

KALAMAZOO ABRAHAM LINCOLN INSTITUTE

Annual Report, October 27, 2023

The year 2023 proved to be an eventful year for the Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln Institute (KLI). Completion of the Institute's flagship project of placing a bronze statue of Abraham Lincoln in what is now Bronson Park where Mr. Lincoln spoke on August 27, 1856, was finally achieved after a decade of planning. Statue Committee Chair Gary Swain and Committee Members Robert Hencken, Dr. Al Jackson and Cameron S. Brown labored through the year to complete the project that involved a myriad of associated tasks necessary to bring the project to fruition.

The Institute held a spirited and well attended statue dedication and unveiling ceremony in Bronson Park on the 167th anniversary of Mr. Lincoln's Kalamazoo visit. Participants included sculptor William Wolfe, soloist Alfrelynn Roberts, the Dodworth Saxhorn Band, Pastor Michael Brown of the Kalamazoo Gospel Ministries, Dr. Michael Rice, State Superintendent of Education, Jane Ghosh of Discover Kalamazoo, Kalamazoo Mayor David Anderson, Helen Lukan Brown, and Board Members Dr. Tom George, Treasurer Terri Novaria, Commissioner Chris Praedel and KLI President Cameron S. Brown. Volunteer videographer Steven R. Schrier videotaped the August 27th ceremony, which has been posted on the Institute's website. Photographers Anthony Dugal and John Lacko also donated their professional services. A dedication poem titled "The Gift for Which We're Blessed" was composed for the statue ceremony and has been posted on the Institute's website as well.

A Memorandum of Understanding with the City of Kalamazoo transferring ownership of the Bronson Park Lincoln statue to the city was completed and signed. This document included stipulations about periodic cleaning of the statue and a reverter clause should the city ever remove the statue from Bronson Park.

An education initiative led by Director Steve Fryling along with educator Mary Burke and a team of area teachers drafted and field-tested a Lincoln-in-Kalamazoo related curriculum for Elementary and Middle School Students tied to Michigan Social Studies Standards. This effort also involved KLI Education Committee members Fred Colgren, Dr. Al Jackson and President Cameron S. Brown. Upon submission of the curriculum draft to Dr. Michael F. Rice, State Superintendent of Public Instruction for comment and input, he requested it be reviewed by Mr. Scott Koenig, Social Studies Consultant in the Office of Educational Supports, Michigan Department of Education. Mr. Koenig's review included this summation: "I like this work as supplemental supports for the classroom. While it is labeled a "curriculum" as specific to the topic, I see this as aligned lessons that are using a C3 inquiry approach. This approach done well is engaging and is exactly what I would

like to see occurring in Michigan's classrooms. This work connects to Michigan studies, and I feel this content may be selected (local choice) and implemented in Michigan classrooms and beyond. Very well thought out work."

A successful Annual Lincoln Birthday Celebration was held at the Zhang Portage Senior Center on February 11th with a capacity crowd of over 100 in attendance. President Brown presented his talk "Lincoln's Winning Smile." Additionally, a new short promotional film was premiered titled "Return to Kalamazoo." A plentiful dessert buffet was catered by Keynote Confections owned and operated by Helen Lukan Brown. Area high school student Aija Hodges presented a poetry reading and a drawing was held for Jon Meacham's book "And There was Light" compliments of Director Bob Hencken and his wife Karen. A successful silent auction of Lincoln-related books and Lincolnia was also a feature of the annual event.

Vice President Tom George's editorship of the KLI email newsletter showed a steady increase in circulation. In 2023 seven newsletters were produced with a list of subscribers growing from 259 to 358. Each newsletter has had a greater than 50% open rate. While the Mailchimp service used has some limitations, it remains a service free of charge.

Plans began on the Institute's 2024 Annual Lincoln Birthday Celebration by securing the services of Northwestern University Professor Dr. Kate Masur as the Institute's February 10, 2024, guest speaker. Contact was also made with acclaimed Lincoln scholar Allen Guelzo as a possible 2025 guest speaker. He is holding dates on his February 2025 calendar as discussions proceed.

President Brown encouraged the Development and Program Committees to meet and begin planning for 2024 and beyond.

As the year drew to a close, Director Spurr expressed his desire to not seek reappointment to the board, and Director Fryling submitted his resignation with the request to be appointed to the KLI's Advisory Committee. The service of both members is to be commended.

In conclusion, the Institute has generated a significant amount of public interest, support, and goodwill throughout the year, leading to the culmination of the August 27th statue dedication. The optimism of what can be accomplished to engage and inspire a community once graced by the presence of one of the greatest statesmen in world history is boundless.

—Submitted by Cameron S. Brown, President