

The Lincoln Room:



First Achievements

Malcolm Johnstone



First photograph of the Lincoln Building, taken 1958

IF THE FACE OF HELEN OF TROY LAUNCHED A thousand ships, then it may be said that the words of Joseph J. Lewis launched 15 thousand biographies of Abraham Lincoln.

The fleet of Lincoln biographies set sail, so to speak, when the first, written by Lewis, was published on February 11, 1860 in the lower level of the historic Lincoln Building, now home to the Chester County Community Foundation.

That former publishing space on the lower level, now called The Lincoln Room, is used as an interpretive site for events surrounding this first biography, a publication that is said to have helped launch Lincoln's presidential campaign.

Above: Painting of Abraham Lincoln by local artist Bill Ewing, 2020



Historic publication of the first Lincoln biography on the front page of *The Chester County Times*. February 11, 1860 edition

But that biography is not the only historic event connected to the 189-year-old structure. Here are a few other notable first-time accomplishments.

- In 1829, local entrepreneur William Everhart bought the land where the Lincoln Building is currently located and hired Philadelphia architect William Strickland to design a building there. Strickland's design was the tallest commercial structure in the downtown and had no residential component—both features were a first for West Chester.
- Although photography had been around since the early 1800s, the first known photograph of the Lincoln Building—then called the William Everhart Building—was not taken until 1958. The photographer, Ned Goode, was working to create a public archive of local structures that share important architectural features. Today the building looks almost exactly as it did in the past.
- On display in the Lincoln Room is the first known facsimile of the Lin-

coln biography on the front page of the February 11, 1860 edition of *The Chester County Times*. Abraham Lincoln's first biography shares space with an article about arctic exploration and a gossip column. Several hundred copies were printed but only two are now known to exist. One is safely stored at the Chester County History Center on North High Street in West Chester.

- The first preservation organization to recognize the impact of this biography was the Chester County History Center. In 1947, the History Center placed the first interpretive plaque on the façade of the Lincoln Building marking the historic event.

Today the Lincoln Room is the site of the Cultural Alliance of Chester County, an organization committed to elevating the arts, culture and historic preservation sector. Various Lincoln and Civil War memorabilia are on display to educate visitors about the past. ♦

Visitors are welcome at the Lincoln Building, 28 W. Market St., West Chester, during business hours.



First Lincoln biographer, Joseph J. Lewis



Architect William Strickland (1788–1854)