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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Commission announces special events for Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial

*Events are planned throughout Illinois to commemorate
Lincoln's 200th Birthday in February 2009*

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission today announced a series of events throughout Illinois in the coming months to mark the 200th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth in 2009. Jan Grimes, Director of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency; Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity Deputy Director Jan Kostner; and Illinois Schools Superintendent Christopher Koch today joined Commission Chair Marilyn Kushak and other dignitaries at Lincoln Home National Historic Site to make the announcement.

“We urge people to visit www.lincoln200.net to see what is in store for the biggest birthday party we've ever had in Illinois. There will be something for everyone, from the state's elementary students to music lovers to life-long Lincoln fans,” said Kushak. “The Illinois Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission has been engaged in helping Illinois communities plan diversified, creative events that appeal to children, teens, adults and seniors to commemorate this historical moment in our lives.”

A simultaneous, statewide reading of the Gettysburg Address and the ringing of church bells around the state on February 12 will involve all Illinoisans in the birthday celebration. All Illinois elementary school students who are in class that day will be asked to read the Gettysburg Address along with the rest of the state in an effort coordinated by the Illinois State Board of Education. All Illinois businesses will be asked to display the message “Happy Birthday Abe” on their marquees or message boards.

“This is a great opportunity for our students to more actively experience history,” said Koch. “When we make what our students study more interesting and relevant to everyday life, we engage them on a higher level that increases learning. This will bring a great Illinois citizen and national leader into the classroom with them.”

A number of special events are planned in the City of Springfield to commemorate Lincoln's 200th birthday. They include:

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Saturday, February 7

- More than 20 Lincoln authors, historians and advocates from around the world will be inducted as Laureates of the Lincoln Academy of Illinois at the Lincoln Presidential Museum.
- The play seen by the Lincolns on the night of his assassination, *Our American Cousin*, will be staged February 7, 8, 13 and 14 at Springfield's Hoogland Center.

Tuesday, February 10

- The Vachel Lindsay Home State Historic Site will host a free public Lincoln reception.

Wednesday, February 11

- A re-enactment performance of Lincoln's 1861 Farewell Address from Springfield will be staged at 10:30 a.m. at Springfield's Prairie Capital Convention Center.
- Lincoln Home National Historic Site will offer several living history, musical and scholarly programs from February 11 – 14.
- The Illinois Symphony Orchestra will offer a free public performance in the evening.

Thursday, February 12

- A wreath laying at Lincoln Tomb at 10:30 a.m. will honor the 16th President's memory.
- New United States citizens will be sworn in during a special Naturalization Ceremony at 3 p.m. in the Old State Capitol State Historic Site, the place where Lincoln served as a legislator and made his famous "House Divided" speech.
- A unique U.S. Postal Service stamp cancellation will be offered at the Old State Capitol.
- A period ball in the Lincoln Presidential Museum that evening will feature ladies and gentlemen in Civil War era formal regalia performing dances from the mid-1800s.
- The Bicentennial Commission and the Abraham Lincoln Association will host a special 200th birthday banquet February 12 with Illinois Senators Barack Obama and Richard Durbin, and U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts the invited speakers.

Many other events are being planned and will soon be announced. Most of the Bicentennial events will be free and open to the public. For those that require tickets, reservations may be made starting October 1 at www.abelincolnmuseum.org.

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“This is a once in a lifetime opportunity for us to celebrate the life of President Lincoln as never before in unique and creative ways,” Springfield Mayor Timothy J. Davlin said. “From speeches to plays to re-enactments, this will be a time in our lives that we will remember for many years. Abraham Lincoln touched the lives of all of us and changed the face of history forever. This will be the opportunity for us to renew our interest in the events of his time and better appreciate the history that he made.”

In addition, the oldest music festival in North America, Ravinia Festival in Highland Park, will celebrate the Lincoln Bicentennial through a variety of events beginning this summer and continuing through the 2009 season. Highlights include the previously announced commissions from Tony-winning choreographer Bill T. Jones, who will create and present a full-evening dance theater piece on the martyred president, and from Chicago jazz legend Ramsey Lewis, who will write a major musical work featuring jazz, gospel and spoken-word parts.

- *Winning Composers.* Today Ravinia announced three winners in its Abraham Lincoln Piano Trio Competition. The winners are James Crowley of Milwaukee for *From the Earth*; Lawrence Dillon of Winston-Salem, NC, for *The Better Angels of Our Nature*; and Eric Sawyer of Amherst, MA, for *Lincoln's Two Americas*. Winning composers each will receive a \$5,000 award along with multiple performances of their submitted work.
- *Lincoln Trio Tour.* The winning piano trio commissions will be performed throughout the state when Ravinia Festival President Welz Kauffman will lead the Lincoln Trio of the Music Institute of Chicago to cities integral in Lincoln's life. Performances are planned for Springfield, Decatur, Lincoln, Champaign, Urbana and Bloomington. In addition, the festival is working toward bookings in Carbondale, Sullivan, Effingham, Peoria and Cairo. Performances will occur in music halls, schools and even a paint store that stands on property once owned by Lincoln himself.
- *“Lawn of Lincoln.”* Ravinia officially kicks off its bicentennial events at the end of this summer with a free day of music and activities on September 7. The Illinois Symphony will make its Ravinia Festival debut, and the Lincoln Trio of the Music Institute of Chicago will perform the world premieres of two of the Lincoln-inspired piano trio works that Ravinia has commissioned through its first composition contest. There will also be a new work on the relationship between Lincoln and Mexico's Benito Juarez, and performances by jazz singer Patricia Barber, piano prodigy Emily Bear and Sugar Strings. Noted Lincoln scholar and collector Dan Weinberg will present a “spot the forgery” contest, and Ravinia will stage a mock press conference with Lincoln for young journalism students. The day also features carnival games, rides and crafts.

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“Lincoln is an unparalleled presence in American history, and Ravinia Festival is proud to join his home state in festivities that celebrate the myth, elevate the man and perpetuate his works,” Ravinia Festival President Welz Kauffman said. “We want to thank the Illinois Bicentennial Commission, United Airlines, the Minor Family Foundation and the McCormick Foundation for making this exciting venture possible.”

Lincoln Bicentennial celebrations are working their way through Illinois in the coming weeks. The 150th anniversary of the Lincoln-Douglas Debates features re-enactments and programs this summer and fall in the debate communities of Bement, Ottawa, Freeport, Jonesboro, Charleston, Galesburg, Quincy and Alton (www.lincolndouglasreunion.com). The “Tour de Lincoln,” a 360-mile bicycle tour of Lincoln sites in Kentucky, Indiana and Illinois, will run from August 16 – 23 (www.tourdelincoln.com). The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum’s one-of-a-kind “Self-Made in America” Mobile Exhibit visits several Illinois communities as it criss-crosses the country (www.alplm.org/self-made/tour_dates.html), and cities for the Library and Museum’s Traveling Learning Station Exhibit will soon be announced.

“Illinois welcomes millions of visitors each year who come to share in the legacy of Abraham Lincoln. We fully expect this year to be just as successful as visitors flock to Illinois to be a part of a historic celebration of Lincoln’s 200th birthday. The events scheduled over the next several months will offer visitors of all ages an opportunity to experience a significant piece of American history,” said Kostner, who heads the Illinois Bureau of Tourism, a division of DCEO.

Scholarly programs featuring many of the world’s top Lincoln authors and historians will be featured in Springfield during the Bicentennial celebration. These include a February 12 luncheon with Michael Burlingame; a Lincoln authors book fair; and programs at various locations on Lincoln and race, Lincoln and leadership, and other topics.

“As Doris Kearns Goodwin notes in her acclaimed book, *Team of Rivals*, historians and writers have uncovered new documents, provided fresh insights and developed an ever-deepening understanding of our 16th president over time. We continue to be fascinated by the mind and spirit of this great and good man. The skill and strength Abraham Lincoln showed as he held the nation together will be studied and honored for many centuries to come. The Illinois Historic Preservation Agency looks forward to sharing our programs and documents with scholars, school children and everyone in between throughout the Bicentennial,” said Grimes.

The Illinois Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission and the Illinois Broadcasters Association are sponsoring the “Voice of Lincoln” public service announcement campaign to promote the Bicentennial on Illinois radio stations. The Lincoln Log, a day-by-day feature that explains what Abraham Lincoln wrote, said or did on a date in history, is a joint venture between the Commission and the Illinois Press Association and is featured in more than 60 newspapers.

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“Lincoln's Bicentennial provides an unprecedented opportunity for the Commission to partner with the Illinois Broadcasters Association and sponsor, State Farm, as well as the Illinois Press Association so people throughout Illinois can experience the inner thoughts, hopes, fears, defeats, and triumphs of our nation's sixteenth President on a daily basis,” said Kushak.

The Illinois Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, formed by Governor Rod R. Blagojevich in February 2006, is working closely with the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, tourism agencies and many other institutions and organizations to organize events and programming from 2008 - 2009. The commission is also partnering with local communities on their bicentennial plans. For information about Bicentennial activities, visit www.lincoln200.net.

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