. The statue was then re-erected on April 15, 1923, this time on a low pedestal. Once placed within easy reach to vandals, Lincoln's fingers were repeatedly broken off and eventually his right hand was re-carved, though at too large a scale.



The statue was again removed in 2006 for the expansion and renovation of the Historic Courthouse. Designed by noted preservation firm Beyer Blinder Belle Architects & Planners, the project will provide much-needed space for the Courts while bringing new life to one of the most significant historic buildings and green spaces in Washington, D.C. The building will reopen in late April 2009 with a dedication ceremony in June.

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