The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze how communities and special interest groups have presented Abraham Lincoln in historic sites and museums with significant Lincoln collections and interpretive themes. Commemoration of Abraham Lincoln began during the murdered president’s funeral trip and extended throughout the later nineteenth century with statues, biographies, Decoration Day oratories, historic sites, special exhibits, and museums. These sites devoted to the sixteenth president are among the earliest public historic museums and preserved sites. They include galleries, research exhibits, interactive galleries, pioneer villages, outdoor museums, and historic houses. After continued expansion in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Lincoln museums and historic sites are so numerous as to constitute a special subcategory identified by its primary biographical content.
Nonetheless, Lincoln’s construction and presentation in museums remains surprisingly underexplored in the fields of both Lincoln Studies and Museum Studies. This dissertation adds to our understanding of both fields by providing a serious exploration of Abraham Lincoln’s place in American public memory, his treatment in American public museums, and the ways in which Lincoln commemoration illustrates the institutional development of American museums and historic sites.