

# **Lincoln statue unveiled at site of historic address in Peekskill**

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PEEKSKILL - Staring at a life-size statue of Abraham Lincoln, Delmar Kearsley imagined what life was like for his great-grandmother, a slave at a manor house in Sailors Creek, Va., where injured Union and Confederate soldiers were treated.

Because of the strength of Lincoln, Kearsley said, soldiers were dying for the freedom of his great-grandmother and other slaves.

"He believed in segregation, but not slavery," Kearsley, 79, said yesterday as he attended an event in Peekskill honoring the slain president. "But I'm a Lincoln fan. I think it's important that he be remembered."

Dozens of residents yesterday braved traffic tie-ups and pouring rain to attend the unveiling of "Lincoln In Peekskill," a statue of the 16th president placed in front of the Lincoln Depot Museum.

Commissioned by The Lincoln Society of Peekskill, the 11-foot bronze monument depicts Lincoln in his trademark stovepipe hat, suit, bow tie and trench coat as he addressed the city on Feb. 19, 1861. Placed atop a 4-ton granite block, the statue shows him holding the left lapel of his coat and clutching a railing with his right hand - what he might have looked like during the speech he gave three months after his election and two months before the country plunged into civil war.

As the rain came down harder, John Hernandez of Closter, N.J., joined a chorus of cheers as a blue tarp was pulled off the statue.

"No other individual in the history of America could have united the country and people like him," said Hernandez, 63, as cameras flashed and Civil War re-enactors began a 21-gun salute. "He was God-sent."

Former Gov. George Pataki, Assemblywoman Sandra Galef, D-Ossining, and developer Martin Ginsburg, who funded the monument with a \$100,000 grant, were among those in attendance. As the horns of passing trains blared, speakers told stories of Lincoln, who is best known for issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, which aimed to free slaves in the Confederate states.

Historian Harold Holzer, senior vice president of external affairs at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Manhattan, said New York was key to Lincoln's election and success in the war.

"No other state contributed more men, materials and treasure to ending the blight of slavery than New York did," said Holzer, who has written more than 30 books on Lincoln and Civil War-era politics. "Peekskill is making sure ... we embrace history and learn from it."

Lincoln spoke in Peekskill as he headed to Washington for his inauguration.

Clad in a new cashmere suit, according to Holzer, Lincoln stood on a baggage cart and addressed a crowd of thousands that had gathered at the former railroad depot on what is now South Water Street. He spoke for no more than a minute, Holzer said, thanking the public for his election and assuring them of his intentions to heal a country on the brink of civil war.

"I will say in a single sentence, in regard to the difficulties which lie before me and our beloved country, that if I can only be as generously and unanimously sustained as the demonstrations I have witnessed indicate I shall be, I shall not fail," Lincoln told the crowd. "But without your sustaining hands, I am sure that neither I nor any other man can hope to surmount these difficulties."

The unveiling came a day after police arrested a 13-year-old boy for scrawling racist graffiti on the exterior of the museum, which is undergoing a restoration. Workers painted over the graffiti before the ceremony.