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# Lincoln Museum doors to close at end of June

## Prized exhibits will be shifted, loaned, gifted

Becky Manley | The Journal Gazette

March 4, 2008

### A statue of Abraham Lincoln at the Lincoln Museum



Samuel Hoffman | The Journal Gazette  
**The Lincoln Museum, 200 E. Berry St., will close June 30.**

Less than a month after the planned launch of a yearlong local celebration marking what would have been Abraham Lincoln's 200th birthday in 2009, Lincoln Foundation officials announced Monday the Lincoln Museum will close to the public effective June 30.

As a result of the closure, 79 historical items in the museum's collection will be displayed elsewhere and may be divided among more than one location.

Those items include a cane carried by Lincoln, a shawl worn by his wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, and toys that belonged to the couple's children.

"We do not know exactly where it is going," said Priscilla Brown, vice president and chief brand officer for Lincoln Financial Group.

Many of the collection's documents will remain at the Fort Wayne site and will be converted to digital form, which will allow researchers more easy access to them, Brown said.

Citing declining local attendance figures, Brown said the collection's dispersal to other sites will better match the Lincoln Financial Foundation's mission for the items, which is to ensure they get maximum exposure and remain accessible to the public.

The foundation's board hasn't determined exactly how it will select display sites for the collection.

Brown said it is possible some items may be loaned to other sites and others may be gifted.

"We will do what's in the best interest of the collection," Brown said. Brown said the museum isn't being closed as a cost-cutting measure and that it does not reflect any failure of the local museum staff. "This was not a decision made for financial reasons," Brown said.

The local museum faced the same struggles many non-profit historical museums face as tight finances force schools to reduce field trips. Plus, the museums face competition from other education venues that offer interactive displays.

In 1996, about 12,000 children visited the museum, Brown said. In 2006, the number had dropped to 7,500.

Overall yearly attendance at the museum is about 40,000, Brown said. Museums in larger cities often boast six-figure attendance figures.

"I am terribly disappointed this community asset will be leaving Fort Wayne at the end of June," Mayor Tom Henry said in a written statement. "The Lincoln Museum has been a wonderful part of our community for decades, providing a national collection of Lincoln history here in Fort Wayne."

The collection is valued at \$20 million, according to Sandra J. Kemmish, foundation director.

In September 2006, Mary Clements, public relations manager for the Lincoln Museum, announced the local one-year bicentennial celebration would kick off Feb. 12, 2008.

The museum has about 20 staff members, both full and part time, Brown said. In addition, the museum has a "substantial" volunteer base.

About a year ago, the museum's staff was told the collection may be moved, Brown said. Employees, most of whom will lose their jobs when the museum closes, immediately began to discuss what should be done with the collection.

"They knew that we needed to do something," Brown said.

Brown said calls would be placed to volunteers beginning Monday afternoon to alert them to the closure.

Tom Scribner, a fifth-grade teacher at Deer Ridge Elementary School in the Southwest Allen County Schools district, said he was disappointed when he heard about the museum's closure during school Monday.

Scribner said he has taken students to the museum for more than 20 years.

"It was always wonderful. That's such an incredible museum."