

“I think Lincoln was one of those men who could see through the fog of time, the fog of history, and he had a vision of a road for this country. We’re not there yet. Ferguson showed us that. We’re not there yet, but we’re still on that road.”

ROBERT DAVIS

‘Lincoln Never Dies’

Finding A Martyr’s Resonance 150 Years After His Death

BY ADAM GELLER
AP National Writer

WASHINGTON — In the oak-paneled hush of the reading room overlooking Pennsylvania Avenue, Karen Needles mostly works alone — but always in good company.

Five mornings a week, Needles signs in at the National Archives, often wearing an Abraham Lincoln T-shirt, and her hand sets to work atop a Lincoln mouse pad. Some days, she stations an Honest Abe bobblehead beside her laptop, his bearded chin seemingly nodding approval.

Here, backed by bound volumes of Lincoln’s writings and three blocks from where, 150 years ago this week, he was felled by an assassin’s bullet, Needles is on a self-appointed mission: to bring the Great Emancipator to life.

“They call me Lady Lincoln,” chuckles the former middle school history teacher who digitally scans every original record she can from Lincoln’s administration — from letters he signed to his final paycheck for \$1,981.67 — posting them online for anyone to see without charge.

To Needles, raised in small town Kansas and first in her family to go to college, Lincoln has long been a role model. But in a new era of poisoned politics, she says, we could all use some Lincoln. She laughs, thinking how satisfying it would be if his seated likeness at the Lincoln Memorial could take a few of today’s politicians over his knee and give them what-for.

“Lincoln never dies,” she says.

Lincoln’s life in memory began almost immediately after he was shot on April 14, 1865. The country embarked on a 1,700-mile funeral that stretched from the capital through seven states. Crowds lined the rails, even in the dark, in an outpouring that has never been rivaled. They mourned Lincoln as a proxy for all the young men who’d never be coming home from war.

But that was a long time ago and Lincoln belongs to history now. Or does he?

From Washington to Lincoln’s resting place in Springfield, Illinois, the commemoration of his death echoes past grief and a nation’s defining struggle.

But it also stirs the voices of Lincoln’s many modern-day admirers, people like Needles. A century and a half after Lincoln was killed, people continue to connect with him in almost personal terms, while searching anew for his relevance to the Republic he left behind.

“There was a rush towards the President’s box when cries were heard — ‘Stand back and give him air.’ ...The entire city to-night presents a scene of wild excitement, accompanied by violent expressions of the profoundest sorrow.” — Washington, April 14, 1865, The Associated Press

When tourists queue in front of Ford’s Theatre on a recent blustery morning, 9-year-old Luke Ring is near the front, blond hair poking out from under the dark blue cap of a Union soldier.

“I like that he was president during the Civil War and he wanted freedom for the slaves,” says the boy, here with his parents and three siblings. “I like everything about him. He’s just really cool.”

The Rings, from Franklin, Tennessee, have

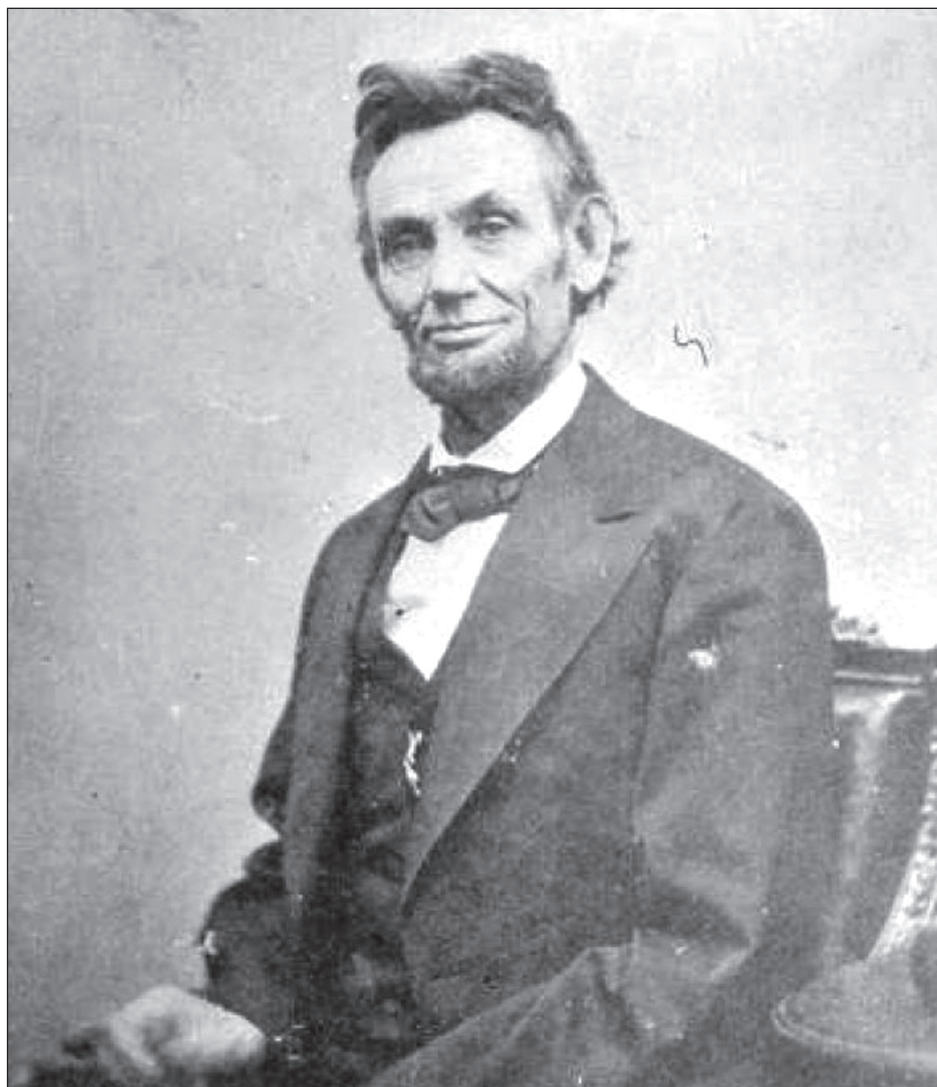


PHOTO: ALEXANDER GARDNER

This portrait of Abraham Lincoln was one of a series taken by Alexander Gardner made April 9, 1865, the day of Gen. Robert E. Lee’s surrender at Appomattox and less than a week before Lincoln’s murder. It is believed to be one of the last formal photographs made of Lincoln.

arrived by way of Gettysburg, scene for one of the most recalled moments of Lincoln’s presidency. But this spring break history lesson wouldn’t be complete without gazing into the theater box, draped in red, white and blue bunting, where John Wilkes Booth drew his pistol.

Lincoln’s death, in the backroom of a boarding house across the street, elevated him to martyrdom, says Richard Wightman Fox, author of “Lincoln’s Body: A Cultural History.” For a century, Americans with a cause attached themselves to that legacy, right up to the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.’s speech at the Lincoln Memorial.

“Lincoln is important today, but it’s a different kind of importance,” Fox says. He still embodies the American ideal that anyone can reach the pinnacle, even from the most humble beginnings. But with Lincoln now used to market everything from auto insurance to barbecue sauce, the aura of sainthood has faded.

Instead, for many, he is the approachable president, looked to as a “model for what it means to be a leader,” Fox says.

“His vision still resonates in American culture — that we can always do better,” says Tyler Ring, Luke’s father.

At the Memorial, throngs of visitors pose for photos with Lincoln’s 19-foot statue. But some pause to study his words engraved in the Indiana limestone. Sherri Bell, a market development manager from Indianapolis, clasps boyfriend Brien Smith’s arm, as they read Lincoln’s second inaugural address.

“He was very real,” Bell says. “He was president, but he seemed liked a regular person, with all the pain and suffering and decisions.”

three miles from Independence Hall. In Jersey City, New Jersey, German immigrants mourned so vigorously their songs were heard across the water in New York — where 120,000 later filed past the coffin.

Then the 9-car procession continued north, retracing nearly all of Lincoln’s 1861 route to the White House.

On that celebratory first journey, the train had stopped briefly at Peekskill, New York, and for decades the Hudson River town has relished its brush with greatness. Each year, the local Lincoln Society holds a dinner, and last year, Peekskill’s restored train station opened as the Lincoln Depot Museum.

Most of the stations where the funeral train stopped are long gone. But the little brick building where mourning locals gathered is the same place that today New York commuters hurtle past morning and night.

Last year, Tony Czarnecki, a past president of the society, heard that someone had built an exact replica of Lincoln’s coffin. In fact, there are four, made by Indiana’s Batesville Casket Co. — one for a museum and the rest sent to funeral homes and others that ask to exhibit them, usually for events around Lincoln’s birthday.

“This year they’re booked for the entire year,” company spokeswoman Teresa Gyulafia says.

In late April, one of those walnut coffins, covered in black broadcloth, will lie in state in Peekskill’s depot, with Civil War reenactors standing sentry. Visitors will sign a condolence book to be sent to Springfield.

“We wouldn’t be the country that we are without the Union that he preserved,” Czarnecki says. “We honor that in ways large and small.”

“The body of President Lincoln arrived here at ten o’clock ... The stores are all closed, the whole population is in the streets, bells tolling, and minute guns firing. The weather is unpleasant; a fine mist falling and the lowering sky add to the sadness which is depicted on every countenance.” — Baltimore, April 21, 1865, The Daily Age of Philadelphia

People bond with Lincoln in their own way.

Mary Coe Foran’s fascination with him dates to childhood, when her family treasured a swatch of cloth, stained with blood, reputedly cut from the dress of the actress who cradled the dying Lincoln’s head. She recalls the many questions it prompted.

“From the White House to the Capitol, the roofs, porticos, windows and all elevated points were occupied by interested spectators ... This was the largest funeral procession that ever took place in Washington ... Many thousands of hearts throbbed in unison with the solemn dirges, as the procession slowly moved upon the way.” — Washington, D.C., April 19, 1865, AP

From Washington, the funeral train traveled to Baltimore, then Philadelphia, where lines to view Lincoln’s body stretched

LINCOLN | PAGE 16



The first step to being prepared for severe weather is knowing when it’s about to hit.

If you have a weather radio in your home you’ll have advance warning when severe weather is heading toward you.

The Press & Dakotan and both locations of Kopetsky’s Ace Hardware will be giving away a weather radio (\$37.99 value) to two lucky readers.

Just fill out the entry form and drop it at either Kopetsky’s Ace Hardware. Locations are 2404 Broadway or 103 W. 3rd St. by Tuesday, April 15, 2015.

A winner will be drawn from each location and announced on the Severe Weather Awareness page running in the April 20 Press & Dakotan in conjunction with Severe Weather Awareness Week in South Dakota.

Kopetsky’s ACE Hardware **YANKTON DAILY PRESS & DAKOTAN**
North Location: 2404 Broadway Downtown Location: 103 W. 3rd St. 319 Walnut St. • 605-665-7811 www.yankton.net

NAME _____ PHONE _____
ADDRESS _____
SIGNATURE: _____

Entry deadline is April 14, 2015. Must be 18 or older. Yankton Media, Inc., employees and their immediate family members are ineligible. By signing above, you give permission for your name and/or likeness to be published in any of the Yankton Media, Inc., publications including on the internet. — No Purchase Necessary —

\$25 =
15 WORDS
1 PHOTO
1 NEWSPAPERS
1 SHOPPERS
SPEEDY SALE!

Get Extra!

Buying or Selling a Car?
Get EXTRA exposure and a Speedy Sale!



Great school car! 2003 PT Cruiser, silver, 91,000 miles, good gas mileage. \$4,200 - call (555)555-5555

Get Extra offer good through April 30, 2015. Subject to change without notice.

MV Shopper **YANKTON DAILY PRESS & DAKOTAN**

319 Walnut
605-665-7811
yankton.net