

LINCOLN PARK

Abraham Lincoln: The Man

Standing Lincoln

LOCATION: North of W. North Avenue, east of the Chicago History Museum

DEDICATED: 1887

SCULPTOR: Augustus Saint-Gaudens

ARCHITECT: McKim, Mead, and White

In 1887, the *New York Evening Post* described *Abraham Lincoln: The Man* as “the most important achievement American sculpture has yet produced.” The commission was extremely meaningful to its sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens (1848–1907), an Irish immigrant who had apprenticed to a cameo cutter and went on to become one of the foremost sculptors of his day. Chicago lumber merchant Eli Bates (1806–1881) had left \$40,000 in his will for an Abraham Lincoln monument in Lincoln Park. Although Saint-Gaudens had initially refused to participate in a design competition for the project, the committee selected him after rejecting all of the applicants to the contest.

The acclaimed artist had great reverence for Abraham Lincoln. As a young man, Saint-Gaudens had seen Lincoln during his journey to Washington to be inaugurated as the sixteenth president of the United States. Several years later, the sculptor was deeply moved by the sight of Lincoln’s body lying in state.

In 1884, when he began working on *Abraham Lincoln: The Man*, Saint-Gaudens wanted to find the perfect model. A friend suggested that there were many “Lincoln-shaped men” in Cornish, New Hampshire. He visited there, established a summer home and art studio, and soon discovered Langdon Morse, a six-foot-four tall farmer from Windsor, Vermont, to serve as his model. The project also benefited from Saint-Gaudens’ use of the newly rediscovered plaster life mask and casts of Lincoln’s hands that another sculptor, Leonard W. Volk had made in 1860.

Saint-Gaudens’ emotionally powerful portrayal of Lincoln stands in front of an enormous chair in a thoughtful stance as though he is about to deliver a speech. Known commonly as the *Standing Lincoln*, the twelve foot bronze figure and chair are mounted on a monumental semicircular exedra designed by architect Stanford White. A crowd of 10,000 attended its unveiling by Abraham Lincoln’s grandson and namesake on October 22, 1887. There are replicas of the renowned sculpture in London and Mexico City. Chicago’s sculpture has had several conservation treatments.



Saint-Gaudens’ famous bronze sculpture of Abraham Lincoln stands on an elegant exedra designed by architect Stanford White, CPD Special Collections, ca. 1930.



Abraham Lincoln: The Man is known to most Chicagoans as the *Standing Lincoln*, 2008.