

The
KALAMAZOO
ABRAHAM
LINCOLN
Institute

A Gift of History

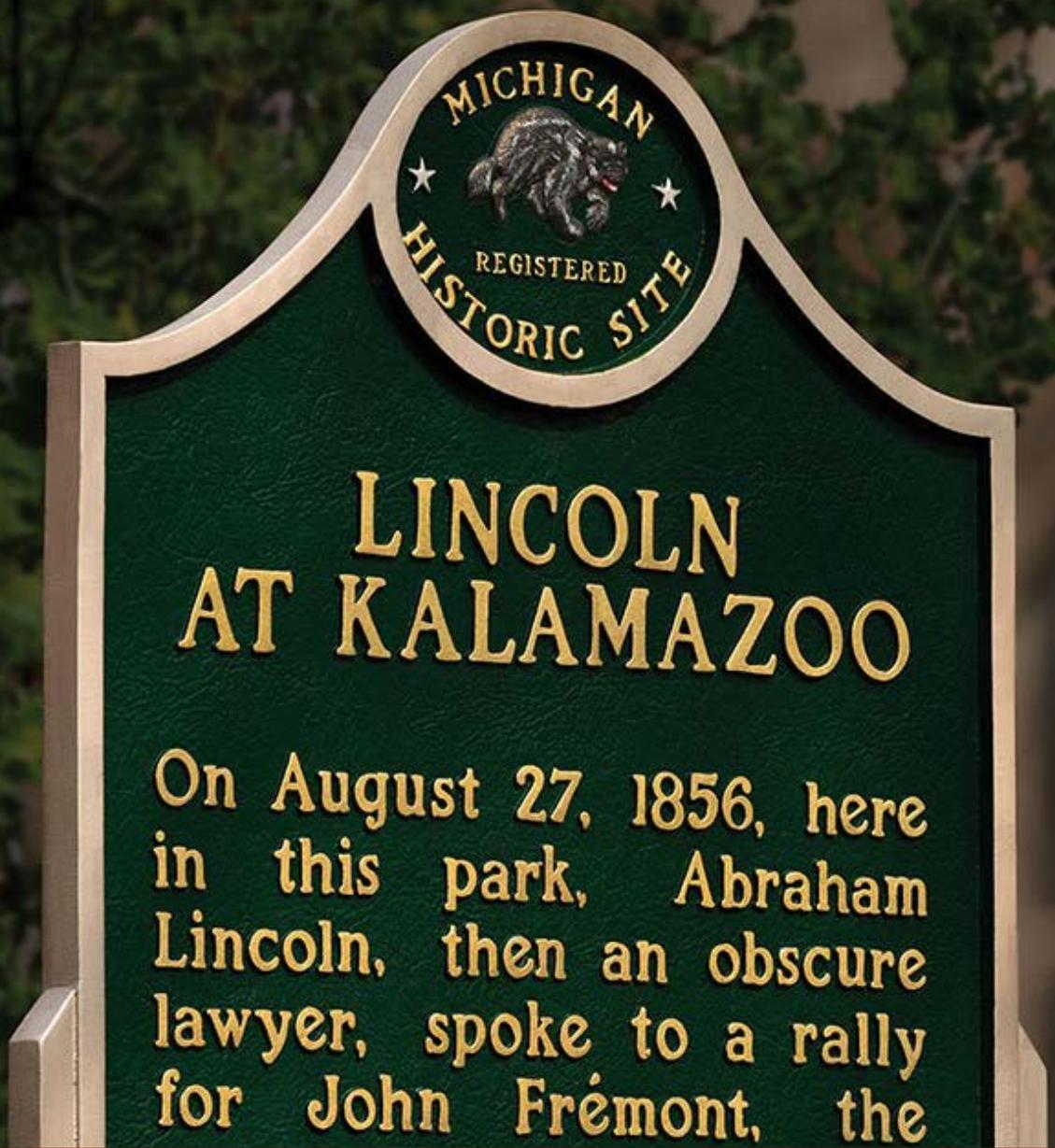
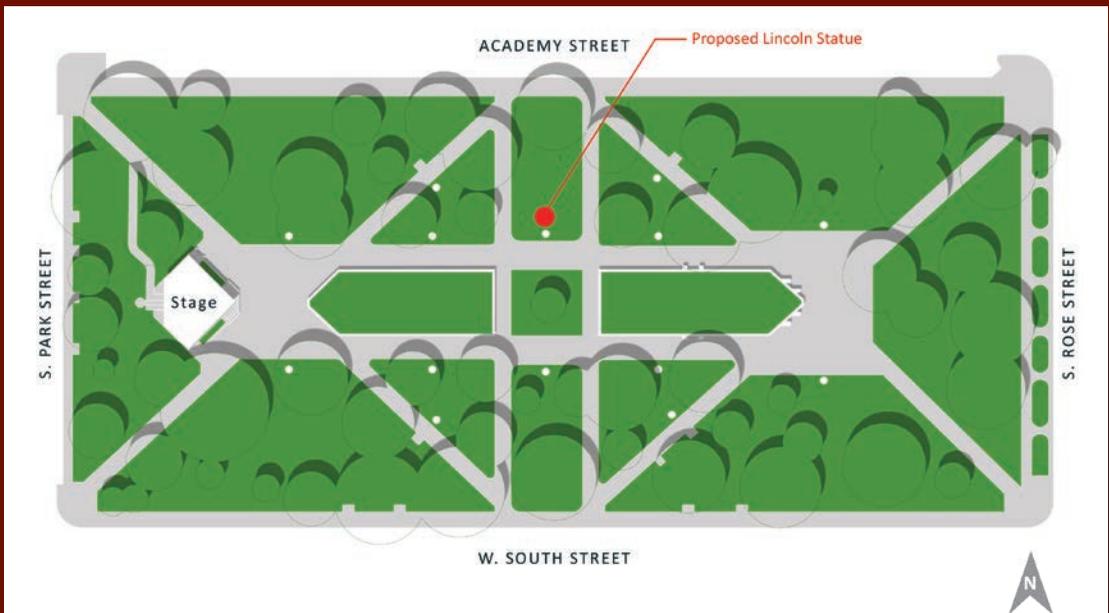


Photo of Michigan historical marker courtesy of Anthony Dugal.



BRONSON PARK

The Power of an Idea

All great achievements begin with the power of an idea: public libraries, the interstate highway system, the Moon Landing— America itself! These ideas capture the imagination of people, inspiring plans that rally public support. This template for success has been the steady course of progress for the Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln Institute since its inception in the fall of 2012 when a local steering committee was formed to celebrate Abraham Lincoln’s 1856 visit to Kalamazoo in a sustained and creative way.

An Invitation

We invite you to help bring Abraham Lincoln back to Kalamazoo! As you read about our plans to use an event of the past to enrich the life of Kalamazoo today, we hope you will be compelled to support this engaging project with your generous tax-deductible gift. There are various levels of giving you may consider. A reply envelope is available for your convenience. You may also donate online by visiting us at www.KalamazooLincolnInstitute.org. Thank you for your consideration!

City of Kalamazoo Public Statement

“The City of Kalamazoo supports the placement of a privately-funded bronze statue of Abraham Lincoln in Bronson Park, and has authorized the Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln [Institute] to coordinate fundraising efforts and oversee the artistic direction for the statue design and selection of a sculptor. Final design approval is subject to the advice and consent of the City of Kalamazoo . . . The statue will be placed on ground located in the north central part of the park.”

—City of Kalamazoo, November 18, 2016 (revised January 22, 2018).

A detailed oil painting of Abraham Lincoln, shown from the chest up. He is wearing a dark suit jacket, a white dress shirt, and a dark bow tie. He has a serious expression and is looking slightly to the right of the viewer. The background is dark and indistinct.

A Gift of History

On the morning of August 27, 1856, a clean-shaven 47-year-old Abraham Lincoln left Chicago on the Michigan Central Railroad bound for Kalamazoo. He had been invited to speak at a political rally that afternoon in what is now Bronson Park where upwards of 10,000 people had gathered.

Little known outside his home state of Illinois, he was one of many speakers that day, and by a stroke of good fortune, his speech was reported verbatim in the Detroit Daily Advertiser—preserving for all time what we know today as Lincoln's Kalamazoo Speech. Four years later, Michigan voters helped elect this once obscure visitor to Kalamazoo our nation's 16th president. Lincoln's Kalamazoo visit was his only public appearance in Michigan—a gift of history no other Michigan community can claim!

The Plan

Lincoln's Kalamazoo visit is an untapped resource with the potential to add significant cultural and educational value to Kalamazoo. His 1856 visit and speech in Bronson Park offers the community an opportunity to transform a unique historical asset into an ongoing educational enrichment. Moreover, Kalamazoo's Lincoln connection provides fertile ground for developing inclusive studies that encompass issues of race and equality in America, and so a three-part Lincoln-legacy plan has been proposed highlighting the placement of a Lincoln statue in Bronson Park. Here is the plan:

- 1) Place a privately-funded bronze statue of Abraham Lincoln in Bronson Park;
- 2) Promote educational programs instructive of Lincoln's 1856 visit; and
- 3) Explore ways to foster leadership development inspired by the life and legacy of Abraham Lincoln with a focus on youth.

Bringing Lincoln Back to Kalamazoo

Why place a statue of Abraham Lincoln in Bronson Park? The answer is simple: it adds value! More than a piece of statuary art, a Lincoln statue in Bronson Park will provide a visual reminder of Lincoln's historic visit, and an anchor for the Kalamazoo Lincoln-legacy plan.

Why was Mr. Lincoln in Kalamazoo? The answer is a launch pad for understanding the deep undercurrents of race in America. In studying the life of Lincoln, we can learn about America at the most transformative time in our history. Lincoln's story is America's story, and uniquely Kalamazoo's story too. We welcome Mr. Lincoln's return!

Building on Past Commemorations

The Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln Institute builds on at least three local commemorations celebrating Abraham Lincoln's 1856 visit. The first was the 1956 centennial celebration sponsored by the Kalamazoo County Historical Society, and the Civil War Round Table of Michigan. That was followed by another commemoration in 1996 hosted by the newly opened Kalamazoo Valley Museum. A sesquicentennial celebration of Lincoln's visit was held in 2006 and was organized through the efforts of then State Senator Thomas M. George with support from the Kalamazoo Valley Museum, the City of Kalamazoo, and the Arts Council of Greater Kalamazoo. And in August 2016, the steering committee itself hosted a well-attended commemorative event at the Kalamazoo Public Library in celebration of the 160th anniversary of Lincoln's visit.

The Value of Legacy

Abraham Lincoln's legacy of character, achievement and leadership has tremendous potential as an educational tool. His story is a safe place for kids to learn about America and her struggles for freedom. Everything from ethics and elocution to the value of literacy and the importance of hard work, honesty, and personal responsibility can be drawn from the life of Lincoln. The values of equality, fairness, and mercy are all illustrative of the Lincoln legacy.

Abraham Lincoln is common ground. He crosses all political divides. He is often a child's first introduction to American history; the log cabin, the beard, and stovepipe hat. Children can appreciate how attractive good character can be because Lincoln is tangible to them.

The Challenge

While Abraham Lincoln is most often associated with historic sites in Illinois and Washington, D.C., Kalamazoo is fortunate to be the one venue in Michigan where Mr. Lincoln made a public address. The challenge is how best to capitalize on Lincoln's historic visit in an ongoing and instructive way.

Progress Report . . . a 501(c)(3) Non-profit Corporation

In early December of 2013, the Kalamazoo City Commission approved the steering committee's request to place a privately-funded bronze statue of Abraham Lincoln in Bronson Park. Specific site location was approved by the city commission in July of 2016. Initial approval by the Kalamazoo Parks and Recreation Board added the stipulation that an endowment fund be established for the statue's maintenance.

In the spring of 2017, the Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln Project Steering Committee incorporated as a Michigan non-profit corporation and received its 501(c)(3) designation from the IRS in December of the same year. The name Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln Institute was officially adopted in the fall of 2020.

Reaching Out and Moving Forward!

The Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln Institute Board of Directors is reaching out to local community leaders and organizations and other area nonprofits to enlist support for its Lincoln statue project. We have reviewed the archival record of the community effort that led to the successful drive to place a statue of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on the north side of Kalamazoo, and we hope to model the best practices that made that collaborative effort possible.

As we move forward, our Lincoln legacy plans envision a biennial Kalamazoo Lincoln Symposium with visiting scholars and speakers, and art and essay contests for local youth.

The enrichment this activity will bring to the Kalamazoo community will complement the educational and cultural benefits offered by the Air Zoo, WMU's Medieval Institute's International Congress on Medieval Studies, and the Gilmore International Keyboard Festival—all unique to Kalamazoo. Coincidentally, the Gilmore Festival was founded on the simple idea to honor the memory of one man. And now his legacy spans the globe. Success springs from small beginnings!

Additional plans include collaborating with Michigan's 37 other Lincoln-related sites such as the Henry Ford in Dearborn, and with Pure Michigan to advance Michigan's Lincoln Remembrance Trail to a state-of-the-art mobile tour using the latest technology as portals for access—building on work begun by the Michigan Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Committee.

Our Mission Statement: To enrich the cultural life of Kalamazoo by creating educational programs that model the example of Abraham Lincoln.

Our Vision Statement: Training young minds through the lens of history with instruction in leadership development inspired by the life and legacy of Abraham Lincoln.

Website: www.KalamazooLincolnInstitute.org

Building on Exceptionalism!

With the advent of the Kalamazoo Promise, Kalamazoo has achieved national prominence in the pursuit of higher education. Educating young minds is central to the scope and purpose of the Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln Institute. Lincoln's visit to Kalamazoo provides a platform to expand the exceptionalism that defines Kalamazoo. The compatible aim of the Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln Institute is to capture the imagination of young people and encourage them to pursue excellence.

Please join us in supporting this positive enrichment in the life of greater Kalamazoo and southwest Michigan—a gift of history no other Michigan community can claim!

Endorsements

Kalamazoo Gazette • Dr. Michael Rice, former Superintendent of Kalamazoo Public Schools
• Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War (SUVCW)-Dept. of Michigan • Gen. Benjamin Pritchard SUVCW Camp No. 20 • March to the Sea SUVCW Camp No. 135 • Vicksburg Historical Society • Kalamazoo Co. Trial Lawyers Association • Kalamazoo Civil War Round Table • Jim Gilmore Jr. Foundation
• Edison Business Association • Oshtemo Historical Society • Cornelia Stockbridge Sheldon Tent 58, Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War, and many others.

Meet our Board of Directors

Cameron S. Brown, President

Tom M. George, MD, Vice President

Chris Praedel, Secretary

Terri Novaria, Treasurer

Steven Fryling

Jeannie Gerchow-Ducharme

Robert Hencken

Al Jackson, DVM

Betty Lee Ongley

Lois Richmond, Honorary Member

Gary Swain

Ted Vliek

This brochure was designed by award-winning graphic designer Richard Schlatter of Battle Creek, Michigan. Like many area residents, Mr. Schlatter has volunteered his time and talents in support of the Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln Institute. This is Richard's second Lincoln-related endeavor. He is the Grand Rapids ArtPrize 2017 Popular Vote Grand Prize winner for his 12-foot-high portrait of Abraham Lincoln made of over 24,500 Lincoln pennies, including 1,681 1943 steel pennies used to create Lincoln's shirt alone.

We wish to thank Richard Schlatter for his invaluable contribution in designing this publication!

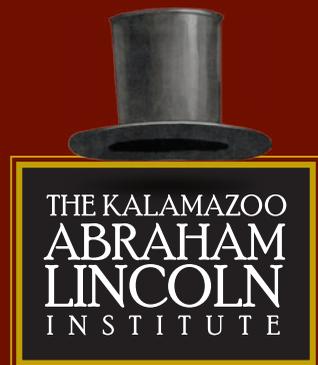
From the Kalamazoo Gazette Editorial Board, Feb. 9, 2014

"In early December [of 2013], the Kalamazoo City Commission endorsed the privately funded [Lincoln statue] project. We too support the project, which we believe celebrates not only Lincoln's historic visit but also the region's role in the Underground Railroad and support of the anti-slavery movement . . . The Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln [Institute] would be a fitting way to remember Lincoln's only Michigan visit and the area's role in fighting the spread of slavery."



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