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Mabley's Report:

New Protest on Lincoln Exhibit at N. Y. Fair

BY JACK MABLEY

THE ROUSING CHORUS OF BOOS that emanated from all over the state of Illinois spending one million dollars for a Lincoln exhibit at the New York World's fair is getting some company.



JACK MABLEY

I thought I was the only sourpuss who felt we might have better use in this state for one million dollars. Not so.

A voice in Decatur is raised. The Herald & Review comments on the focal point of this million dollar thing, an effigy of Abraham Lincoln made of plastic and fiberglass that will frown, smile, move its lips, nod its head, make body movements, and strike poses like Abe Lincoln.

In the opinion of some this could be the hit of the show, says the newspaper.

"It also could be looked upon as a cheap carnival trick that would demean the memory of Abraham Lincoln and degrade the Illinois exhibit," says an editorial.

These wise central Illinoisans say this Disney mockup of Lincoln is at best a waste of public funds, at worst a grotesque publicity stunt that would surely draw more snickers than anything else.

WHAT DO OUR NEIGHBORS farther south think of the project? The Southern Illinoisan at Carbondale, Murphysboro and Herrin call the thing "macabre" and likens it to carnival effigies of Jesse James and John Wilkes Booth.

Getting back upstate, Springfield has been having a ruckus lately over the commercialization of Lincoln's memory, and specifically of his home in Springfield.

By more than coincidence the chairman of the Illinois commission on the New York fair and chief advocate of spending a million dollars to lure tourists to Illinois is Ralph Newman, known as a Lincoln scholar.

Our representative in Springfield has a different name for Mr. Newman.

"In our book he's a bookseller, promoter and concessionaire," says this reporter.

"He's presently involved in the commercialization fracas at the Lincoln home . . . he operates a garish concession north of the shrine, complete with stuffed dummies of Abe, plus Confederate and Union soldiers, plus souvenirs, popcorn and soft drinks.

"He also is the sole operator of a food and souvenir stand at the New Salem state park."

RALPH NEWMAN STANDS TO MAKE a lot more money from tourists if an Illinois exhibit at the New York fair sends them scurrying westward. I can't quarrel with him trying to make a buck, but I object vigorously to being forced to subsidize him.

They'll have to collect a lot of sales tax from me and a couple of other fellows to make that million dollars to pay Disney to build Newman's dummy and build something to put the dummy in at the fair.

I breathlessly follow the progress of the New York fair thru the New York papers, and the latest dope story tells of the measures taken by the various exhibitors to compete for the attention of visitors.

It would take a visitor days, maybe a week, to see everything at the fair, so the smarter exhibitors have figured a way to hook the customers. When you go in, you can't get out until you've seen the whole commercial—15 minutes, 20, half-an-hour.

They've engineered it so you get on a moving track or vehicle or into a maze and you move so far at such and so pace, and that's it. No turning back.

ILLINOIS' BID—LINCOLN'S DUMMY—will talk for 10 minutes, and I don't know whether it will be good manners to walk out before he . . . it . . . is finished. I doubt if it will care, tho.

Abe, the dummy, will drum the arm of the chair with its fingers, shift its weight, stand, rub its nose, grasp a coat lapel, look around [known in the trade as casing the house], and talk. With gestures.

A million dollars. What could you do with a million dollars in your school district?

[Mabley broadcasts on WFMQ from 7 to 8 a. m. daily.]