



The Lincoln Memorial at Waterfront Park  
Louisville, Kentucky

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“There is no question but that the idea of a Lincoln Memorial in Waterfront Park came initially from Senator Dan Kelly.”  
-- David Karem, president and executive director, Louisville Waterfront Development Corporation

Kentucky senator Dan Kelly had long considered the idea of a Lincoln Memorial

at the Louisville Waterfront. Pursuing this idea with key members of the Louisville Waterfront Development Corporation, discussion quickly turned to the lasting impact of Kentucky slavery on Abraham Lincoln—and the key place of Louisville in Lincoln’s development. Members decided that, somehow, the story of Lincoln’s firsthand encounter with the Kentucky slave trade in 1841 needed to be told through this memorial.

The story was this: On their return to Springfield, Illinois, Lincoln and his friend Joshua Speed had boarded a boat at the Louisville riverfront. On that boat trip, they witnessed a dozen slaves, chained together “like so many fish on a trot line,” en route to the slave markets of New Orleans. Fourteen years later, Lincoln recalled that very scene, and how it had “tormented” him ever since.

“Knowing that we have a world-class sculptor in our own community,” says former state senator David Karem, “it was my suggestion that we contact Ed Hamilton and gauge his interest.” Senator Kelly strongly agreed. Soon, the group had secured an enthusiastic Ed Hamilton (whose nationally recognized work includes the African American Civil War Monument in Washington, D.C.), and a \$2-million appropriation from the General Assembly.

Placed within a flowing arc-shaped expanse, set off by trees, and terminating in an open amphitheater, Ed Hamilton has sculpted a welcoming figure of Lincoln, bareheaded and seated upon a rock with book in hand. Along the pathway leading into the site, visitors will experience four large bas-relief panels, sculpted by Hamilton, with interpretive text and quotations developed by the Kentucky Historical Society. Scenes depict Lincoln’s frontier origins, important Kentucky relationships that shaped his life and career, the Civil war and the story of Lincoln’s own “House Divided,” and, finally, Lincoln and the ending of slavery. Moving into the amphitheater, visitors can join Lincoln in a moment of reflection, overlooking the great Ohio River.

Louisville Waterfront Park, Lincoln Memorial, entry view, by Hargreaves Associates, 2007  
Courtesy of the Lincoln Memorial at Louisville Waterfront Park, Waterfront Development Corp.