

Strange History Brought to Light

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The shadow of a man, forever unknown, fell across the open grave and for a fleeting moment touched the box of pine that held a man known to the ages—Abraham Lincoln. It was 1901, 36 years after Lincoln's death, that the extraordinary photographs below and on the following pages were taken. They begin the final episode in the unbelievable story of what happened to Lincoln's body after death. It is a story which will be told in its entirety in a book by Dorothy Meserve Kunhardt and Philip B. Kunhardt Jr. soon to be published by Harper & Row.



Eleven years after Lincoln was laid to rest at Oak Ridge Cemetery, Springfield, a band of thieves broke into the sepulcher of the Lincoln Monument and almost made off with the body. They had planned to hold it for \$200,000 ransom. After that a small group of Lincoln's friends hid the coffin in the leaky labyrinths between the walls of the tomb, and for years countless pilgrims paid homage to an empty sarcophagus. Finally in 1900 the monument had to be torn down and completely rebuilt. During the 15 months of construction the bodies of Lincoln and other members of his family were secretly buried in a multiple grave a few feet away. Then, when the present tomb was completed, the temporary grave was opened to transfer the coffin and a photographer caught the moment .

After the derrick had hoisted the box that contained Lincoln's coffin out of the ground, workmen carried it to the monument and set it carefully down beside the iron-barred door to the tomb. The outer pine box was broken away and Lincoln's cedar coffin lifted out (right). The workmen reverently removed their hats and spectators pressed around. The children present were not able to get very close. Five photographers were at the exhuming. These pictures are believed to have been taken by Guy Mathis, a local photographer, and were obtained from the Illinois State Historical Library.



In Springfield dignitaries cluster about the temporary grave containing the bodies of Lincoln and five members of his family as it is opened (left). Then (above, right) with the help of guiding hands the steam derrick plucks a child's coffin from the earth. Children looking on (below) include three grand-nephews of Mrs. Lincoln standing shoulder to shoulder. The lady behind the two Keys boys who are wearing caps is Josephine Remann Edwards-who as a girl was the "little Josie" Lincoln used to carry around on his shoulders on the streets of Springfield.

On a gentle spring morning a couple of hundred men and women and five children gathered the north side of the reconstructed tomb. Hushed and expectant they watched as workmen cleared away a mammoth nine-top pile of pulverized bricks and stones that had been heaped over the temporary grave to disguise it. In the top section of the vault (above, left) were the coffins of three Lincoln sons Eddie, who had died at 3, Willie, 12, and the President's best companion, 18-year-old Tad Beside them; was a 16-year-old grandson, Abraham III. Husband and wife were so safely tucked away in a lower recess that it was necessary to batter away one side of the vault to reach them.

It was sunset when the box that held Lincoln lay there in a corner, alone. The puffing of the steam engine as it hoisted that long box blotted out the singing of the birds and the



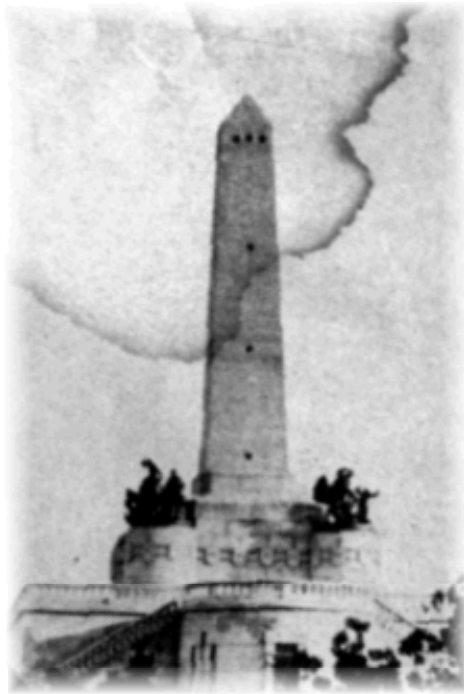
sound of the brook at the foot of the hill. The gold red of the setting sun suddenly colored the scene with a radiance that made people's hearts jump - men whipped off their hats, throats were choked. When the protecting outer box was broken away (see next page) and the red cedar coffin revealed, six construction company workmen carried it into the monument chamber and placed it in the white marble sarcophagus. When the others had been deposited in their crypts, there was nothing more to do and the group dispersed, but not before the authorities had ordered an electric burglar alarm to be placed between the tomb and the custodian's residence a few hundred feet away. But not - even the newfangled protective device was enough to calm the fears of Lincoln's only surviving child -his eldest son, Robert.



'...And His Face Was Chalky White'

By DOROTHY MESERVE KUNHARDT

A month after the strange historic scene shown in these pictures Robert Todd Lincoln, Mr. Lincoln's oldest and only surviving son came to Springfield and visited the sarcophagus in which his father's body had been placed. He was disturbed and dissatisfied. Even with the burglar alarm, he felt there could be a repetition of the time in 1876 when thieves had worked the President's coffin almost out of this same sarcophagus. (The Secret Service had overheard a boast in a Chicago bar, got wind of the plot, followed the criminals to Springfield and foiled them in the act.) Now Robert gave new and explicit directions.



Tire construction company was to break a hole in the tile floor of the catacomb in line with the center crypt and place the remains 10 feet deep in an east and west direction. The red cedar coffin was to be encased in a huge cage of flat steel bars resting on 20 inches of Portland cement concrete. Upon this should be poured enough concrete to inure both coffin and cage so that they would be hardened forever in a solid block of rock. On Thursday, Sept. 26, 1901 all was ready. Twenty people gathered at the monument. They were state officials and members of the Lincoln Guard of Honor, a local group of men. Most of them were elderly, men with faces serious and drawn. There were two women present, Mrs. Alfred Bayliss, representing her husband, a trustee of the monument who had to be out of town, and Mrs. Edward S. Johnson, wife of the tomb's custodian.

Now began a discussion which turned into an argument - should the coffin be opened and the body viewed before this last interment to make sure it was actually Abraham Lincoln who was being buried. The coffin had last been opened in 1887. To most present, it seemed a wise precaution to open it now, since there were persistent rumors, all across the country that Mr. Lincoln was positively not in that inner leaden box.

The opposition spoke up heatedly. In the first place the son Robert Lincoln had expressed his wish, very much the form of a command, that the casket not be opened, and he was the only man who could rightfully decide yes or no. Besides, viewing the body now after 36 years would be a scandalous invasion of privacy.

Finally, it was decided to view it. Even those who had spoken for it now felt shocked at their own boldness, as if they were violating something or someone. Still, they could not withstand an overwhelming compulsion to make this final identification. Two plumbers, Leon P. Hopkins and his nephew Charles L. Willey, were sent for to chisel an oblong piece out of the top of the lead-lined coffin just over Lincoln's head and shoulders. The

same men had opened the casket 14 years before. Joseph P. Lindley, a member of the Lincoln Guard of Honor, sent a message back into Springfield for his 13-year-old son Fleetwood to ride out to the tomb quickly on his bicycle. He wanted the boy to have an experience he would never forget.

At 11:45 a.m. six workmen carried the casket from the north end of the tomb to the still unfinished Memorial Hall at the south, set it on two sawhorses and then were unceremoniously thrust out to wait till they were needed. The room was hot and damp-an imperfect electric fan droned and a single incandescent lamp produced a weird light. Newspapers had been placed across the glass part of the door to prevent the curious from looking in and they shut out the daylight. Hopkins and Willey arrived with blowtorch, chisels and other equipment and set to work. Back in 1887, Hopkins remembered, the group making the examination was so small and the plan had been kept so secret that he did not know what he was being summoned for until he got there. It was almost funny, though, he recalled, how, with all that care, a young honeymoon couple walking blissfully about the monument grounds had wandered into the viewing chamber and gazed transfixed at what they saw.

Now young Fleetwood had arrived, rolling his bicycle right into Memorial Hall and leaning it up against the wall a few feet from the coffin. The boy had wondered what could have been urgent enough to make his teacher excuse him in the middle of class and he had pedaled furiously the two miles to the tomb. Now he knew what he was going to see and all he could think of was that his father had told him the last time he had viewed Mr. Lincoln's face, 14 years before, it had been the color of an old saddle.

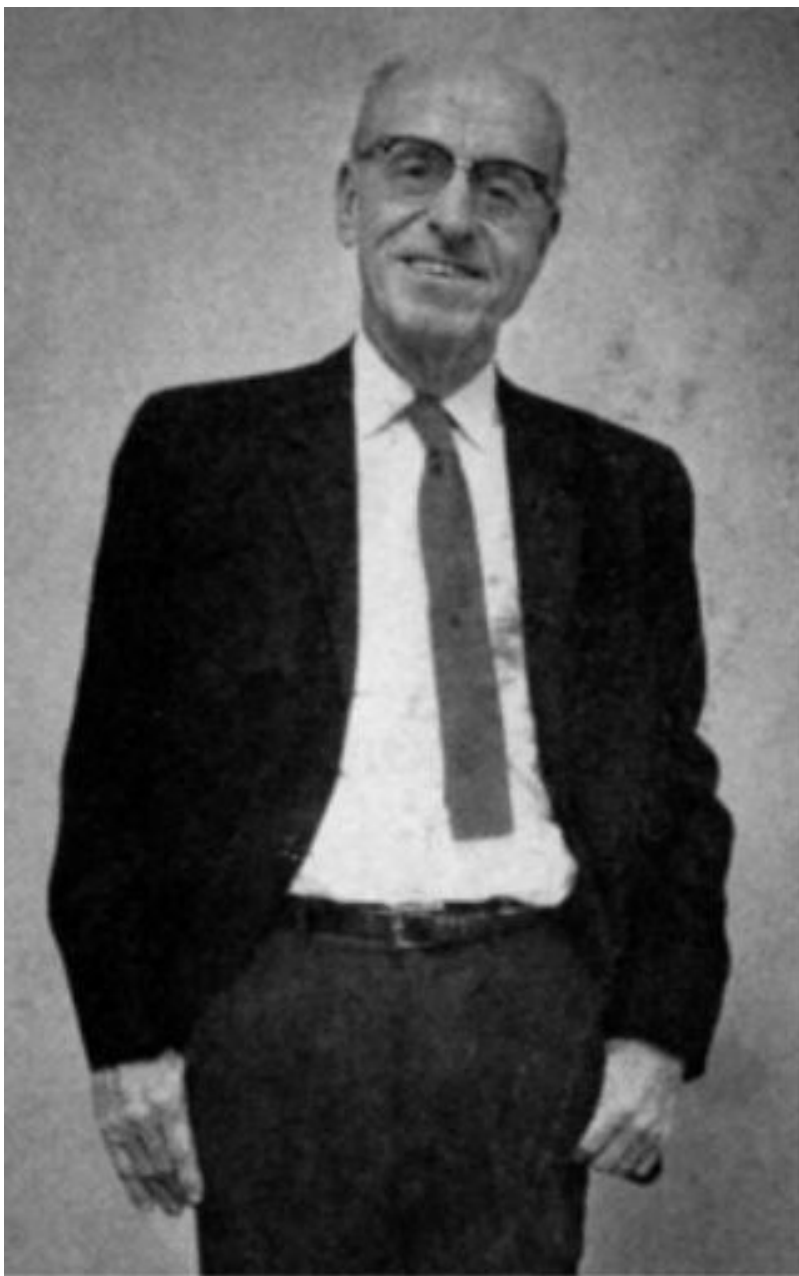
Suddenly voices dropped to a low, prayer like murmur. Master plumber Hopkins made his dramatic uncovering, lifting the section of green-colored lead from above Mr. Lincoln's head and chest. A pungent, frighteningly choking smell arose. Simultaneously but controlling themselves, all 23 persons crowded forward.

The dark brown Lincoln face was indeed covered with a distinct rubbing of white chalk, which was applied by an under-taker in Philadelphia in 1865 on the trip west, when the skin inexplicably turned black and it was impossible to exhibit the body to the public without this thick covering. The effect was of powdered bronze, said Mrs. Bayliss later, or you could call it a sort of grayish chestnut color. The features were entirely recognizable and the expression was one of sadness.

The headrest had fallen away so that the neck was thrown back but the black, short chin whiskers were perfect, recalled plumber Hopkins. The small black bow tie the warts on his cheek, the coarse black hair all were unmistakable, although the eyebrows had vanished.

The black broadcloth suit which the President had worn, new, at his second inauguration, was covered with tiny delicate stalagmites of yellow mold. There were red spots, too, that looked like vestiges of material, and someone said there must have been a small American flag that had rotted away. Over his hands, said Hopkins, there was "something-evidently something had been stretched over them." Indeed something had, for Lincoln, who hated gloves and always drew them off as soon as Mrs. Lincoln's back was turned, had been buried in an elegant pair of French kids.





After a few moments heads began nodding-yes, it was the President, it was he, it was the President beyond all manner of doubt. The viewers backed away. As Mr. Lincoln lay there with his face exposed for the very last time, the photographs of himself which were hanging on the curving walls looked down eerily. Every likeness seemed to focus its eyes upon the fearful and prophetic sight on the tipped-back pillow-as Lincoln himself once in a dream had looked down on his own body, laid out still and pallid in a coffin on a black-draped catafalque.

Resoldering the cut-out piece was the work of a few moments. B. H. Monroe, a member of the Lincoln Guard of Honor, recalled, "I watched the shadow of the lid fall across Lincoln's face as that face disappeared from mortal view forever."

Then Robert Lincoln's specifications were carried out with dispatch. The coffin was lowered into the cage and two tons of cement poured down, rolling and lapping about the metal like lava. Mr. Lincoln is still there, 10 feet beneath the floor, and more than a million people make the pilgrimage to his tomb each year.

As for Fleetwood Lindley, the bicycle boy, he was a spry 75 when he recalled the scene to a LIFE reporter two weeks ago, in his room in St. John's Hospital in Springfield, awaiting a gall bladder operation. His father had been right, he , said, he had never forgotten that day, and now, the very last person alive of those 23 viewers in 1901, he proudly retold his memories. "Yes," he ended, "his face was

chalky white. His clothes were mildewed. And I was allowed to hold one of the leather straps as we lowered the casket for the concrete to be poured. I was not scared at the time but I slept with Lincoln for the next six months." Fleetwood Lindley sleeps now, very near Abraham Lincoln in Oak Ridge Cemetery. He died three days after the interview, on Feb. 1, 1963, and now there is not even one left of the 23 who can say, "I saw him."

LIFE

RARE PHOTOGRAPHS, NEW-FOUND FACTS
TELL THE INCREDIBLE STORY OF

What Happened to Lincoln's Body

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