It proved easier to select Springfield as the capital city than build a suitable Capitol building. Architect John F. Rague, who moved to Springfield in 1831, designed the new Capitol and directed its construction. This building would become the crowning achievement of his career. PUBLIC

The cornerstone was laid with appropriate ceremony on July 4, 1837. Springfield attorney Edward D. Baker, who was noted for his rousing oratory, delivered the principal speech. It was no coincidence that Baker happened to be a close friend of Abraham Lincoln.

Dogged by repeated delays, construction was not completed until 1853. Still, the result was nothing less spectacular. Rague designed it in the Greek Revival style. All stone was taken from a quarry a short six miles outside of Springfield. When completed, no one complained the final cost of \$260,000 was about twice the original estimate.

It was in this building that Abraham Lincoln put the divisive issue of slavery front and center. On June 16, 1858, Illinois Republicans chose Lincoln as their candidate for the U.S. Senate. At 8 p.m. that day, Lincoln climbed to the podium in the House chamber to address his party.

"A house divided against itself cannot stand," Lincoln said, citing Jesus' words as recorded in the three synoptic gospels.

"I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free.

"I do not expect the Union to be dissolved – I do not expect the house to fall – but I do expect it will cease to be divided.

"It will become all one thing or all the other."

Though Lincoln failed to win the Senate seat from Sen. Stephen A. Douglas, his bold and challenging message on that June evening catapulted the lanky Illinois lawyer to the national stage and eventually the presidency.

Following his election in 1860, Lincoln maintained an office in the Capitol. Here friends, well-wishers and job seekers came to see the president-elect.

The jubilation of 1860 was replaced with sobs of sorry on May 3-4, 1865. It was on these two days that Lincoln's body lay in state under the Capitol rotunda before burial in Oak Ridge Cemetery.

Despite its beauty and historical significance, the state had outgrown the Capitol by the early 1860s. Construction of the present Capitol began in 1868 and was completed in 1888. The principal architect of the new Capitol was Alfred Piquenard. His unique influence can be seen in the French-style Mansard roofs on the north and south wings. Located on a nine-acre site, thegrand structure was designed in the form of a modified Latin cross. Inside and out, it is widely considered to be one of the nation's most beautiful capitol buildings.

Meanwhile, the old Capitol was sold to Sangamon County for \$200,000. It would serve as the seat of county government after the state vacated the building in 1876.

Next: A Capitol reborn.