

President Lincoln visits the library

BY ANNA WIESEMAN - awieseman@ftimes.com | Posted: Sunday, February 14, 2016 6:00 am

Along with 2016 being Indiana's bicentennial, it is also the bicentennial of when Abraham Lincoln's family came to Indiana. Patrons of the Michigan Road Community Library got a chance to learn this fact and many others Thursday during a visit from President Lincoln himself.

Lincoln, portrayed by Danny Russel, visited the library to give comedic and serious insight on the nation's 16th president.

"All they (the audience) ever see are the results, but there were hundreds of man hours put into the performance," Russel said.

Before donning the costume and telling his story, Russel went through almost 15 years of researching and training to portray Lincoln. All of this work came together to present a well-rounded trip, guided by Russel, through Lincoln's life. It included many of his quotes and quirks.

"I did not realize Abraham Lincoln was such a jokester," said audience member Kelly Adair.

The journey started with a short history of Lincoln's family, his mother, father, sister and anyone else who helped on his journey. During his time growing up, Lincoln only shot a gun once and was so saddened by the death of the turkey he shot, he never picked up a gun again.

Russel set up Lincoln's future career as a lawyer and the president. Lincoln was often known as lazy, according to Russel's narrative, because he was more interested in reading than farming. One of his favorite books was the Bible, which gave him comfort during the passing of his mother and other tragic events.

Along with narratives, Russel used period-specific props to keep his audience engaged. He frequently referenced a Bible and papers during the performance. Clinton Central student Max Adair said the props were his favorite part of the show.



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Introductions: Abraham Lincoln, portrayed by Danny Russel, introduces himself as part of his performance at the Michigan Road Community Library Thursday. The performance included Lincoln's life as a young boy and ended with the Gettysburg Address.

Much emphasis was placed on Lincoln's experiences with slavery and moments that would drive his desire to abolish the institution. Lincoln saw his first slave auction while delivering goods in New Orleans and thought it was heartbreaking, Russel included.

The slave narrative was broken up by references to other characters in Lincoln's life, including his wife and children. Even though these aspects were also tinged with sadness, Russel presented them as motivation for Lincoln's future actions. These personal touches to the story connected to the audience.

"I liked how he talked about his wife and how the footprints were on the ceiling," said audience member Lillian Cline, referencing a story about Lincoln's mischief-making told at the beginning of the event.

After going over the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates, Russel moved to Lincoln's time in the White House. He went over the moments before the 16th U.S. president signed the Emancipation Proclamation and the emotions before the Civil War.

He ended the performance with the Gettysburg Address. Russel said the historic speech was only two and one-half minutes, but the man who warmed up for Lincoln spoke for two hours.

Russel then detailed the Civil War events that occurred after the address.

"I am here as a reminder that freedom is not free," Russel said, in character. "It comes with a cost."

He then took questions from the audience, composed of both children and adults.

The question and answer portion of the performance is Russel's favorite. The most interesting questions come from children, he said.

"I really like how he was talking about how he went from a log cabin to the White house," said Clinton Central student Makenzee Smith.

The performance ended with a famous quote from Lincoln, "I sure am glad you got to see me."