

# Free Press

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## Confesses To Opening Coffin of Lincoln

**Former Illinois Official, 15 Others Secretly Viewed Body When It Was Moved.**

Special to Free Press and New York World.

Galesburg, Ill., Feb. 2.—M. O. Williamson, former state treasurer of Illinois, 85 years old, today broke a silence of more than 22 years and told how he, with 15 others, opened the coffin of Abraham Lincoln on September 20, 1902, gazed at the body of the great emancipator and then closed and sealed the coffin, which was bedded in solid concrete, never again to be exposed to mortal eyes.

Williamson was a member of the board of trustees of the Lincoln monument, and as the time drew near for the placing of the body of Lincoln under the monument the board decided, with the consent of Robert Lincoln, the son, to open the coffin before it was sealed forever. Robert Lincoln agreed to the proposal, to set at rest rumors that ghouls had carried away his father's ashes. But the son swore all members of the board to secrecy. He declined to be present.

### "There Was Lincoln."

"We had to certify that the body was actually in the coffin," Mr. Williamson said today. "So on the night in question we secretly assembled at the Springfield, Ill., cemetery, within the new monument, and the sarcophagus was carried into the room. Workmen opened the casket with chisels. It was a red cedar box lined with copper which had been sealed with solder.

"When the copper covering the bust was bent back we reverently bent forward.

"There was Lincoln, looking just like his pictures, seemingly asleep. His face was darker than yours or mine now. But that was to be expected. Otherwise there was scarcely a change. His features stood out

as they had been engraved in my memory from pictures of him.

"It seemed as though we might have spoken to him and awakened him.

"He wore a black bow tie like the one I have on, and one bow was slightly mildewed, but those were the only signs of decomposition we could observe.

"It was an impressive occasion.

"Then the casket was again sealed.

"Robert Lincoln had offered to furnish a steel cage in which to place the coffin before it was set in concrete and placed under the monument. His father-in-law, Geo. M. Fullman, had been buried in a coffin placed within steel bars to prevent tampering.

### Coffin Put in Case

"So he furnished the cage and it was used to contain the coffin. Outside was the block of concrete eight feet square. The entire mass was placed 10 feet below the base of the Springfield monument, and I have no fear that the casket will ever be seen again.

"America may rest assured that the body of President Lincoln will never be disturbed in its resting place, and I shouldn't wonder if that kindly, thoughtful, sympathetic face is the same today as when we secretly gazed upon it. No air can reach the interior of the casket, and decomposition should be resisted for years.

"Richard Yates, now congressman-at-large from Illinois, was governor at the time and was on the monument board, but he was away from Springfield and missed the occasion. I have had wealthy men tell me that they would have given half their fortunes to have seen Lincoln's body.

"Several attempts were made by outsiders to be present when rumors of the opening got out, but even newspaper men were absent."

Of the 16 who were present only eight are now alive. They are aging rapidly. Robert Lincoln lives in Washington, D. C., but is in feeble health.