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**From kids to Obama, nation marks Lincoln's 200th**

By **JOHN O'CONNOR** Associated Press Writer © 2009 The Associated Press  
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**Rich Pedroncelli AP**

Dressed as President Abraham Lincoln, Roger Vincent, center, of Santa Rosa, talks with school children, during a celebration of Lincoln

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SPRINGFIELD, Ill. — Folksy, melancholy Abraham Lincoln would have been dumbfounded by the fuss over his birthday Thursday.

Bells tolled, wreaths were laid, speeches intoned and banjos picked to mark the 200th anniversary of Lincoln's birth in a Kentucky log cabin. At the Lincoln presidential museum in Springfield, hundreds of excited schoolchildren joined in reciting the 16th president's Gettysburg Address — an attempt to break the record for the biggest worldwide crowd reading it aloud together.

"I got up at 4:30 this morning to be here!" said Emma Bradford, a 9-year-old fourth-grader from the Chicago suburb of Barrington. "Abraham Lincoln is my idol."

Bookended by a log cabin and a replica White House, Lincoln impersonator Michael Krebs of Chicago and Gov. Pat Quinn led the reading of the famed speech. Officials hoped 300,000 Abe fans around the world would join in to break the record of 223,363.

"We were blessed by God to have Abraham Lincoln at a crucial time in our country's history," Quinn said. "We have to be ambassadors from the Land of Lincoln to the whole world to make sure that Abraham Lincoln's memory is always with us."

Lincoln festivities were a hot ticket.

"Everyone wants to have something to do with it," said Anjali Baiju, a 10-year-old Springfield fifth-grader, whose mother was 5 when she emigrated from India.

"He didn't try to be all fancy. He just wanted to be himself and he wanted everyone to have equal rights," Anjali said.

Church bells rang from Springfield — where Lincoln was a state legislator and successful lawyer before moving to the White House — to points as far-flung as Vermont. Wreaths were laid in Hodgenville, Ky., where Lincoln was born, and the Spencer County, Ind., grave of his mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln.

Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C., where an assassin felled Lincoln in April 1865, celebrated his birthday with performances of Lincoln's great speeches. In Owensboro, Ky., the president's life

was set to bluegrass in the style of another famous native son, musician Bill Monroe.

At Gilson Brown Elementary School in the Mississippi River town of Alton, where one of Lincoln's game-changing 1858 senatorial debates with Stephen Douglas took place, students signed a monstrous pro-Lincoln banner in the cafeteria.

The U.S. Senate approved a resolution honoring Lincoln, and Sen. Roland Burris, D-Ill., urged Americans to "draw on Lincoln's legacy and move forward" during this time of economic turmoil.

President Barack Obama, speaking in Washington, urged Americans to remember Lincoln's message of putting national unity above political differences.

"I feel a special gratitude to this singular figure who in so many ways made my own story possible — and in so many ways made America's story possible," Obama said before heading to Springfield, where he and Lincoln both served as state legislators, for a celebratory banquet.

Obama wasn't the only person to note a personal connection to Lincoln.

"We want to let everyone know what Abraham Lincoln did," said 13-year-old Nate Ryan at St. Clement School in Chicago, where Lincoln won the Republican nomination for president in 1860. "He was kinda curious. Seems kinda like me."

Associated Press Writers Sophia Tareen in Chicago and Jim Suhr in St. Louis contributed to this report.

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