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# COOK-WITTER REPORT

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## Famous Oak Ridge Cemetery turns 150

**T**he country's second most visited cemetery, Oak Ridge Cemetery in Springfield, celebrates its sesquicentennial beginning this year. And if tourism trends continue, the cemetery could give Arlington National Cemetery, the nation's most visited cemetery, some tough competition.

However, Oak Ridge's founders didn't have fame on their minds when they created the cemetery. They were merely meeting a basic need.

On May 14, 1856 the Springfield City Council stipulated that no more cemeteries could be constructed within the city limits and one-half mile beyond, and that the two cemeteries within the city had to stop burials.

"The city fathers determined these (existing) cemeteries were becoming landlocked," says Oak Ridge Cemetery Executive Director LuAnn Johnson. "Development was all the way around them. So the city fathers determined they should have a cemetery that was outside of the city limits because they saw it as a health issue."

City councilman and former newspaper publisher Charles Lanphier convinced the city to buy 17 acres north of the city for a new cemetery. The land was purchased for \$350 from Archer Herndon, the father of Abraham Lincoln's last law partner William Herndon.



*Photo Courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library*

"The site chosen is a most beautiful one," said the 1865 "Rules and Regulations of Oak-Ridge Cemetery of Springfield, Illinois." "Its varying typography (sic), a pleasing blending of hill and dale, interspersed with a natural growth of trees and shrubs, making its landscape beauty unsurpassed for the purpose designed." The area was full of "forest oaks of various species," so then Springfield Mayor John Cook suggested it be named "Oak Ridge."

The first burial was in 1858 and was sadly common for the time; it was a nine-month-old baby girl named Eliza Helmle. The cause of death was listed as "teething," Johnson says. During Oak Ridge's first year there were numerous babies buried who were stillborn, several people who died of typhoid, some who died of "old age" or cholera, and many women who died from "child bed," which means while giving birth.

Oak Ridge was formally dedicated two years later, on May 24, 1860. Local schools and businesses shut down for the solemn occasion. Before Mayor G. A. Sutton dedicated the grounds, a choir sang this dirge:

Earth to earth and dust to dust!  
Here the evil and the just,  
Here the youthful and the old,  
Here the fearful and the bold.  
Here the matron and the maid,  
In one silent bed are laid,  
Here the vassal and the king  
Side by side lie withering;  
Here the sword and sceptre rust -  
Earth to earth and dust to dust!"

Prominent Springfield lawyer and Lincoln cohort James Conkling gave the dedication address. "How solemn, how impressive the scene!" he began. "Far away from the haunts of busy life...far removed from the giddy whirl of fashion and of pleasure...Here, with naught but the pure arch of heaven above us, and Nature in all her silent beauty and loveliness around us, we dedicate the City of the Dead."

At that time visiting the cemetery was a weekly, family affair. After church on Sundays, families would get their picnic baskets, blankets and flowers from their garden, get on the street car (which ended at Oak Ridge), put flowers on the graves of loved ones and have a picnic, Johnson says.

"They had a very healthy view of cemeteries," says Johnson. "They felt they were a place to pass on tradition to their children, to keep the memories of previous generations

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alive; it was a way of showing respect and letting the children always remember those who had come before them.”

The tradition became so popular that crowd control measures had to be enacted, she adds. The cemetery had to issue tickets for Sunday admission. Lot owners got “non-transferable” season tickets from the City Clerk. Others could apply for tickets from the Mayor’s office, City Clerk, or any Cemetery Board Manager. “Strangers” could get tickets at the principal hotels of the city, “upon application.”

Regulations in 1864 stipulated that families pay a city sexton, who was in charge of the cemetery, between one dollar and two and a half dollars per burial, depending on whether the deceased was a city resident or an adult; the city paid for the burial of “paupers or strangers without means.” Rules also required visitors not to “unfasten” their horses on the grounds and required lot owners to erect monuments that were similar to other monuments, yet different enough “to produce a permanently pleasing effect.”

When Oak Ridge was established in 1856, city ordinances required that a portion of the cemetery grounds be “set aside for the burial of the poor, another portion for the burial of strangers or persons not belonging to the city, another portion for the burial of the inhabitants of the city not having private lots, and another portion for the burial of colored persons.”

A temporary vault was built to hold coffins if no lot had been selected, but the coffins of cholera victims weren’t allowed to be stored there. Johnson says that’s probably because cemetery leaders feared storing cholera victims’ coffins there could somehow spread the disease among the living. Not much was known about cholera or similar diseases and their transmission back then.

Today the 365-acre Oak Ridge Cemetery is best known as the home of Lincoln’s Tomb. (To learn why Lincoln was buried here, see “Capitol Matters.”) “But at Oak Ridge we have over 75,000 souls that we feel are equally important in their own right,” Johnson says. “We also have 70 prominent people buried at Oak Ridge besides Lincoln.” Visitors can get a free map of their graves from the cemetery office, or pay \$5 for a pamphlet that gives their short biographies.

## To learn more...

“Now They Belong to the Ages: Abraham Lincoln and His Contemporaries in Oak Ridge Cemetery,” by Susan Krause, Kelley A. Boston, and Daniel W. Stowell, details Oak Ridge’s history and gives short biographies of dozens of interesting people buried there; it also has rare photos of the cemetery from its early days and of Lincoln’s colleagues. This Papers of Abraham Lincoln publication was published by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency in 2005.

Currently, Oak Ridge is the second most visited cemetery in the country. “We’ve always had 2.5 million visitors a year,” Johnson says. “With the opening of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, the Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau has predicted an additional one million visitors to Springfield. Since April our traffic has shown that. We are on target for an extra million visitors a year, so that would put us at 3.5 million.” She says Arlington National Cemetery gets 4 million visitors annually, which means if the tourism trend continues to increase, Oak Ridge could tie Arlington for the title of America’s most visited cemetery.

While it’s nice being a famous cemetery, the downside is people tend to think Oak Ridge is only a tourist site. “So often we get phone calls from people saying, ‘You have a wonderful cemetery, it’s so peaceful, we love to visit; too bad I can’t consider it as my own (future burial site),’” Johnson says. “In fact, we do burials on a daily basis and have lots of space and are developing more.”

She tells stories of visitors from around the country who visit and spontaneously buy plots for their whole families so they can be buried within sight of Lincoln’s Tomb.

To celebrate the cemetery’s 150th birthday, the cemetery has planned several events between now and next fall. This winter, it will sponsor a formal dinner in Springfield featuring speakers who will discuss the cemetery’s history and architecture. Next spring, memorials will be erected on two historic graves, those of former Illinois Supreme Court Justice Samuel Hubbel Treat and the Home for the Friendless. The cemetery will also coordinate a family picnic day at Oak Ridge, in the style of the 1800s when families picnicked at loved ones’ graves on Sundays. A veterans lawn crypt section will be dedicated near the Illinois War Memorials, and finally next fall, the celebration will end with the cemetery’s annual historic walk in October, when costumed actors portray interesting people buried at Oak Ridge.

For more information about Oak Ridge Cemetery’s sesquicentennial and celebration, contact the Cemetery at: 217/789-2340.

SOURCES (from the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library collection):

James C. Conkling, Address Delivered at the Dedication of Oak Ridge Cemetery, May 24, 1860

Oak Ridge Cemetery: Its History and Improvements, Rules and Regulations... (Springfield, Illinois: H. W. Rokker, 1879)

Rules and Regulations of Oak-Ridge Cemetery, of Springfield, Illinois, 1865



## Capitol Matters: Lincoln Tomb Wannabe

If not for Mary Todd Lincoln, Illinois' Statehouse would be somewhere else and Lincoln's Tomb would be standing in its place. According to Paul Angle's "Here I Have Lived" (Chicago and Lincoln's New Salem, 1991), shortly after Abraham Lincoln's death on April 15, 1865, a group of Springfieldians got Mary's okay to bury Lincoln in his hometown.

A local committee in charge of the burial selected Mather's Grove, one of the highest points in the city, as the site. This is where the Statehouse now stands, although it wasn't constructed until later. Builders started working on a temporary tomb at the Grove and hurried to finish it by the time Lincoln's funeral train arrived from Washington, D.C.

The workers finished on time, but Mary vetoed those plans. She did not want her husband's body buried there, but at Oak Ridge Cemetery. One week before his death, while they took a carriage ride, Lincoln told Mary he wanted to be buried someplace "quiet," according to "Now They Belong to the Ages: Abraham Lincoln and His Contemporaries in Oak Ridge Cemetery," by Susan Krause, Kelley A. Boston, and Daniel W. Stowell. Mary "demanded that (Lincoln) be interred in a family plot in Oak Ridge Cemetery, rather than alone on a hill in downtown Springfield, where local residents had already purchased land for the purpose," the authors wrote.

In August, 1930 workers discovered the temporary tomb during routine underground work. (See a photo of the vault from that excavation at: [www.ilstatehouse.com/Construction.htm](http://www.ilstatehouse.com/Construction.htm), a Web site dedicated to the Statehouse and its history). An August 2, 1930 Illinois State Journal article says: "Workmen tunneled through the vault at a point forty feet north of the Capitol driveway... The vault is of brick, the two walls being eighteen inches thick. Their inner surfaces are eight feet apart.



*This is an illustration of the temporary tomb that was built at Mather's Grove for Lincoln's coffin, but was never used. It's from John Carroll Power's book, "Abraham Lincoln, His Great Funeral Cortege, from Washington City to Springfield, Illinois," 1872.*

"The excavation work clearly shows the arching at the top of the walls, although this is not intact."

Part of the vault is still there, according to Mal Hildebrand, Director of the Office of the Capitol Architect.

"I saw it years ago," he says. In the early 1970s, when he was the Chief Building Manager for the Secretary of State, Hildebrand was present during underground work at the Statehouse. "We found the remnants of the (vault's) foundation there, it was sort of a red, vitrous clay brick. I don't think the walls and ceiling were there, but we didn't do a complete excavation."

The vault's foundation rests underground, "right off the north drive (of the Statehouse), on the northeast side of the north porch," says Hildebrand.

"You look at it and think, 'My God, this has been buried here all these years'... You're looking at a piece of history that very few people would have the privilege of seeing." Having grown up in Springfield, "at the foot of Lincoln's Tomb practically," it was especially meaningful, he says. "I played in Oak Ridge (Cemetery) as a kid, so I grew up with Lincoln, and then to see what was supposed to be his interment vault... it was unbelievable."



## Who Does That?

*Beginning in this issue, the Cook-Witter Report will offer a semi-regular feature called "Who Does That?." In it, we will look at groups responsible for tasks that keep the Statehouse running smoothly. These groups often work behind-the-scenes, but they're essential. Without them, Statehouse work might grind to a halt.*

Before an idea can become law, it has to be written as a bill for the legislature to consider. This is no easy task. Bill drafters have to know and understand the legislative process, the Illinois Constitution and statutes, and the House and Senate Rules, among other topics. When legislators, constitutional officers, and state agencies need a bill drafted, they call the Legislative Reference Bureau, commonly known as "LRB."

LRB was created in 1913 as the state's first modern legislative service agency, according to its Web site ([www.ilga.gov/commission/lrb/lrbabout.htm](http://www.ilga.gov/commission/lrb/lrbabout.htm)). The Bureau's staff of

attorneys and paralegals draft bills, amendments, resolutions, and conference committee reports, among other tasks. As a result, LRB rolls out mountains of papers; it produces more than 25,000 documents every two years, according to its Web site.

If you're following legislation, and don't have access to a computer (where you can track legislation online at: [www.ilga.gov](http://www.ilga.gov)), LRB's Legislative Synopsis and Digest is a helpful resource. The Digest is usually published weekly when the legislature is in session; it summarizes legislative documents under consideration and legislative actions.

LRB also tracks the federal courts, the Illinois Supreme Court, and the Illinois Appellate Court in case they take action that affects the Illinois Constitution's or Illinois statutes' interpretation, or that requires legislative action. In addition, the Bureau oversees an extensive legal library.

Learn more about LRB and the bill drafting process online at: [www.ilga.gov/commission/lrb/lrbguide.htm](http://www.ilga.gov/commission/lrb/lrbguide.htm).



## Web Sightings

Got a question about Abraham Lincoln you'd like to ask an expert? Want to learn about upcoming events at historic sites near you? You can do this and more at the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency's (IHPA) Web site.

This site has a lot to offer tourists, preservationists and history lovers. You can take virtual tours of the Lincoln-Herndon Law Offices, the Old State Capitol, and an archaeological dig at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum site. Watch videos of IHPA experts discussing how to get educational materials about Illinois history, how to know if you have a Lincoln collector's item, or how the Agency can help you preserve family documents.

One of the more interesting features, especially for history fans, is searching through Lincoln's own papers. Search by word or phrase through thousands of digitally-imaged documents from the renowned Henry Horner Lincoln Collection of Lincoln manuscripts and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's (ALPL) manuscripts. Click on the "Illinois Legacy Online" icon to start. For example, when you search for the word "Tad," you'll find several letters Lincoln wrote, including one in which he told Mary: "Think you better put 'Tad's' pistol away. I had an ugly dream about him."

If you're interested in old newspapers (for genealogical or historical research), search online here by town to learn which of its former and current newspapers are microfilmed in the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library collection. For example, the ALPL has more than 100 former and current newspapers published in Springfield, including old German newspapers. You can't search the papers' contents or read the microfilm online -- you have to do that at the Library.

Naturally you can also get the hours, history, and admission information for IHPA historic sites around the state, as well as view a photo and map for each. Read about Agency news here and learn about preserving or redeveloping historic buildings.

The site even has a feature for kids -- they can download small scale models of historic buildings in Illinois to color or put together. It's all at:



[www.illinois-history.gov/](http://www.illinois-history.gov/)



## Transitions

**Cheryl Axley** has taken the place of Republican **Senator Dave Sullivan**, who retired from the Senate this fall. Her district office is in Des Plaines.



**Geneva Clem**, who worked for Cook-Witter for 20 years, retired this fall. She had been with the firm since it opened in 1985. On October 19, 2005 she was the guest of honor at a reception hosted by Cook-Witter, Inc. where family, friends, Cook-Witter clients, and former interns gathered to wish her well.



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