

Presidents Day ceremony held at Old Calton Cemetery

On Presidents' Day 2022 wreaths were laid at the foot of the Abraham Lincoln statue and war memorial at the Old Calton Cemetery in Edinburgh.

The new annual tradition has been initiated by the [White House Historical Association](#), a nonpartisan, nonprofit organisation dedicated to preserving, protecting, and providing access to White House history.

US Consul General, Jack Hillmeyer, laid a wreath on behalf of the association and the US Government alongside the Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, Angus Robertson MSP, and The City of Edinburgh's Culture and Communities Vice-Convener, Cllr Amy McNeese-Mechan.

Stewart McLaurin, who is President of the Association travelled to Edinburgh last Christmas and visited the monument, which was inaugurated in 1893 to commemorate Scottish soldiers who died in the Union Army during The American Civil War. The memorial includes a statue of the

16th President – the first statue of any American president in Europe and still the only statue of a US president in Scotland, and a freed slave. It is also believed to be the only memorial to the Civil War outside the USA. Inspired by this and his own Scottish roots, McLaurin proposed a new annual tradition of marking on Presidents' Day Lincoln's life and the historic relationship between Scotland and the United States.

A minor restoration of the statue was also unveiled, as a spearhead on one of the regimental flags on the statue had been missing for more than 40 years. The spearhead had been broken off and collected for repair, sitting in various workshops and had been thought lost. It was a great surprise when it was returned to the council in late 2021 by a now-retired employee now living in Spain who had kept it for safekeeping during various workshop moves.

A new tradition was set today with representatives of the US Consulate the Scottish Government and the council laying wreaths on Presidents' Day at the Abraham Lincoln statue in Old Calton Cemetery Lincoln was a lover of Burns – and statues of both are close to each other
pic.twitter.com/sfWheZcQLq

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [February 21, 2022](#)

Stewart McLaurin, President of the White House Historical Association said: “To see a statue of Abraham Lincoln in Edinburgh is a thrilling reminder of how he bent American history towards the arc of justice—and of our nation's deep ties and everlasting friendship with Scotland.”

Jack Hillmeyer, U.S. Consul General said: “The United States and Scotland share many deep and profound connections. The Scottish- American Soldiers Monument provides a constant reminder that our close relationship even extends to the field

of battle. This ceremony is a fitting tribute to Lincoln, whose shining example of leadership during America's darkest hour continues to inspire, and the Scots who were moved to fight for freedom and equality on American shores.

"We stand here today in the face of another possible war. In American history the American Civil War is known as the most brutal of all of the wars in our history. It brought people on both sides, divided families and is something that we all remember of course. We have lots of monuments in Washington DC. One that strikes me is the Franklin Delano Roosevelt monument there is a quote "War is Hell" and I think it is a reminder to us that no-one ever goes into war wanting to. if we can avoid war that is what we do. I think we are doing that today and have been for weeks."



Presidents Day marked with wreath laying in Old Calton Cemetery a new annual event on Monday instigated by the White House Historical Association with Scottish Government External Affairs Cab Sec Angus Robertson; US Consul General Jack Hillmeyer and City of Edinburgh Councillor, Amy McNeese-Mechan

PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter

Angus Robertson, Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, MSP for Edinburgh Central said: "It is an honour to mark Presidents' Day 2022 on behalf of The Scottish Government. The relationship between Scotland and the US is strong and our personal and cultural ties are enduring and longstanding.

"The restoration of the monument and the inaugural wreath-laying event are a testament to the power of these historical connections and a welcome sign that these connections will endure long into the future."

Mr Robertson also expanded on Lincoln's love of Robert Burns commenting that it is fitting that the statues or memorials of the two men now face each other – albeit with St Andrew's House in the middle.

He continued: "If you go to the Dean Cemetery you will find a memorial to Colonel Robert Smith of the Confederate States Army who was the bodyguard of Jefferson Davies, the white supremacist and president of the confederate states. We must remember that here were Scots who fought on both sides of the conflict. I think we can all look back with immense respect at those who secured victory for the values of liberty and freedom and for the freedom of African Americans, and that is why I am so pleased we are marking this important memorial here today.

"It is also worth noting that there are connections between Lincoln and Scotland. He never visited Scotland – he never left the USA but he grew up with Robert Burns at his side and he had a lifelong love of Robert Burns and his poetry. In the days shortly before his assassination in the Ford Theatre at the end of the Civil War he said: 'Now we have won this Great War I must make good on my promise to go to Scotland and pay homage to the man without whom everything would be different. Tomorrow you must book my passage.'

“Sadly he was then assassinated a few days later. His wife Mary Todd Lincoln did come to Scotland and wrote: ‘Beautiful, glorious Scotland has spoiled me for every other country’.

“I look forward to more of these gatherings each year.”



Presidents Day marked with wreath laying in Old Calton Cemetery a new annual event on Monday instigated by the White House Historical Association with Scottish Government External Affairs Cab Sec Angus Robertson; US Consul General Jack Hillmeyer and City of Edinburgh Councillor, Amy McNeese-Mechan
PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter

Councillor Amy McNeese-Mechan, Edinburgh's Culture and Communication Vice Convener said: "As possibly the first-ever Edinburgh city councillor born in the US, I grew up in the Land of Lincoln – the State of Illinois – and attended Abraham Lincoln elementary school. I'm therefore so pleased to be able to participate in celebrating the historic cultural and political links between our two countries at our newly restored statue of the 16th President, known as the Great Emancipator."

She explained that it was Sgt Major John McEwan's wife who asked the US Consul of the day, Wallace Bruce, for a war widow's pension as others were entitled to. It is believed that in doing this a train of events ensued, leading to the Lord Provost of the time granting a plot for the erection of the statue to the US President. The statue was shipped across from the US to Scotland.

There are six men from Edinburgh including Sgt Major McEwan – who are believed to have been so moved by the plight of those living in chains that they fought for the union army – and they fell and died for that cause. Their names are inscribed on the memorial depicting a slave being freed from his shackles at Lincoln's feet – McEwan, Duff, Steedman, Wilkie, Smith and Ferguson.



Presidents Day marked with wreath laying in Old Calton Cemetery a new annual event on Monday instigated by the White House Historical Association with Scottish Government External

Affairs Cab Sec Angus Robertson; US Consul General Jack Hillmeyer and City of Edinburgh Councillor, Amy McNeese-Mechan
PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter



Presidents Day marked with wreath laying in Old Calton Cemetery a new annual event on Monday instigated by the White House Historical Association with Scottish Government External Affairs Cab Sec Angus Robertson; US Consul General Jack Hillmeyer and City of Edinburgh Councillor, Amy McNeese-Mechan
PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter



Presidents Day marked with wreath laying in Old Calton Cemetery a new annual event on Monday instigated by the White House Historical Association with Scottish Government External Affairs Cab Sec Angus Robertson; US Consul General Jack Hillmeyer and City of Edinburgh Councillor, Amy McNeese-Mechan
PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter



Presidents Day marked with wreath laying in Old Calton Cemetery a new annual event on Monday instigated by the White House Historical Association with Scottish Government External Affairs Cab Sec Angus Robertson; US Consul General Jack Hillmeyer and City of Edinburgh Councillor, Amy McNeese-Mechan
PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter