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INTERNATIONAL

Scout & About

Posted: Fri., Nov. 16, 2012, 4:00am PT

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New land of 'Lincoln'

Scout & About: Virginia 2012

By TODD LONGWELL

Steven Spielberg's high-profile "Lincoln" has cast the spotlight on Virginia as a shooting location. But while many films have shot in the Old Dominion over the years, few have integrated the state's historic locations so effectively into their story, and perhaps none has taken such clear advantage of the visual and emotional authenticity that can be gained by filming in the very locations where the story is set.



Virginia's Capitol in Richmond, designed by Thomas Jefferson, has played historic structures in many films, including 'Lincoln.'

Virginia happens to be where more than half the battles of the American Civil War were fought, and from 1861 to 1865 the state capital, Richmond, also served as the capital of the Confederate States of America.



'Lincoln'

"It's like we were living history," says Daniel Lupe, exec producer of the DreamWorks pic. "(Confederate President) Jefferson Davis sat in a chair where we shot in Richmond. When we shot in Petersburg, we were based in the old railhead in where the Union soldiers were based."

All this was especially beneficial to the film's President Lincoln, played by Daniel Day-Lewis, who is famous for staying in character between takes.

"Daniel never really had to leave the Civil War in his mind," says Rick Carter, the film's production designer, or do "weird shots against green screen."

But, as valuable those Civil War backgrounds were, Spielberg never would've shot "Lincoln" in Virginia if the price wasn't right.

"In addition to being the director, he was also operating very much as a studio executive," says Kathleen Kennedy, the film's producer, and "he did not want to spend a huge amount of money," That's because of the bottom-line reality that, as a historical film dealing with complex emotional and political issues, "Lincoln" is far from a surefire hit in the manner of, say, an "Indiana Jones" pic.

Earlier incarnations of the script spanned the entirety of Lincoln's presidency, with numerous major battle sequences, pushing the budget north of \$100 million. Over the years, Spielberg narrowed the

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scope of the film so it covered just the last four months of Lincoln's life, and he was determined to get the working budget down into the mid-\$50 million range.

On the surface, Virginia doesn't seem like the ideal place to pull that off. It has a 15%-20% tax credit with a \$2.5 million cap (it goes up to \$5 million next year), which is paltry compared to incentives offered by many other top U.S. production destinations, including Massachusetts, another top contender to land the shoot, which has a 25% tax credit with no cap.

"Lincoln" ended up getting the entirety of Virginia's annual allotment for the tax credit, \$2.5 million, as well as a \$1 million grant from the Governor's Motion Picture Opportunity Fund. But what really sealed the deal were the extra perks, including free access to the interiors and exteriors, a wealth of historic state buildings in Richmond's Capitol Square, which boasts a 180-degree vista of period-correct structures.

"When we looked in Massachusetts and Georgia, we found some of the (suitable historic locations), but not all of them," Lupi says. "Virginia gave us locations for free, plus support from police and government workers, and help with taking out street signs and the electrical work."

Designed by Thomas Jefferson, the Capitol building in Richmond was the Capitol of the Confederacy during the Civil War. With some set dressing and minimal CGI, it was able to stand in for the White House in Washington, D.C., as it had in 2000's "The Contender."

Inside, the House of Delegates chamber was used to portray the U.S. House of Representatives, as it had in the 1993 comedy "Dave." To top it off, Virginia Gov. Bob McDonnell allowed the production to shoot in the bottom floor of the adjacent Governor's Mansion, while he lived upstairs.

"The governor and the legislature basically opened it all up for us to use as a backlot," says Carter. "We were able to shoot a third of the movie there," which drastically reduced construction and transportation costs.

The legislature was out of session during the film's October-December 2011 shoot, but the Capitol building was still the functioning seat of state government, as well as an active tourist destination.

"We had to closely coordinate with some of the tours and school groups to be able to allow them access to the Capitol, sometimes even in between takes," says Andrew Edmunds, interim director of the Virginia Film Office, who first scouted locations for "Lincoln" with Carter back in 2003.

Shooting in the Old Towne section of nearby Petersburg, site of the Civil War's climactic Siege of Petersburg, the filmmakers were allowed to cover the streets in dirt and change the signage on the businesses. They shot the battle sequences and exteriors at the River Queen steamboat (integral to several scenes in the film) in the town of State Farm, where they were able to take advantage of structures built for HBO's "John Adams" miniseries. Interiors of the River Queen and the second floor of the White House were constructed in a warehouse in Mechanicsville.

The production was also able to take advantage of the Civil War reenactment clubs in the state, but more for researching tents and cannons than using their members as extras.

"At that time in the war, there were a lot of young soldiers, and they were somewhat malnourished," Lupi explains, "and a lot of the reenactors tend to be a little bit like me -- older and getting gray."

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