



ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S BODY EXHUMED AND VIEWED IN 1901

In 1900 the Lincoln Tomb located in Oak Ridge Cemetery in Springfield, Illinois, was in need of repair and underwent a reconstruction. Construction of the present tomb took 15 months, and during that time Mr. Lincoln's coffin was in a temporary grave a few feet away. In May 1901 Robert Lincoln visited the tomb and decided things needed to be changed again. In 1876 **thieves** had failed in an attempt to steal Mr. Lincoln's corpse and hold it for ransom. Robert didn't want a repeat of that possibility. This time the coffin would be buried in a huge cage ten feet deep and then encased in concrete. The outer pine box that had been broken away lies to the right of the coffin. Many of the men removed their hats out of respect.

Both the cage and the coffin would be hardened forever in a solid block of rock. Robert's idea for this had come from the burial procedure employed for George M. Pullman (inventor of the Pullman sleeping car).

Finally, on September 26, 1901, all was ready. Because of the permanency of this burial, a discussion arose among those present as to whether the coffin should be opened. Some people argued that the remains should be identified due to rumors around the country that Mr. Lincoln was not the body in the box. Other people thought opening the casket would be a violation of privacy. In the end, it was decided to open the coffin.

Two plumbers, Leon P. Hopkins and his nephew, Charles L. Willey, chiseled an oblong piece out of the top of the lead-lined coffin. The piece these two men cut out was just over Mr. Lincoln's head and shoulders. When the casket was opened, a harsh, choking smell arose. 23 people slowly walked forward and peered down. Mr. Lincoln's features were totally recognizable. His face had a melancholy expression, but his black chin whiskers hadn't changed at all. The wart on his cheek and the coarse black hair were obvious characteristics of Mr. Lincoln's. The biggest change was that the eyebrows had vanished. The president was wearing the same suit he wore at his second inauguration, but it was covered with yellow mold. Additionally there were some bits of red fabric (possibly the remnants of an American flag buried with Mr. Lincoln). All 23 people were unanimous in their agreement that the remains were indeed those of Abraham Lincoln.

After the viewing of the body, the oblong piece was then soldered back into place. The coffin was lowered into the cage. 4,000 pounds of cement were then poured down covering the

cage and casket. For various reasons, Mr. Lincoln's remains had been moved 17 times since his original burial. They would be moved no more. Mr. Lincoln lies buried 10 feet beneath the floor of his tomb that is visited by more than 1,000,000 people a year.

One of the people who viewed the body was a man named J.C. Thompson. In 1928 Mr. Thompson said, "As I came up I saw that top-knot of Mr. Lincoln's - his hair was coarse and thick, 'like a horse's,' he used to say - and it stood up high in front. When I saw that, I knew that it was Mr. Lincoln. Anyone who had ever seen his pictures would have known it was him. His features had not decayed. He looked just like a statue of himself lying there."

All 23 of the people who viewed the remains of Mr. Lincoln have long since passed away. The last one was Fleetwood Lindley who died on February 1, 1963. Three days before he died, Mr. Lindley was interviewed. He said, "Yes, his face was chalky white. His clothes were mildewed. And I was allowed to hold one of the leather straps as we lowered the casket for the concrete to be poured. I was not scared at the time but I slept with Lincoln for the next six months." Mr. Lindley was 75 when he died and 13 when he had viewed the body. He had been the only child to do so. Mr. Lindley was buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery not far from Lincoln's Tomb.

Abraham Lincoln's coffin has been moved 17 times, mostly due to numerous reconstructions of the Lincoln Tomb and fears for the safety of the president's remains. The coffin itself has been opened five times: December 21, 1865, September 19, 1871, October 9, 1874, April 14, 1887, and September 26, 1901.

1. Why did Robert Lincoln want a tomb built?
2. Why Lincoln's coffin opened?
3. Explain how Lincoln looked to those 23 people in 1901, give 3 examples.
4. What made this tomb different?
5. Who was Fleetwood Lindley and where is he buried?
6. Do you think Robert Lincoln was correct in the elaborate new 1901 tomb? Explain your answer.