

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Lincoln's Illinois Home

Springfield in Illinois is having the problem we often face in Monterey, that of saving historic homes and monuments. At present Springfield is worried over the preservation of the home of Abraham Lincoln, Civil War president, whose birthday was the 12th of this month. The home was the only one he ever owned.

In the minds of a group of Illinois citizens, something must quickly be done to protect the surroundings of the historic house, because the neighborhood in which it stands is, in their opinion, seriously deteriorating. Since half a million people visit it every year, the site not only deserves but demands adequate preservation, these citizens assert.

In a feature story printed recently in the New York Times, the details of plans to give the old house proper treatment and a deserving setting, is reviewed. For this purpose, the article relates, a non-profit Lincoln Memorial Center Assn. has been formed. The plan put forward is to acquire the properties along both sides of the 500 block of Eighth street, on one corner of which the Lincoln house stands; and to replace the present cluttered structures with a park-like area which would also have a Lincoln Museum and adequate parking space and rest rooms set among landscaped lawns and trees.

The association wants to raise \$1 million for these purposes.

Parts of this Times story read like it might be set in Monterey. In Springfield there is some opposition to the proposal from some quarters, based on the argument that such a park would radically alter the scene as Lincoln knew it. Other opponents would prefer the entire block to be restored to its appearance in Lincoln's time. So far there has been no endorsement or opposition from the State of Illinois. According to the leaders of the association it is planned to turn the jurisdiction over such a memorial park to the Illinois Division of Parks and Memorials which it is felt, has done an admirable job in maintaining the Lincoln home itself.

The spokesmen from the association say that the neighborhood has already changed radically from what it was when Lincoln knew it. It is now, zoned for all but

heavy industry. Gas stations, neon signs, souvenir shops and other small stores, as well as shabby old houses crowd in upon the home, and parking meters bristle along the curbs.

The fund which the association hopes to raise would be turned over to the state, in the spirit of Robert Lincoln (the President's son), who gave the Lincoln home to the state in 1887, "to be kept in perpetuity, and open to the public without admission fee."

The Lincoln House was built in 1839 and was originally a story and-a-half frame cottage, which Lincoln later converted to a full two stories. He bought the house for \$1,500 in 1844 from the Rev. Charles Dresser, who two years earlier had performed the marriage service for Lincoln and Mary Todd. In this home all but the eldest of their sons were born, and here their little 4-year-old son "Eddie" died.

Simple in design, the house is strongly constructed of fine hardwoods. The frame and floors are oak. The weatherboarding, doors and doorframes are black walnut. Hand-split hickory supplied the laths, and hand-split walnut the original shingles. Wooden pegs were used in the construction, with strategic but sparing use of hand-made nails. The Times story voices the opinion that "undoubtedly Lincoln, the woodsman, recognized the value and durability of the lumber used. And somehow, with its unpretentious exterior concealing a wealth of solid worth, the house seems to reflect the qualities of the man who made it his home."