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For Immediate Release

Contact: Cameron S. Brown
c: 269-625-0275

Michigan Commander McKinch Supports Kalamazoo Lincoln Statue Effort

An Abraham Lincoln statue in Edinburgh, Scotland was featured on the cover of last spring's issue of the *Banner*. This prompted Brothers Gary Swain and Cameron Brown to bring to the attention of Dept. of Michigan Commander Terry McKinch their efforts to place a privately funded bronze statue of Lincoln in Kalamazoo's Bronson Park where Mr. Lincoln spoke on August 27, 1856. Kalamazoo was the only place in Michigan where Abraham Lincoln made a public appearance, and the only time he left Illinois that year.

In addition to both being SUVCW members, Brothers Swain and Brown are members of the Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln Institute (KLI), a 501(c)3 non-profit organization spearheading a community-wide effort to raise funds for the Kalamazoo Lincoln statue. The group has raised \$94,000 toward their goal of \$150,000 and has received approval by the Kalamazoo City Commission to place the instructional memorial statue in the city's downtown park.

In response to the efforts of the Kalamazoo group, Commander McKinch issued Department Order #4 last August that established a special committee to help advance the statue project with specific instruction to all Michigan camps to support this "Lincoln memorial endeavor." Brother Charles Worley PDC of the March to the Sea Camp, #135, Centreville was assigned as

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committee chair. Brothers Swain and Brown were also assigned to the committee. At its most recent meeting, the committee has been assisted by Brother Bruce Gosling, also of Camp 135. Swain and Brown are members of the Benjamin Prichard, Camp #20, Kalamazoo, and Camp #135 respectively.

The Kalamazoo statue project is aligned with Commander-in-Chief Brian C. Pierson's National Order Number 7 of December 9, 2020 encouraging members to follow the SUVCW's National Policy on Monument Protection and Preservation. Of particular note, the policy states that "Monuments serve the necessary purpose of inspiring and educating future generations of Americans on the sacrifices made by their forefathers. Further, monuments are visible signs of the patriotism and selflessness shown by American soldiers and sailors, who placed the country before their own lives and fortunes, to ensure the preservation of the Nation. By this policy, we state our intent and reaffirm our commitment to our honored dead and dedicate ourselves to do all in our power as an organization, to ensure that the memorials to them will be preserved for the inspiration and education of future generations." According to KLI members, Lincoln's legacy embodies the spirit and intent of this policy. As commander-in-chief of the United States during the crisis of the American Civil War, he too placed country first and ultimately was martyred in the course of doing his sworn duty to preserve and protect the Constitution and thereby save the Union.

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Using Lincoln's Kalamazoo visit as an opportunity to commemorate his heroic life and legacy, the Kalamazoo project has inspired countless young people in Kalamazoo County public schools. Last year a well-coordinated penny drive was launched to help raise funds for the Lincoln statue. Hundreds of elementary and high school students, their parents and teachers participated. Young people are being introduced to the history of the civil war through this special project, and their exposure to the lessons of the past can only help make them better citizens today. To this end, the Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln Institute believes the potential for teaching and motivating young minds is unlimited using a simple gift of history, Lincoln's visit to Kalamazoo in the summer of 1856.

Indeed, the broader focus of the Kalamazoo group is to use Lincoln's 1856 visit and extant speech to teach young people the value of history. In addition to the Lincoln statue, the KLI is developing educational resources and planning a biennial symposium with guest speakers and art and essay contests for area youth. "Helping young people develop leadership skills in the mold of Lincoln is one of our central goals," Brother Swain says.

Noted Lincoln scholar Louis A. Warren called Lincoln's *Kalamazoo Speech* his "transitional pronouncement" that anticipated the full rhetorical and thematic elements found in Lincoln's more famous *House Divided Speech* two years later. Brother Brown serves as the institute's president and is emphatic about the importance of the group's efforts. "Kalamazoo is an

important venue for advancing the purposes and ideals of the SUVCW,” Brown says. “We do understand these are trying times. All the more reason to teach children the lessons of history and the inspiring life story of Abraham Lincoln. We have found that Lincoln is often a young child's gateway to American history. Young people come to appreciate how attractive honesty can be because Lincoln is so tangible to them. Understanding the devastating cost of over 600,000 lives to save the Union and end slavery is a sobering truth of history we must teach each generation.”

The Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln Institute believes it is time to bring Lincoln back to Kalamazoo, and they believe camp members can help make that happen. Brother Worley's committee will be reporting back to Commander McKinch with their proposal to help the SUVCW Department of Michigan promote this unique project. In the meantime, individual camps and members can donate online at KalamazooLincolnInstitute.org. Checks can be made payable to Kalamazoo Abraham Lincoln Institute and mailed to 2037 Quail Cove Dr., Kalamazoo, MI 49009.

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