

## **PRESS RELEASES**

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### **Building the 'Experiment'**

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### **A Growing Museum**

- 1931: Dedication of the first home of The Lincoln Historical Research Foundation, in the 4th floor tower above The Lincoln National Life Insurance Co. headquarters, 1300 S. Harrison, Fort Wayne. A few exhibit cases share the space with library shelves, files, and offices.
- 1960: The Lincoln Library and Museum moves to larger, more accessible quarters on the first floor of the Harrison Street building.
- 1977: The Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum expands into a bi-level 11,000 square foot space in Lincoln National's building at 1300 S. Clinton.
- September 1995: The Lincoln Museum reopens in its new 30,000-square foot home at 200 E. Berry Street.

In February 1993, months of debate and controversy concerning the future of The Lincoln Museum came to an end when Lincoln National Corporation announced its decision to build a new home for the museum in Fort Wayne. With the museum's future secure, the next challenge was to design a permanent exhibit, one that would showcase the museum's rich collections while telling a meaningful story of the life and times of Abraham Lincoln.

The first step was to find an exhibit design firm that could translate the museum staff's ideas into reality. After interviewing a number of leading designers, the museum selected Formations, Inc. of Portland, Oregon. Formations' record, including an award-winning tribal museum at Warm Springs, Oregon, demonstrated its ability to make complex historical subjects accessible to the public while maintaining high standards of scholarship.

Planning began in December 1993, when museum staff members met with Formations to decide which elements of the Lincoln story should be the focus of the permanent exhibit. Drawing upon the recent scholarship of Gabor Boritt, Phillip Paludan, Mark Neely, and others, the planning team agreed that both of Lincoln's great works, his efforts to end slavery and to save the Union, were integral to his vision of America as an ongoing experiment in human freedom. Thus, the new permanent exhibit, "Abraham Lincoln and the American Experiment," was to emphasize Lincoln's role in preserving and purifying America's experiment in government of, by, and for the people.

As research and writing of the exhibit storyline got underway, Portland architect Thompson Vaivoda & Associates began to configure the museum's new space, located within the Lincoln National Corporate headquarters building. In addition to the permanent exhibit, the museum had to accommodate a temporary exhibit hall, a large book and gift shop, research and conference rooms, administrative offices, and the vital storage spaces for the preservation of its massive collection of books, artifacts, and other Lincoln-related materials. Working under ever-present constraints of space, time, and money, the team continued to grow. Odyssey Productions of Portland was subcontracted to produce video presentations and Harvest Moon Studio of Los Angeles

signed on to write original software for touchscreen computer exhibits. While museum staff members researched and edited the scripts, Odyssey personnel recruited Hollywood stars Sam Waterston and Ossie Davis, and movie critic Gene Siskel, to lend their talents to the project.