



# Lincoln Lore

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## ABRAHAM LINCOLN WAS NOT A FREEMASON

Some members of the masonic fraternity have claimed that Abraham Lincoln was a Freemason. It has been asserted that Lincoln was initiated in one of three lodges; namely, the Grand Lodge of New York, the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania and an army lodge attached to General Grant's forces in front of Richmond, Virginia. One masonic lodge even attempted to provide Lincoln with posthumous membership. On May 17, 1865, the Lodge of La Franche Union, at Choisy-Le-Roi, Department of the Seine, notified the United States Minister that "From this date the name of Abraham Lincoln is inscribed on the list of our members, and at each session, for three months, a brother will rise at the call of his name and answer: 'Abraham Lincoln died like a Mason, to elevate humanity, outraged by slavery.' At the expiration of three months we will celebrate a Masonic Funeral to his memory, inviting the brethren of all the other lodges." This resolution was signed by "Bourgeon, Jr. Venerable" and twenty-four members of the lodge.

Other masons with little documentary evidence to rely upon have stated, "if Lincoln was not a mason he should have been," that he was the greatest uninitiated mason, that he was a mason "at sight," that he was a posthumous (only living men can be accepted for membership) mason, and that "a man can be a Christian outside the church and a man can be a mason outside the lodge." In fact, it is asserted that the Gettysburg Address reads so much like a masonic document that many have claimed Lincoln for membership in the craft.

Daniel B. Robinson in an address before the Prairie Lodge, No. 1008, A.F. & A.M. stated that "His (Lincoln's) every public utterance seemed to come from the lips of a master mason, his every public act seemed to be guided by the inspired mind of a Free and Accepted Mason and the very life he lived—in all its greatness—was an exemplification of the masonic precepts . . ." However, Robinson did not claim for Lincoln masonic membership.

William H. Grimshaw in his *History of Freemasonry*, 1903, lists Lincoln as a Freemason. In a letter dated April 5, 1917, he said, "So far as my book is concerned I quoted M. Edouard Quartier-la-Tente, P.G.M. Swiss Grand Lodge 'Alpina' who in the *Annuaire International Masonic Association* listed Lincoln among illustrious Freemasons." Mr.

Grimshaw continued, "I will further state that Mr. J. H. Brooks, who was Mr. Lincoln's messenger, informed me that Mr. Lincoln was a Mason. The degrees were conferred in an Army Lodge attached to Gen. Grant's Army in front of Richmond." Grimshaw wrote to Robert T. Lincoln, making inquiries about Lincoln's alleged masonic membership, and the son replied that there were no papers or other records among his father's papers to indicate that he was a mason.



From the Library and Museum of the Grand Lodge F.&A.M., State of New York, 71 West 23rd Street, New York, N. Y. 10010

A skillfully fabricated photograph of Lincoln (M-30, O-69, April 17, 1863) wearing a masonic sash and apron. The sash and apron with their visible symbols (particularly French) is typical of European masonry.

members of the fraternal group. Albert J. Beveridge, in his work *Abraham Lincoln 1809-1858* commented on the death of a good masonic friend of Lincoln: "On February 12, 1842, Bowling Green died. He was a Mason and Springfield Lodge Number 4 of that order conducted his funeral in a grove near his cabin. Lincoln was there, and, at Mrs. Green's request, tried to say something at the grave of his

In the memorial volume published by the government in Washington, D.C., 1867, entitled *The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln . . . Expressions of Condolence and Sympathy Inspired By These Events*, there are found the tributes of forty-four masonic bodies, most of these plainly referring to Lincoln as a brother mason. Today in many Central and South American masonic lodges, it is taken for granted that Lincoln was a mason. In a letter addressed to the editor on September 21, 1966, the statement is made by a grand master of a masonic lodge in Brazil that "since most of the abolitionist leaders were masons it was quite natural, with the help of the exalted latin imagination, to enroll him (Lincoln) in the masonic rank and file . . . with a view to step up their enthusiasm for the Cause." A Grand Secretary of a masonic lodge in Brazil wrote on July 18, 1966, "In Brazil we ever know that Great President Abraham Lincoln was a Freemason."

A Grand Secretary of a Colorado Grand Lodge wrote a letter dated March 15, 1960 stating that he had seen a picture of Lincoln in masonic regalia in a masonic publication printed in Ecuador, and a mason of New Jersey, on December 9, 1959, wrote of a recent trip to Paris, France where he saw "President Abraham Lincoln dressed as a Freemason" in "La Grande Loge De France" next to a picture of President George Washington who actually was a Freemason.

While Lincoln was not a Freemason, he did have some early and cordial contacts with mem-



old friend. Some who heard him, recall that his remarks were very fine and others that he made a sorry failure." In all likelihood, the "sorry failure" was the result of Lincoln's inability to control his emotion.

Mrs. Lincoln, on October 29, 1860, in a letter from Springfield addressed to D. Burgess, went on record regarding Lincoln's alleged masonic membership by stating, "Mr. Lincoln has never been a mason or belonged to any secret order . . ." The Rev. Dyer Burgess of Adams County, Ohio, was an anti-mason adherent, and he wished to support Lincoln if he did not belong to any secret society.

Previous to Mrs. Lincoln's statement, but during the same month, Dr. Robert Morris of Oldham County, Kentucky visited Lincoln in Springfield. In reporting his conversation with the Presidential candidate, he recorded these words:

"Mr. Lincoln, I came up the road last night with an old Masonic friend, Judge Douglas. Last Friday I came down to Louisville with another Masonic friend, Mr. Breckinridge, and a few weeks ago one of my agents, Mr. Porter, met in the Grand Lodge of Tennessee, Mr. John Bell, so you see all three of your opponents for the presidential chair are Freemasons.

"Mr. Lincoln replied: I am not a Freemason, Dr. Morris, though I have a great respect for the institution."

During the 1860 political campaign for the Presidency the Grand Lodge of Illinois meeting in Springfield declared a recess in their deliberations in order that the Grand Lodge representatives might call on Mr. Lincoln. During the conversation which ensued Lincoln said: "Gentlemen, I have always entertained a profound respect for the Masonic fraternity and I have long cherished a desire to become a member, but I have never petitioned because I have felt my own unworthiness to do so." With the masonic visitors offering a protest Mr. Lincoln continued: "I might be overcoming my hesitancy and be petitioning at the present time but I am a candidate for political office, and by some such action would be misconstrued. For this reason, because my motives would be misconstrued, I must for the time being refrain."

This statement has caused many masons to believe that Lincoln would have petitioned for membership in 1869 if he had lived.

Benjamin B. French, Grand Master of the District of Columbia and Commissioner of Public Buildings in the nation's Capital, wrote a statement for a magazine entitled *The Masonic Trowel*, published in Springfield, Illinois, dated May 15, 1865:

"After Mr. Lincoln's election, signs of serious trouble were evidently manifest, and those Masons who knew Mr. Lincoln's kindly and trusting nature were very anxious that he should become a Mason. Dr. [Ira A. W.] Buck was then Grand Master, and in an easy way led Mr. Lincoln to converse upon the subject. In the course of the conversation, Mr. Lincoln remarked that he had often thought of the matter; that he believed it to be a good institution, but no one had asked him to join, and he had put the matter off until business and other causes had engrossed his entire time. He made up his mind to be initiated, but after thinking the matter over he said that he would be liable to be charged with wrong motives, and he would defer the matter to some future time.

"Knowing only what he then knew, the motive which impelled him to decline Masonic honors was creditable; knowing what every Master Mason knows, his decision is to be lamented, for had he been a Master Mason, the chances for assassination would have been less."

In a letter dated at Washington City, April 20, 1865, to a mason named Harmon G. Reynolds, Benjamin B. French, who will be remembered by Lincoln students as the man who introduced Edward Everett at the Gettysburg Cemetery dedication and who wrote the ode which was sung by the Baltimore Glee Club, made the following statement about Lincoln's qualifications for masonry and his failure to secure membership:

"Abraham Lincoln was not a Free Mason, but he should have been. His pure heart, his honest and upright life, his kindly feeling toward every human being, his love of his country, his devotion to all her institutions, in-

deed his entire character as a man, would have made him an eminent Free Mason. He once told me how highly he respected our Order, and that he at one time had fully made up his mind to apply for admission into it; but, said he, 'I feared I was too lazy to do all my duty as I should wish to were I a member, and I have kept postponing my application.' I told him it was by no means too late now. To which he laughingly replied, 'Well, perhaps some day I may ask you to let me in.'

The Summer of 1955 issue of the *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, pages 191-198, under "Lincolniana Notes" has a section devoted to "Lincoln and The Masons." In addition to the French statement and the letter to the editor of *The Masonic Trowel* as are partly given above, the article appearing in the *Journal* also contains the resolution on Lincoln's death, (April 17, 1865) passed by the masonic lodge in Springfield:

"The members of Tyrian Lodge No. 333, A. F. & A. M., in regular communication convened, with members of Springfield Lodge No. 4, Central Lodge No. 71, and other worthy visiting brethren, deem this a suitable occasion to express their opinions as Masons and citizens in this momentous crisis; therefore,

*Resolved*, That as the immediate friends and neighbors of our late beloved and now revered President Lincoln, we deeply and sorrowfully deplore his death.

*Resolved*, That the scrupulous honor and honesty of President Lincoln in all his private relations, his faithfulness and kindness as a husband and father, his fairness and ability as a lawyer, his wisdom and public spirit as a citizen, and his patient, humane and honest career as a magistrate and statesman, furnish examples worthy of all praise and imitation.

*Resolved*, That we sincerely condole with the bereaved widow and fatherless children in their terrible and irreparable loss.

*Resolved*, That the decision of President Lincoln to postpone his application for the honors of Masonry, lest his motives should be misconstrued, is in the highest degree honorable to his memory.

*Resolved*, That the murderer of President Lincoln, and the assassin of Secretary Seward, should be hunted with unceasing vigilance and vigor until found, and be brought to trial, judgment and punishment . . .

O. H. Miner, W.M.

J. R. Tyson,

H. G. Reynolds,

T. R. King,

Jesse K. Dubois,

Pierson Roll,

John C. Reynolds, Secretary. *Committee.*

The late Harry E. Pratt, the editor of the *Journal*, pointed out that all the signers of this resolution had known Lincoln personally. The names of thirty-one other lodges that endorsed the resolution are given in the May 15, 1865 issue of *The Masonic Trowel* only to be followed by one hundred more in subsequent issues.

Perhaps we should concur with the Most Excellent Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia, Benjamin B. French, that "Abraham Lincoln was not a Freemason, but he should have been."

Editor's Note: The editor is indebted to Bert Sheldon, Washington, D.C. who made a selection of the essays and printed material relative to Lincoln's alleged masonic membership, used in this short article, in the Library and Museum of the Grand Lodge F & A.M., State of New York, 71 West 23rd Street, New York, N. Y. 10010. See *Lincoln Lore*, Number 1005, July 12, 1948 titled "Lincoln And Fraternal Organizations."

## The Tools of War

In the Foundation's archives is to be found a document bearing the title "Form of Endorsement by Prest." The document is a half sheet of letter size paper written on both sides in ink and bearing the signature (not genuine) "A. Lincoln." This document is not considered to be a forgery, rather it is thought to be a rough draft of a statement, likely dictated by Lincoln, which he intended to sign once it was re-written in a more presentable form. The handwriting does not appear to be that of any of Lincoln's secretaries.

The document is as follows:



In consideration of the efforts made by Robt. A. Gallaher, as Agent of the "Union Fire Arms Company of New York," to carry out in good faith the contract of 5th May, 1862, for Twenty Thousand Springfield Rifle Muskets, and Twelve Thousand five hundred of Marsh's Breech and Muzzle loading Rifle, I desire that the time for filling the contract be renewed & extended for twelve months from the 30th May, 1862, under the conditions and obligations specified therein—the delivery of arms to be monthly. The Ordnance Department to reserve the privilege of substituting any other gun for Marsh's Breech Loader.

(to be  
(signed)

A. Lincoln

(The substitution proposed is because Joslyn has declared an interference with his patent)

Robert V. Bruce in his book, *Lincoln and the Tools of War*, The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., Indianapolis and New York, 1956, has several references to Samuel Wilmer Marsh and Robert H. Gallaher. One statement is, "Marsh and Gallaher began their enterprises with no plant, no capital, nothing but Marsh's worn old prototype of a breech-loading rifle and President Lincoln's order for twenty-five thousand new rifles on that model. They nearly succeeded. Waving Lincoln's order as bait for investors, they organized the 'Union Firearms Company' and managed to get some favorable newspaper publicity."

Bruce pointed out that apathy in the War Department, and failure by Stanton to approve the formal requisitions caused delay which was disastrous for Marsh and Gallaher. Financial backing melted away, operations came to a standstill and the delivery of guns was cancelled. Also, when Thaddeus Stevens, acting as legal counsel for the Joslyn Arms Company, served on Marsh and Gallaher a notice of patent infringement, the company collapsed and 1862 ended without a single Marsh breechloader delivered. In fact, not a single Marsh breechloader was ever purchased by the Union government.

From the Lincoln endorsement, mentioned above, it appears that the President acted in good faith, believed in the sincerity and integrity of Marsh and Gallaher, and was willing to extend their contract for a period of twelve months to provide them ample time to make future delivery of the guns in question. Whether Lincoln continued to exhibit such patience is questionable, and there is no evidence that the "Endorsement" was ever re-written or that Lincoln actually ever signed it.

### The American War Cartoons

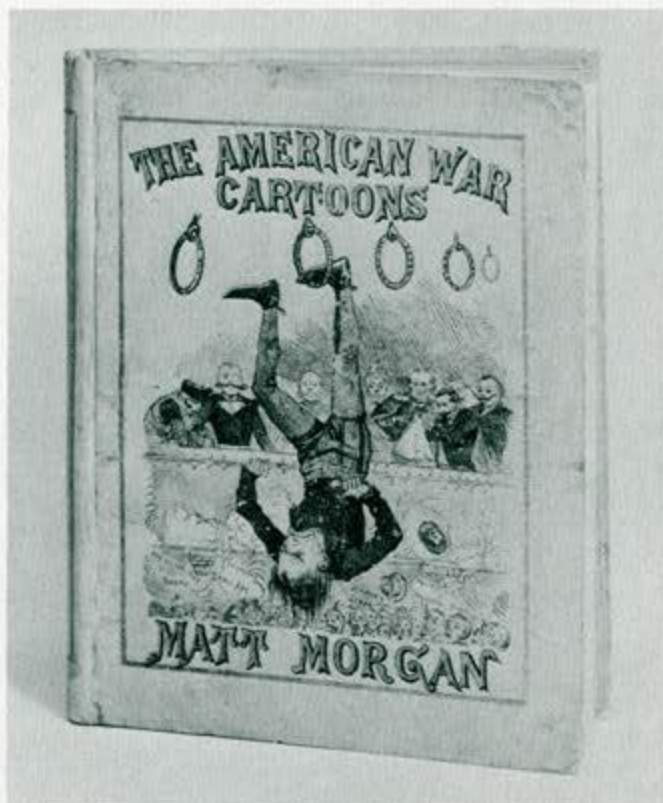
A Lincoln book that has great appeal for the reader is Matt Morgan's *The American War Cartoons*. This book (M 936) was published in 1874 in London by Chatto and Windus. However, that firm name may have been used to add humor to the publication, whose real identity was most likely Savill, Edwards and Co., Printers, Chandos Street, Covent Gardens, London. The title page of the book indicates that "other English artists" also made contributions to this work.

The book contains fifty-five plates along with two smaller cuts. While Lincoln is not a topic in every cartoon plate, he is "treated as a dominant figure of the Civil War" to quote Jay Monaghan's note in his *Lincoln Bibliography 1809-1939*. The Foundation's copy of the 223 page work contains Matt Morgan's autograph pasted on the front end-paper.

The Lincoln cartoons are critical of Lincoln from an English point of view and a statement regarding this attitude appears in the text:

"The earlier Presidents of the United States had in nowise been distinguished for that magnificence, artistic tastes, devotion to beautiful women, or schemes of aggrandizement, which mark patrician rulers. But their courtliness, simple grandeur, dignity, and reproachless private gifts, had many points of resemblance to those of the English country gentleman, who therefore approved deeply if not loudly of his contemporary type.

"When, therefore, a man like Abraham Lincoln stood in the place of Washington, Jefferson, and Adams, a plain rugged man of whom many of his countrymen but ironically approved, he was inevitably



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

Pictorial cover of Matt Morgan's book picturing what is perhaps his most popular Lincoln cartoon. Opposite the plate (November, 1862) appears this comment: "The prospects of the U. S. Government had never hitherto been so gloomy.

"The ill will of every Continental power was at its height, and the successive steps of President Lincoln from the early days of Brag and Buncombe, through those of suspension of specie payments and that magnificent temporary maiming, Emancipation, — brought him — it would seem — on the verge of Utter Ruin.

"One Olmar, a gymnast, had caused a 'sensation' by substituting for Sand's 'sucker-shoes,' a line of rings, by inserting his feet alternately into which he could cross a hall, head downwards.

"This perilous *traverse*, the President is executing to the plaudits of his fellow-countrymen, but amidst the hostile glances of the plotting sovereigns of Europe. They cordially echo the fear of Abe the Acrobat: "Geerusalem! guess I'll smash myself—and them, too!"

fitted to be the butt of the wittlings who hang on the skirts of the aristocracy.

"Mr. Morgan was consequently in no danger of incurring reproof in England when he caricatured the martyr President as a gross and monstrous incubus oppressing Columbia."

The above statement had reference to a cartoon dated September, 1864. A cartoon dated April, 1865, the last one of the series, reveals a different appraisal of the merit and ability of the President. The cartoon depicts Lincoln reaching for the cup of victory while a dagger is being thrust into his back. The accompanying statement follows:

"To be slain in the moment of triumph has always been regarded as the most apt commentary on the antique *memento mori*.

"After time had amply proven that Abraham Lincoln might be considered, almost on account of his gifts not being exceptional, the best man who could have held the helm of the ship of State in such tempestuous weather upon a sea of Revolution—he was assassinated by a fanatic.

"For once the artist pictures unbiassed truth.

"With his hand on the refreshing Cup of Victory, for which the whole nation with him had been athirst, the ruler whose sterling good sense and unflinching urbanity under the burden of a vast domain to which the realms of Alexander and Napoleon were but as kitchen gardens had become proverbial, was snatched away. The revulsion of feeling abroad at the news of this tragedy was immense. The veil was torn from all eyes, and the Star of Empire shone in the West with an unflecked radiance which has never since worn a cloud."



## Lincoln Medallion

Sponsored by The American Numismatic  
And Archaeological Society  
New York, 1866

Shortly after President Abraham Lincoln's assassination, the American Numismatic and Archaeological Society resolved that "a medal, creditable alike to its distinguished subject and to the Society, should be struck." The idea of the issuance of such a medal originated with I. F. Wood and the motion was sponsored by F. H. Morton. Emil Sigel, after considerable deliberation, was selected to cut the die and strike the medals.

Due to the unusual thickness and great relief of his medallion there was considerable delay in production. It was almost impossible in 1866 to find a sufficiently powerful press to strike the medal. The *Proceedings of The American Numismatic and Archaeological Society* (1900-1901) states, "Only sixteen impressions in bronze had been struck when the dies were broken so badly as to necessitate the abandonment of striking any more in hard metal."

A conflicting statement is made by Robert P. King of Erie, Pennsylvania whose compilations of Lincoln medals under the title "Lincoln In Numismatics" appeared in the February, 1924 issue of *The Numismatist*. King wrote that the dies were cut in 1866 by Emil Sigel and the medal was subscribed for by the members of the American Numismatic Society, but owing to the difficulty in striking a medal cut in such high relief, requiring at the time nearly a whole day's work by two men, the contracting party lost so much money that but few medals were delivered to the subscribers. All the medals were struck upon remarkably thick planchets. "Sixteen were struck in white metal, when the die broke."

According to Andrew C. Zabriskie, whose article "The Medallion History of Abraham Lincoln" was published in the *Proceedings of The American Numismatic and Archaeological Society* (1900-1901), "A new die was made differing slightly from the first on the obverse, but on the reverse it differs in that the word 'Acts' was omitted from the inscription, reading simply 'IN MEMORY OF THE LIFE AND DEATH OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN.'" According to Robert P. King, "No medals are known to have been struck from this die. It is in the Society's collection of dies and dated 1867."

The medallion (K 244) is described by King as follows:

"Obv. clothed, bearded bust of Lincoln facing right, cut in very high relief. Inscription, 'SALVATOR PATRIAE.' Below the bust, in small letters, the die-sinker's name, 'EMIL SIGEL FECIT.' Rev., a laurel wreath enclosing the inscription in eight lines, 'IN MEMORY OF THE LIFE ACTS AND DEATH OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN BORN FEBRUARY 12, 1809 DIED APRIL 15, 1865.' Entwined with the wreath is a ribbon inscribed PUB. BY THE AMERICAN NUMISMATIC AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEW YORK 1866. Copper, white metal. Size 83 mm."

In the Lincoln Library-Museum is to be found both the bronze and the white metal medallions as described above. However, due to conflicting statements by Zabriskie and King we are uncertain as to the number struck in the two metals. Furthermore, we are at a loss to know how to classify a similar bronze medal as to size, thickness and high relief but with the name of the sculptor deleted. There appears to be one other difference; the composition of the metal. The one bearing Sigel's name has a beautiful sheen and presents a perfect metallic composition; whereas the one without the Sigel name has a rough, porous surface, and would never attain the high polish of the original piece.

King mentions in his description of the medal, "Some later impressions . . . were struck on planchets previously cast in form to lessen the danger of breaking the dies, as well as to reduce the amount of labor." Perhaps the medal without the sculptor's name is a product of this procedure.

Reductions have also been made of the Sigel medallion. One is described by King (no. 252) as "measuring 35½ mm and appearing in silver, copper and white metal." The obverse and reverse dies were cut in England "so as to show the work of a reducing machine in copying from the original medal of size 83 mm." These reduced medals were not sponsored by the American Numismatic Society and the name of the sculptor does not appear. The dies were made in England by Wyons, a noted London firm of engravers and die makers.

Another reduction of the original medallion (K 288) appears in silver, copper and white metal and measures 16 mm. The dies were cut by William Wyon of London. Likewise a smaller reduction is listed by King (289 and 290). The size is 7 mm. and the first appears in silver and copper while the latter appears in silver, copper and white metal. These were featured by William Wyon as the smallest reduction of the largest medal. King did not make clear the difference between K 289 and K 290 except for the fact that K 290 appears in white metal.

