

Lincoln Boyhood

National Memorial
Indiana



A Nation Mourns

The assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, coming just days after he led the Union to victory in our most costly war, has proven to be one of the most famous events in American history. Until 1865, political assassination had been something that had happened elsewhere in the world, but not in America. For the majority of Americans in the 19th century it was the most traumatic public event to happen in their lifetime. The outpouring of grief and anger following the murder was unparalleled in any previous history of the American experience.

Virtually the entire North and even portions of the South were plunged into grief. After lying in state at the White House, Lincoln's body made a long slow journey via train to his hometown of Springfield where he was entombed. More than a million people paid their respects as his funeral cortege visited several eastern cities on the way to Illinois. Those who could not attend the funeral ceremonies clamored for depictions of the events that had transformed their lives. Although there were photographs of the funeral procession, they did not satisfy the popular hunger to comprehend the horrific deeds of April 1865. A variety of lithographs and engravings of the shooting at Ford's Theatre and the scene at the Petersen house across the street where Lincoln died appeared to meet the demand. Many of the images were somewhat fanciful and a few physically impossible. Nonetheless, they helped Americans to better understand the unfathomable events and, to a lesser extent, come to terms with their grief.

The prints and images on display are a portion of the private collection of Mr. Jack L. Smith of South Bend, Indiana. "I think Lincoln was the greatest of all Americans," claims Mr. Smith. "He came from nothing and look what he accomplished." Mr. Smith's Lincoln collecting began in 1959 when he discovered a picture of his grandfather, a Union soldier during the Civil War who served under Ulysses S. Grant. After putting that picture, and one of General Grant, on display in his home, Mr. Smith decided he needed a picture of their commander-in-chief, Abraham Lincoln. In the forty years since he purchased that first Lincoln image, Mr. Smith has accumulated more than 1,000 framed photographs, paintings, lithographs and woodcuts of the 16th president. In the words of Dan Weinberg, owner of Chicago's Abraham Lincoln Bookshop, "Jack Smith has the largest, deepest, most diverse and beautiful private collection in the world, period."

