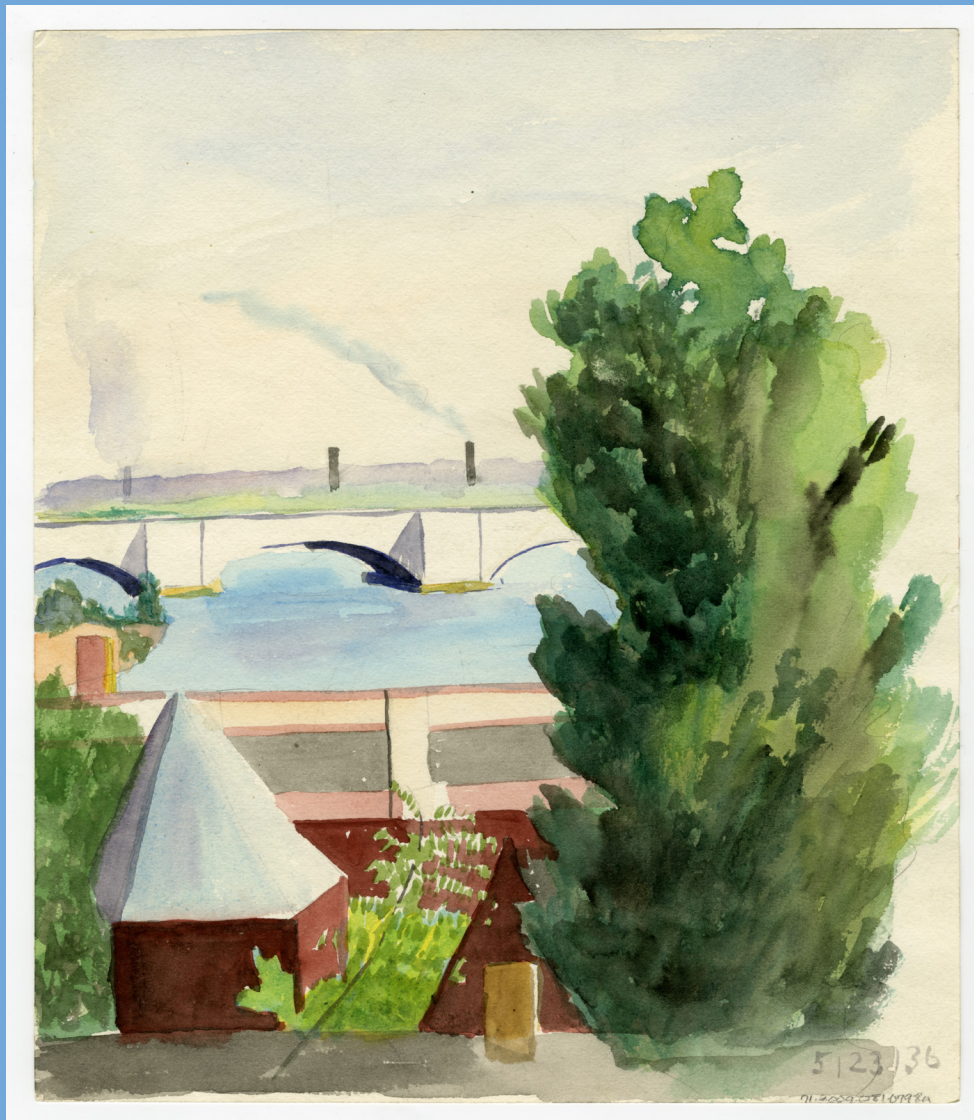


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# Lincoln LORE

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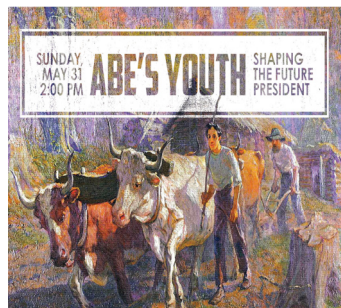
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# Upcoming Events



## 2020 ROLLAND LECTURE

Presented by CSPAN's Peter Slen  
Wednesday, May 6, 2020 7:00 PM  
Theater  
Allen County Public Library, Main Library  
Fort Wayne, Indiana  
Free and Open to the Public



## LINCOLN AT THE LIBRARY

*Abe's Youth: Shaping the Future President*  
Presented by Bill Bartelt  
Sunday, May 31, 2019 2:00 pm  
Meeting Rooms A-B  
Allen County Public Library, Main Library  
Fort Wayne, Indiana  
Free and Open to the Public

# On the Cover



The watercolor painting shown on the cover is "View of River with Bridge" (71.2009.081.0798a) by Mary Harlan Lincoln Beckwith (Peggy) and is part of a collection of items in the Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection that have interesting provenance. To see more items, go to page 14 for the full article.



**Sara Gabbard: Please trace the Lincoln family's journey from England to Virginia.**

**Daniel Cravens Taylor:** President Lincoln was not familiar with his family history in early life. As he approached his campaign for the presidency, Lincoln knew his father and mother came from Virginia but considered them to be of undistinguished families. If he had known more of the journey from England to Virginia, he would have told a different story.

The usual starting point is Samuel Lincoln, an apprentice weaver, in Norfolk County, England. Samuel, Abraham's great-great-great-great grandfather, came to America in 1637. Two of his brothers were already in America. Samuel soon joined them in Hingham, Massachusetts. There Samuel married and became a prosperous landowner and businessman.

Samuel's son, Mordecai was born in 1657. He, as had his father and uncles, prospered. It was Mordecai's son, also named Mordecai, who saw opportunity and moved to Monmouth County, New Jersey. He and his brother, Abraham, established a forge near Middletown, New Jersey. They were successful in business but moving their product from Middletown to market was not very effective. In 1722, Mordecai moved his family to Philadelphia and formed an ironworks with two partners. Three years later he bought land and built a forge in Berks County, Pennsylvania. It was there the Lincolns connected with the Boones. The families became close and intermarried (a key event to the Lincolns' future in Virginia and Kentucky).

Mordecai and Hannah Lincoln's oldest son, John, Thomas' grandfather, was born in 1716. He returned to an earlier family tradition and became a weaver. Successful in that trade, he began speculating in land and became wealthy. He settled in Lancaster, Pennsylvania near other family members and members of the Boone family. Some of the Boones

# An Assessment of Thomas Lincoln

## An Interview with Daniel Cravens Taylor

Sara Gabbard

had moved to the Shenandoah Valley and brought reports back to Lancaster where John heard and decided the opportunities in Virginia were good. In 1768 he bought land on Linville Creek in what is now Rockingham County, Virginia, and established his family and business there.

### **SG: Did the Lincoln family play a part in the American Revolution?**

**DCT:** The Lincolns did play a part in the Revolutionary War. How much of a part is debated. The records indicate John Lincoln and his sons embraced the cause of freedom and served in the Virginia militia. Virginia was very important to the British, being the largest and wealthiest of the colonies. Many battles and

skirmishes occurred in Virginia as the British struggled to hold it. John's son, Abraham, was the captain of his militia company in Augusta County. There were several skirmishes in and around Augusta County. It is likely Captain Lincoln engaged in some of those but the documentation is sparse.

It is known that Captain Lincoln, serving under Colonel William Christian, engaged in an expedition against the Overhill Cherokee, one of many Native American nations with which the British formed an alliance. The expedition saw action, though limited, and resulted in new treaties with the Overhill Cherokee, reducing their support of the British.

During much of Captain's Lincoln



Norfolk County, England 71.2009.083.1295

service in the Revolutionary War, he acted as Judge Advocate for his area. This responsibility kept him busy and limited his engagement in battles. Thomas Lincoln was born in 1778 during the Revolutionary War, toward the end of Captain Lincoln's military service. As the war wound down, Captain Lincoln did not re-enlist in the militia at the end of his service term. He traveled to Kentucky and made preparations to move his family. A Revolutionary War service marker is in place on Captain Lincoln's grave. It honors his service with the word "Patriot".

**SG: The family appears to have been relatively prosperous in Virginia. Please comment on the "call of the West" that led these pioneers to risk everything.**

**DCT:** In addition to working a chosen career/trade, wealth was accumulated and built through land speculation in pioneer times. The Lincoln family was very successful in buying and selling land in Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. As Kentucky opened up, large tracts of land were available for purchase at good prices. The land was fertile and game was plentiful.

Close family friend Daniel Boone was forging the way into Kentucky for the Transylvania Land Company. Captain Lincoln listened to Boone's stories and descriptions and saw an opportunity to use his wealth to build even greater wealth in Kentucky. His purchase of one thousand acres in 1776 shows he was committed to the opportunities Kentucky offered.

There was risk and danger. While there were treaties with the Cherokee which let the Transylvania Land Company purchase twenty million acres from the Cherokee, those treaties were not agreed to by other Native American nations. In addition to developing their land, making themselves almost completely self-sufficient in furnishing their life needs, and dealing with wildlife, pioneers also faced the possibility of Native American attacks.

Early pioneers were daring and bold. They weighed all these dangers and hardships against the potential of building wealth for themselves and their families. For Captain Lincoln and thousands of others, the opportunity outweighed the danger.

**SG: What was the "Laki eruption" and how does it fit into the Lincoln story?**

**DCT:** The Laki eruption was a major volcanic event. A gigantic fissure opened near Mount Laki in Iceland in June of 1783. The eruption continued for eight months and ripped open almost seventeen miles of erupting fissures. The volcanic ash in the atmosphere dropped the 1783/84 winter temperatures in the eastern United States eight degrees below normal. Charleston Harbor in North Carolina froze completely over. Ice on the Mississippi River extended past New Orleans into the Gulf. This long and cold winter caused crop loss and famine. Thousands in the northern hemisphere starved to death. The eruption and resulting famine and starvation was a main cause leading to the French Revolution.

We have no direct record of the impacts to the Lincoln family, but Captain Lincoln and young Thomas would have worked through this time. Crops would have been lost and the hardship of a very cold winter were endured. With the abundance of game, the family would have had food in plenty even though animal life was also impacted by the cold and the length of the winter.

Thomas Lincoln was five years old at the time of the Laki eruption. It is an interesting piece of trivia that Thomas lived during the cold winter of the Laki eruption as a child and then experienced the impact of the Mount Tambora eruption in April of 1815 as an adult, thirty-six years of age.

When Mount Tambora (Indonesia) erupted, it spewed tons of volcanic ash into the atmosphere, dropping the average global temperature by as much as three degrees Fahrenheit. Kentucky saw little impact in 1815 but the ash cover hit the following year. Spring arrived in 1816 and Thomas began planting crops. The earth was in the waning years of the Little Ice Age and Mount Tambora pushed global cooling back into high gear. Vermont had snow in June, freezing temperatures in July, and a killer frost in August. Thomas Jefferson had crop failure due to the cold at Monticello in Virginia, crop failure severe enough to put him in debt. Savannah, Georgia, had a high temperature of 46 degrees Fahrenheit on July 4.

Again, we have no direct records of the impact on the Lincolns, but 1816 is known as the year with no summer. We do know Thomas had a crop surplus when he moved his family to Indiana in the fall of 1816. He left two hundred bushels of corn stored in the lofts of Caleb Hazel's cabins until it was sold. Because of crop failures in the summer of 1816, crops were bringing top dollar prices and the surplus boded well for Thomas.

Most people never see the impact of a major volcanic eruption. Thomas lived through two of them.

**SG: Did Thomas Lincoln speak often of his father's death at the hand of Native Americans? Did he harbor a lifelong resentment?**

**DCT:** Captain Abraham Lincoln was killed by a Native American ambush while he worked in the fields with his sons. The story of his death became legend in the Lincoln family. All of the Captain's children told the story over and over and over. Thomas repeated the story often. Thomas was a noted and popular storyteller. The telling would have been lively and memorable.

Abraham Lincoln also told the story repeatedly. Named for his grandfather, the story of the Captain's death was the standard story Abraham told as to how he came by his name. The tale was important enough to Lincoln that he included it in his presidential campaign autobiography.

History records that Thomas' mother, Bathsheba, the year following Captain Lincoln's death, donated the family's best rifle to an expedition against the Wabash. (This has led many to believe it was a raiding party from the Wabash nation that killed the captain.) It is also known that Mordecai, Thomas' eldest brother, held a lifelong resentment against Native Americans and took every opportunity he found to attack them. There is no indication Thomas held a grudge. President Lincoln never indicated any hate held by Thomas when he told the story. The only record we have of Thomas being involved in conflict with Native Americans is his participation in an excursion against the Shawnee. This was in 1795 when Thomas, as a member of his local militia, took part in the Northwest Indian War. He was seventeen. How much action he saw in the excursion is unknown.

**SG: Was the family's move from Kentucky to Indiana a wise one? Was life better there?**

**DCT:** Yes, to both questions. The system of recording land deeds in Kentucky was a disaster in the early 1800s. There were contradicting surveys and multiple deeds to the same land. Tracking clear title was often a guessing game. Thomas had clear title to his home in Elizabethtown and to the Mill Creek Farm where he settled his mother, sister, and brother-in-law. There is no record of any issues with those.

However, his title to the Sinking Spring farm, where Abraham was born, was challenged and much of the money he invested in the purchase and development was lost along with the land. There is a question as to whether Thomas purchased or rented the Knob Creek farm, but the title there was also challenged and Thomas' investment was lost. After losing the legal battle to maintain title at Sinking Spring, Thomas did not want a repeat at Knob Creek. He decided to move to Indiana where the titles were guaranteed by the government and the surveys were not in question.

Moving to Indiana allowed Thomas to develop his land and business without fear of deed issues. It was a good thing. He was attempting to follow family tradition of buying land to build wealth. Kentucky purchases had failed. Indiana offered better. Indiana brought Thomas and family into a strong, supportive community of pioneers. While much of the business Thomas conducted was of the same type as he did in Kentucky, Indiana provided stability. Thomas paid for his land and no one could take it from him. That stability allowed Thomas to live on the same farm the entire time he resided in Indiana, giving his family the constancy and permanency that lead to a better life. The family had security and stability in Indiana that Thomas could not obtain in Kentucky.

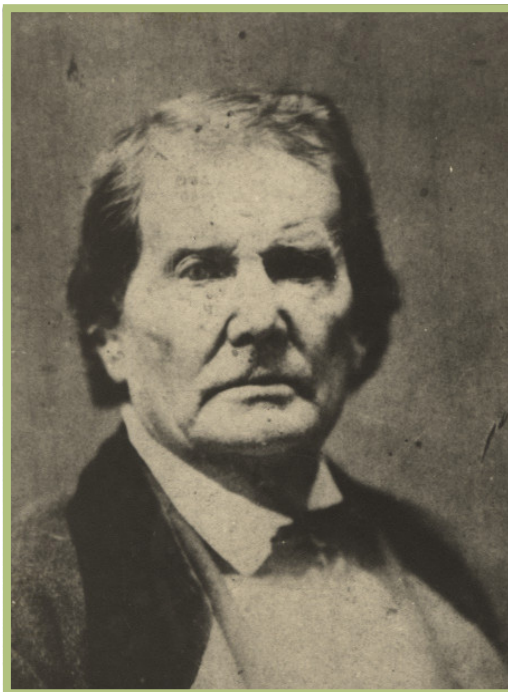
**SG: Who was Sophie Hanks?**

**DCT:** Sophie Hanks is the proverbial mystery wrapped in an enigma surrounded by a conundrum. She was virtually unknown to the Lincoln world until Arthur Morgan found her. The family stories handed down from Sophie are convincing that she knew

the Lincolns very well but it is hard fitting her into the Lincoln timeline.

Sarah Hanks was a sister or half-sister to Nancy Hanks Lincoln. She had six illegitimate children, one of whom was Sophie Hanks, making Sophie Thomas and Nancy's niece. She was born in March of 1809, a month younger than Abraham. Sophie's story is that Tom and Betsy Sparrow took her in to raise in addition to their taking in Dennis Hanks.

Though standard Lincoln history does not mention her, Sophie's family history indicates she was with Tom and Betsy and Dennis when they moved to Indiana and settled in with Thomas and Nancy at first and then on the farm next to them. When Tom and Betsy died of the "milk sick," Thomas and Nancy took



Thomas Lincoln LN-1475

in both Dennis and Sophie. Sophie tells that she lived with the Lincolns (and possibly some with the Gentrys) until she married Dillings Lynch in 1827.

The stories and anecdotes told by Sophie's family are such that many Lincoln historians accept and include her within the Lincoln story. And it does seem she should be there. The mystery is in how to fit her in. William Herndon, in all his research and writing, never mentions Sophie. Dennis Hanks, who corresponded with Sophie after her marriage and move to Arkansas, never mentions her in relation to Thomas'

home in Indiana. The 1820 census lists only eight people in the Lincoln home. Sophie would have been number nine and she is not listed. The same goes for the Gentrys, where seven children are listed (the Gentrys had seven children), and Sophie is not there either.

Sophie's story seems to fit in Lincoln history. But how she fits is an unsolved riddle.

**SG: Did the family's move from Indiana to Illinois bring a greater prosperity? Any change in lifestyle?**

**DCT:** The move from Indiana to Illinois did not bring a greater prosperity. It brought a downturn in Thomas' life. In Indiana, Thomas had a productive farm, land on which nothing was owed.

He had a small mill. He had an established business as a carpenter, a cooper, and a furniture maker. He was well known, respected, and well liked. He had begun laying the foundation for a new house. Thomas was not wealthy by any stretch of the imagination but they were as well as if not better off than many of their neighbors. The family still lived by a subsistence economy methodology wherein they provided most of what they needed by themselves and traded for those items they could not produce themselves. They were firmly set in the pioneer lifestyle. They did not live in abject poverty and failure, but Indiana had not been a period of gaining substantial wealth or prosperity either.

Moving to Illinois did not change Thomas' lifestyle. He moved as a pioneer to the new frontier and lived a pioneer lifestyle for the rest of his life. He left an established farm and an established business to start over. He moved with such suddenness that he sold his land and some of his assets at a loss. (Tradition has used this to show Thomas in a less-than-favorable light, but my research shows it was likely more the family's decision than Thomas'. Thomas' family was determined to move and he gave in to the pressure.) Economically, going to Illinois was a step backward for Thomas. It was not an opportune time for him to start over in a new location.

**SG: I have always felt that history has not treated Thomas Lincoln fairly and, therefore, loved your**

**statement: "Lincoln history no longer needs to debase the father to honor the son." Please comment.**

**DCT:** Following Abraham Lincoln's death, biographies began rolling off the presses. It was the time period when authors like Charles Dickens and Horatio Alger took their leading characters from the lowest of adverse circumstances and raised them to heroic heights. Many Lincoln biographers followed this style of writing. They wanted to show Lincoln as a self-made man, rising from remarkable lows to previously unattained heights by his own willpower, intelligence, and fortitude.

There is no doubt that Lincoln was a great man, a great national hero, and that his willpower, intelligence, and fortitude were major factors in his success. It is also true that his family background was not one of wealth and privilege. Lincoln was of pioneer stock. His family was the typical pioneer family seen in the settling and development of Indiana and Illinois.

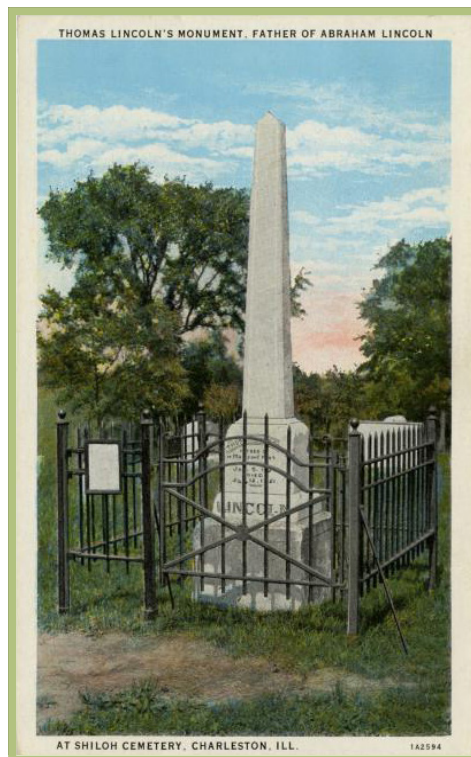
Thomas provided well for his family by pioneer standards, but times were changing as he settled in Illinois. Industrialization was coming to the frontier. Log cabins were being replaced with more modern home styles. Cities and towns were becoming the centers of life and society. Thomas stayed a pioneer. He did not change with the times. In Illinois, success passed Thomas by. Illinois moved out of the pioneer period. Thomas did not. He was content and happy with being a pioneer.

Combine this life choice by Thomas with the literary portrayal of great men rising from nothing to obtain success and it is clear Abraham Lincoln was a real-life example of the most popular fictional characters. A self-made man rising by his own ingenuity to greatness. A man overcoming the greatest of odds by his own determination.

William Herndon gave us a wealth of valuable information on Lincoln's early life. He also led the way in portraying Lincoln's youth as one of abject poverty, in portraying Lincoln's father and mother and family as opposed to his wanting to be something other than a subsistence pioneer. Herndon declared Lincoln an illegitimate child from a depraved, uneducated family.

Early biographers accepted that interpretation. Early Lincoln tradition exhibited Thomas as an obstacle Lincoln had to overcome and reject to become the man he became. That was unfair and inaccurate.

In Kentucky and Indiana, Thomas was making a place for himself and gaining some prosperity. He was known as a skilled carpenter who was put in charge of building projects and known for his finishing touches on woodwork. The furniture he made ranged from simple items for lower end cost through ornately finished pieces that furnished



*Thomas Lincoln Monument  
71.2009.083.1367*

well-to-do homes and offices. Those pieces now grace museums. He was a millwright, a wheelwright, a cooper, and a mechanic in addition to farming. He was frequently chosen to serve on juries. He represented his church district at denominational conferences. He was known for being a caring neighbor, a devoted family man, and honest beyond question.

He was still respected and loved in Illinois but things began to change. The fact that Thomas had become blind in one eye and with poor sight in the other undoubtedly played a role in this change and in his choices. By choosing to remain a pioneer, Thomas ended his life in comparative poverty to those around him. In Illinois, as it probably

would have been had he remained in Indiana, Thomas let progress pass him by. The successes and respect that were his in Kentucky and Indiana were not the same for him in Illinois. Herndon took Thomas' situation from near the end of his life and projected that image back throughout his life. Early Lincoln biographers followed a pattern of making their subject greater by coming out of something far lower. Thomas' status in Illinois made that easily possible. The concern was not telling Thomas' story, but rather making Abraham Lincoln's story even more dramatic. The result was a Thomas who was always a failure, a Thomas who opposed Lincoln's ambition, a Thomas who tried to stop Lincoln from succeeding, a Thomas who was unworthy of his son, a Thomas who was written off as not worth the time to investigate who he really was.

The reality is that Thomas, while not one of life's great success stories, is not one of life's failure stories either. He was a man who strove with life for success but in the end settled for a lifestyle he liked and with which he was content. He was a man who taught his son honesty and integrity. He was a man who encouraged Abraham and was proud of his son's achievements. Thomas was a man who was well-loved and well-thought of despite his choice to remain a pioneer-style man in a world that had moved on.

Thomas and Abraham were very different in their approach to life. They were very different in what they were contented to have. They were very different in their vision for the future and where they wanted to be in that future. That is all true. What is not true is that Thomas was the worthless White trash so many made him out to be in their biographies of his son. Thomas was a man most of us would have liked and enjoyed spending time around. He was honest and kind. He worked hard. He loved his family and cared for his neighbors.

Unfortunately for Thomas, history chose to ignore those traits and even to deny them. History chose to build the son up by tearing down the father. It is time to correct that view. Lincoln history no longer needs to debase the father to honor the son.

*Daniel Cravens Taylor is the author of Not a Technical Christian.*

# Lincoln's Domestic Policy:

## Toward a More Modest Conception of the Presidency

Jon D. Schaff

Charles and Mary Beard, in *The Rise of American Civilization*, make the claim that the Civil War constituted a "Second American Revolution." The noted historian James McPherson, in his book self-consciously titled *Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution*, echoes the Beards' conclusion. While all would agree that the emancipation of slaves, first in the Emancipation Proclamation and then in the 13th Amendment, had a profound influence on American history, McPherson goes beyond slavery in his claims. The Civil War era was also "revolutionary" in what we might call domestic policy. By domestic policy I mean policy not associated with military or foreign policy. Of course, a civil war is by definition "domestic," but in using the term "domestic policy" I wish to separate the more mundane policies of government from those more traditionally associated with high statesmanship, namely diplomacy and military leadership. In this sense, McPherson points to a number of Civil War-era domestic policies he considers "revolutionary." Among these are the Homestead Act, the Morrill Act (aka the Land-Grant College Act), the Pacific Railroad Act, the Legal Tender Act, and the National Bank Act. Borrowing from Leonard Curry, McPherson argues that these policies taken as a whole formed a "blueprint for modern America" and that Abraham Lincoln was one of the "principle architects" of what McPherson calls a "capitalist revolution."

Lincoln, to be sure, is often considered

one of our more aggressive presidents in his use of the powers of the office. Clinton Rossiter went so far as to call Lincoln a "constitutional dictator." On the other hand, David Herbert Donald referred to Lincoln as a "Whig in the White House." The Whig Party, in which Lincoln achieved his political maturation, took its name precisely from Great Britain's anti-crown party as the American Whigs originated in response to the perceived abuses of the presidency by Andrew Jackson. There is a reason why they derisively referred to Jackson as "King Andrew." Lincoln, however, is looked upon as a model for those who wish to promote an active government headed by an aggressive presidency.

Not surprisingly Lincoln was admired in his use of presidential power by such Progressive luminaries as Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and the founder of *The New Republic*, Herbert Croly. Wilson, in *Constitutional Government in the United States*, opines that the president is the "political leader of the nation" and the country "craves a single leader." More recently the late Mario Cuomo, former governor of New York, argued in his book *Why Lincoln Matters* that Lincoln would adopt the modern progressive platform almost in total. Indeed, he provides a mock State of the Union speech by a contemporary Lincoln in which Lincoln's views are hardly distinguishable from the modern Democratic Party platform. It is no accident that when Barack Obama announced his run for

the presidency in the 2008 election he did so from Springfield, Illinois and invoked Lincoln in support of his agenda.

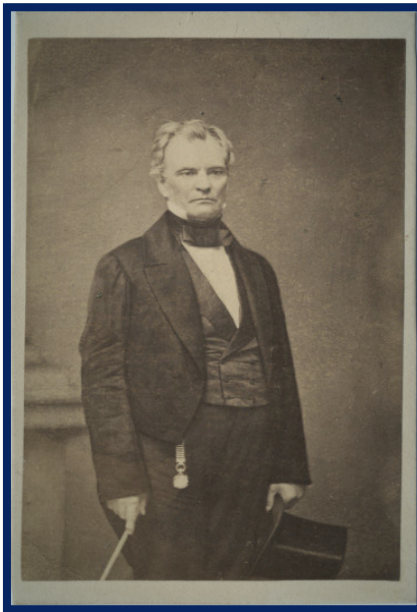
Can Lincoln's example justify today's presidency-centered government supported by both political parties? Study of Lincoln is typically the purview of historians and naturally so. But on this question political science can help us grasp Lincoln's place in the history of presidential power. We can turn to three separate political science literatures to adjudicate the claim that Lincoln was a "principle architect" of a policy revolution and a model for the modern strong presidency. One of those literatures is precisely that of presidential studies. Presidential scholars tend to divide the office into pre-modern and modern eras. The conventional opinion proposes Franklin Roosevelt as a pivotal figure in presidential history. Roosevelt, it is argued, used the powers of the presidency so effectively and so transformed the office as to create a new "modern presidency" that is qualitatively different from the "pre-modern" presidency. Nineteenth century presidents are usually denigrated as "mere clerks" doing the bidding of a powerful Congress. While Lincoln is rightfully seen as a strong war leader, the question is whether that strength translated to what I term domestic policy in defiance of 19th Century conventions.

A second political science perspective is that of public policy studies. One of the ways in which political scientists study public policy formation is through what

is termed policy typology. This theory essentially holds that the politics of policy development differ based on the type of policy being debated. Theodore Lowi describes three kinds of policy: distributive, regulatory, and redistributive. Distributive policy, as the name indicates, is simply the distribution of government largesse. Public works projects are classic examples of distributive policy. This policy type is typically low conflict and any differences of opinion are resolved at the congressional committee level. Regulatory policy is policy that influences individual business decisions. Redistributive policy involves redistributing resources (usually money) from one social class to another. Because regulatory and redistributive policy create greater conflict they must be resolved at a higher level, often that of congressional leadership or even the presidency. Lowi contends that the 19th Century was dominated by distributive policy, which explains why it tended towards congressional dominance. However, what if the policies advocated by Lincoln had some characteristics of the more conflictual policy types? Might we see greater presidential leadership from Lincoln than was typical of his era?

Finally, realignment theory might help us determine the extent to which Lincoln was a "principle architect" of a revolution. Perhaps as the Republican Party replaced the Whigs and swept into office in 1860 they did so not just as an anti-slavery party but also as a party advocating a definitive economic vision. Lincoln's victory in 1860, therefore, could be read as an endorsement of an economic agenda. Also, as the first Republican president perhaps Lincoln was central in orchestrating this partisan realignment. There are two theories of partisan realignment. We might term these "bottom-up" versus "top-down." The question is whether partisan realignments are caused by shifts in the electorate that elites capitalize upon after the fact (bottom-up) or whether partisan disquiet first occurs among elites who then lead the public towards a new set of issues and, ultimately, new partisan alignment (top-down). Naturally if the latter view is true for the realignment of the 1850s and Lincoln was one of these elites driving new partisan alignments this would give credence to the "principle architect" thesis.

In applying these political science literatures to Lincoln's presidency let me start with the realignment thesis. The Whig Party, as mentioned, formed out of opposition to the perceived abuses of presidential power by Andrew Jackson. Whigs also largely adopted Henry



Benjamin Wade OC-1036

Clay's "American System" economic vision promoting internal improvements, banking, and a protective tariff. Therefore, economic policy was central to Whig identity. Slavery, though, early on indicated the fissures in the Whig coalition that would ultimately lead to its demise. In 1844, within a decade of the Whig Party's founding, the Liberty Party ran an explicitly anti-slavery campaign, siphoning votes from the Whigs and arguably costing Henry Clay the presidential election. Later the Free-Soil Party would continue this push for a more aggressive anti-slavery agenda. The Whigs, with members in both North and South, were loath to come down solidly on one side or the other of the slavery dispute. Whigs tended to hold one position in the North and another in the South. The Compromise of 1850, negotiated by Clay, only hastened a split between these two sectional factions while the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854 likely sealed the party's fate. Frustrated by the Whig vacillation regarding slavery, the Kansas bill spurred the creation of the Republican Party as an unambiguously anti-slavery party. By 1855 most anti-slavery Whigs were Republicans while the more slavery-friendly (or outright proslavery) members had joined the Democrats. It is fair to state that the Republican Party formed with slavery, not an economic agenda, as the core.

Still, the loss of the 1856 election by Republican John C. Frémont to Pennsylvanian James Buchanan convinced many Republicans that opposition to slavery alone would not gain them electoral success. In particular, support for the tariff might win them votes in Buchanan's home state while land policy might gain the party favor in the West. Thus, the 1860 Republican

platform included explicit support for the tariff, homestead legislation, and a railroad to the Pacific. While the absence of public opinion polling makes it difficult to draw definitive conclusion regarding this strategy, Lincoln won the states of Pennsylvania, Indiana, Illinois, and California, all of which had gone to Buchanan in 1856. My tentative conclusion is that while resistance to slavery was central to the Republican message, economic issues could be said to have put the party "over the top" and were important in assembling the coalition that brought the party success in 1860. Yet, this does not seem to be enough to claim that economics drove the realignment of the 1850s. The main impetus was clearly slavery.

Further, was this realignment bottom-up or top-down, and if top-down was Lincoln one of the leaders of the party realignment? Assuming it was top-down, figures such as Salmon Chase and William Seward have as much claim as anyone to national leadership. But the Republican movement also occurred on a state-by-state basis, as was typical of an era of strong state parties. Individuals such as William Fessenden in Maine, Benjamin Wade in Ohio, Anson Morrill in Maine, and Thaddeus Stevens and David Wilmot in Pennsylvania were essential to the building of state parties. Newspapermen such as Horace Greeley of the *New York Tribune* and Joseph Medill of the *Chicago Tribune* were also key figures in spreading the Republican message.

Lincoln, though, does not seem to have taken an important position in growing the nascent party. Long an active Whig organizer, Lincoln was tardy in joining the Republican Party, not signing on until 1856, at least a year after most all of the party's leading lights had joined. Lincoln campaigned for Frémont in 1856, even getting some support for the vice-presidential role. He then turned his attention to beating Stephen Douglas in the monumental 1858 Senate election in Illinois. His notoriety heightened by his narrow loss to Douglas, Lincoln then traveled the country in 1859-1860 advocating his anti-slavery principles. At this point Lincoln's attention seems to be almost exclusively on slavery. He rarely discussed economic matters. To the extent that Lincoln gained national prominence, it was not based on "domestic policy." Even if the Republican realignment was of a top-down variety, it is not accurate to say that Lincoln led the Republicans on a policy revolution. His approach to the joining the Republican Party was cautious. His



selection as presidential nominee in 1860 was precisely because he seems less radical and less obviously ambitious than alternatives such as William Seward and Salmon Chase. It is worth noting that Lincoln's election to the presidency was an *effect* not a *cause* of partisan realignment. Lincoln's dedication to Republicanism was primarily based on opposition to slavery, taking positions on other issues only after the party had come to consensus.

Regarding presidential leadership and policy typology, again the record seems to indicate little support for the "revolutionary" thesis. First of all, the land legislation of the Civil War congresses, namely the Homestead Act, the Land Grant College Act, and the Pacific Railroad Act, all passed by large majorities with little administration involvement. An investigation of congressional debate gives virtually no mention of the administration on these matters. This is not surprising as these bills were distributive in policy type, precisely the kind of legislation where presidential involvement is usually minimal. What can be said about Lincoln is that he did not veto these kinds of bills as had previous presidents, for example Buchanan's vetoes of homestead and college legislation. Still, on these historic pieces of legislation there is little evidence that Lincoln was a "principle architect" of a "Second American Revolution."

The Legal Tender Act and National Bank Act gained more administrative attention, however. The congressional debates on both bills are littered with references to Secretary of the Treasury Salmon Chase, often citing his opinions and reports as gospel. In addition, members cited Attorney General Edward Bates regarding constitutional interpretation. Chase regularly met privately with members of Congress to advocate for these measures. Lincoln himself got involved regarding the bank act. In his Annual Message of December 3, 1862, Lincoln promoted the "organization of bank associations, under a general act of Congress." The creation of these banks would augment the issuing of paper money, as the national banks would be furnished "circulating notes, on the security of the United States bonds deposited in the treasury." These national banks could control the issuing of paper money, and thus keep inflation in check. In a subsequent letter to Congress in January of 1863, Lincoln digressed from the point of the letter to make these same arguments in favor of national bank association. Chase, Interior Secretary John Usher, and Lincoln's

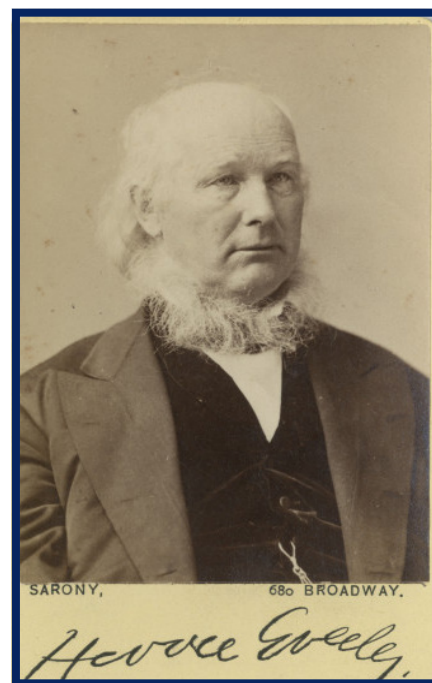
secretary William Stoddard personally lobbied members of Congress on the bank act. This proved crucial as the bill passed the Senate by a slim 23 to 21 margin. The bill passed the House by the narrow margin of 78 to 64.

Policy theory predicts more aggressive administration action on regulatory policies such as the Legal Tender Act and the National Bank Act. The Legal Tender Act and the National Bank Act altered the relationship between the national government and the nation's monetary system. The Legal Tender Act and following acts taxing rival currency out of existence made national treasury notes the only currency of the nation, eventually supplanting specie as the medium of economic activity. This represented a huge increase in the government's power to regulate currency. The bank system supplemented the act of the previous year by increasing the government's power over the nation's banking system.

The different kinds of policy considered in the 37th Congress brought on a different brand of leadership by Lincoln. Presidential scholars see differences between the modern and pre-modern presidents, yet this may be largely a change in public policy. The modern presidency may be simply realizing the powers that are inherent in the office. Industrialism and post-industrialism necessitate regulatory and redistributive policies that encourage presidential leadership. The modern president has institutional support for his activity in the legislative process not possessed by 19th Century presidents. Alexander Hamilton perceived that economic nationalism and a strong presidency went hand in hand. Lincoln never made the connection. His activity on the banking and currency acts elucidate the linkage of policy and politics and to the inherent potential of the presidency, but in regards to Lincoln this activity represents the exception rather than the rule. Lincoln found himself holding contradictory positions. He favored economic nationalism but not the presidential leadership possibly necessary to make such policies a reality. In all senses, Lincoln was a Whig in the White House.

Even when exerting some influence over Congress the methods Lincoln used were less revolutionary. Jeffrey Tulis, in his study of presidential rhetoric, argues Lincoln typified the "old way," which held that the president must not comment publicly on a matter before Congress. Lincoln seldom spoke on public policy, not wishing to take a public position that would limit him in negotiation. Lincoln also

preferred the written form of communication with Congress to public speeches. This is true of the matters considered here. Lincoln's policy pronouncements were strategically placed in veto messages, messages to Congress, Annual Messages, and the like. His activity tended to be behind the scenes and through proxies. Lincoln was respecting the time-honored divisions between Congress and the Presidency. Indeed, Lincoln was criticized in *Harper's Weekly* for being too deferential to Congress and not being "a great orator." By Ronald White's calculation, Lincoln spoke publicly fewer than one hundred times in his four years as president. By contrast, in his first term Barack Obama spoke nearly 2,000 times, almost 700 of which were formal enough to require a teleprompter. Richard J. Ellis concludes, "Lincoln



Horace Greeley OC-0669

was largely content to leave economic policy in Chase's capable hands."

Lincoln eschewed the "going public" strategy that presidential scholar Samuel Kernell says is the hallmark of the modern presidency. The pre-modern presidency, argues Kernell, engaged in a bargaining strategy, meaning elite-to-elite dialogue typically performed behind the scenes. In contrast, the modern "going public" strategy, which Kernell maintains began with John Kennedy, is elite-to-public dialogue and has more in common with electoral rhetoric than governing rhetoric. Lincoln offered no "New Freedom," "New Nationalism,"

"Square Deal," "New Deal," "Fair Deal," "New Frontier," or "Great Society." To the extent the Civil War-era domestic legislation represented a "revolution" Lincoln was largely passive, respecting the conventions of his day.

We have reason to doubt the revolutionary nature of the era's domestic policy. As Allen Guelzo has pointed out, while the government grew substantially during the war, at the war's completion the government quickly returned to near pre-war levels of spending and personnel. The land legislation that is part of this "revolution" consisted largely in the government selling its land assets while creating almost no bureaucracy. Further, Lincoln could lead the executive branch of a nation at war with a staff of three secretaries. Today's White House has a staff of nearly 400. Lincoln can hardly be said to have laid precedent for today's activist, presidency-centered government.

The three perspectives of political science, those of presidential studies, policy typology, and realignment theory, indicate that Lincoln was not a revolutionary leader on domestic policy in the manner suggested by McPherson. This is not to deny that in his push for emancipation and in his conduct as a war president Lincoln was much more aggressive, possibly even revolutionary. Consideration of Lincoln's presidency usually focuses on Lincoln as a wartime leader. This is understandable, but distorts the lessons of Lincoln's presidency because Lincoln governed in a crisis, and crisis is by definition the exception not the rule. A thorough study of Lincoln's presidency requires that we look at those aspects of his service that are more "ordinary," not crisis driven. Using the tools of political science we can see that Lincoln's domestic presidency exemplifies a more modest conception of the office than the presidency as it exists today.

The modern presidency-centered government promotes multiple pathologies. First, what Lowi calls the "personal presidency" relies far too much on the

president personally and on the president's personality to do all that the country needs. The danger here is that we ask more of the president that he (or she, someday) can deliver, setting the people up for regular disappointment. Further, as political scientist James Ceaser puts it, our framers were interested in minimizing the harmful effects of ambition. Putting excessive personal stake in the president gives far too much temptation to presidents to act the demagogue, as all modern presidents do to a greater or lesser extent.

Also, the extravagant attention placed on the presidency combined with electoral changes creates an atmosphere of the "permanent campaign." Both Ceaser and Lowi note weakness

affected as the long election process provides incentives for presidents and presidential aspirants, usually governors and U.S. senators, to tailor their activities not toward governing but toward positioning themselves electorally. Campaign rhetoric infects governing, which is problematic as campaign rhetoric thrives on distinctions and combat metaphors while governing rhetoric must work toward conciliation. This is the cost of the "going public" strategy eschewed by Lincoln but ubiquitous in the modern presidency.

The "personalized presidency" contributes to one final pathology, that of the perpetual crisis. We often assume that in times of crisis the president will lead the nation. In part this is due to the vigor of the office, as identified by Alexander Hamilton in *The Federalist Papers*. And it must be said that sometimes a crisis is really a crisis, for example a civil war! For better or worse,

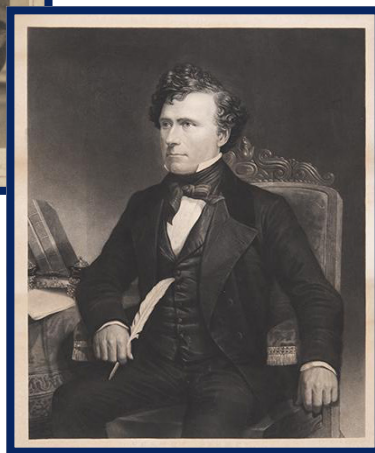
Americans over the last handful of decades have lived through crises of poverty, inflation, crime, illiteracy, and drugs on which we have declared war. The "war on terror" is as much a war on a concept as against any actual enemy, its very fluidity of definition allowing for maximized presidential power. We have had a health care crisis, global warming crisis, a spending crisis, an energy crisis, an immigration crisis, etc. The "war" on each "crisis" justifies ever-increasing executive power.

Lincoln illustrates a different and better way. In those parts of the government that were not in crisis mode Lincoln was largely deferential to Congress. He rarely spoke in public, and when he did speak on public policy it was rhetoric directed to Congress in the written form, as in his annual messages. In those few cases where Lincoln did involve himself or his administration in the creation of "domestic" policy such involvement was limited and behind the scenes. He did not wish to commit any actions that might suggest that the power of initiating the regular legislation of government lay anywhere but with Congress. Lincoln never claimed an electoral mandate or that his power came from "the people." Rather he regularly couched his actions in the legal powers of the office. By limiting the expectations he had for himself as president he also limited the expectations the people had of the office.

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Millard Fillmore OC-0577



Franklin Pierce 71.2009.081.1410

of the modern political party, largely caused by reforms of our electoral system (namely the rise of primary elections) and campaign finance law (creating candidate centered campaigns and strengthening interest groups at the expense of parties), have left presidents electorally unaccountable to anyone but the people at large. In the decade before Lincoln's election, Millard Fillmore, Franklin Pierce, and James Buchanan suffered the ignoble fate of their party denying them the presidential nomination despite being a sitting president. This is almost impossible to imagine today. The weakness of parties makes candidates more dependent on interest groups, who are almost by definition narrow and extreme. Also, because candidates must largely run on strength of personality in order to gain attention, they are encouraged to make extreme appeals, for example making extravagant promises that they cannot possibly fulfill. Governing is also



*An Interview with*

Kathryn Harris

*Regarding Her Portrayal of*  
Harriet Tubman

Sara Gabbard



Harriet Tubman Library of Congress LC-DIG-ppmsca-54232;  
Kathryn Harris, Photo: E. Rapoza

**Sara Gabbard:** Your first person portrayal of Harriet Tubman is in a class by itself. What led you to this method of presentation?

**Kathryn Harris:** I have found that audiences remember more content or information from a first person presentation than from reading or seeing a video. There is the opportunity to interact with the presenter, to ask questions... My first foray into first person presentation was at our local historical society cemetery walk when I made Phoebe Florville, the wife of William Florville ("Billy the Barber," Mr. Lincoln's Springfield barber and friend), come alive. My friend and former colleague at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library (formerly the IL State Historical Library (ISHL)) who is the Director of Shows helped me develop and refine my presentations of both Phoebe and Harriet.

**SG: I have never attended an event in which there were so many questions from the audience after your official presentation concluded. To what do you attribute this response?**

**KH:** I cannot include everything in my

monologue, so I leave time for the audience to ask questions that they want answered. Because of that, I have to be as prepared and as knowledgeable as I can possibly be. That preparation comes from research, including the old-fashioned way: reading books. When I began presenting as Harriet, I read everything I could find in the ISHL collection and on the internet...this was in the late 1990s. Since then, I have also read the works of Catherine Clinton, Kate Clifford Larson, Jean Humez, and Beverly Lowry. I've also read Harriet's 1869 biography by Sarah H. Bradford: *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman*. I never know what the audience will ask, so I try to be as prepared as I can be.

**SG: Please describe Tubman's journey as she escaped from slavery. Who helped her along the way?**

**KH:** Even though she "took" her freedom, Harriet had help from many unnamed abolitionists. She escaped from Dorchester County, Maryland (Brodess plantation) to Philadelphia where she met William Still, a conductor and stationmaster on the Underground Railroad. Still, who was black, was the Secretary to the Vigilance Soci-

ety in Philadelphia. He recounts many of those who passed through his doors on the road to freedom in his seminal work: *The Underground Railroad: A Record of Facts*, published in Philadelphia by Porter and Coates in 1872.

**SG: How did she first become involved in helping slaves escape?**

**KH:** Once Harriet reached freedom in Philadelphia, she wanted others in her family to enjoy the "sweet taste of freedom" so she went back to Dorchester County. She took her brothers and their families, and eventually her parents to freedom. In between, it is said that she made thirteen trips.

**SG: How did slaves know where/when she would be available?**

**KH:** Harriet, who was born Araminta Ross, the daughter of Harriet Green Ross and Benjamin Ross, would send word by trusted friends that she was going to be at a certain place at a certain time, and if you wanted to join her on the "freedom line", be there. There were, of course, no signs, posters, etc. as Harriet was il-

literate, as were most slaves. It was against the law to teach a slave to read and write. (Harriet was called "Minty" as a child; she took the name of Harriet when she took her freedom in order to honor her mother.)

**SG: When Tubman led slaves to safety, did she always have a definite plan, or did she have to improvise, depending upon the circumstances surrounding each trip?**

**KH:** Harriet was a smart woman. How foolish would it be for her to go the same way all the time as slave catchers and patrollers were always looking for her? It is my thought that she was so familiar with the area between Dorchester County and Philadelphia that she knew different ways to get there...even in the swamps and marshy places. I am confident that she improvised, depending on the needs of the moment.

**SG: Did she have people "along the way" who helped her?**

**KH:** Harriet knew, or knew folks who knew, people who were abolitionists. One such person that she knew for sure was Thomas Garrett, a Quaker abolitionist in Wilmington, DE. Garrett sheltered more than 2,500 fugitives at this home/property. In 2012, a monument to these two fighters for freedom was unveiled in a riverfront park in Wilmington. Readers can Google "Unwavering Courage in the Pursuit of Freedom" to see an image of the monument, to learn more about their relationship, and to learn about the sculptor (Mario Chiodo).

**SG: I believe that Harriet Tubman was illiterate. Did other people record her journeys?**

**KH:** Harriet was indeed illiterate. William Still recorded some of her stories in his book and Sarah H. Bradford recorded her life story in: *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman* (Auburn: W.J. Moses, Printer, 1869). *Harriet, the Moses of Her*

*People* (Lockwood and Sons, New York, 1886) was also written by Bradford.

**SG: Can you estimate how many slaves she rescued? What was the average number participating in each trip?**



*Unwavering Courage in the Pursuit of Freedom* by Mario Chiodo, Photo: FreedomMarchOfArt.com

**KH:** In elementary school, I was taught that Harriet freed 300 slaves, but recent scholarship has reduced that number to about 70. To me, the number is immaterial because if she only led ONE to freedom, that was one less enslaved person. Consider that in 1860, there were nearly four million held in bondage. Escapes via the Railroad have been estimated to be about 10,000, so... Readers who want to learn more can visit the library or Google books for resources by/about Levi Coffin, the President of the UGRR.

**SG: What happened to Harriet Tubman after the Civil War ended?**

**KH:** At the close of the War, she worked in the Freedmen's Bureau and eventually returned to Auburn, New York, where she had purchased a house and opened its doors to former elderly slaves. Harriet died there on March 10, 1913... she was likely ninety years old or so. She also married Nelson Davis, whom she'd met while working in The Bureau.

**SG: Were people aware of her "crusade" during the War?**

**KH:** By the time the War had come, she'd ceased her work on the UGRR as she served as a scout, spy, and nurse for the Union Army. She was unassuming and no one would ever expect her to be a spy or scout or an agent for Union Generals. She was successful at this task as well. She led a raid on a plantation along the Combahee River with Union Generals, burned acres of crops and freed nearly 700 enslaved persons.

**SG: Has history treated Harriet Tubman fairly?**

**KH:** She is getting the recognition she deserves with the publication of academic/scholarly biographies. There are scores of children's books about her and school children—black and white—admire her for her bravery and persistence and commitment to her belief about FREEDOM. Also, a major motion picture debuted in November 2019: *Harriet*. Cynthia Erivo, an actress from the UK, will star in the lead role. Eventually, an image of Harriet Tubman will appear on our \$20 bills.

*Kathryn Harris is the former Library Services Director at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum (Springfield, Illinois) and Past President of the Abraham Lincoln Association.*

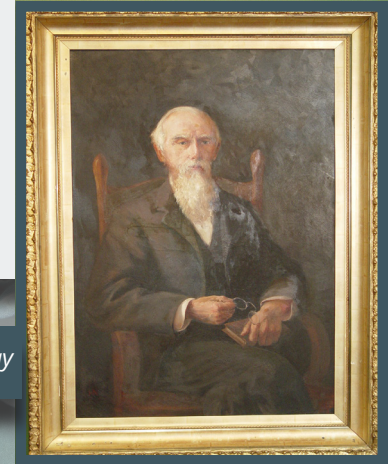
# Provenance and the Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

Provenance provides a measure of evidence for an artifact's claim to have witnessed history. In laying out the chain of an object's ownership, it can also illuminate people's relationships across time and space. In the Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection, we are fortunate that many of the artifacts have a strong, continuous provenance. The pieces shown here are just a small sample, selected for their connection to the Lincoln family or close associates.

The collection includes Abraham Lincoln's copy of *The Life and Speeches of Henry Clay*, which Lincoln used for his own speeches. An Illinois friend and fellow lawyer, James W. Somers, verified it was Lincoln's, noting: "In reading from this Book I distinctly remember that Mr. Lincoln, for the first time, used spectacles, apologizing to his audience, saying that he was not as young as he used to be." The volume went to Major William H. Lambert, one of the "Big Five" Lincoln collectors. Its scorched spine is evidence of the 1906 fire in his library. Provenance from major Lincoln collections could be a subject of its own—one of the Lincoln Museum's early acquisitions was the collection of Daniel Fish, another member of the "Big Five".

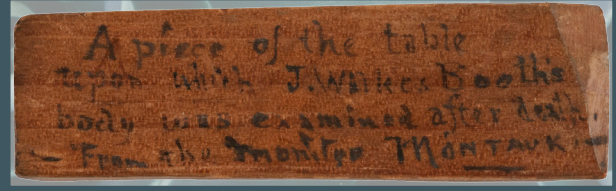
In 1866, financier Jay Cooke commissioned a portrait of Lincoln by African American artist David Bowser. This same urge to possess an image of the martyred president led to Matthew Wilson painting multiple copies of his recently completed Lincoln portrait. Careful research and documentation through the Welles family proved that the Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection's is the original portrait commissioned by Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles.

In a dilemma familiar to many families, items are often sold or donated when there are no close heirs with strong attachments to the objects. When Helen Nicolay, daughter of Lincoln's secretary, died in 1954, her possessions went to her secretary and companion Fay Elizabeth Pierce Beij, who died soon after. Beij's daughter, Barbara Benoit, sold the collection to the Lincoln National Life Foundation. The Nicolay materials include papers and manuscripts from both Helen and John Nicolay; photographs; Lincoln's enormous woolen shawl; John's 1891 patented "new and useful Improvement in Folding Chairs"; a flag that flew in Ford's Theatre the night Lincoln was assassinated and an oil portrait by Helen of her father.



Helen Nicolay, Portrait of John Nicolay

Abraham Lincoln's copy of *The Speeches of Henry Clay*, showing scorched spine



Lincoln assassination relic, "A piece of the table upon which J. Wilkes Booth's body was examined after death. From the Monitor Montauk"

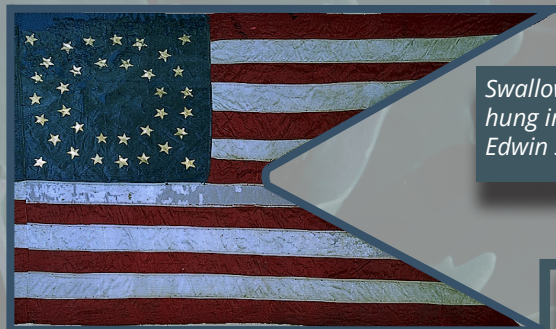


David Bowser, Portrait of Abraham Lincoln, 1866



Matthew Wilson, Abraham Lincoln portrait for Gideon Welles

# Susannah Koerber, Chief Curator and Research Officer Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites



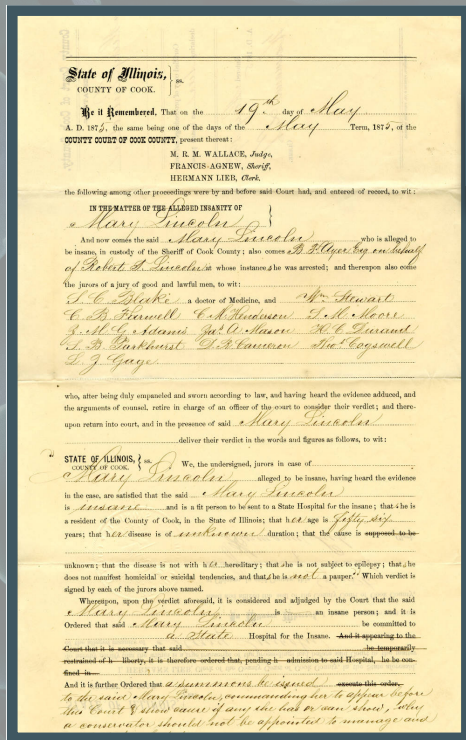
Swallowtail pennant that hung in Secretary of War Edwin S. Stanton's office



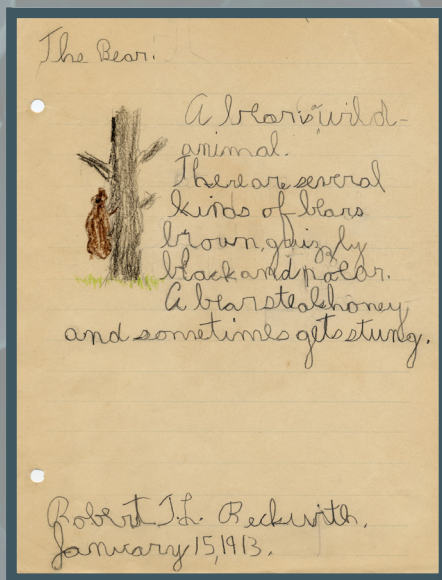
Cased image with lock of Mary Todd Lincoln's hair collected by Elizabeth Edwards



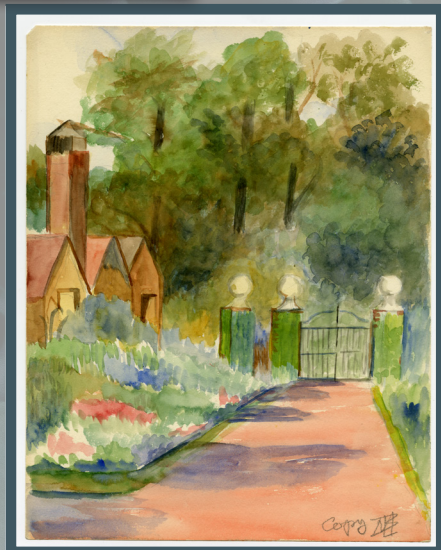
Mourning brooch belonging to Mary Todd Lincoln, inherited by Elizabeth Edwards



Proceedings and Order Declaring Mary Todd Lincoln an Insane Person



School book page from Robert Todd Lincoln Beckwith, 1913



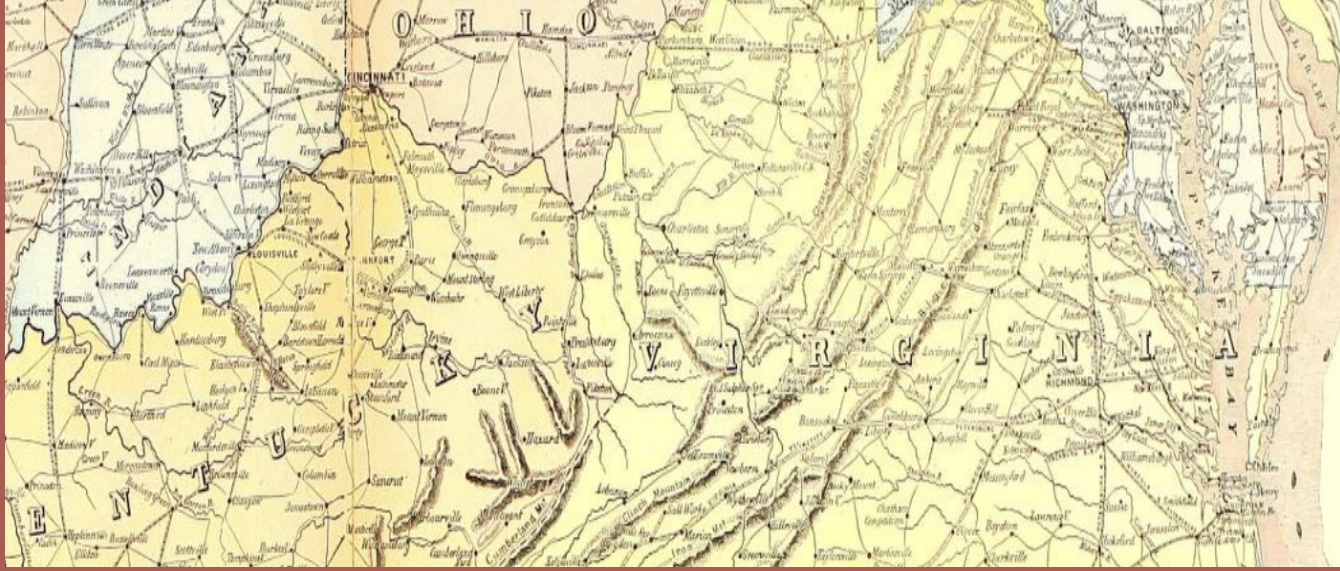
Mary Lincoln (Peggy) Beckwith, Country Home

Multiple items were donated by Henry Clark Ottiwell, most notably the swallowtail pennant that hung in Secretary of War Edwin Stanton's office. It came to him via his aunt Adelaide, widow of Dr. Winthrop Butler, a Navy veteran. Butler had received it from Stanton's daughter, Bessie Habersham, a patient and friend. Ottiwell also donated a fragment of the table on which John Wilkes Booth's body was examined.

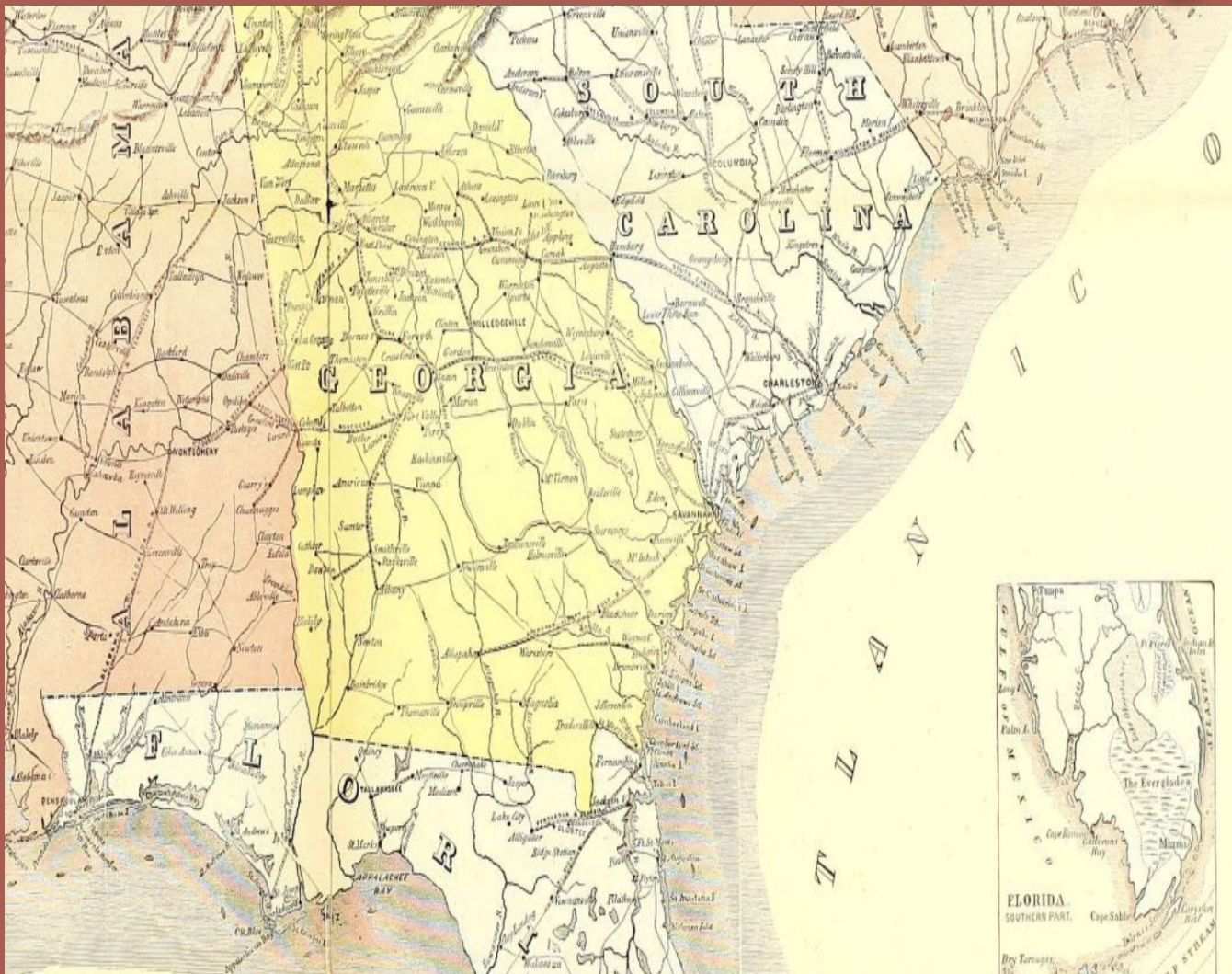
Mary Todd Lincoln was living with her sister, Elizabeth Edwards, when she died. Elizabeth was offered some of her possessions, including material from Mary's 64 trunks. Among them was a fine onyx mourning brooch. She passed it on to her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Albert Edwards, who gave it to her close friend Jessie Palmer Weber, librarian of the Illinois State Historical Library, who presented it to Louis Warren's daughter. From there it made its way into the museum collection. Elizabeth also clipped a lock of Mary's hair shortly before she died and encased it with a Brady photograph from the time of the inauguration. It descended to Elizabeth's grand-daughter and then to the collecting market.

Robert Lincoln Beckwith, the last of Abraham Lincoln's direct descendants, had the task of clearing out Hildene and disposing of family possessions after the death of his sister, Mary Lincoln "Peggy" Beckwith, in 1975. Many of the extended Lincoln family's personal effects in the collection came through Beckwith, either directly or indirectly. These include the Lincoln Family Album of photographs, a cordial set and parlor chair used in the White House, and evidence of multiple Lincoln generations.

Most poignant is the bundle of well over 100 documents found tied with a pink ribbon in Robert Todd Lincoln's file room. These were his records of his mother's insanity trial and its repercussions. Although Robert Beckwith originally specified they not be published during his lifetime, three years later, he gave Gerald R. McMurtry and Mark E. Neely, Jr. permission to publish them, in the hopes that they would help establish a more nuanced understanding of situation.



# Reconstruction: What Went Wrong



Map of the Southern States, 71.2009.085.01033

Hon. Frank J. Williams



Winning on the battlefield may be relatively “easy” compared to winning the peace afterward. Abraham Lincoln was a political genius in keeping together conservatives, moderates and Radicals during the American Civil War, especially after he found generals who could win battles. But things change and the longer that time passes, the more likely it is that presidents lose their influence. Most presidents find that the window for opportunity is limited to “the first-hundred days” phenomenon. Assassinations cut short plans and people tire of a policy that does not lead to a quick end.

Lincoln understood how to win a major civil war as a political revolution but implementing his “new birth of freedom” was a gigantic peacetime project involving a social revolution. If a bullet had not killed him, even his expectations might have been diminished in achieving Reconstruction.

This article focuses primarily on: (1) Andrew Johnson’s approach to Reconstruction which was nearly opposite to what Lincoln had wanted; and (2) Ulysses S. Grant’s approach which was more like Lincoln’s approach and produced some short-term positive results, but the nation’s focus changed. Johnson barely survived impeachment, while Grant’s policy was ended in the Bargain of 1877 – a national cop out.

In personality and outlook, President Andrew Johnson was ill suited for the responsibilities he now shouldered following Lincoln’s assassination. A lonely, stubborn man, he was intolerant of criticism and unable to compromise. He lacked Lincoln’s political skills and keen sense of Northern public opinion. Although Johnson had supported emancipation during the war, he held deeply racist views. A self-proclaimed spokesman for poor white farmers of the South, he condemned the old planter aristocracy, but believed African-Americans had no role to play in Reconstruction. Thus, Johnson proved incapable of providing the nation with enlightened leadership.

With Congress out of session until December, Johnson in May 1865 outlined his plan for reuniting the nation. He issued a series of proclamations and more amnesties than

any president in American history. But rather than magnanimous acts, Johnson offered a pardon to all Southern whites, except Confederate leaders and wealthy planters (and most of these subsequently received individual pardons), who took an oath of allegiance. He also appointed provisional governors and ordered state conventions – elected by whites alone. Apart from the requirement that they abolish slavery, repudiate secession, and abrogate the Confederate debt, the new governments were granted a free hand in managing their affairs. Previously, Johnson had spoken of severely punishing “traitors,” and most white Southerners believed his proposals surprisingly lenient.

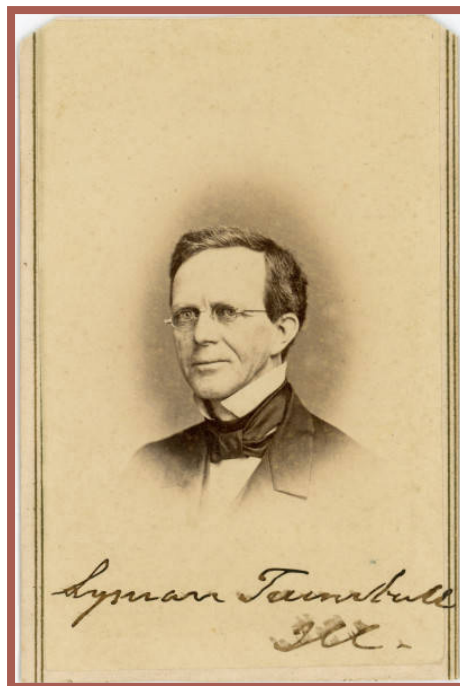
Radical Republicans criticized Johnson’s plan of Reconstruction for ignoring the rights of the former slaves. But at the outset, most Northerners believed the policy deserved a chance to succeed. The conduct of the new Southern governments elected under Johnson’s program, however, turned most of the Republican North against the president.

Johnson assumed that when elections were held for governors, legislators, and congressmen, Unionist yeoman would replace the planters who had led the South into secession. In fact, white voters by and

large returned the old elite to power. Republicans and black leaders like Frederick Douglass were further outraged by reports of violence directed against former slaves and Northern visitors in the South. But what aroused the most opposition were laws passed by the new Southern governments, the Black Codes, which granted freed people limited rights, such as the right to own property and bring suit in court. But African-Americans could not testify against whites, serve on juries or in state militias, or vote. The Black Codes required blacks to sign yearly labor contracts and unemployed vagrants were subject to arrest, fines, and being hired out to white landowners. Some states limited occupations open to blacks and prevented them from acquiring land. The Black Codes, wrote one Republican, were attempts to “restore all of slavery but its name.”

After Congress assembled in December 1865, Johnson announced that with loyal governments functioning in all the Southern states, Reconstruction was over. This led moderates to join Radicals, like Thaddeus Stevens, in refusing to seat Southerners recently elected to Congress. Then they established a Joint Committee to investigate the progress of Reconstruction. Early in 1866, Lyman Trumbull, a senator from Illinois, proposed two bills, reflecting the moderates’ belief that Johnson’s policy required modification. The first extended the life of the Freedmen’s Bureau, which had been established for only one year. The second, the Civil Rights Bill, was described by one congressman as “one of the most important bills ever presented to the House for its action.” The bill left the new Southern governments in place, but required them to accord blacks the same civil rights as whites. It made no mention of the right to vote.

Passed by overwhelming majorities in both the Houses of Congress, the Civil Rights Bill represented the first attempt to define in legislative terms the essence of freedom and the rights of American citizenship. In empowering the federal government to guarantee the principle of equality before the law, regard-



Lyman Trumbull OC-1644

less of race, against violations by the states, it embodied a profound change in federal-state relations. To the surprise of Congress, Johnson vetoed both bills. Johnson offered no possibility of compromising with Congress; he insisted instead that his own Reconstruction program be left unchanged. The vetoes made a complete breach between Congress and the president inevitable. In April 1866, the Civil Rights Bill became the first major law in American history passed over a presidential veto. That law is still used today. Ironically, it has been used by opponents of the proposed Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) as the 1866 act includes all rights of the ERA.

Unfortunately, there was no override of Johnson's veto of the Freedmen's Act. But a look at the Freedmen's Bureau Act is instructive on its successes. Freedmen's Bureau schools quickly achieved "spectacular gains in literacy." Less than two months after the end of the war, Freedmen's schools were educating 2,000 children in Richmond, VA. By spring of 1866, at least 975 schools were educating more than 90,000 students in 15 Southern states. By late 1869, more than 250,000 pupils were enrolled in Freedmen's schools. Literacy was imperative for black economic security. Ex-slaves needed to read in order to understand deeds and labor contracts. Indeed, this was exactly the cornerstone of Lincoln's and Grant's hope and plan for African-Americans to understand and enjoy the civil rights that should come from freedom and citizenship.

Although Freedmen's schools were open to whites, few attended. "Despite the absence of statewide systems in most Southern states, most parents preferred to consign their children to illiteracy rather than to see them educated alongside black children." White families who did send their children to bureau schools were typically ostracized or physically beaten.

In the postwar years, blacks in the North, inspired by the new civil-rights legislation and the heroic example set by black Union troops during the war, were more willing to confront authority and challenge the North's own ingrained racism. Northern blacks, though not subject to the

same violence as in the South, were sometimes denied equal schooling, segregated in public conveyances and abused when they tried to vote.

Although defenders of the old South will doubtlessly disagree, there is



Thaddeus Stevens LN-1261

a compelling case that American society as a whole would have benefited mightily had Reconstruction been permitted to fulfill its early promise. In particular, it would have saved the U.S. from the long Jim Crow agony of racial repression and the distortion of national politics by the South's determination to protect segregation at any price. So what went wrong?

Reconstruction's problems began with what was arguably the worst decision that Abraham Lincoln made as president, when he dropped from his 1864 re-election ticket his capable vice president, the abolitionist Hannibal Hamlin of Maine, and replaced him with Andrew Johnson, the Unionist Democrat from Tennessee. There is still a question of Lincoln's role in this switch. But I see his fine Machiavellian hand here. There is no way Andrew Johnson could become the vice presidential nominee of the National Union Party without the president's acquiescence. Fearing

defeat in the November election, Lincoln hoped to shore up support among Northern Democrats and win the trust of voters in the re-conquered areas of the seceded states.

Lincoln's assassination, a week after Appomattox, put Reconstruction in the hands of a racist, formerly slave-owning alcoholic who sabotaged efforts to extend civil rights – and physical protection – to newly freed slaves. Johnson encouraged Southern whites to re-assert their power and ignored violence against Freedmen and white Unionists who were trying to form biracial coalitions. By executive order, he returned hundreds of thousands of acres to white planters. Republican military officers were replaced with compliant Democrats, many of whom averted their gaze when armed "white leagues" drove teachers from their schools, assassinated local black leaders, and intimidated defenseless black and white Unionist voters. Blacks who dared to defend themselves were murdered whole-sale. Lawlessness, not Reconstruction, became the order of the day.

In June 1866, Congress approved the Fourteenth Amendment, which broadened the federal government's power to protect the rights of all Americans. It forbade states from abridging the "privileges and immunities" of American citizens or depriving any citizen of the "equal protection of the laws." In a compromise between Radical and moderate positions on black suffrage, it did not give blacks the right to vote, but threatened to reduce the South's representation in Congress if black men continued to be denied the ballot. The amendment also barred repayment of the Confederate debt and prohibited many Confederate leaders from holding state and national office. And it empowered Congress to take further steps to enforce the amendment's provisions.

The most important change in the Constitution since the adoption of the Bill of Rights, the Fourteenth Amendment established equality before the law as a fundamen-

tal right of American citizens. Until the Supreme Court constricted the Fourteenth Amendment, it shifted the balance of power within the nation by making the federal government, not the states, the ultimate protector of citizens' rights – a sharp departure from pre-war traditions, which viewed centralized power, not local authority, as the basic threat to Americans' liberties. In authorizing future Congresses to define the meaning of equal rights, it made equality before the law a dynamic, elastic principle. The Fourteenth Amendment and Congressional policy of guaranteeing the civil rights for blacks became the central issues of the political campaign of 1866. Congress now demanded, that in order to regain their seats in the House and Senate, the Southern states must ratify the amendment. Johnson denounced the proposal and embarked on a speaking tour of the North, the "swing around the circle." Denouncing his critics, the president made wild accusations that the Radicals were plotting to assassinate him. His behavior further undermined public support for his policies, just as his drunken behavior had done at his inauguration as Vice President.

In the Northern congressional elections that fall, Republicans won a sweeping victory. Nonetheless, egged on by Johnson, every Southern state but Tennessee refused to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment. The intransigence of Johnson and the bulk of the white South further pushed moderate Republicans toward the Radicals. In March 1867, over Johnson's veto, Congress adopted the Reconstruction Act, which divided the South into five military districts, temporarily barred many Confederates from voting or holding office, and called for creation of new governments in the South, with black men given the right to vote. Only after the new governments ratified the Fourteenth Amendment could the Southern states finally be re-admitted to the Union. Thus began the period of Congressional or Radical Reconstruction, which lasted until the fall of the last Southern Republican government in 1877. It was the nation's first real experiment in interracial democracy.

In order to shield its policy against presidential interference, Congress in March 1867 adopted the Tenure of Office Act, which may have been unconstitutional as a violation of separation of powers, barring the president from removing certain officeholders, including Cabinet members, without the consent of the Senate. In February 1868, Johnson removed Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, an ally of the Radicals. The House of Representatives responded by approving articles of impeachment against the president. Virtually all Republicans, by this point, considered Johnson a failure as president and an obstacle to a lasting Reconstruction, but some moderates disliked the prospect of elevating to the presidency Benjamin Wade, a Radical who, as president pro tem of the senate, would succeed Johnson. Wade in some ways was a mirror image of Johnson in terms of personality. The final tally to convict Johnson



Andrew Johnson LFA-0280

was one vote short of the two-thirds necessary to remove him from office. Seven Republicans had joined Democrats in voting to acquit the president.

Johnson's acquittal weakened the Radicals' position and made the nomination of Ulysses S. Grant as the party's presidential candidate inevitable. The nation's greatest war hero initially had supported Johnson's

policies. Eventually, Grant came to side with Congress, but Radicals worried that he lacked strong ideological convictions. His Democratic opponent Horatio Seymour was the colorless former New York governor. Reconstruction was the central issue of the 1868 campaign. The campaign was bitter. Republicans identified their opponents with secession and treason, a tactic known as "waving the bloody shirt." Democrats appealed openly to racism, charging that Reconstruction would lead to interracial marriage and black supremacy throughout the nation.

Grant won the election, although by a margin many Republicans found uncomfortably close. He received overwhelming support from black voters in the South, but Seymour may well have carried a majority of the nation's white vote. Nonetheless, the result was a vindication of Republican reconstruction and inspired Congress to adopt the era's third amendment to the Constitution. In February 1869, Congress approved the Fifteenth Amendment, prohibiting the federal and state governments from depriving any citizen of the right to vote because of race, except women. Bitterly opposed by the Democratic Party, it became part of the Constitution in 1870.

In 1868, even after Congress had enfranchised black men in the South, only Northern states had allowed black men to vote. In March 1870, the American Anti-Slavery Society disbanded, its work, its members believed, now complete. Congressional Reconstruction policy was now essentially complete. Henceforth, the focus was on Reconstruction within the South. Among the former slaves, the passage of the Reconstruction Act of 1867, which brought black suffrage to the south, caused an outburst of political organization.

Throughout Reconstruction, black voters provided the bulk of the Republican Party's support. Although Democrats charged that "Negro rule" had come to the South, nowhere did blacks control the workings of state government, and nowhere did they hold office in numbers equal to their proportion of the total population (which ranged from about 60 percent in South Carolina to

around one-third in Arkansas, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas). Nonetheless, the fact that well over 1,500 African-Americans occupied positions of political power in the Reconstruction South represented a stunning departure in American government. The new Southern Republican party also brought to power whites who had enjoyed little authority before the Civil War.

Given the fact that many of the Reconstruction governors and legislators lacked governmental experience, their record is remarkable. The new governments established the South's first state-supported public school systems, as well as numerous hospitals and asylums for orphans and the insane. These institutions were open to blacks and whites, although generally, they were segregated. Only in New Orleans were public schools integrated during Reconstruction, and only in South Carolina did the state university admit black students (elsewhere separate colleges were established for blacks).

In assuming public responsibility for education, Reconstruction governments followed a path blazed by the North. Their efforts to guarantee African-Americans equal treatment in transportation and places of public accommodation, however, launched these governments into an unknown area in American law. Racial segregation, or the complete exclusion of blacks from both public and private facilities, was widespread throughout the country. Black demands for the outlawing of such discrimination produced deep divisions in the Republican Party. But in the Deep South, where blacks made up the vast majority of the Republican voting population, laws were enacted making it illegal for railroads, hotels, and other institutions to discriminate on the basis of race. Enforcement of these laws varied considerably, but Reconstruction established for the first time at the state level, a standard of equal citizenship and recognition of blacks' right to public services.

Republican governments also took steps to assist the poor of both races and to promote the South's econom-

ic recovery. The Black Codes were repealed, the property of small farmers protected against being seized for debt, and the tax system revised to shift the burden from property-less blacks, who had paid a disproportionate share during Presidential Reconstruction, to planters and other landowners. The former slaves, however, were disappointed that little was done to assist them in acquiring land. Only South Carolina took effective action, establishing a commission to purchase land for resale on long-term credit to poor families.

Rather than land distribution, the Reconstruction governments pinned their hopes for Southern economic growth and opportunity for African



Hannibal Hamlin LN-1719

Americans on a program of regional economic development. Railroad construction was its centerpiece, the key, they believed to linking the South with Northern markets, and transforming the region into a society of booming factories, bustling towns, and diversified agriculture. The program had mixed results. A few states—Georgia, Alabama, Arkansas, and Texas—witnessed significant new railroad construction between 1868 and 1872, but economic development in general re-

mained weak. With abundant opportunities existing in the West, few Northern investors ventured to the Reconstruction South.

Thus, to their supporters, the government of Radical Reconstruction presented a complex pattern of achievement and disappointment. The economic vision of a modernizing, revitalized, Southern economy failed to materialize, and most African-Americans remained locked in poverty. On the other hand, biracial democratic government, a thing unknown in American history, for the first time functioned effectively in many parts of the South. Public facilities were rebuilt and expanded, school systems established, and legal codes purged of racism.

The conservative oligarchy that had dominated Southern government from colonial times to 1867 found itself largely excluded from political power, while those who had previously been outsiders – poorer white Southerners, men from the North, and especially former slaves – cast ballots, sat on juries, and enacted and administered laws. The effect upon African-Americans was strikingly visible.

The South's traditional leaders – planters, merchants, and Democratic politicians – bitterly opposed the new Southern governments, denouncing them as corrupt, inefficient, and embodiments of wartime defeat and "black supremacy." There was corruption during Reconstruction, but it was confined to no race, region, or party.

The most basic reason for opposition to Reconstruction, however, was that most white Southerners could not accept the idea of former slaves voting, holding office, and enjoying equality before the law. They had always regarded blacks as an inferior race whose proper place was as dependent laborers. They believed that Reconstruction had to be overthrown in order to restore white supremacy in Southern government, and to ensure that planters would have a disciplined, reliable labor force.

The violence that greeted the ad-

vent of Republican governments after 1867 was pervasive, organized, and explicitly motivated by politics. In wide areas of the South, Reconstruction's opponents resorted to terror to secure their aim of restoring Democratic rule and white supremacy. Secret societies sprang up whose purpose was to prevent blacks from voting, and to destroy the infrastructure of the Republican Party by assassinating local leaders and public officials.

The most notorious of such organizations was the Ku Klux Klan, which in effect served as a military arm of the Democratic Party. Founded as a Tennessee social club, the Klan was soon transformed into an organization of terrorist criminals, which spread into nearly every Southern state. Led by planters, merchants, and Democratic politicians, men who liked to style themselves the South's "respectable citizens" and "natural rulers," the Klan committed some of the most brutal acts of violence in American history. Grant's election did not end the Klan's activities; indeed in some parts of the South, Klan violence accelerated in

1869 and 1870. The Klan singled out for assault Reconstruction's local leadership. White Republicans – local officeholders, teachers, and party organizers – were often victimized. In 1870 William Luke, an Irish-born teacher in a black school, was lynched in Alabama along with four black men. Both female and male teachers were beaten.

Although some Northern Republicans opposed further intervention in the South, most agreed with Senator John Sherman of Ohio, who affirmed that the "power of the nation" must "crush, as we once before have done, this organized civil war." In 1870 and 1871, Congress adopted three Enforcement Acts, outlawing terrorist societies and allowing the president to use the army against them. These laws continued the expansion of national authority during Reconstruction by defining certain crimes – those aimed at depriving citizens of their civil and political rights – as federal offenses rather than merely violations of state law. In 1871, President Grant authorized federal marshals under the new Department of Justice, backed

up by troops in some areas, to arrest hundreds of accused Klansmen and bring them to trial.

Despite the Grant administration's effective response to Klan terrorism, the North's commitment to Reconstruction waned during the 1870s. Many radical leaders, including Thaddeus Stevens, who died in 1868, had passed from the scene. Within the Republican Party, their place was taken by politicians less committed to the ideal of equal rights for blacks. Many Northerners felt that the South should be able to solve its own problems without constant interference from Washington. The federal government had freed the slaves, made them citizens, given them the right to vote, and crushed the Ku Klux Klan. Now, blacks should rely on their own resources, not demand further assistance from the North.

Other factors also weakened Northern support for Reconstruction. In 1873, the country plunged into a severe economic depression. Distracted by the nation's economic problem, Republicans were in no mood to devote further attention

to the South. Congress did enact one final piece of civil rights legislation, the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which outlawed racial discrimination in places of public accommodation. This was a tribute to Senator Charles Sumner, who died in 1874 after devoting his career to promoting the principles of equality before the law.

In those states where Reconstruction survived, violence again reared its head, and this time, the Grant administration showed



## THE CLANSMAN

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE  
OF THE KU KLUX KLAN

BY  
THOMAS DIXON, JR.

AUTHOR OF  
THE LEOPARD'S SPOTS, COMRADES, ETC.

ILLUSTRATED WITH SCENES FROM THE PHOTO-PLAY  
THE BIRTH OF A NATION

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PUBLISHERS :: NEW YORK

*The Clansman* by Thomas Dixon 71.2009.084.06054

no desire to intervene, in part because of lack of public support. In contrast to the Klan's activities – conducted at night by disguised men – the violence of 1875 and 1876 took place in broad daylight, as if to flaunt Democrats' conviction that they had nothing to fear from Washington.

In January 1877, unable to resolve the crisis of the election of 1866, Congress appointed a fifteen-member Electoral Commission, composed of senators, representatives, and Supreme Court justices. Republicans enjoyed an 8 to 7 majority on the Commission, and to no one's surprise, the members decided that Rutherford B. Hayes had carried the disputed Southern states and was elected. The Bargain of 1877 recognized Democratic control of the remaining Southern states, and Democrats would not block the certification of Hayes's election by Congress. He became president, ended federal intervention in the South, and ordered United States troops, who had been guarding the state houses in South Carolina and Louisiana, to return to their barracks (not to leave the region entirely, as is widely believed). The redeemers, as the Southern Democrats who overturned Republican rule called themselves, now ruled the entire South. Reconstruction had come to an end.

One might say that the violence that had crushed Reconstruction's highest aspirations now reaped its reward: Northern abdication and Jim Crow.

A particularly glaring deficit in our memory, that black officeholders in the early Reconstruction era – demeaned by many pro-Southern historians and portrayed as lascivious buffoons by fictionalizers such as Thomas Dixon, Jr., whose novel became the basis for "Birth of a Nation" – were actually substantial citizens who were well prepared to govern. These blacks had often risen from a middle class of minis-

ters and businessmen that existed in antebellum America beyond the view of racist whites. By the turn of the 20th Century however, once-effective biracial coalitions across the South had been destroyed and black voters almost completely disenfranchised through physical intimidation and electoral trickery, White supremacists took control in the former Confederate states. And our Supreme Court did not help either.



Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, U.S.A. OC-1412

For, by this time, we had a policy of "separate but equal" as espoused in the 1895 decision – *Plessy v. Ferguson*. It would take 60 years to correct this inequity with *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Anyone who lived or worked in the Jim Crow South could see the price that African-Americans paid for the crippling of Reconstruction. In the mid-1960s, it was always difficult to persuade would-be voters to appear before hostile white registrars, even more so after the Ku Klux Klan held a rally festooned with Confederate flags on the steps of the courthouse where the blacks were required to

register.

A century after the Civil War, blacks in the South could still feel so vulnerable that they would flee at the sight of a white stranger. Members of a nation who rightly regard themselves as residents of a more just and democratic society than many others on the planet are collectively loath to admit that good and honorable policies were consciously overturned by a reactionary minority while thousands of people across the nation found it easier to look the other way.

Perhaps Abraham Lincoln was naïve about his hope to reconstruct the South. He had thought the Civil War would be a short one and, after that turned into a false hope, most of his time was spent on how to win a long one. The transition from a slave to a free society would take a social revolution. The Johnson administration seems to confirm the Founders wisdom about character and the danger of demagogues.

Ulysses S. Grant's administration confirms Lincoln's remark that Americans are "the almost chosen people." Grant was running a race against time – not only in regard to white southerners who had been displaced from power, but also the flash-flood of his cronies whom he had trusted. Yet, Grant did yeoman service to Lincoln's dream in suggesting that justice in an open society would eventually become more likely in the long term.

One might even take the view of the historian Barbara Fields, who eloquently said in Ken Burns's Civil War documentary that if, as she believes, the Civil War was a "Struggle to make something higher and better out of the country," then "the Civil War is now over."

*Portions of this article were presented by Hon. Frank J. Williams as a lecture at Mississippi State University, the site of the Frank and Virginia Williams Collection of Lincolniana.*

# Letters from the Front



## John Truex, Company D, 82nd Regiment, Indiana Volunteers

United States Indian Commission treaty party camp at Big Lake,  
Minnesota LN-2579

**August 27, 1862 (Camp Emerson) "Dear Wife"** This letter was apparently written shortly after his arrival at Camp Emerson because he comments: "We have not drawn our clothes yet." At this early date, the ugly reality of war has not yet dawned: "We are enjoying ourselves very well, getting as much to eat as soldiers could ask. The health is very good generally. There is about a thousand in camp and very few sick. Shumaker is as happy as a pet pig in a bucket of slop." Religion is very important and Truex sends word to his wife: "I want you to be faithful and still keep up the family altar. Bring the children up in the fear of the Lord. I don't want you to grieve after me. I believe that the Lord will protect me through and bring me safe home again."

**September 4, 1862 (five miles south east of Louisville) "Dear Wife"** Truex comments that "The boys are in good spirits. We've plenty to eat, water is a little scarce, very dry here this season. Some of the war news is flattering and some not so good." This letter continues to encourage his wife Catharine to "Be contented. Live religious. Endeavor to train up the children the way they should go. Children, I charge you to obey your mother."

**September 13, 1862 "Dear Wife"** Military life is a bit more strenuous than in his two previous letters: "We have been force marched ever since we left Madison. Truex then expresses the concern of so many soldiers from the frontier: "Tell me if you have got your wheat threshed yet." Again he states with certainty: "I thank God that man can be a Christian any where and under all circumstances. I leave you in the hands I am in, the hand of God, and I put my trust in Him, knowing that he is able to bring me off more than conqueror." Then on to more practical matters: "The reason we do not pay postage on our letters is we have no sutler in our regiment and we can't get stamps."

**September 16, 1862 (Camp Butler) "Dear Companion"** Truex laments the fact that he has not received any letters from Catharine: "This is the fourth I have wrote you and never received any answer." He then gives some war news: "Have had great victory at Munfordville. Our loss was 8 killed and 30 wounded. The rebels lost 700. In standing sentinel, I overheard our officers on the war question. They said it's the desire to call soldiers again and again until the South is completely over run. There is now four regiments in this camp. Said to be seventy five thousand union troops in five miles of this place. I stood sentinel last evening and could hear the drums and guns all around me." Attention to religion isn't quite as easy as in his first three letters: "I would like to say that our religious liberties are somewhat limited. Sunday still comes down to our guard lines but it never has the countersign and don't get in. Our officers drill us on Sundays as well as Mondays. But we will serve the God of battles."

**September 29, 1862 "Dear Companion"** Again, the practical farmer Truex says: "Don't be in a hurry selling your wheat and other things. I think produce will come up. There is no farming going on here and the 6 and 22 [Regiments] boys says there's nothing left where they've been...not even enough for the women and children." Truex ends the letter: "Give my love to all inquiring friends. Reserve a share for yourself."

**Oct 11, 1862 (Garrard Co. Ky) "Dear Wife"** Truex and his companions have not yet been involved in fighting: "We laid within a mile of a hard battle. If it had lasted an hour longer, we would have been called in to it but dark came and the fighting stopped and we was detailed the next evening to bury the dead." This task gave the first intimate glimpse of the reality of war: "We got no tools to work with and we looked over the battle ground some. I will tell you it was a distressed sight though our men did not suffer half like the rebels did. We could stand in place and count from 18 to 20 in sight of us and the rebels laid in piles and their loss is supposed to be 4 times as large as ours. A view of the battle ground is a sad and horrible one." Perhaps because of this experience, at the end of the letter Truex instructs his son Thomas: "I want you to be an industrious boy, stay at home and carry on the business the best you can. I think you had better stay at home and never come in the army for you would wish yourself at home a thousand times and that is all the good it would do you."

**October 23, 1862 (Marion Co.)** *"Dear Companion"* Still no direct combat, but the long marches are taking a toll on health and feet, not to mention the fact that: "the earth has been our bed and the heavens our coverings since we left Louisville." This deeply religious man finds "dissatisfaction in absents of my family and roughness of society is disagreeable and religious liberties so limited that no religious man can enjoy himself as he would wish. I shall not repine but will trudge along through this campaign with cheerfulness through the assistance of Devine Grace serving God with diligence. I have set a firm resolution to serve God better than ever I did before seeing the wickedness of the world. I am fully convinced that this war is a judgment that God has sent on our nation on account of this wickedness for I learn by reading his Word that the wicked shall not go unpunished." And then, perhaps with a premonition even though he had not yet seen combat, Truex writes: "Tell Brother Elledge that I want him to write us a letter and tell us how the church is prospering and if I fall I want him to preach my funeral and tell the people that I fell like a soldier, I died at my post."

**November 4, 1862 (Cave Springs, near Bowling Green, Ky)** *"My Dear Wife"* Truex describes his latest march: "a distance of ninety five miles and my feet gave out and after the first day's march I could not keep up with the reg nor pack my gun. It is the foot I hurt with the plow once. I am fearful that it will trouble me a right smart about marching." Instead of the glowing reports a few months earlier about how everyone was in good health, he writes: "The health of the reg is only tolerable. John Pender and Lark White (Indiana neighbors) will likely get a discharge soon."

**November 8, 1862 (Mitchelsville, Tennessee)** *"Dear Companion"* This letter reflects the frustration felt in the inadequacy of mail service to and from soldiers. Truex finally received a letter from his wife, but she had not received any from him, including all those noted above. Again, looking forward to peace: "when the boys may all joyfully return to their homes. O that God may speed the day when right and righteousness will prevail and when righteousness may cover the earth as the waters cover the channels of the deep." Then he mentions the realities of camp life, when again he says that the regiment's health is: "only tolerable. The measles, mumps, typhoid and camp fever is the chief complaints."

**November 24, 1862** *"Dear Wife"* For the first time, Truex speaks at length about the political situation in the North and how it affects Southern attitudes. "We have been in fine spirits thinking the war would soon be ended. The rebels is very tired of it & was quite much discouraged when we first came to Tennessee but since the election has went off & the strife of the north has got scattered abroad I think I can see hope spring up in their countenance. They seem sasyer and many of our soldiers have been somewhat discouraged. One thing I feel safe in saying the strife that's been and yet is manifest in the north has & will cause more deaths than all the south. Tell the people for me if they won't help us to not kill us. I think if they knew what I knew, they would pursue a different course for I do know that every word spoken against our government or administration, if known in the south, cause the war longer and hoter. I am sorry there is so much strife & division in the north for if they had been united the war would have been ended by this time. I hope the God of battles will be with us and guide us to His home and glory."

*Truex also includes a letter to his son Thomas:* "Stay at home. Tend the farm. The support of the family lies mostly on you and your mother and above all things live religious, lay up your treasures in heaven, that if you see me no more on earth you may meet me in Heaven. Son, remember that without holiness of heart none can reach that happy shore."

**December 1, 1862 ("Camped near Gallatin Tenn.)** *"My Love"* Truex reports that "John Pender is dead. He died a faithful servant of God and his country." Health problems are worrisome for some of his friends from home. "James and Elzey Wever is sick. I think James is not long for this world. He took cold and settled on his lungs. We think they've both taking the measles." Again, he gives advice on running the farm: "You said that Nathen Hufman would clear that field for one crop if you would board him. Well, if he will clear it and not be lying around boarding off you and doing nothing. I think it would best be the thing you could do but bind him to do it in a certain time and not give him more than one year to do it in, not 2 or 3 or 4 or when he pleases."

**December 7, 1862 ("Camp near Gallatin, Sumner Co., Tenn")** *"Dear Companion"* Truex tells his wife that he has finally received a few letters from her, expressing the reality that movement of military units makes it difficult for soldiers to receive letters from home. The fact that dates on his last few letters to his wife indicate that he remained camped near Gallatin perhaps explains that he did receive several letters at the same time. He ends the letter with: "I believe that most soldiers would rather be at home if they could, with our union restored and government again enjoying peace. Will you pray for it and for me and all the soldiers? The Lord in His word says the prayer of faith shall save the sick. And will prayer prevail in behalf of our government."

**December 22, 1862 (Nashville, Tenn)** *"Dear Companion"* This letter contains interesting comments about Nashville and its citizens. "This is the finest and the nicest town I have seen and the best country, the best land, all looks mighty well. Some of the finest buildings I ever seen. If this war was over I would like to talk to the citizens here about this country but as this thing called rebel is in the way for I don't like them and they don't like us but they have to like us now because they can't help themselves. There is a good many of rebels around here but they have to keep still." There are comments about what historians have described as the havoc caused by childhood diseases: "The regiment got the measles in it and our company got it and we can't muster only about 30 for duty and when we left we could muster 75."



Truex continues to articulate his deep faith: "I still aim, by the blessing of God, to meet you in heaven, this is all that buoys me up in all the travels and troubles and hardships that I have to go through while I am here in this lonesome state or unpleasant life for a Christian man, but I think it is better for me than the ungodly or the unrighteous for I am prepared to die when the Lord calls me hence.

Now I will tell you something of a soldier's life. The first is when we are wakened by the drum and fife, five o'clock in the morning, fall in the line of battle in the time of five minutes or less. We must lay with our clutterment by us nor mustn't mix them with anyone else's so we can fall in line quick. Then to stack arms and then to quarters and keep on our rigging. Then all at once the drum will beat. The colonel will holler double quick time, then to quarters to get breakfast, the guard mount, then drill two hours in the forenoon, then dinner, then after eating drill again, this making 4 hours per day besides other duties. So this is all right enough for our health and to make us better soldiers and to be better able to fight when needed and to fight with some skill."

*On December 22, 1862, Truex also wrote to his son Thomas.*

"I want you to be good to your mother and the family and attend to the affairs of the farm." He repeats an earlier plea that his son not join the army. "Now Thomas I will tell you we have had pretty hard time since we've been in the service. The 82nd has been trotted through. You was anxious to come in the army but you may be glad you did not for you could not stand it. Our regiments has gone down a great deal since we left Louisville. Our company numbered 87 when we left and now we can only muster about 30." At the end of the letter, he again directs his son: "I want you to always respect and honor your mother so that if I never get back you may be a help to her in her old age and above all things remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth. Oh, how I would like to hear of you joining the church and devoting your time to the service of God that if I never see you on earth again may I have a prospect of embracing you as my son in the Lord on the other shore. Remember these as if they were my last words."

**December 27, 1862 (Tenn)** Truex becomes somewhat critical of the actions of others at home. It appears that "Brother Shoemaker" allowed his pigs to destroy someone else's corn. He is obviously responding to a letter from his wife when he comments on the "degraded hate of that Tlaffered class." This appears to include "shame to the neighborhood for people to profess to be religious, to go to such a low called place as a dance, which is a place destitute of good morals - let alone religion." He then switches criticism to army officers: "While we are trying to put down this rebellion our officers is engaged in drunkenness and every other wickedness that could be imagined or some of them at least." The only non-critical portion of this letter is at the end: "I must tell you that our governor sent us all an oil blanket apiece, which came at a very good time, for it has been rainy here since and they keep us as dry as kittens."

**January 9, 1863 (Murfreesboro, Tenn)** This letter contains information about a major battle at Stones River. (December, 31, 1862 to January 2, 1863) "The 28 we started at night and we marched all night and then for 4 nights and days we was on our feet and no sleep. We was firing for 3 days before a general attack was made." He describes viewing a cavalry charge: "While we was looking our horsemen made a charge on the enemy just before sun down. It was a mighty pretty sight. This was on New Years Day and if I must say a new world to many brave boys." He describes the advance of regular troops: "Them in front of us fired and fell to the ground, then we fired and did the same and while in this place the bullets came like hail over our heads but none killed on our side or our regiment. I never will forget this New Years Day. We gave them a might bad licking. It was the blessing of God that gave the victory."

**January 20, 1863 (Camp near Murfreesboro, Tenn)** "Dear Wife" Truex is sick and is "in a private house that is taken for a hospital, close to the regiment. I have taken cold and it has settled in my lungs." He believes that his sickness was a result of the battle "which lasted six or eight days and all the time with but very little to eat and exposed to the rain which was prevalent and no blankets to cover us of a night and then had to wade a river."

He comments on his concern regarding the tenacity of Northerners: "The news has come to us here that the pluguglies has begun to rebel in the north which has caused some excitement here in the army. Some swears they are going back to help them while others does not approve of their course of procedure. For my part I do not understand it all together. I want peace to be made and I want it made honorable and in accordance with our constitution but any other way would not suit me at all. I want you to write as soon as you can and let me know the opinion of some of your best neighbors regarding this thing that has taken place here.

**January 23, 1863 (Murfreesboro, Tenn)** "Dear Companion" Following up on his letter three days earlier, Truex tells his wife that he is much better. "I can say that I am smartly on the mend. I am in camp again but not able for duty. I expect to go to the hospital to sleep a few nights yet." He then comments on his belief about Southern motivation for the War. "The negro question being the cause of this war is all a humbug. They make it a pretense but I am satisfied that it is only through pretense. The rebels want a government to themselves and a monarchical one at that." He ends the letter with another comment about God's will for him. "Grieve not for me but look up to God and muster all the faith you can and pray for peace and protection. Will not God avenge his elect that cry unto Him day and night?"

**January 27, 1863 (Murfreesboro, Tenn)** *"My Beloved Wife"* Concern about the health of his regiment continues to be foremost in Truex's mind. "Our reg. is not in very good health at this time. We can't muster more than two hundred men out of the nine hundred we started with. Our officers has got up a petition to have our reg. sent back to Indiana for the purpose of recruiting for 60 days but I do not know whether it will be done or not."

For the second time in a month, he comments on the purpose of the War. "The news has also come that people in the north has come to the conclusion that pease shall be made irrespective of the war department and the war department is endeavoring to free the negroes calling on the north to help them in so doing. Now I fear that this will leave us in a bad predicament not knowing where to center our hopes. I wish they could, just for the sake of government, lay aside their views on the subject and unite on the constitution and its laws then we may have some hopes of peace.

Truex also mentions a frequent concern of soldiers writing home, as they worry about the status of their farms: "I want to know how much you got for your pork that is if you have sold it."

**January 30, 1863 (Murfreesboro, Tenn.)** *"Dear Wife"* Truex is still sick ("My health is quite delicate today"), but, once again, he relies on his faith: "Well, Catharine, don't be uneasy about me. Though I am unwell, I believe the Lord will do all things well. Though sometimes the way seems a little dark through this world, nevertheless God's word stands firm." He continues to talk about his participation in the recent "battle of Murfreesboro" (Stones River in most historical accounts). "The balls whistled pretty thick around us. I felt the wind of one burn pass my left ear. It felt tolerable warm." Once again he mentions the depleted regiment and comments on the devastation of diseases among the troops. "The measles, mumps, and yellow jaundice got among us at Gallatin. Our regiment has been going down ever since. We have the typhoid fever with us now.

There are also his continued comments about the prospect of peace. "I desire peace above all things that is on honorable terms and I hope the time not far distance when God will work our peace for us."

**Feb. 5, 1863 (Murfreesboro, Tenn.)** *"Loving Wife"* The desire to see his wife is overwhelming, but Truex states: "I suppose I will have to wait till my time is out or peace made, for furloughs is plain out and taking fence furlough ad desert is not my name, except I was very close home I might step over for a few moments."

"I will tell you the seashash [usually spelled sesesh, from secessionist, to refer to Confederate deserters] is deserting the enemy ranks daily and joining our forces. We've a new regiment partly made up of them, about four hundred of them in it."

**Feb. 11, 1863 (Murfreesboro, Tenn)** *"Loving Wife"* Still sick, Truex writes: "I have a pretty severe cold and some pain in my breast, back and head and my eyes is not well yet and my throat thinks its not very well and I have to cough considerably. Well with all of this if you would see me you would think I was happy as a jaybird. I am with the Co but not able for duty but you need not be uneasy about me. I have worked when I've been worse than I am now.

The subject of peace and the reality of corruption are articulated once again. "I do want peace above all things, may the God of heaven speed on the day of peace. Oh that he would remove corruption. From authority I fear it in the hearts of men that holds the reigns of government. I see but little less here in men of authority would to God they were changed from nature to grace and the power of sin and Satan unto God. I do not know what to think about peace being made soon. There is so much division in the north and the south knows it and encourages them."

In his own little corner of the War, Truex expresses his frustration: "We thought when we whipped so bad here that we would soon get through with the job but this bow-wowing around against the administration ruins almost everything. It encourages the rebels, discourages some of our men, kindles wrath in others while some are pleased with it."

While he doesn't mention slavery in most of his letters, Truex here opines: "For my part I'm not in for fighting to free the blacks neither do I feel like grumbling so hard at the administration for from what I have seen I am quite certain if their slaves were taken from them they could not carry on the war long. The conscript has taken all but the infirm and squipt. They can oversee very well while the darkey does the work and thus the farming goes on as well as if they were at home and thus through the negro the rebels are fed. Now I would think it wisdom to deprive them of that food if possible.

**Feb. 13, 1863 (Camp near Murfreesboro, Tenn)** *"Dear and Affectionate Wife"* While his health is still poor, Truex informs his wife that he is "smartly better." He is able to be out of bed, "with the exception of two days that was on the account of a dizziness in my head. I was so light headed that I could scarcely walk." He also comments on unrest in the North and states: "That is one thing desirable, the constitution obeyed and the union restored in accordance to it. I think as much of a traitor to the constitution on one side as I do the other. God save me from either."

In the signature portion of this letter, he writes: "John Truex to Catharine Truex, his wife, his love, his friend, his better half."

**Feb. 19, 1863 (Murfreesboro, Tenn)** *"Loving Wife"* A pronounced discouragement with the prospects of peace is the focus of this letter. "My hope for seeing you soon is very small for I see no prospect of peace at all. I do not think the officers at the head of government is trying or has ever tried to make peace. The sesesh [Confederate] prisoners that we take say that they are fighting for the constitution and the citizens invariable declare they want peace and the old constitution. Now if this is their motto which they declare most earnestly it is, and we claim the old constitution, I can not tell for the life of me what we're all fighting about or why our rulers can't make peace."

Truex also criticizes Northern troops by citing an example of a raid upon a Southerner's home: "They broke open a poor woman's house that had one child and her man conscripted and took everything she had. Took her bed, burnt her trunk, burnt her bureau of drawers, carried off all her meat, in a word they left her nothing.

**Feb. 28, 1863 (Murfreesboro, Tenn)** *"My Dear and Much Respected Wife"* Truex expresses joy that he had received three letters from his wife. He also heard from others from home. [The frustration with the failure of the government to expedite the delivery of mail is expressed in many letters from Civil War soldiers. While understandable for an army on the move, Truex has remained at the same place for two months.]

Health continues to be a major problem, and he predicts that he "will ever be able for duty anymore in the service." He also warns about soldiers returning home with the measles. Truex continues to hope and pray for peace and comments on the devastation of war: "The country here looks like desolation."

**March 7, 1863 (Murfreesboro, Tenn.)** *"My Dear and Much Respected Wife"* "I have to say that my health is rather worse than it was a while back." For the first time, he criticizes the fact that he has not been either discharged or furloughed: "I Believe if our Cap. Was any account I could have a discharge. The Col. advised him to apply for a discharge for me but he has as yet done nothing and I do not know that he will soon. There has also been orders issued to give furloughs and some troops has got them but I don't know that the 82nd will get any. It would be too much honor to get a furlough." In this letter, Truex also mentions the fact that past due payments have been received by troops.

**March 8, 1863 (Murfreesboro, Tenn.)** *"My Dear Wife"* Harking back to the letter sent the day before: "I thought of not sending any money home but our regiment is ordered to move and I have concluded to send you twenty five dollars."

**March 13, 1863 (Murfreesboro, Tenn.)** *A letter from friend R. E. Plummer to Catharine Truex:* "Sister Truex, Respected Mistress, according to Brother Truex's request I tonight lift my pen to address you a few lines to inform you that I am well and to let you know that Brother Truex is still poorly. He has been taken away to the General Hospital some two miles from here. The reason he was taken we got orders to march and he was not able to march. I think that he likely will get a discharge before long."

**March 18, 1863 (Murfreesboro, Tenn.)** *"Dear Companion"* "It is through the mercy of our Lord and Saviour that I am still spared and have the opportunity of addressing you with a few lines to let you know that my health is not very good yet. Though I am not dangerous nor have not been. I am not with the regiment now. I am at the General Field Hospital and we are very well fixed here. We have cots with good straw-ticks to sleep on, and plenty of blankets to cover with, and plenty to eat such as it is. They are so crowded here now that they can't get things fixed yet like they will have them. Our regiment has gone but I don't know where it is now. Dear Wife, if we are not permitted the happy privilege of meeting in this world I trust that you will continue to live so that when we come to die that we will meet in a better world where there will be no wars nor any more separation."

At the end of the letter, John Truex again turns to concerns about his farm. "You wrote that you thought you would have some ground grubbed for tobacco, well you can do just as you think best. Though I think that you had better raise a little peas. I think that I would put in about one acre."

**April 2, 1863 (Murfreesboro General Field Hospital Ward D Tennessee)** *To Mr. R. E. Plummer from Siman Garrison:* "Dear Sir" It is with a heavy heart and trembling hand that I attempt to drop you a few lines today to let you know that our old friend, Mr. John Truex, has at last departed this world of trouble. He is dead and gone to rest where more of us will soon have to go.

[Editor's note: John Truex served in Company D, 82nd Regiment Indiana Volunteers. He was an ancestor of Vicky Geisler, a resident of Fort Wayne IN, and a member of the Lincoln Book Group at the Allen County Public Library. She very generously donated transcripts of Truex's letters to the Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection. The transcripts were compiled by Sara Gabbard, Executive Director of the Friends of the Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection.]

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