



BOARDMAN-SMITH
FUNERAL HOME
— Butler —

Centennial Edition of the Illinois State Journal

Article by Earl B. Searcy

The following feature article was published in the Centennial Edition of the Illinois State Journal (now the State Journal-Register) and illustrates the once secret work done to move the Lincoln Family to their final resting places. It also explains the involvement of Thomas C. Smith of Smith Funeral Chapel (now Boardman-Smith Funeral Home) in laying to rest President Abraham Lincoln and of Smith's sons, Tom and Will, who were involved in the disinterment and removal to Arlington National Cemetery of Abraham Lincoln II (the president's grandson) and the disinterment of Mary Todd Lincoln and sons, Eddie, Willie and Tad, during the second reconstruction of Lincoln's Tomb.

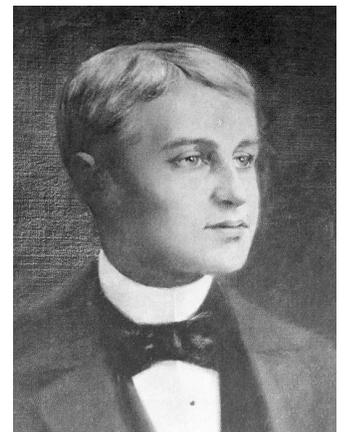
This is a story that a considerate press, nobly actuated, has kept from the public until now. And rightly. As current news of the hour, it might have innocently invited tragedy. As a feature, now that crypts are sealed and trowels have been laid away, it can and will serve as a fascinating bit of information to an American public that idolizes the memory of Abraham Lincoln and all that his name implies. I refer to the incidents that attended safe-keeping of the bodies of Lincoln's family while the tomb at Oak Ridge cemetery was under reconstruction.

Two phases of the drama have been revealed. First, there was the disinterment and removal from Springfield to Arlington National Cemetery, near Washington, D.C., of the remains of Abraham Lincoln II—son of Robert T. Lincoln and grandson of the martyred president. The other episode was the disinterment and caching of the bodies of Mrs. Lincoln and her three sons while masons and structural experts rebuilt the tomb and monument from the ground up, including the vaults which had held those precious mortal remnants for so many years.

Mrs. Robert Lincoln, now a widow, had heard of the legislature's appropriation at the 1929 session, and knew that the reconstruction would necessarily entail removal, even though temporary, of her son. With every natural and moral right, she wrote Director Harry H. Cleaveland of Public works and Buildings—whose architectural division under C. Herrick Hammond would have immediate charge of the work—requesting that her mother's wish be granted. She wanted her son to be buried in Arlington, where the son's father, the late Robert T. Lincoln, would lie. Director Cleaveland wrote Mrs. Lincoln at her Manchester, Vermont home on September 12, 1929, granting the wish and extending Illinois' official cooperation. Soon afterward, Max W. Babb, vice president of the Allis-Chalmers company of Milwaukee—a personal friend of the Robert Lincolns—came to Springfield to open negotiations for the removal. After presenting himself to the state authorities, he called on former State Senator Logan Hay, president of the Lincoln Centennial Association, who appropriately and graciously agreed to aid Mrs. Lincoln in the delicate errand so vital to her. Again appropriately. Mr. Hay took into his confidence Tom and Will Smith of Thomas C. Smith Sons, whose distinguished father, in 1865, had helped lay Abraham Lincoln at rest.

The other day, I visited the casket room of the Smith Funeral Chapel and, under Tom's direction, viewed a counterpart of the coffin which Mr. Hay and Mr. Babb selected for Abraham Lincoln II, when they found all but the interior metal container of the lad's shroud ruined by the ravages of time, in the vault at Oak Ridge. The massive yet dignified and not too ornate bronze casket reposed on a pair of ancient standards which supported the coffin of the martyred president when it lay in state in 1865 in Springfield. I pondered the curious yet romantic association of the Smith boys and their family with Lincoln. Their father had helped in the burial of the president. When the tomb was remodeled a generation ago, and Lincoln's body was placed securely and permanently away within walls of concrete after Louis P. Hopkins, of New Street, then in tinner's trade, had gazed last upon Lincoln's features as he sealed the glass, the Smith boys' father, the late Thomas C., had again officiated. Last year, and this, Tom and Will Smith took their father's place.

It was toward dusk on the evening of May 22, 1930, that Mr. Hay, the Smith brothers, Custodian Herbert Wells Fay of the tomb and the hand full of necessary helpers, entered the north chamber of the old monument and began to open the first vault, that of the grandson. They had waited, of course, until after public visiting hours. Will Smith was immediately in charge of the disinterment. Reverently, yet as swiftly as the nature of the task would permit, they broke away the seals and opened the crypt. As they lay hands on the old casket, the wood part fell away.



Abraham "Jack" Lincoln II
Son of Robert Lincoln; Grandson of
President Abraham Lincoln

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This had been anticipated. The new casket which Messrs. Hay and Babb had selected had been set inside the little chamber. With as much dispatch as possible, the metal part of the grandson's coffin was extracted and cleaned, then set inside the new casket. The metal portion had held firm, and no effort was made to open it.

With the cargo so dear to that mother's heart down east, the little cortege left the tomb, and quietly and without display, traveled to the Smith funeral establishment on Edwards Street, east of Sixth, where the body was secretly hid away, under ample guard, until the night of May 25, when, with the Smith brothers accompanying, it was shipped to Chicago where Washington friends of the Lincoln family claimed it and escorted it on to Arlington. The remains arrived in Washington on the 27th, and not until after the burial in Arlington were press notices permitted.

Reasons for this were obvious. Robert T. and Mrs. Lincoln remembered with bitterness the wretched and all but successful attempt of ghouls to steal the president's body from out of the old sarcophagus in 1874. They doubtless envisioned like depredations upon their own son. Newspapers, as I said at the beginning, were considerate. They wanted to help the family execute perfectly this sacred transaction. Wealthy and illustrious of name, the Robert Lincolns would have been choice prey for vandals, had impetuous publicity revealed the drama in the course of its playing. So, the papers and the press services were merciful. They often are.

Comes now the second episode. With Abraham Lincoln II safely at his own father's shrine in Arlington, Senator Hay, Tom and Will of the Smith firm, Custodian Fay, Dr. C. M. Service of the public works and buildings department, Raymond Birnbaum, superintendent of Oak Ridge, and the few necessary helpers made another night pilgrimage to the now partly dismantled tomb. First, they had gone to get the seventeen year old grandson. Now, they had a bigger task. The remains of Mary Todd Lincoln, wife and later widow of the president, and the bodies of her three boys--Eddie, who died in 1850 at the age of four; Willie, who died at the White House in 1862 at the age of eight, and Tad, who died in 1871 at the age of eighteen--must be taken safely and surely, secure from evil or idly curious eyes, to their rendezvous of temporary abode while their permanent resting place was being made over. As on the first visit, the second was at dusk of an evening late in May, 1930.

Reverently again, yet swiftly as they could, the men assigned by fate to this historic errand broke open and emptied, one by one, the old crypts. The caskets, this time, were in good repair. Speedily, while the outer gates were guarded, the four of them---mother and her three sons---were transported to Oak Ridge abbey, imposing mausoleum that arrests the attention of the 150,000 pilgrims who annually enter Oak Ridge cemetery. Four widely separated crypts, marked so secretly that none but the official party could identify them, were opened. One by one the caskets were placed within, and the slabs sealed. It was noted that all of the coffins, save that which contained Mrs. Lincoln, were of the old "shoulder flare" or taper type. Their sacred errand run, the little party dispersed. Their work, so far as 1930 was concerned, was done. All were sworn to the utmost secrecy, for reasons that the public will readily understand.

By May of this year, the beautiful edifice that tomb visitors now see, was near completion. The new crypts were ready. So, a third time, in the twilight glow of a May evening, the little party gathered again. It was much like the other visits, except that the wife and sons of the immortal first American were going back to be with the husband and father. Abraham Lincoln's form lies deep in impenetrable rock, but the bronzed marble pile above him stands guard a few feet from the four crypts that face the immortal burial chamber on the north. Visitors, passing through, note the proximity and reflect upon the silent yet faithful picture it portrays of the Lincoln family life. Too, the death dates of Eddie and Willie Lincoln, whom the president and Mrs. Lincoln worshiped, bespeak the tragedies that added so wretchedly to the already burdened heart of a president who had to do with war and bitter national crises. You who have ever lost a son or daughter will understand.

President Hoover came, about a month after this drama had passed into history, and dedicated the re-built tomb. Before he looked into the sea of faces that thronged Oak Ridge, he went to the spot I have just told you of.

State, city and civic agencies cooperated in this enactment. Under Illinois law, human bodies, once interred, are "contagion," and that is why the offices of Dr. H. H. Tuttle, then city health director, were pressed into action. Much of what would seem to the layman like red tape had to be attended to. Messrs. Hay, Will and Tom Smith were granted special powers of attorney. But to all concerned, it was a privilege that comes but rarely.

When Mr. Babb, who came here last year representing Mrs. Robert Lincoln, returned to the east with her son, and after the Arlington burial was over, Mrs. Lincoln asked him to write to the principals here of her very deep appreciation. There was not a detail, she said, that was not attended to wholly to her liking. She feels contented, now that her own immediate family will rest together. And, after



President Herbert Hoover and Gov. Louis Emmerson (top hat) at the Lincoln Tomb Rededication Ceremony, 1931