



Lincoln Lore

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THE PLOT TO STEAL THE LINCOLN CORPSE

Lincoln Lore, Number 792, June 12, 1944

Editor's Note: The publication of *The Chicago Tribune* article of November 8, 1876 relative to "The Attempt To Steal Lincoln's Body" in *Lincoln Lore*, Number 1609, March, 1972 has lead to considerable correspondence.

Many of our subscribers do not have the early number of *Lincoln Lore* written by Louis A. Warren, Number 792, June 12, 1944, entitled "The Plot To Steal The Lincoln Corpse," which was cited as a reference. For this reason it is reprinted in this issue.

R. G. M.

There are few incidents connected with the final disposition of Lincoln's remains which are of more human interest than the plot to steal the corpse. Although most students of Lincoln have a vague idea of the episode, the development of the plans and the frustration of the effort are not so easily called to mind.

A band of counterfeiters was found operating in Illinois during the latter part of 1875. It was discovered that an expert engraver by the name of Benjamin Boyd was making the plates from which the money originated, and it was thought if he would be apprehended, the gang could be broken up. It was also discovered that a printing press, owned and operated by a certain Dr. Driggs, was being used to strike off the currency. His press was discovered in a freight house at Clinton, Illinois, but it was soon removed and traced to its destination.

A plan was laid by the officers to arrest the engraver and printer at the same time, although they were operating in different towns. The United States Secret Service men had made Fulton their base of attack, and Capt. Patrick D. Tyrrell and John McDonald remained there to arrest Boyd, while Chief Elmer Washburn proceeded to Centralia to pick up Driggs. The engraver was found in his workshop in a deserted storehouse, near the river at Fulton, and a telegram was sent to Washburn, who immediately captured Driggs in a secret room in the top story of a building in Centralia, where he had set up his press.

Boyd and Driggs were tried on October 21, 1875, and both were found guilty, and sentenced. The former and the more important one of the pair was sent to Joliet to serve his term.

The salesmen for the gang, who dealt in the worthless money, were Terrence Mullen and Jack Hughes. Their chief locality for the distribution of the goods was Chicago. Running short of funds after the arrest of their accomplices, and with their engraver now in prison, they began to discuss plans to have him released.

There is some evidence that they first conceived of their weird plot at Lincoln, Illinois, in a saloon on Pulaski Street. Possibly their presence in a town, named after the martyred president, and which he is said to have christened with a watermelon, may have suggested the possibility of stealing the lamented Lincoln's body and holding it as a ransom for the release of Boyd.

Before their plan became mature, they had raised their bounty and not only were they to demand the release of Boyd, but also ask for a cash settlement of \$200,000, to boot. Possibly as they visualized this amount of cash, the release of Boyd may have become a secondary matter. Their plans were to remove the body from the tomb at Springfield, and transport it to the Sand Dunes of Indiana. There they intended to deposit it in a secluded place

between two trees where the wind would so blow the sand that the traces of their own presence there would be obscured, and the body preserved until it would be redeemed by the payment of the funds.

Soon after the arrest and conviction of their confederates, Mullen and Hughes were suspected of their part in the counterfeiting enterprise, and Lewis C. Swegles, a detective, was ordered to shadow the pair. He did such an excellent job that they soon made him their confidant, and revealed enough of their plans so that he was invited to assist them after he had left the impression that he had some experience in snatching bodies.

The date set for the raid in Springfield was November 7th, 1876. The election of President Hayes occurred on that day, and it was contemplated that election night would be an ideal time for the effort. In the meantime Swegles had kept his other detective associates acquainted with what he knew about the proceedings. At the appointed time not only Mullen, Hughes and Swegles boarded a Chicago train for Springfield, but Capt. P. D. Tyrrell, John McDonald, and a force of detectives also found quarters in the sleeping car of the train, while the three confederates occupied the smoker. Just before the Springfield station was reached, the officers were let off in the freight yards without any suspicions aroused on the part of the counterfeiters.

Upon reaching Springfield, the part each one of the three men was to play in the abduction was assigned. Hughes was to go immediately to the tomb and make a survey of the situation. Mullen had the task of providing the necessary tools, and Swegles, the detective, was to be responsible for transportation of the body by securing a vehicle which he assured he could acquire.

An interesting detail about the arrangements called for the wrapping of the tools used in an old newspaper which they felt sure those discovering the empty crypt would preserve as evidence. A part of the front page of the paper was ingeniously torn off through the title and date. This was to be sent to Boyd in the penitentiary so that he might prove he was in touch with the kidnapers, and with the payment of the ransom money could produce the body.

In the preliminary plans of the plot, the detective, Swegles, was supposed to act as a watchman on the outside of the tomb. This would give him an opportunity to signal the other secret service men hiding in the registration room of the monument, when the time was ripe to catch the culprits in the act of robbing the grave. At the last moment, however, Swegles was given a lamp to hold within the crypt. It was not until the marble sarcophagus had been mutilated, the end and part of the top removed, and the casket holding the body partly pulled from the stone receptacle that Swegles was free to signal. He was sent for the vehicle, but instead notified the secret service men.

As soon as Swegles left on his supposed errand for the horse and wagon, Hughes and Mullen hid in some nearby bushes to await the return of Swegles. They had just reached their hiding place when they saw the group of detectives rush around the monument and enter the tomb. Of course the officers found no grave robbers present.

The counterfeiters, now conscious that their plans were known, made their escape.

Several days after the failure of their plot, they were arrested in Chicago and brought to Springfield for trial. The law at that time provided no penalty for an attempt to steal a dead body, so a charge of burglary was entered against them, and they were sent to the penitentiary for a year.

It is of interest to note that the Pinkerton detective agency, which warned Lincoln of the Baltimore plot to assassinate him on the way to the inauguration, and which became invaluable to the government during the hostilities, conclude their services to the martyred Lincoln by frustrating the plans of those who would steal his corpse.

Viewing Lincoln's Remains

Editor's Note: According to the custodians of the Lincoln tomb, the remains of the Sixteenth President have been moved some seventeen different times since the body was first placed in a receiving vault at the Oak Ridge Cemetery, at Springfield, Illinois, on May 4, 1865. The construction of the temporary vault, the erection of the Lincoln Monument, the abortive attempt to steal the body and the numerous repairs and reconstructions of the deteriorating, original monument are largely responsible for the many secret movements of the Lincoln corpse.

It would be expected that in the attempt to find a permanent and safe resting place for Lincoln's remains there would be the urge to open the casket, to satisfy a morbid curiosity, to make sure the remains were secure and to put an end to the many rumors that Lincoln's body was no longer in the tomb. However, it is surprising to learn that Lincoln's casket was opened five different times during the years from 1865 to 1901.

This information, relative to the viewing of Lincoln's remains, has been compiled from John C. Power's book, *History Of An Attempt To Steal The Body Of Abraham Lincoln . . .*, which includes among its interesting topics, "A History of the Lincoln Guard of Honor"; the magazine article (*Week By Week*, August 19, 1933), "Burials and Removals of Lincoln," by Herbert Wells Fay; "Beholding Lincoln's Face For The Last Time" in *Lincoln Lore*, No. 1338, November 29, 1954; and numerous clippings and letters in the Foundation's subject files.

December 21, 1865

Lincoln's coffin was opened in order that the features of the deceased might be seen and identified before placing the body in an especially constructed temporary vault, prior to the erection of a National Lincoln Monument. Six of Lincoln's personal acquaintances, R. J. Oglesby, O. H. Miner, Jesse K. Dubois, Newton Bateman, O. M. Hatch and D. L. Phillips, filed a written statement with the Secretary of the National Lincoln Monument Association that the body was that of Abraham Lincoln.

September 19, 1871

Preparatory to moving the body from the temporary vault to the partially completed monument, in 1871, the remains were taken out of the original coffin because the lead lining was broken, and put into one made of iron. After depositing the remains in the Monument, the six personal friends who identified the remains on December 21, 1865, again viewed them and certified in writing that they were the remains of the Sixteenth President.

October 9, 1874

After the stone sarcophagus was constructed, it was found that the iron coffin, with the lid projecting over the ends, was too long to go into the interior area. A solution to the problem was to place Lincoln's body in a red cedar coffin that was heavily lined with lead. Hon. D. L. Phillips, a member of the National Lincoln Monument Association, was present when the newly constructed casket was placed in the sarcophagus. However, there was no formal record made of the identity of the remains, but Mr. Phillips, Thomas C. Smith, the undertaker and Col. Babcock, who put the lead lining in the coffin, all distinctly recognized the features as those of the Sixteenth President.

April 14, 1887

In order to definitely and finally deposit the body of Lincoln within the tomb, a pit was excavated in the interior of the monument for the remains of the President and Mrs. Lincoln, who died on July 16, 1882. It was decided by the members of the National Lincoln Monument Association that, "in order to satisfy the reasonable expectations of the people, after so many changes, it was indispensably necessary to identify the body of the President."

The undertaker, Mr. Thomas C. Smith, who made the red cedar coffin, was requested to open the casket, which he did. Then a piece of the lead lining, about a foot square, was cut on three sides and turned back, exposing



The Allentown (Pennsylvania) Morning Call of Monday, February 25, 1933, used this artist's drawing to illustrate an article entitled "Last Man to See Face Of Lincoln Tells Story." The drawing carried the following outline: "The President's features were well preserved and he appeared just as he did in pictures I had seen." The article is based on the reminiscence of Charles L. Willey.

the familiar features to the eighteen or nineteen persons present, nearly all of whom had personally seen the President in real life. "There was not one who expressed the slightest doubt that he was looking at the features of the beloved President. They were almost as perfect as they are in the bronze statue on the Monument, and the color is about as dark as the statue.

"After being exposed fifteen or twenty minutes, the lead coffin was closed and soldered air tight by the plumber, Mr. Leon P. Hopkins, of Springfield, who as a natural consequence, was the last man (on that date) to look on the face of Abraham Lincoln. The bodies were then conveyed from Memorial Hall to the Catacomb, and there buried.

"The following is a copy of the statement made and signed by the members present of the Lincoln Monument Association:

"We, the undersigned members of the Lincoln Monument Association, of Springfield, Illinois, do hereby certify, that on the 4th day of April, 1887, we saw the cedar and lead coffins, which contain the remains of Abraham Lincoln, opened in our presence in the Memorial Hall of the Monument. The remains were somewhat shrunken, but the features were quite natural, and we could readily recognize them as the features of the former illustrious President of our Nation, and our former friend and fellow citizen. We do hereby certify that they are his remains, and that they were again re-sealed in said coffins and deposited in the vault beneath the floor of the catacomb in our presence.

James C. Conkling,
Ozias M. Hatch,
George N. Black,
John W. Bunn,
Lincoln Dubois,
Christopher C. Brown."

September 26, 1901

With the turn of the century, it was found necessary to rebuild the Lincoln tomb. The foundation was not secure and considerable moisture accumulated between the veneer and the sustaining wall of the obelisk. Freezing temperatures caused the outer granite blocks to be thrown out of alignment.

With the reconstruction of the Lincoln tomb in 1900-1901, all the Lincoln bodies were placed in a temporary vault nearby and were under guard the entire time of the project. In April, 1901, the bodies were again brought back into the monument. Mrs. Lincoln's remains and those of other members of the family were placed in crypts provided for them. Mr. Lincoln's remains were taken on September 26, 1901, to Memorial Hall and, in the presence of about twenty-five people, they were viewed and positively identified as those of the Sixteenth President.

Among those viewing Lincoln's remains were, Hon. John H. Breholt, Acting Governor of the State; Hon. James S. McCullough, State Auditor; Hon. Moses O.

Williamson, State Treasurer; Hon. Joseph H. Freeman, Superintendent of Public Instruction; Hon. Jacob Thompson, Assistant Superintendent of Public Instruction; General Jasper N. Reece, Adjutant General of the State; Hon. B. D. Monroe, Assistant Attorney General of the State; Hon. Clinton L. Conkling; Hon. George N. Black; Col. Edward S. Johnson; Major Walter Robbins; Col. J. S. Culver, the rebuilder of the monument; Joseph P. Lindley; Mrs. Edward S. Johnson; Mrs. Alfred Bayliss; and a young son of the above named Joseph P. Lindley. Perhaps one or two others were present whose names are not now remembered.

Again the lead casket was sealed by Leon P. Hopkins and his assistant, Charles L. Willey, as it had been in 1871, and taken to the north room of the tomb. An excavation was made six feet from the north wall, twelve feet below the floor. The bottom of the pit was filled with two feet of concrete. Upon this was placed a steel cage. The coffin, rough box and all were then deposited within the steel frame and a steel cover was then riveted thereon. Liquid cement was next poured over the steel caged box filling all the vacant space and masonry was built to the top of the ground. Next, a few inches of soil was placed over it, leaving a four foot space between the concrete and the floor. So today, the body is enclosed in tons of iron, stone and cement ten feet below the floor and six feet south of the north inside wall. (See *Lincoln Lore*, Numbers 1502 (April, 1963) and 1503 (May, 1963) for story, "Postscript To The Life Magazine Article, 'What Happened To Lincoln's Body.'")

Editor's Note: It was not necessary to move Mr. Lincoln's body in the 1931 reconstruction of the Lincoln tomb.

The Gothic Chairs In Lincoln's Cabinet Room

Editor's Note: In my research for this short article, I wish to acknowledge the help of Bert Sheldon of Washington, D.C., who was successful in securing the assistance of Ehmer S. Atkins, Assistant Director of White House Liaison, of the National Park Service. In the writing of this sketch, I relied heavily upon the Meeks invoice discovered by

Margaret Brown Klaphor, Assistant Curator of Political History in the Smithsonian Institution's Museum of History and Technology, and the research of Robert Marshall, Curator of the National Capital Parks, National Park Service of Washington, D.C.

R. G. M.

In the painting by Francis H. Carpenter (later engraved by A. H. Ritchie) entitled "The First Reading Of The Emancipation Proclamation Before The Cabinet," considerable emphasis was given by the artist to the chairs in the Lincoln cabinet room. The same emphasis has also been noted in various contemporary photographs and sketches of the Lincoln cabinet room, particularly an 1864 drawing by C. K. Stellwagon which illustrates all twelve of the cabinet chairs.

Many people have erroneously assumed that these Gothic Revival styled chairs, attributed to J. and J. W. Meeks, New York City cabinetmakers, were purchased during the Lincoln administration. The Meeks chairs have also been confused with the Gothic chairs made by A. & F. Roux in 1848. (See advertisement in July, 1967, issue of *Antiques Magazine*.) For further information, see an article in *Antiques Magazine*, February, 1968, entitled "Alexander Roux and his Plain and Artistic Furniture," pages 210-218.

The Meeks firm (1797-1868) delivered to the White House, during the James K. Polk administration, twelve black walnut Gothic chairs as recorded in the Records of Receipts and Expenditures of the United States, General Treasury Account (National Archives) (No. 96) 137, voucher No. 45, dated October 26, 1846 and January 9, 1847. This invoice was discovered by Margaret Brown Klaphor. The invoice follows:

	(dollars)
Chairs	96.
(Not the Lincoln cabinet chairs)	
12 boxes for do	4.
1847 Jan. 9 — 12 BW Gothic Chairs	96.
12 boxes do	4.

10

200.

One of the remaining "Lincoln Cabinet" side chairs in the White House has been described by V. Craig, Museum



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

The Ritchie engraving of the Carpenter painting, "The First Reading Of The Emancipation Proclamation Before The Cabinet," reveals, in whole or in part, five of the black walnut Gothic Revival style chairs which were purchased by the government in 1847 and were utilized as cabinet chairs in the 1860's.



Photograph from the National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

Lincoln cabinet chair, one of four presently in the White House, attributed to J. and J. W. Meeks, New York City cabinetmakers. The seat was upholstered in green velvet in 1962. The chair is rather classical in line, but is embellished with such Gothic elements as trefoil cutouts in the crest rail and pointed arches in the back. This type of chair was frequently seen in America during the second quarter of the Nineteenth Century.

Curator, National Park Service, "as having upholstered seat and open back. Front legs flat with rounded fronts, shaped in reverse ogee curves without feet, rear legs canted in sabre curve. The upholstered seat is rectangular with slightly bowed front. Upholstery material is attached to the upper part of flat plain seat rails. The open back is supported by cyma-curved side uprights and three similar curved center uprights. The center uprights are separated at the top by pointed arches cut into the top rail in the Gothic style. The top rail is flat and has three trefoils cut into it. The top of the rail curves slightly outward."

We can conclude from the information compiled by Robert Marshall, Curator of the National Capital Parks Office, entitled "Joseph Meeks and Sons" that these chairs predate the Lincoln era and were used in the White House previous to that administration. Other similar chairs, of the same form and origin, have been brought to the attention of the White House Curator and the Brooklyn Museum also has identical chairs.

Connoisseurs of fine furniture are familiar with the firm of Joseph Meeks and Sons and articles concerning their work are to be found in *Antiques Magazine*, April, 1964, entitled "The Meeks Family of Cabinetmakers" and the July, 1966, issue entitled "More on the Meeks Cabinetmakers."

Was Lincoln A Rosicrucian?

Was Abraham Lincoln an adherent of a movement, dating back to the Seventeenth Century, that was devoted to esoteric wisdom? Was he a member of the *Order of the Rose* along with Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, John Brown and William Lloyd Garrison to name a few Americans claimed by the

Order? The Rosicrucians think Lincoln was not only a member of their Order, but that he held a seat in their World Council and that he played an important role as a member of the Council of Three.

In a three volume work entitled *The Book of Rosicruciae* by R. Swinburne Clymer, M. D., The Philosophical Publishing Company, "Beverly Hall", Quakertown, Pennsylvania, 1947, a biographical sketch of Abraham Lincoln appears in volume two, pages 173-174, in which the statement is made that he was a member of the Great, or World Council and the Council of Three of the Fraternitas and "co-worker, friend and associate of General (Ethan Allen) Hitchcock and (Paschal Beverly) Randolph." The informed reader of the biographical sketch is surprised to read that Lincoln was "born in Hardin County, Ky., February 12, 1800 (1809)."

In this three volume work, which is relatively free of documentary facts, the statement is made that, "Lincoln's Gettysburg Address has a place of honor in Oxford University, England, proclaimed by literary critics as the most perfect piece of literature ever written in the English language." This statement is, of course, erroneous and Oxford University has in times past issued a form letter to deny the statement.

Under the heading of "American Members Of The Councils Of Three And Seven — The Peerless Trio," a garbled statement is made that, "The three highest ranking members in the Western World (North America, Central America and South America, and the Isles of the sea), and who composed the *Council of Three* during the critical period of the pre-beginning formation of the American *Dome*, were first: John Temple, General Hitchcock and Dr. Randolph, the Supreme Grand Master, and later, when John Temple temporarily took the seat as Acting Supreme Grand Master in the absence of Dr. Randolph; General Hitchcock and Abraham Lincoln (seat of the Council in Washington). The Council continued active until the death of the President."

A further statement as to Lincoln's role as a Rosicrucian official follows: "President Lincoln possessed no directive, authoritative power, due to his public office, and was under the Law of Silence . . . Abraham Lincoln, General Hitchcock and Dr. Randolph were known as *The Peerless Trio*, or *Unshakable Triumvirate*."

To be sure, Major General Ethan Allen Hitchcock (1798-1870), a grandson of the leader of the Green Mountain Boys, was "an intimate of . . . Abraham Lincoln" and the many communications of Lincoln addressed to the general, who was commissioner for the exchange of prisoners, which appear in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* attest to their association. It is also known that Hitchcock wrote many literary works, "devoting himself to general literature and the peculiar philosophical investigations which had for years occupied his thoughts." The biographical sketch of Hitchcock appearing in Ezra J. Warner's book, *Generals In Blue*, is much more inclusive than the one which appears in *The Book Of Rosicruciae*, which deals with Hitchcock's preoccupation with the "perfection of Man" and his "Unity with Divine nature."

Paschal Beverly Randolph (1825-1875), Supreme Grand Master of the *Fraternitas Rosae Crucis*; Brotherhood, Order, Temple and Fraternity of the *Rosy Cross* and Hierarch of *Imperial Eulis* does not seem to appear within the focus of the Lincoln administration. There are no letters, no reminiscences, no authentic references connecting the lives of the two men.

How can historians be expected to believe that Abraham Lincoln was a Rosicrucian? There are no membership certificates, no statements by the President, no references in Lincolniana to the *Order of the Rose*, in fact, nothing of dates or documentary records, and even the biographical sketch of the President appearing in *The Book Of Rosicruciae* gives an incorrect birth date and is taken up with the folklore about Oxford University and the Gettysburg Address (most of the legends refer to the Bixby letter).

Lincoln was undoubtedly interested in the wisdom of the ages, but he was no joiner of a group which considered its members among the intellectual elite.