



Monument Square and the Lincoln Stone

from the Mifflin County
Historical Society's book,
*It Happened in
Mifflin County*

The Town Square was the scene of farmers' markets, social gatherings, and even the first football game in the county's history. Eventually, the area of the Square became run down and concerned citizens beautified it with a fence and flower beds.

By the late 1800s, local citizens wanted to do something to honor the soldiers and sailors of the Civil War. George R. Frysinger, editor and publisher of the Lewistown Gazette, had editorialized for some time about the need for an improved downtown and a Civil War monument. Interest in the project was hard to generate, but when the 1895 Lewistown Centennial was being organized, Frysinger spearheaded another push for this cause.

With the inspiration and support of an old friend and county native, a committee was eventually formed and began to raise money for a monument by selling shares at \$1 each. A quarter share could be bought for \$0.25. Taxes were also raised to help pay for the memorial. Each taxpayer was assessed \$0.84 every year for five years. Finally, the \$15,000 needed for the project was reached and construction began in 1906.

HOW THE LINCOLN STONE CAME TO MIFFLIN COUNTY

The friend of Frysinger had been a drummer boy and soldier from Mifflin County's Logan Guards.

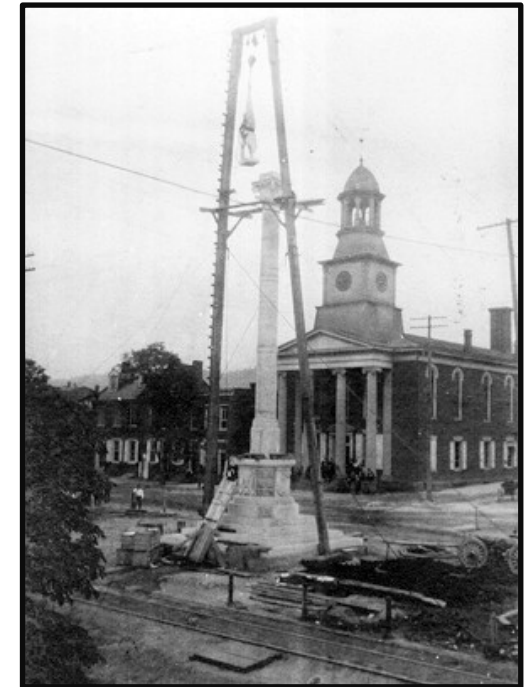
Maj. Robert Burns Hoover, served in the Civil War and eventually moved to Springfield, Illinois. A letter from Hoover appeared in the *Gazette* on Feb. 12, 1890. He wrote, in part: *I was pleased to see in a late issue of your paper an article on the future of Lewistown, from the pen of my old friend and school-mate, Geo. R. Frysinger. Although it is not likely I shall ever live there again, my heart often goes out to that lovely little city on the banks of the blue Juniata, and I wish I could do or say something to enthuse the people of Lewistown into what we term in the west a business boom...*

Almost every western city has a public square, and yet in all my travels I know of none that could be made so beautiful and attractive as the one at Lewistown...What a fine place the center of your square would be for a soldiers' monument...a reflection on your enterprise and patriotism that the one town in this great nation which furnished the first company to report to Washington in defense of the Union has not yet honored the memory of those who did not return.

As a prominent Springfield resident, Hoover was involved with the Lincoln Memorial Foundation. He requested a stone from the Lincoln tomb when it was being remodeled at the time. Maj. Hoover based his proposition on the fact that Mifflin County sent some of the first volunteers to answer President Lincoln's call for troops to defend the Union in 1861.



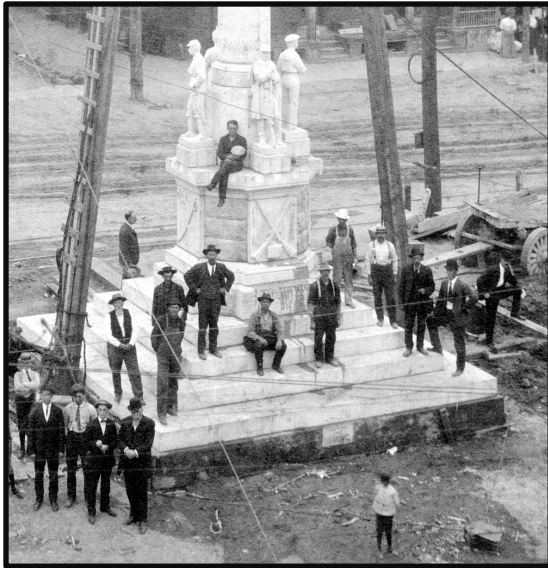
The Lincoln Stone



Erecting the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument

Hoover's request was approved. The only stone ever removed from Lincoln's tomb was given to the people of Mifflin County. The 14 by 24 inch granite block was sent to Lewistown by rail from Springfield, on condition that a monument be built in the town square. The stone was placed in a street window of the Mifflin County National Bank on Market Street to aide the fund raising effort. Some individuals offered matching fund to spur interest, children got into the act saving pennies.

On May 7, 1906, a ceremony was held to place articles in a cavity behind the Lincoln Stone. A heavy glass jar was used to hold a list of soldiers from Mifflin County in the Civil War, a button and badge from the G. A. R., other military records from the Civil War, United States coins for the five years of the war 1861 - 1865, plus an 1895 Lewistown Centennial medal.



Work completed June 1906 - Workmen from Lewistown contractor D. R. Stratford and men from Moore Brothers and Brault Company, Granite Manufacturers from Barre, Vermont, take a much deserved break after setting the finishing touches on the Soldiers' & Sailors' Monument. At the base of the monument, is a special stone which came from the tomb of Abraham Lincoln. It can be seen as a white rectangle in the base directly behind the boy standing in front.

The Lewistown Gazette noted that the jar was made airtight by, "three thicknesses of adhesive strips contributed for the purpose by Druggist J. A. Muthersbaugh. The wrappings were made fast by county seals kindly given for the purpose by the county commissioners."

A car load of granite figures destined to adorn the monument, arrived at the Lewistown depot on the same day. The completed monument tipped the scales at 125 tons. Made of Vermont granite, it measures 64 feet and six inches high. The four sides of the monument display designs of the branches of the military at the time - Navy, Infantry, Artillery and Cavalry.

A celebration and dedication ceremony was held June 21, 1906. Newspaper reports indicate 25,000 to 30,000 people came to witness the unveiling. The plan was for a rope to be pulled

and drop the veil at the time of the dedication, but strong winds prior to the program tore the covering and offered a sneak peek.

REDEDICATED TO ALL WHO SERVED

The Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument was rededicated in 1969, to become a memorial to all service people from Mifflin County who fought and died for the country.

It is a source of community pride, much as Robert B. Hoover had envisioned. The next time you have the chance, be sure to take a close look at the Lincoln Stone. The 1993 book, *Mifflin County Yesterday & Today* notes, "Remember Major Hoover, who never forgot the people of Mifflin County or their role in the defense of the Union. He truly brought President Lincoln to Mifflin County."



Reference
Fisher, Forest K.

"R.B. Hoover and the Lincoln Stone" pp. 216-235

It Happened in Mifflin County - American History with a Central Pennsylvania Connection. Lewistown, PA: Mifflin County Historical Society, 2009.

2018- Revised



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