

### A. Abstract

Ford's Theatre Society (FTS) will plan a permanent exhibition on the history of Ford's Theatre and the Petersen House in the years since President Abraham Lincoln's assassination that considers what these two buildings can teach us about changing historical memory of national tragedy. NEH funds will allow Ford's Theatre Society to consult with a group of scholars of historical memory, create a schematic exhibition design and exhibition script, and test themes and ideas with target audiences. The planned exhibition will offer the 650,000 annual visitors to Ford's Theatre a window into changing popular memory of the Lincoln assassination through the story of the buildings where the event took place, contextualizing the changing uses of the buildings and urging visitors to question what messages monuments and historic sites reveal about the people who build and steward them.

### B. Nature of the request

Ford's Theatre Society respectfully requests a Public Humanities Planning Grant in the amount of \$40,000 to support interpretive planning and design for a new permanent exhibition on the second floor of its Center for Education and Leadership.

More than a hundred years after the assassination of President Lincoln on April 14, 1865, Ford's Theatre reopened in 1968 as a working theatre and historic site dedicated to honoring President Lincoln. Ford's Theatre is operated through a public-private partnership between Ford's Theatre Society (a non-profit 501(c)(3)) and the National Park Service. The FTS mission is to celebrate the legacy of Abraham Lincoln and explore the American experience through theatre and education. One of the many ways in which FTS accomplishes its mission is through comprehensive interpretation of the historic events surrounding Lincoln's presidency and assassination and the Civil War via exhibitions in the Museum under the historic Theatre and in the Center for Education and Leadership, adjacent to the Petersen House.

When the Center for Education and Leadership (CEL) opened in 2012 as the final element of the four-part Ford's Theatre visitor experience, its second-floor gallery was originally designated as a space for temporary exhibitions. Since then, FTS has mounted special exhibitions in the space, including an acclaimed exhibition of Lincoln assassination artifacts as part of its commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the event. When a special exhibition is not in the gallery, the Society offers a modular *Lincoln and Leadership* exhibition in the space. The rest of the Ford's Theatre campus is immersive and engaging, evoking a strong sense of time and place, with reconstructed life-size elements and facades, particularly in the CEL exhibits. The *Lincoln and Leadership* exhibition presents a sharp break, in both design and content, from the rest of the visitor experience. Informal visitor observation and discussions have indicated confusion about how to interact with this exhibition.

Over time, staff has learned that many visitors leave the Ford's Theatre campus with unanswered questions about the fates of the people connected to the assassination—the remaining Lincoln family members, as well as the Lincolns' guests Henry Rathbone and Clara Harris, Ford's Theatre employees and others—and the story of the reconstruction of the Ford's Theatre site—including both the historic theatre and the Petersen House, where Lincoln died. While this information about the impact of the assassination on the people, places and objects involved is occasionally shared with visitors through conversations or ranger talks, direct access to this significant information remains as a serious gap in our interpretive framework.

FTS seeks funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities to investigate these interpretive gaps further and explore how best to answer them with an on-site exhibition. Exploring the site's evolution to its present state would add a critical layer to the Ford's Theatre historic site visit, a layer encouraging visitors to question the stories told (or not told) at Ford's and other sites. The related stories of how Ford's Theatre came to be a National Historic Site, its relation to the larger landscape of American historical memory and how key artifacts were collected or disbursed are the largest gaps in interpretation at the Ford's Theatre campus. By answering and exploring these gaps, FTS seeks to add to current public discourse around the memorialization and interpretation of sites of tragedy. This exhibition will ultimately serve as a case study for

the humanities themes and questions embedded in this discourse, engaging broad audiences in current research on this topic and the changing historical memory of the Lincoln assassination.

To effectively accomplish these goals, Ford's will engage in a scholarly exploration about memorialization of public sites with an advisory council of scholars specializing in historical memory and will conduct front-end evaluation studies to gain more information about how visitors interact with these humanities questions. Informed by these elements, we will plan a new exhibition that replaces *Lincoln and Leadership* with a visitor-centered display filling the gaps currently left by our on-site interpretation and blending seamlessly into the overall Ford's Theatre experience.

### **C. Humanities content**

In the light of recent violent events, and in particular the Emanuel AME Church Massacre in Charleston, S.C., communities throughout the United States revisited debates about how the country should depict its most volatile period—the Civil War and Reconstruction—in the landscape of historic sites, memorials and symbols. This debate showed a lack of popular awareness of how monuments, and by extension historic sites and their interpretation, came into being as representatives of particular moments and places.

The purpose of this proposed exhibition is to provide the additional context and exploration desperately needed within the current public discourse on the memorialization of sites of tragedy. Exploring the site's evolution to its present state would add a critical layer to the Ford's Theatre historic site visit, a layer encouraging visitors to question the stories told (or not told) at Ford's and other sites. The related stories of how Ford's Theatre came to be a National Historic Site, its relation to the larger landscape of American historical memory and how key artifacts were collected or disbursed are the largest gaps in interpretation at the Ford's Theatre campus.

The exhibition that will fill in these gaps in interpretation would explore two interrelated humanities themes which consider the implications of one guiding question:

*“How has changing historical memory of the Lincoln assassination affected the people, places and objects involved in that event?”*

Through discussing the story of the evolution of Ford's Theatre, the new exhibition will also prompt visitors to question how present-day society memorializes tragic events, such as the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the Kennedy assassination, and compare how people have responded to other tragic events throughout the 150 years since Lincoln's death.

Since the installation of new, permanent exhibitions in 2009 and 2012, FTS has learned a great deal about the unanswered questions sparked in visitors through visitor research and staff experiences with guided tours and educational programs. Recent qualitative visitor research on student experiences reveals that many students, after visiting Ford's, believe that the site was left unchanged after the Lincoln assassination. This research also reveals questions about the revival of theatre on-site, why certain objects are on display at Ford's while others are housed elsewhere and what happened to the Lincolns' guests. These visitors also often express curiosity about why the site focuses on the life and presidency of Abraham Lincoln rather than just his assassination. Teachers who bring students for field trips find the site's post-assassination history and the characters involved particularly fascinating. These stories resonate with visitors all the more when comparisons are drawn to other sites of tragedy like Ground Zero in New York City.

To help answer these questions and ensure that the planned exhibition is grounded in solid humanities scholarship, FTS will convene an advisory panel of seven scholars to advise on the humanities themes of the exhibition. FTS chose these scholars based on their specialties and the scholarship they have produced that address the themes of the planned exhibition. After consulting the works that these scholars have written and others they suggest, FTS will convene the scholars virtually to review key exhibition planning documents, such as thematic outlines, an exhibition script and a conceptual design. The scholars will also participate in

conference calls and be available via email if the FTS staff members and contractors devising the exhibition script and schematic design have questions and seek feedback. Some scholars have also reviewed this narrative and engaged in conversations with staff already.

The two themes outlined below will serve as theoretical frameworks through which to view the story the exhibition will ultimately tell. These threads will be woven through the chronological treatment of the exhibition that FTS seeks to refine with input from the team of scholars, evaluator and exhibition designer.

***Humanities Theme 1:*** *The changing uses of Ford's Theatre and the Petersen House reflect the country's changing historical memory of the Lincoln assassination.*

The history of Ford's Theatre and the Petersen House provides a microcosm of the changing ways that the country has remembered this traumatic national event. The buildings' changing uses reflect shifting U.S. perceptions of what to do with sites of tragedy and an evolving culture of memorialization at critical junctures since 1865. In *Shadowed Ground*, University of Connecticut geography professor and project advisor Kenneth Foote offers a typology of four possible outcomes for sites of violence. They include:

- **Obliteration**: the complete destruction of the site after the tragic event;
- **Rectification**: bringing the site back to either its original form and function or a new function unrelated to the tragedy, with little to no acknowledgement of the tragic event that happened there;
- **Designation**: addition of a plaque or similar marker at the site, acknowledging the tragedy; and
- **Sanctification**: the transformation of the site into a memorial to the tragedy.<sup>1</sup>

Since the Lincoln assassination, Ford's Theatre and the Petersen House have at different times represented each of these outcomes. The framework, with advice from Foote, will help frame how FTS tells the buildings' stories.

The history of Ford's Theatre and the Petersen House can be divided into five distinct time periods that each typifies a unique era in the memorialization of the site, as well as different eras in the evolution of Lincoln's historical memory. As part of the planning process, FTS will consult with University of Southern California history professor Richard Wightman Fox about how each era corresponds with the broader story he tells in *Lincoln's Body: A Cultural History*. As always in historical inquiry, these categorizations are imperfect, but they are useful in defining the narrative and the scaffolding of the complicated history we plan to share in the eventual exhibition. Throughout this research process, Ford's will be able to add important insight into this timely topic while also responding to critical visitor questions.

#### *1860s and 1870s: The Immediate Aftermath*

Theatre historian and project scholar Thomas Bogar's *Backstage at the Lincoln Assassination: The Untold Story of the Actors and Stagehands* outlines what happened at the theatre and to its staff in the immediate aftermath of the event.<sup>2</sup> Bogar will help FTS refine the story as the planning process proceeds. Almost immediately after news of Lincoln's assassination reached Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, he ordered soldiers to seize the venue as a crime scene. Investigators questioned the theatre's staff during the hours after the unconscious Lincoln was carried across 10th Street to the Petersen boarding house. An advertisement in Washington's *Daily National Republican* on the day of Lincoln's death simply noted, "There will be no performance at this theatre to-night."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Foote introduces his typology in succinct form on p. 7 of *Shadowed Ground* and elaborates on it throughout the book. Kenneth E. Foote, *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy*, Rev. and updated, rev. ed (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas A. Bogar, *Backstage at the Lincoln Assassination: The Untold Story of the Actors and Stagehands at Ford's Theatre* (Washington, DC: Regnery History, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> *Daily National Republican*. (Washington, D.C.), 15 April 1865. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86053570/1865-04-15/ed-1/seq-3/>>

Immediately after the assassination, the Ford's Theatre building took on symbolic significance, as people responded to the tragedy with various proposals to obliterate, rectify, designate and/or sanctify the site. The night of the assassination, bystanders shouted, "Burn it down!" Over the succeeding months, other groups began planning to make the building a memorial to Lincoln. Proposals ranged from a secular "Lincoln Institute," modeled after the Smithsonian Institution, to a religious building—a plan championed by Secretary of State William Seward.

The theatre remained under military control until Stanton returned it to John T. Ford on June 22. Rather than reopen the playhouse, Ford hoped to sell the building to the Young Men's Christian Association. But, after the YMCA's fundraising efforts failed, Ford, under financial duress, attempted to reopen on July 10, just three days after the executions of four Lincoln assassination conspirators and less than three months after Lincoln's death. The memory was still too fresh; arson and riot threats convinced the Secretary of War to seize the theatre once again.<sup>4</sup>

Although Ford objected to the seizure, he and Stanton eventually came to terms. Stanton leased the structure, pending Congressional funding for an outright purchase—alleviating Ford's financial woes and allowing him to dispense with the building. To force Congress's hand, Stanton undertook extensive renovations, finally gaining approval for the purchase at the end of 1865.

Meanwhile, across the street from the theatre, residents of the Petersen House attempted to resume their normal lives, although that proved impossible. Eventually souvenir hunters and curiosity seekers overwhelmed the Petersens' boarders, but William and Anna Petersen lived there until their deaths in 1871. Their heirs sold the home to Louis Schade in 1878, and the Schade family lived in the home until 1893. Project advisors Kate Masur and Sharita Jacobs Thompson, both experts in the history of diverse groups in the Washington area, will help provide the broader neighborhood context to flesh out the story of the people living nearby and what the building meant to them.

The people most intimately involved with the assassination—those sitting in the presidential box—found their lives forever altered by the trauma. They were also scrutinized forever in the public eye. After her husband's death, Mary Lincoln locked herself in a room in the White House for 40 days of deep mourning, refusing even to attend the funeral and burial. Finally, she returned to Illinois but remained in an extended period of mourning. Suffering many losses throughout her life (including the death of her son, Tad, in 1871), Mary wore only black aside from select occasions. Mary Lincoln died at her sister's home in Springfield in 1882.

Major Henry Rathbone and Clara Harris married the year after Lincoln's death and went on to have three children together. Henry Rathbone never overcame the events of the assassination and his personal failure to prevent Booth's escape; public reaction likely contributed to this conclusion on his part. In 1883, the family was living in Germany, where Rathbone served as U.S. Consul in Hanover. Rathbone, tormented by paranoia and delusions, stabbed his wife to death. He spent the rest of his life in a German asylum.

#### *1880s and 1890s: A Focus on the Petersen House*

Records in the Ford's Theatre National Historic Site archives, as well as the site's 1963 historic structures report, lay out a chronology of what happened next. For almost 30 years, the former theatre served as a three-story federal office building, housing the Office of the Surgeon General and various War Department bureaus. Using Foote's typology, essentially the site was obliterated—the original theatre layout was lost—but it was also rectified and used for an unrelated function.

During its time in the Ford's Theatre building, the Surgeon General's Office prepared its comprehensive *The Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion*. Until 1887, the third floor also housed the Army Medical

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<sup>4</sup> Bogar, 229.

Museum.<sup>5</sup> In 1893, disaster struck as the third floor collapsed, killing 22 office workers. Contemporary newspaper reports were quick to link the two tragedies. In 1894, a congressionally appointed board found the former theatre unsafe for human use, and the government used it for records storage until the early 1930s.

Ford's Theatre remained unmarked: no plaques or memorials existed to tell the building's history, although two statues in the city memorialized the 16th president. The first, dedicated in 1868, sat in front of what was then Washington's city hall in today's Judiciary Square neighborhood. The second, dedicated in 1876, sat in Lincoln Park, 10 blocks east of the Capitol.<sup>6</sup> These statues fit within a broader context of statues of "great men," particularly Civil War heroes, spread around Washington at the same time.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps because the Petersen House was where Lincoln died, rather than the place where a crime was committed (a question to be discussed with the project scholars during the planning process), this building became the focus of memorialization during the 1890s. It was first designated as a site of tragedy in 1883 with a commemorative plaque. This came two years after the assassination of President James Garfield at a train station within blocks of Ford's Theatre. A plaque marked the spot for a quarter-century but did not survive the building's demolition. That site, now home to the National Gallery of Art, remains unmarked.<sup>8</sup>

Ten years after the installation of the plaque at the Petersen House, a group of prominent Washingtonians had a bigger idea: they planned for the Petersen House to be a national monument to Lincoln. The Memorial Association of the District of Columbia was officially established in 1892 to identify, mark and preserve important historic sites in Washington. But, from the beginning, its literature shows one main site was the focus of its preservation efforts—the Petersen House. An editorial in *The Washington Post*, enthusiastically reprinted as an endorsement in a Memorial Association pamphlet, suggested that the Petersen House could be a pilgrimage site, the equivalent of Mount Vernon but for Lincoln, again fitting within the context of monuments to "great men."<sup>9</sup> Project scholars Denise Meringolo, author of a work on late 19th and early 20th-century museums and historic sites, and Gretchen Sullivan Sorin will help contextualize this development in the broader spectrum of the stories that U.S. historic sites told as they developed at the time.

Osborn Oldroyd, an eccentric Civil War veteran, had assembled a 3,000-item collection of Lincolniana since the end of the war and was operating a Lincoln Museum in the 16th president's home in Springfield, Illinois. When in 1893 a newly elected governor evicted Oldroyd, the Memorial Association raised funds to purchase the Petersen House and subsequently leased it to Oldroyd to house and display his collection. Many dignitaries, including Vice President Adlai Stevenson, Chief Justice Melville Fuller and members of Congress were present for the dedication of the Lincoln Museum in the Petersen House on October 17, 1893.

The Petersen House, with Oldroyd's Lincoln Museum on the main floor, remained the focus of memorialization of Lincoln's assassination in Washington, D.C., for over thirty years. The historic theatre languished as a records storeroom. Even a revival in interest in Lincoln, in part from President Theodore Roosevelt's reverence of the 16th president and coinciding with the centennial of Lincoln's birth in 1909, did not change the treatment of the theatre. In 1911, a proposal calling for purchasing the neighboring buildings and expanding the Lincoln Museum stalled in Congress. In 1913, meanwhile, Congress designated a spot on the western edge of the National Mall in Washington for a grand memorial to Lincoln.<sup>10</sup> In spite of Oldroyd and the Memorial Association's efforts, another location—the National Mall—would become the focus of

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<sup>5</sup> J. E. (John Edward) Buckingham, *Reminiscences and Souvenirs of the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln* (Washington [DC]: Press of Rufus H. Darby, 1894), <http://archive.org/details/reminiessou03inbuck>.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Wightman Fox, *Lincoln's Body: A Cultural History*, First edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> See Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., The National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Foote, 15.

<sup>9</sup> Memorial Association of the District of Columbia, *The Memorial Association of the District of Columbia; Words of Lincoln* (Washington, D.C.: Memorial Association of the District of Columbia, 1892), <http://archive.org/details/memorialassociat00memo>.

<sup>10</sup> Fox, 209

commemorating Lincoln in the capital city. This reflected a shift from decentralized memorial spaces in Washington during the late 19th century to a centralization of memorials on the National Mall in the early 20th century, as well as a shift from memorializing Lincoln as the Great Emancipator to depicting him as the savior of the Union.<sup>11</sup>

### 1920s and 1930s: A Shift in Focus

In 1922, President Warren Harding led a grand dedication ceremony of the Lincoln Memorial. Meanwhile, the site of Lincoln's assassination remained unmarked, and the Petersen House served as a small museum. One man with a direct connection to the event, however, sought to change that. Representative Henry Riggs Rathbone (R-Ill.), son of the ill-fated couple who attended the theatre with the Lincolns, took up the banner of the historic theatre in the early 1920s. He advocated turning both Ford's Theatre and the Petersen House into a memorial to Lincoln and succeeded in marking the theatre with a plaque in 1924 and pushing through the federal acquisition of Oldroyd's collection in 1926.

Other parts of Rathbone's plan, however, stalled. A 1929 *Washington Post* article noted that Rathbone's plan "has found little favor because the country wishes to remember the achievements of Lincoln rather than keep alive the memory of his assassination."<sup>12</sup> The bill that Rathbone introduced called for the former theatre to be not just a museum, but to serve as headquarters for the Grand Army of the Republic. This provision was stricken from the final legislation.<sup>13</sup> After Rathbone's bill passed in 1930, the Lincoln Museum moved across 10th Street to Ford's Theatre in 1931, opening in 1932.

At that same time, as project scholar Denise Meringolo's *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks* documents (and discussions during the planning process will further flesh out), a wider shift was underway in how the United States cared for sites of national importance, particularly those from the Civil War. Previously, the military had served as custodian of important battlefields, using them for military training rather than interpreting history. Other federal agencies ran the parks and monuments in the capital city. The National Park Service ran nature parks primarily in the West. Through the efforts of National Park Service director Horace Albright, in 1933 President Franklin Roosevelt ordered the War Department and other federal agencies to transfer battlefields, along with Washington parks and monuments, to the National Park Service and its newly-created History Division.<sup>14</sup> This placed Ford's Theatre under the same jurisdiction, both administratively and symbolically, with both Civil War battlefields and the Lincoln Memorial.

Nonetheless, resistance to restoring the space to its 1865 appearance continued. Instead, the theatre was used as exhibition space, with Oldroyd's collection on the ground floor. A diorama and black lines along the floor indicated the site's former appearance. In the 1940s, Senator Milton Young of North Dakota, Representative Fred Schwengel of Iowa and others introduced plans to restore the theatre to its 1865 appearance, but many still believed that idea would glorify Booth.

### 1950s and 1960s: Restoration of the Theatre

The 1950s saw another revival in interest about Lincoln. In 1953, Walter Cronkite's *You Are There* series ran an episode on the capture of John Wilkes Booth. In 1955, a broadcast of the novel *The Day Lincoln Was Shot* appeared. These were two of many small and big screen depictions of Lincoln as a symbol of American democracy in the opening stages of the Cold War.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See Savage for a wider discussion of the shift in memorial spaces, and Fox for the shift of emphasis in memorialization of Lincoln.

<sup>12</sup> "Lincoln Museum," *The Washington Post* (1923-1954), February 13, 1929.

<sup>13</sup> Henry Riggs Rathbone and 2nd session (1926-1927) House United States. Congress (69th, *A Bill to Establish a National War Memorial Museum and Veterans' Headquarters in the Building Known as Ford's Theater* [Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1927, <http://archive.org/details/billtoestablishnrath>].

<sup>14</sup> See Denise D. Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Fox, 250-255.

Coinciding with that interest, in 1954 Congress appropriated funds to investigate the renovation of the theatre. The connections between these depictions of Lincoln and the revival of interest in restoring Ford's Theatre to its original appearance will be the subject of discussion with project scholars during the planning process. The resulting study<sup>16</sup> was officially dated April 14, 1963—exactly 98 years after Lincoln's assassination, and slightly more than seven months before President John F. Kennedy suffered the same tragic fate. The latter event, along with the Civil War centennial, and NPS's Project 66 (marking the agency's 50th anniversary) helped spur Congress to appropriate the funds needed to finally carry out the project. The building—restored to its 1865 appearance—reopened to the public in 1968.

Lobbyist and Washington insider Frankie Childers Hewitt, however, was concerned that initial restoration plans in 1965 made no mention of reintroducing live theatre. She feared that the absence of live theatre would turn the building into a monument to Booth's crime, and so approached Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall with the idea of putting live shows on the stage but was told that the government could not run a theatre. Hewitt built a partnership with the National Park Service to found Ford's Theatre Society, which still produces all the theatre's plays today and has also taken an increasing role in the site's historical and educational programming. Hewitt switched careers to bring live theatre back to the stage and directed the newly-founded Ford's Theatre Society from its inception in 1968 until her death in 2003. The theatrical productions on the stage became a staple of D.C. cultural arts, highlighting Lincoln's love of the performing arts. Even today, this decision is not without controversy, as demonstrated by a 2010 blog post arguing that live theatre in the space is "crass and congenitally wrong."<sup>17</sup>

FTS treats its theatrical productions as a living memorial to Lincoln in the space where he was assassinated. This too, perhaps, was a product of its time. A "National Cultural Center" authorized by Congress in 1958 transformed into a "living memorial" to the recently-assassinated John F. Kennedy in January 1964; it opened as the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in 1971.<sup>18</sup> As a comparison in that decade, Dallas citizens quickly pushed to build a memorial in Dealey Plaza, near the site of Kennedy's assassination, but the Texas School Book Depository remained unmarked with a plaque until 1980. The sixth floor of the building, where Lee Harvey Oswald fired the fatal shots, did not become a museum until 1989.<sup>19</sup>

Even still, interpretation at the Ford's Theatre site remained devoted not just to Lincoln's death but to his life. For the next two decades, a museum exhibition—relocated from the main floor to the basement—carried on the Lincoln Museum name. The literal centerpiece of the exhibition was Lincoln's life mask.

#### 1980s to Today: A Modern Museum

After 20 years, in 1988, the National Park Service undertook a restoration of the basement exhibition. When it reopened in 1990, not only did the museum include more information about the assassination, but a search of *Washington Post* articles finds a new name as well—the Ford's Theatre Museum. The Lincoln Museum name, present on the site for 95 years, had been retired. This happened at the same time that the Sixth Floor Museum in Dallas opened with exhibitions about the Kennedy assassination, perhaps indicating an increasing comfort in the United States with devoting a site to telling the story of a presidential assassination.

After another 20 years, Ford's Theatre Society and National Park Service created the current exhibition, which opened in 2009. Today's exhibition focuses on Lincoln's presidency within the context of the Civil War but also gives significant interpretive space to the assassination—including life-size figures of the conspirators. FTS and NPS also renovated the theatre, adding modern amenities and removing canebrake seats that previously lent a sense of historicity—as well as extreme audience discomfort—to the space since

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<sup>16</sup> George J. Olszewski, *Restoration of Ford's Theatre, Washington D.C.* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, National Capital Region: For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O, 1963).

<sup>17</sup> David Boles, "The Stench of Death at Ford's Theatre," *David Boles, Blogs*, January 25, 2010, <https://bolesblogs.com/2010/01/25/the-stench-of-death-at-fords-theatre/>.

<sup>18</sup> "Kennedy Center: History of the Living Memorial," accessed July 28, 2016, <http://www.kennedy-center.org/pages/about/history>.

<sup>19</sup> Foote, 58-70.

1968. The renovated theatre and museum opened as part of a new surge in nationwide interest in Lincoln, including a commission formed to coordinate a national celebration of the bicentennial of his birth in 2009. Interest surged even more with the release of Steven Spielberg's *Lincoln* in 2012, the sesquicentennial of the Civil War from 2011-2015 and the sesquicentennial of the Lincoln assassination in 2015.<sup>20</sup>

***Humanities Theme 2:*** *Ordinary objects became extraordinary through their association with the Lincoln assassination and have taken journeys of their own, demonstrating the continued importance of the event.*

Souvenir hunters swarmed both Ford's Theatre and the Petersen House almost as soon as a carriage delivered Lincoln's lifeless body to the White House for an autopsy on the morning of April 15, 1865. Willie Clark, a young veteran who rented the room where Lincoln died, wrote to his sister the following week that he had to keep constantly alert for people wanting pieces of his property. In the same letter, he included a lock of Lincoln's hair and "a piece of linen with a portion of his brain."<sup>21</sup> Like many 19th century people, 1865 souvenir hunters sought tangible mementos associated with important events.

While objects that people collected related to other events may fade in monetary and symbolic value over time, the Lincoln assassination has proved its enduring importance. The buildings associated with the event, and historical memory of the event itself, showed significant change over time, but the objects associated with it immediately acquired—and retained—mythic status. Since the assassination, these mementos have made their way into collections around the world, and some have ended up back where they began. The objects, along with the buildings, provide insight into the continuing significance of Lincoln and his death. By exploring the fates of items associated with the Lincoln assassination, visitors will examine, as Leah Dilworth writes in her introduction to *Acts of Possession*, a tangible way in which material objects "become sites of cultural memory and reproduction."<sup>22</sup>

When visitors to Ford's Theatre see a portion of the 5,600-item Ford's Theatre collection, many are struck by what is not on-site. While visitors are often accustomed to seeing reproductions of artifacts at other historic sites because the originals are in storage, they may be surprised to learn that iconic pieces, like the bed in which Lincoln died or the rocking chair in which he sat, are not in the site's collection.

In 2015, record crowds came to Ford's Theatre for a special exhibition of assassination artifacts, which had been dispersed across the country after Lincoln's death. The amount of media and public attention Ford's received during the showing of these artifacts demonstrates the incredible amount of interest that still exists in these original items and their stories. While there is little chance that any of these artifacts will return to Ford's, the special exhibition and frequent visitor questions in what happened to pieces that are not found on-site requires us to further explore these stories. Consultation with project scholars and audience evaluation during the exhibition planning process will help determine which offsite artifacts will be featured. Among these items are:

- The rocking chair in which Lincoln sat when Booth shot him. Today displayed at The Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, this ordinary piece of furniture from the theatre manager's office was originally seized as trial evidence in 1865 by the Judge Advocate General's office and was eventually turned over to the Smithsonian Institution. But in 1929, the widow of theatre manager Harry Ford, the owner of the chair, successfully sued for its return. Almost immediately thereafter, the family auctioned it to automaker Henry Ford (no relation) for the museum he was creating in Dearborn, Michigan.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Fox, 300-327.

<sup>21</sup> William Clark. "Willie Clark to Ida Clark". Remembering Lincoln. Web. Accessed July 29, 2016.

<http://rememberinglincoln.fords.org/node/707>

<sup>22</sup> Leah Dilworth, ed., *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 7.

<sup>23</sup> Fritz Klug, "How Abraham Lincoln's Assassination Chair Ended up in Michigan | MLive.com," *Michigan Live*, April 14, 2015, [http://www.mlive.com/lansing-news/index.ssf/2015/04/how\\_lincolns\\_assassination\\_cha.html](http://www.mlive.com/lansing-news/index.ssf/2015/04/how_lincolns_assassination_cha.html).



- The bed in which Lincoln died is now in the collection of the Chicago History Museum. The Petersen family auctioned it, along with their other furniture, when they vacated the home in 1871. Unlike furniture from any other Washington boardinghouse, though, this bed was endowed with much more significance. The purchaser's heirs sold it to a Chicago candy magnate, who eventually transferred it to the Chicago History Museum.<sup>24</sup>
- The Treasury Guard flag that adorned the presidential box is now at the Pike County Historical Society in Milton, Pennsylvania. While Civil War-era flags that did not find themselves carried into battle have largely deteriorated, this one was different. Theatre manager Thomas Gourlay took the flag after the assassination, passing it to his heirs, who donated it to their local historical society in 1954.<sup>25</sup>

By contrast, some artifacts displayed at Ford's Theatre surprise visitors because they are not directly linked to the Lincoln assassination but are more broadly connected to Lincoln's life. The Ford's Theatre National Historic Site collection was drawn from two main sources:

- Crime scene evidence that the Judge Advocate General's Office turned over to the National Park Service in 1940; and
- Osborn Oldroyd's private collection of objects, images and documents related to Lincoln's life.

Illinois native Osborn Oldroyd found his life defined by the assassination. Having begun to collect Lincoln memorabilia during the 1860 presidential campaign, Oldroyd devoted his life to his collection after Lincoln's death. When Robert Lincoln sought a tenant for the Lincoln family home in Springfield in 1883, Oldroyd found the perfect place for his collection. For ten years, Oldroyd operated his Lincoln Museum out of the Lincolns' Springfield home. His collection numbered roughly 3,000 items—many of them ordinary objects of everyday life endowed with significance by their association with the martyred president—by the time he moved it to Washington in 1893.

His collection, mostly related to Lincoln's life rather than death, came into federal hands in 1926 when Congressman Henry Riggs Rathbone, the son of the Lincolns' guests at the theatre, championed a bill to purchase that collection for \$50,000. This collection formed the basis of a museum for telling the story of Lincoln's life in the Petersen House and helped to determine interpretation when Oldroyd's Lincoln Museum was transferred to Ford's Theatre in 1932. The National Park Service assumed stewardship of the Oldroyd collection, along with the two buildings, in 1933.

The other core of the collection came into NPS hands in 1940, when the Judge Advocate General transferred its collection of Lincoln assassination evidence. Much of the evidence was collected in the days after the event, used in the military trial of the conspirators, and then displayed in a case in the Judge Advocate General's office until its transfer to the Park Service.

One of the most notable examples, and an artifact that exemplifies the collection, is the single-shot deringer pistol Booth used to kill Lincoln. After Booth fired the fatal shot, he dropped the pistol, struggled with Major Henry Rathbone, and then jumped onto the stage and fled out the theatre's back door. William T. Kent, a theatre patron who had helped to move Lincoln to the Petersen House, found the deringer on the floor of the Presidential Box when he returned to look for his lost keys later that night and turned it over to the federal government. After the Judge Advocate General's handover to NPS, the trial evidence went on display at Ford's Theatre in 1942—timed to coincide with the military trial of German saboteurs taking place blocks away at the Department of Justice building.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> "Abraham Lincoln Deathbed," *Abraham Lincoln Online*, accessed July 29, 2016, <http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/education/abed.htm>.

<sup>25</sup> This and stories of other items associated with the Lincoln assassination can be found in Ford's Theatre and Beckon Books, eds., *The Lincoln Assassination at Ford's Theatre: Now He Belongs to the Ages* (Nashville, TN: Beckon Books, 2015).

<sup>26</sup> "Exhibits From Lincoln Death Trial Placed on Public View," *The Washington Post (1923-1954)*, July 8, 1942.

These stories exemplify the journeys of the artifacts as they became relics, a microcosm of the site itself. By learning about how the artifacts were revered and even sanctified—whether stolen from the site, held as crime scene evidence, bought and sold by countless private collectors, found their way into museum collections or held as family heirlooms—we see the increasing resonance and continuing significance of the event in popular memory.

### **Project Format and Participant Experience**

The proposed planning project will investigate the themes delineated above and, in conjunction with project scholars, an evaluator and an exhibition designer, explore how best to convey these themes in a 600-square-foot exhibition space. To do this, Ford's staff will engage in a scholarly exploration of the memorialization of public sites with an advisory council of scholars specializing in memorialization, historic sites and historical memory, particularly relating to the Civil War and Lincoln. FTS staff will also work with a contract evaluator to conduct visitor research to help shape the scope and form of exhibition content. This will serve as the foundation for planning a new exhibition that replaces *Lincoln and Leadership* with a visitor-centered experience that explores the humanities themes discussed above while filling the gaps currently left by our on-site interpretation and that blends seamlessly into the overall Ford's Theatre experience.

#### Scholar Involvement

An advisory panel made up of seven scholars will help staff to:

1. refine the humanities themes discussed above;
2. share insight into current research, so the exhibition can engage with new work in the field;
3. work with the audience research evaluator to develop outcomes for each target audience group;
4. formulate an exhibition script outline; and
5. finalize a schematic design for the exhibition.

Our project will begin with a virtual meeting of the scholars, many of whom are based outside the region. In this first meeting, FTS staff will facilitate a discussion about the proposed exhibition concepts, themes and plans. Scholars will be asked to respond to identified themes by drawing on their expertise and experience in the field. These preliminary meetings will clarify the framework of humanities content on which to base the evaluation studies and schematic designs.

In the months that follow, we will engage one-on-one with specific scholars about issues that relate specifically to each area of study. Richard Wightman Fox, for example, can contextualize American memory of Lincoln from 1865 to the present. Kenneth Foote can help us place Ford's Theatre within the context of other sites of violence and tragedy memorialization trends. Denise Meringolo and Gretchen Sullivan Sorin can help with placing Ford's Theatre in wider trends of historic site interpretation. We have also identified two scholars with expertise in post-Civil War African American experiences and historical memory (Sharita Jacobs Thompson and Kate Masur) to whom we will look for guidance in weaving relevant elements of that narrative into the exhibition themes and stories.

A second virtual meeting with the scholars will communicate the results of the evaluation studies and afford group discussions about the narrative content for the exhibition. We will also ask for feedback from the group as a whole on the preliminary schematic design to allow for its incorporation into a design plan revision, in an effort to ensure the humanities themes are presented in a compelling and accessible manner. Both of these meetings will require significant preparation by our staff, which is reflected in their salaries included on the project budget.

#### Evaluation

Conny Graft, a seasoned evaluator, will work with the project team to define and test outcomes for audience members and test how best to communicate the humanities themes presented in an engaging exhibition for the general public. The evaluation process is described in the Evaluation section below.

### Artifact Research

While significant investigation of specific individual objects in the Ford's Theatre National Historic Site (FOTH) collection will be part of the planning process, the *Petersen House and Death of President Lincoln* Collection and the *Commemorative Events* Collection are anticipated to be the most fruitful sources both for research and possible objects for display in the new exhibition. A close examination of the wealth of resources available to Ford's (described in further detail below under Project Resources) will result in an artifact list for the exhibition. We know the locations of key artifacts no longer in the hands of the National Park Service (described elsewhere), and we will continue to research their provenance so that we can incorporate their stories into the exhibition as well. This artifact research, and securing of rights for images of these artifacts and other images to be included in the exhibition, will take significant staff time, which is reflected in the project budget. The evolving object list will inform our conversations with scholars throughout the planning process. The purpose of the artifacts in the exhibit will be to support the stories we choose to tell, and as such, the specific artifacts available will constitute a key component of the narrative development process for both scholars and FTS staff.

### Exhibition Schematic Design

Throughout the grant period, FTS will work closely with an exhibition designer, Split Rock Studios, to produce a schematic design for the proposed exhibition, which our panel of scholars will help plan and shape. FTS staff will produce a preliminary exhibition script outline with the expert knowledge and input of our academic scholars. This exhibition script outline will require extensive staff time, which is reflected in the accompanying budget. With the help of the National Park Service and the project scholars, FTS will discuss concept design elements that Split Rock will use to create a preliminary schematic design. In close partnership with our evaluator, Conny Graft, FTS will test key components of the exhibition design, including the proposed interactives, in its second floor galleries and will collect data on the success of these interactives that will further shape the exhibition design. From those results, FTS will again convene scholars and National Park Service staff to discuss the results and revise the initial exhibition script and design. After this, Split Rock will send FTS a final schematic design plan, including the final script, artifact list and design direction for the physical elements and floor plan.

### Preliminary Creative Approach

The creative approach that the project ultimately takes will be informed by the scholarly discussions and visitor research described above. We fully expect that our current concept will evolve over the course of the development process to reflect the information we gather from evaluation studies and scholar input.

At this preliminary stage, FTS staff envisions the exhibition weaving the two humanities themes into a chronological presentation, with the separate but intertwined stories of the Petersen House and Ford's Theatre being represented opposite each other in the narrow gallery. Each of the representative periods described above could include specific narratives of events and historic figures that exemplify the themes delineated above and connect the history of Ford's Theatre to the larger context of memorialization of sites of tragedies in America since 1865.

The planning period funded by NEH would provide an opportunity to determine if a chronological approach would be the best way to tell these stories and to test and refine these ideas into a plan for turning the humanities themes discussed above into a physical exhibition.

### **Project resources**

To plan the exhibition, FTS will draw on the numerous resources associated with the site that are easily accessible on-site, as well as conduct research as needed at other institutions. The primary resource on which FTS will draw is the 5,600-item Ford's Theatre National Historic Site collection. This collection contains a wealth of resources on the life of Lincoln and the assassination; only a small percentage of artifacts are currently displayed on-site. The majority of the collection is stored in an NPS National Capital Region storage facility in Landover, Maryland, easily accessible to FTS. Ford's Theatre Society itself has only a few artifacts

and relies on NPS for all of its artifact-based exhibitions. The FTS-NPS partnership has a successful history of artifact loans, including long-term loans on permanent display in the Center for Education and Leadership. Because of this ongoing partnership, FTS will be able to easily secure the rights and permissions needed to display these artifacts and has successfully done so with all of the three other floors of exhibitions that are currently on display in the Center for Education and Leadership.

There are five thematic sub-collections within the FOTH collection, two of which directly apply to the proposed exhibition. These two subthemes will be the primary focus of research during the planning phase, and later will be the primary source of artifacts pulled for display in the exhibition.

The Osborn H. Oldroyd Collection includes objects, artifacts and documentary materials included in the original Osborn H. Oldroyd Lincoln Collection purchased by the federal government in 1926. The bulk of this collection is from Lincoln's presidency and the Civil War era but also includes objects that relate to the 1865 assassination and conspiracy. The collection contains over 3,000 individually cataloged items including: medals, badges, buttons, ribbons and pins; statuary; personal and utilitarian items; furniture; architectural fabric; drawings, paintings, prints and engravings; flags and other textiles; and documentary materials—such as photographs and negatives; certificates; books; letters and envelopes; sheet music; newsprint; and theater programs, playbills and tickets.

The Lincoln Presidency and the Civil War Collection includes objects and artifacts from 1861-1865 and capture the temper of the times by exploring race relations, the wartime presidency and the timing of the assassination. Items include presidential campaign and election memorabilia, political cartoons, newspapers and memoranda. Civil War-era items include prints and photographs, as well as envelopes, stationery and stamps. Items from the presidency include White House furnishings, utilitarian items and personal family materials.

The Ford's Theatre and Assassination Collection features objects and artifacts associated with the assassination. The Ford's Theatre subcategory includes architectural fragments, original furnishings, playbills, sheet music, Presidential Box and *Our American Cousin* decorations and textiles, and personal items from the Lincolns and others in the theatre and backstage. The Assassination subcategory includes evidence used in the trial and personal items belonging to the conspirators including maps, weapons, personal accessories and other implements used to carry out the plot.

The Petersen House and the Death of President Lincoln Collection includes objects and artifacts that document the events at the Petersen House as well as the cultural significance of the Petersen House; Victorian death/mourning rituals; and the origins of the manhunt and federal investigation of the conspirators. Items in this category include historical materials directly associated with the death of the president such as furnishings and utilitarian items from the Petersen House; textiles worn and used by the president and his doctors; medical instruments; noteworthy prints, paintings and other depictions of the death scene that are otherwise not represented in publicly accessible collections; newspapers; mourning ribbons; memorials; and funerary objects.

Finally, the Commemorative Events Collection includes objects and memorabilia from important/significant current or commemorative events at the site. The collection includes memorabilia such as programs, tickets and press materials from 20th century events such as the reopening of the theatre in 1968.

While significant investigation of specific individual objects in the FOTH collection will be part of the planning process, the Petersen House and Death of President Lincoln Collection and the Commemorative Events Collection are anticipated to be the most fruitful sources for both research and eventual objects for display in the new exhibition.

Additionally, NPS keeps an archive of research files in its on-site offices at Ford's Theatre. These research files contain numerous photos, articles and other primary sources about the site's history. FTS mined and digitized a large number of materials from this archive during research for the *Images of America: Ford's Theatre* book, published in 2014. The already-digitized materials, plus the research files, will be particularly valuable for stories of the site's history. Additionally, in the process of researching the book, FTS borrowed and digitized the personal archives of FTS founder Frankie Hewitt.

In addition to a trove of photographs, FTS has copies of several NPS publications on Ford's Theatre, including:

- Historic Structures Reports for Ford's Theatre (1963) and the Petersen House (2002)
- Historic Furnishings Plans for the Petersen House (1967, 1977)
- Historic Handbooks for Ford's Theatre and the Petersen House (1949, 1969)

### **Project history**

Adding a new permanent exhibition to the second floor of the Ford's Theatre Center for Education and Leadership will be a culmination of two recent initiatives of Ford's Theatre Society: to re-imagine and improve the visitor experience at the Ford's Theatre campus and to research and document the history of the site. This newly redesigned exhibition space will serve as a significant part of these initiatives.

In late 2007, FTS and NPS began a renovation of Ford's Theatre and its museum. The Theatre was closed for 16 months during rebuilding and reopened on the bicentennial of Lincoln's birth in 2009. FTS assumed an active role in exhibition planning for the first time, working closely with NPS on a new visitor experience in the basement museum. Rather than the seemingly haphazard artifact cases that previously populated the space, the new museum used artifacts from the Ford's Theatre National Historic Site collection, in conjunction with modern technology, to tell broader stories of Lincoln's presidency and the events that preceded his assassination.

During this time, FTS purchased an office building adjacent to the Petersen House where it had previously leased space. FTS renovated the building, branded it as the Ford's Theatre Center for Education and Leadership (CEL), and opened it in 2012 as a continuation of the visitor experience from both the Theatre Museum and the Petersen House. This new center was created to link seamlessly the visitor experience at the Petersen House, where visitors learn about Lincoln's death, to the immediate aftermath of his death and the lingering impact of his legacy.

After leaving the Petersen House, visitors enter an elevator to emerge in the Center's fourth floor exhibition, which provides an overview of Lincoln's funeral, including a model of the train car that carried the president's body back to Illinois, as well as artifacts from the hunt for Booth and an interactive touch screen that displays and annotates Booth's diary. This gallery also details the controversial military trial of the conspirators. The third floor then follows Lincoln's legacy through the last 150 years and into the present day, showing everything from uses of the President's image in propaganda and popular culture to the memorial built in his name and a video of everyday people speaking Lincoln's words in a modern day "remix," meant to uncover their 21<sup>st</sup>-century relevance.

When the Center opened, the second floor was intended to serve as a special exhibition space. Since then, FTS has utilized the space for various special exhibitions, including accompaniments for its plays *Fly* (about the Tuskegee Airmen) and *The Laramie Project* (about the murder of Matthew Shepard). For the 150th anniversary of the Lincoln assassination in 2015, FTS created a signature temporary exhibition for the space, *Silent Witnesses*, which brought together artifacts that were at Ford's Theatre the night of the Lincoln assassination but had since been dispersed throughout Washington, D.C., and the rest of the country. The content of *Silent Witnesses* lives on through a book created to complement the exhibition and through a

Google Arts and Culture online exhibition. However, these artifacts, which were found on 10<sup>th</sup> Street in 1865 and have now been so widely dispersed, were only available temporarily.

Although *Silent Witnesses* was a critical and audience success, FTS has since reassessed its special exhibitions programming, concluding that regularly producing special exhibitions was not the best use of resources, and the space has been given over more permanently to the modular *Lincoln and Leadership* exhibition. The success of *Silent Witnesses* made it very clear that visitors need and want a more comprehensive and engaging experience on the 2nd floor, especially one that fills the current gaps in interpretation and addresses the place of Ford's Theatre and the Petersen House in the wider landscape of memorials and historic sites.

In recent years, FTS has completed exhaustive research and documentation of site and institutional history. Prompted by an inquiry from a board member, Washington attorney Brian Anderson, Ford's undertook this expansive project to document the site's rich history after discovering that no other source for this information existed. FTS staff worked closely with NPS staff and Anderson to publish *Images of America: Ford's Theatre* in 2014. FTS has since elaborated on the themes of the book in a series of blog posts and shared parts of the research in Google Arts and Culture online exhibitions about the histories of the Petersen House and Ford's Theatre. Yet, this important and fascinating story is still not currently told on-site.

While both online exhibitions and the above-mentioned books provide opportunities for visitors to explore these humanities themes on their own time, nowhere are the current project's humanities themes introduced on-site. A permanent exhibition in the Center's second floor gallery would introduce these themes and make them a permanent part of the overall visitor experience. While an exhibition cannot go as in-depth given space constraints, it would offer two specific advantages over the aforementioned books and online exhibitions:

- The capacity to display actual artifacts; and
- The space to create immersive displays that help bring the visitor into the time periods described.

Additionally, since 2008, many of FTS's teacher professional development programs have focused on reading *places* as primary sources. As the culminating element of the visitor experience on the Ford's Theatre campus, this permanent exhibition will help visitors walk away with an understanding of *place* as a primary source. In addition, it would encourage visitors to think critically about their experience of any historic place or monument they visit—a worthwhile skill in a time when memorialization is increasingly contested. The planned exhibition would thus contribute a model for other historic sites to interpret the development of the site in a broader historical context.

### **Audience, marketing, and promotion**

As a new addition to the permanent exhibitions, the audience for this exhibition must be broad in scope. We propose that it will serve a majority of the 650,000 annual visitors to Ford's Theatre National Historic Site, with a special focus on the 235,000 students who visit the site annually. These visitors come in tour groups from around the country and other parts of the world.

The marketing department has done a thorough analysis of our daily visitors who pre-purchase their site tickets online. The analysis gleaned from this research can be utilized to understand the type of visitor we may expect to view this new exhibition. From our research, we have found that our daily visitors are in the following age categories: 3% are 18-24, 12% are 25-34, 28% are 35-44, 30% are 45-54 and 27% are 55+. Our visitors come from all 50 states and several countries; approximately 10% of our daily visitors are international; 7% are from California; 7% are from Texas and 5% are from Florida. The average daily visitor is middle aged (45-54) and earns \$125,000+. Fifty-eight percent of the audience is female, and the majority of our visitors have a college degree. Although these numbers are representative of our daily visitors who reserve in advance, there are a number of visitors of whom we do not currently have data. We expect to attract a new, diverse audience after the redesign of our second floor exhibition by increasing our media coverage and utilizing social media to promote the exhibition.

FTS will undertake special efforts to promote this new exhibition to on-site audiences, especially those who do not buy advance tickets, including increased signage on-site, messaging for individuals and groups booking advance tickets, and mentions by FTS visitor services and NPS interpretive staff. Additionally, FTS will seek to attract new and repeat audiences to the site for the exhibition's opening and will leverage the opening of the exhibition to educate the media about the site's physical and programmatic expansion. Stories will be pitched to major wire services including national and local television; local, national, trade and international print publications; radio outlets and websites, around the country and around the world.

FTS will also host a series of opening events to provide news pegs for media coverage. Gauging from the success of other media campaigns around the renovations to the Theatre and museum, the opening of the CEL in 2012 and the 150th anniversary of the Lincoln assassination in 2015, FTS expects to garner stories in news outlets from around the region and possibly the country. Additionally, FTS has been successful with its social media efforts—Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube and the institutional blog—and will use these as platforms to announce the exhibition opening and continue to promote it. FTS will also discuss the progress of the planning process on its institutional blog as a way to share lessons learned with the broader library, archive and museum field.

### **Audience evaluation**

One of the foremost challenges of this proposed project to re-envision the 600-square-foot exhibition space is how to effectively convey and reveal the humanities themes in the stories of Ford's Theatre and the Petersen House. A secondary challenge is that this exhibition is the last stop on a tour that typically lasts approximately one to two hours. Anecdotal evidence suggests that visitors come to this space seeking something intuitive and engaging as the conclusion to an already heavily informative experience, and they will need to be captivated by the space, lest they be drawn to make their way down our large spiral staircase and out the door.

FTS conducted visitor research in the basement museum of the Theatre this past spring, and we learned that what happened to the site after the assassination is one of three key interests that students articulated as additional questions that were not answered by their visit to Ford's Theatre. Extensive work with a professional evaluator will allow us to confirm the anecdotal evidence we are currently relying on as the basis for our thoughts about the content of the exhibition as well as gather more specific information. With these factors in mind, FTS will work with evaluator Conny Graft to craft both a Front End and Formative evaluation.

The purpose of the evaluation will be to assist Ford's Theatre Society in determining the degree to which the proposed exhibit is effective in meeting its outcomes. More specifically, this evaluation will help FTS answer the following questions:

- Are the proposed outcomes for the exhibit engaging and relevant to visitors?
- To what degree is the proposed exhibit, including the content and the presentation techniques, effective in meeting the outcomes for this project?
- To what degree does the proposed storyline engage visitors?
- To what degree are the proposed techniques used to convey the storyline, engaging, meaningful and relevant to visitors?
- To what degree does the proposed storyline help visitors make connections between the way Lincoln's assassination has been memorialized over time and more recent tragedies such as Kennedy's assassination and 9/11? Or, what connections can be made to larger historical themes?
- What questions do visitors have about Ford's Theatre currently, and what questions do visitors have after experiencing a prototype of the exhibit?

### *Methodology*

#### *Front End Evaluation*

The purpose of the Front End Evaluation is to ensure that the proposed outcomes involve members of the target audience in the design of the visitor experience. This type of evaluation will help the planning team gather feedback on the outcomes for the visitor experience as well as the appeal of different strategies for achieving those outcomes. In addition, this process will show members of the targeted audiences that the organization cares about them and that their opinions and ideas matter. The findings from this evaluation will be used to revise the outcomes and strategies before creating the prototypes of the exhibit.

#### *Formative Evaluation*

After the outcomes and strategies have been revised, we will conduct a formative evaluation. The purpose of this evaluation will be to determine the degree to which the prototypes are achieving the proposed outcomes.

We will conduct visitor observations as visitors tour the exhibit. The observations will be followed by a very brief interview after the tour. In addition, visitors will be asked to participate in an online survey at the conclusion of the tour. The visitor observations will assist the interpretive planning team in understanding how visitors behave during the interpretive experience. After each observation, FTS will conduct an exit interview and then invite each interviewee to participate in an online survey. The online survey is important because it gives visitors time to talk about the experience with others, reflect on the experience and to be more honest about how the experience might be improved since they are able to finish the survey in the privacy of their own home.

The findings from this evaluation will assist the planning team in making more informed decisions about the proposed storyline and the way the storyline is presented. This evaluation will also reveal insights about visitor preferences for ways to experience exhibits. In addition to informing the proposed exhibition, these insights may have implications for how FTS can improve other exhibits in the museum.

#### **Organizational profile**

More than a hundred years after the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln on April 14, 1865, Ford's Theatre reopened in 1968 as a working theatre and historic site dedicated to honoring President Lincoln. Ford's Theatre is operated through a public-private partnership between Ford's Theatre Society (FTS) (a non-profit 501(c)(3)) and the National Park Service. The National Park Service is responsible for the utilities, maintenance and staffing of the historic theatre and the Petersen House. Ford's Theatre Society's renowned theatrical productions, engaging educational programs, quality museum exhibitions and live historic interpretation are sustained through the generosity of our donors. The mission of FTS is to celebrate the legacy of Abraham Lincoln and explore the American experience through theatre and education. Ford's annual operating budget totals \$14,935,720.

A working theatre, historical monument, world-class museum and learning center, Ford's Theatre is the premier destination in Washington, D.C., to explore and celebrate Lincoln's ideals and leadership principles: courage, integrity, tolerance, equality and creative expression. Ford's produces renowned plays, vibrant musicals and newly commissioned works that captivate and entertain while examining political and social issues related to Lincoln's legacy. As a working theatre located in downtown D.C., Ford's strives to provide accessible, high-quality cultural arts experiences to enrich the lives of the greater Washington community. FTS presents four mainstage productions each season that have relevance and value for the diverse area communities we serve; the Theatre attracts approximately 100,000 visitors each year.

Ford's hosts a number of special events designed to provide unique opportunities for visitors, young and old and in-between, to delve into Civil War history and the presidency of Abraham Lincoln. In 2015, for example, Ford's commemorated the 150 years since the assassination of Lincoln by honoring his life and legacy in April during *Ford's 150: Remembering the Lincoln Assassination*. Over 650,000 people from around the country and the world visit Ford's Theatre each year as a site of national tragedy.



With the opening of the Center for Education and Leadership in February 2012, FTS has become an educational keystone for both teachers and students at all grade levels, with programs that enhance oratory skills and build upon history lessons. Recognized with a 2012 Momentum Award by Washington's Downtown BID for its role in the revitalization of downtown D.C., the Center brings the values and ideals of Lincoln from the past into the present, examining Lincoln's multi-faceted legacy through exhibits, workshops, seminars and speakers, as well as community outreach programs.

## **Project team**

### *Staff*

**Laura Anderson**, National Mall and Memorial Parks Curator, NPS, is the curator of the Ford's Theatre (FOTH) collection and will be invaluable in obtaining access to the archive and collections during the research and planning phases. She will also be a valuable partner in identifying artifacts that support the narrative of the exhibition in a rich and compelling way.

**Kristin Fox-Siegmund**, Deputy Director and Director of Programming, FTS, has over 25 years of experience in theatre programming and 10 years at Ford's Theatre Society and oversees the productions on the Ford's Theatre stage as well as programming initiatives including the Exhibitions Program. She will provide supervision and oversight of the 2nd floor redesign with a focus on the development of the physical design.

**Heather Hoagland**, Exhibitions and Collections Manager, FTS, holds a master's in Museum Studies from George Washington University and has been with FTS for three years, managing the FTS exhibitions program for one year. She will lead development of the 2nd floor exhibition, ensuring the physical design accurately conveys the narratives and responds to the questions that evaluation studies indicate are not being answered by current interpretation.

**Sarah Jencks**, Director of Education and Leadership, FTS, has over 20 years of experience as a history and arts educator both in classroom settings and educational organizations, including nine years at Ford's Theatre Society. Sarah oversees the educational and interpretive programming at Ford's Theatre and will provide supervision and oversight of the 2nd floor redesign with a focus on the content and interpretive strategies.

**David Patrick McKenzie**, Associate Director of Education for Digital Resources, FTS, is currently a history Ph.D. student. David serves as a primary content expert at FTS, in addition to managing the organization's digital resource initiatives, including the *Remembering Lincoln* website, and playing a key role in planning historical content for a renovated Ford's Theatre website. He will work closely with Heather and the project advisors to guide content for the exhibition, ensuring historical accuracy and scholarship.

## **Humanities scholars, consultants, and collaborating institutions**

### *Scholars*

**Thomas Bogar**, Ph.D. in Theatre History/Literature/Criticism, Louisiana State University, was most recently a professor at Hood College in Frederick, Maryland. He is the author of *Backstage at the Lincoln Assassination*, which details the lives of the staff of Ford's Theatre from the night of the Lincoln assassination.

**Kenneth Foote**, Professor of Geography, University of Connecticut, is an expert on historical memory and sites of tragedy. He is the author of *Shadowed Ground*, which is a definitive look at the fates of sites of tragedy and violence. He will help contextualize the Ford's Theatre campus within the broader landscape of sites of tragedy in the United States.

**Richard Wightman Fox**, Professor of History, University of Southern California, is a cultural historian who recently published *Lincoln's Body: A Cultural History*, a definitive study of the historical memory of Lincoln. He will contextualize the story of Ford's Theatre in broader American memory of Lincoln.

**Kate Masur**, Associate Professor of History, Northwestern University, is an expert on the Civil War and Reconstruction in the Washington area, particularly questions of race, equal rights and citizenship. She is also a consultant to the National Park Service for the 150th anniversary of Reconstruction. She will bring insight on the Washington context of Ford's Theatre, as well as historical memory of Reconstruction.

**Denise Meringolo**, Associate Professor of History and Director of Public History, University of Maryland-Baltimore County, is an expert in the genealogy of public history as a profession and a practitioner, working frequently with historical organizations and training public historians. She will bring insight into Ford's Theatre in the broader context of commemoration, particularly its context within National Park Service historical activities.

**Gretchen Sullivan Sorin**, Director and Distinguished Professor of Museum Studies, Cooperstown Graduate Program, has worked as a consultant for more than 200 museums and historical organizations and is an expert in African American history and museum practice. She will bring insight into African American history as portrayed in museums.

**Sharita Jacobs Thompson**, Ph.D. in History, Howard University, is an independent scholar currently teaching at Montgomery College. She is an expert on the impact of the end of the Civil War and Reconstruction on enslaved people in the Washington area and also manages an annual D.C. Emancipation Day symposium in Washington. She will bring insight into the Washington-area context of Ford's Theatre.

#### *Evaluator*

**Conny Graft** began consulting in 2000 and serves as a consultant in interpretive planning, research and evaluation for nonprofits including museums, parks, zoos and healthcare organizations. Her prime interest is in helping nonprofits build capacity to articulate and evaluate their impact and learn how to apply those insights to provide more intentional and meaningful experiences.

#### *Exhibition Designer*

**Split Rock Studios**, St. Paul, Minn. (SRS), is a nationally recognized exhibit design and fabrication firm. SRS' multidisciplinary team has grown to over 50 museum professionals including project and production managers, exhibit designers and developers, graphic designers, CAD detail designers, skilled cabinetmakers and artists. SRS specializes in creating award-winning cultural and natural history exhibits for museums, interpretive centers, aquariums, zoos and political institutions.

FTS has worked with SRS before, specifically on the other permanent exhibitions on site, including the Theatre Museum and the Center for Education and Leadership (a sample of their previous work at Ford's is provided in an accompanying attachment). As the designer for those exhibitions, SRS provides the continuity that FTS is looking for on the second floor. FTS is confident that Split Rock will be able to deliver a product that is engaging and compelling from past experiences working with them. Split Rock also has the proven capacity to develop engaging, dynamic interactives that create a layered, nuanced experience for visitors, which is of primary importance in this exhibition since there are so many stories to tell and so little space to tell them. Split Rock also excels at designing technology that supports and enhances the content without overwhelming it. Like many on staff at FTS, they are proponents of the philosophy that no technology should ever be used for its own sake.

#### **Work plan**

Apr 2017	Grant awarded
May 2017	Advisory Council Virtual Meeting 1 <i>Discuss overall exhibition concept and themes; Discuss evaluation plans</i> <i>Goal: Refine and identify overarching themes for exhibition and finalize evaluation research plan</i>
May - Jul 2017	Formative evaluation study <i>2-3 month collection period; Results identify interpretation gaps and visitor questions</i>

- May - Aug 2017 Artifact research  
*Results in an artifact list for the exhibition*
- May - Aug 2017 Preliminary exhibition script outline  
*Defines specific narrative elements and allows for research; Includes collaboration with individual advisors as necessary*
- Sep 2017 Preliminary Schematic Design from exhibition designer  
*Based on concept dialogue between FTS and designer; Includes select members of Advisory Council (to be determined)*
- Sep 2017 Advisory Council Virtual Meeting 2  
*Review preliminary script and design plans; Collect feedback on both and discuss path to move forward  
Goal: Refine schematic design plan draft with input generated from scholars*
- Sep - Nov 2017 Revisions to design plans  
*In collaboration with exhibition designer; Incorporating FTS, NEH and scholar feedback; Responds to formative and prototype evaluation results*
- Sep - Nov 2017 Prototype evaluation on 2nd floor  
*Testing of key components and narratives*
- Dec 2017 Interim report submitted to NEH  
*Includes evaluation study results and initial design plan*
- Dec - Mar 2018 Revisions to exhibition script outline  
*Defines specific narrative elements and allows for research; Includes collaboration with Advisory Council on an individual basis as necessary*
- Mar 2018 Final Schematic Design from exhibition designer  
*Includes final script, artifact list, and design direction for physical elements and floor plan*
- Apr 2018 Final report submitted to NEH  
*Includes results of front end and prototype evaluation studies, complete object list, final script and final exhibition design*

### **Project Funding**

Funding from this grant will be used to cover costs associated with: 1) salaries for key staff who will be managing this project and crafting an exhibition outline; 2) fees to contract with Split Rock Studios, an exhibition designer; 3) fees to contract with Conny Graft, a Visitor Research Consultant, to conduct formative evaluations; 4) books, including our *Silent Witnesses* exhibition book and *Images of America: Ford's Theatre*, to familiarize the project scholars with the site-specific stories; and 5) stipends for our scholar panel. NEH will fund \$40,000 of these costs, and Ford's Theatre Society will provide \$41,220 in additional funds as part of a cost-share. Ford's intends to raise these funds through general operating support from the corporations, foundations and individuals who already support us every year.