



Lincoln Lore

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RECENT ACQUISITIONS

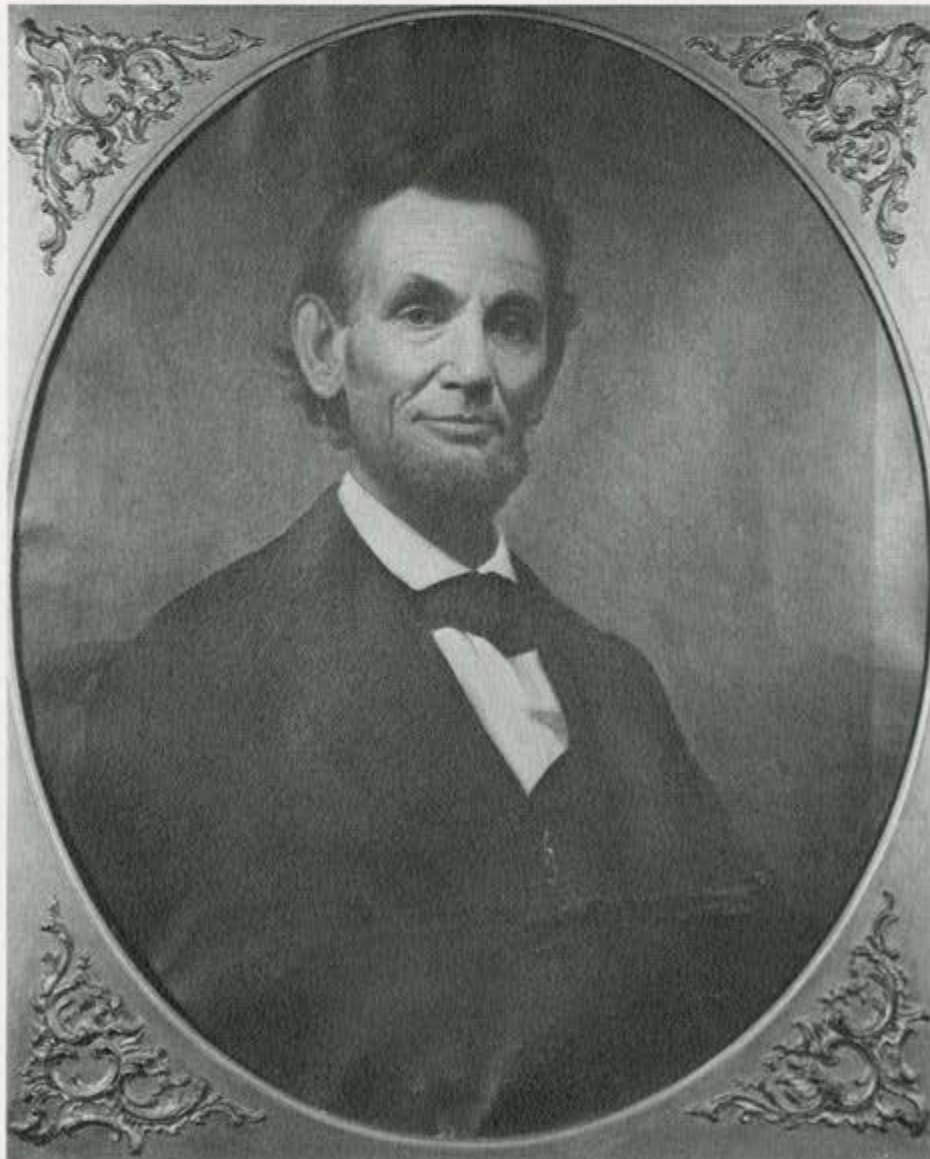
Collecting Lincolniana began with Abraham Lincoln's nomination for the Presidency in 1860. "You request an autograph, and here it is," the nominee wrote to early-bird autograph collectors. Some recognized the value of historic sites very early as well. Dr. George Rodman purchased Lincoln's birthplace cabin in March, 1861. The President's assassination four years later gave further impetus to the collecting spirit. Many people badgered Lincoln's acquaintances for souvenir letters from the martyred President. Among them was Charles Henry Hart, an eighteen-year-old law student at the University of Pennsylvania. His letter of December 27, 1865, to William H. Herndon, requesting an autograph of his late law partner, was the beginning of one of the earliest Lincoln collections.

The demand for Lincolniana is now well over a hundred years old, and it continues to be strong. Given Abraham Lincoln's prominence in American history, it is no surprise. What is surprising is the continuing availability of fine items of Lincolniana. This *Lincoln Lore* shows some of the interesting materials which have recently found their way into the collection of the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum.

A particularly enjoyable recent acquisition is the oil painting of Lincoln on the cover of this issue. Executed by Charles Wesley Jarvis in 1865, the portrait was obviously based on a photograph of Lincoln taken by Alex-

ander Gardner in 1865. Formerly thought to be Lincoln's last photographic sitting, this picture is now believed to have been taken in February rather than April. Jarvis reversed the portrait so that the part in Lincoln's hair appears on the right instead of the left side. It is not a clumsy reversal, however, for Jarvis kept the distinctive mole on Lincoln's right cheek on the proper side of his head. The artist also supplied a bit more sparkle and animation than the original photograph did. Jarvis retained the near-smile and made Lincoln's eyes slightly less heavy-lidded.

The existence of the Jarvis portrait has been well known since Rufus Rockwell Wilson published *Lincoln in Portraiture* (New York: Press of the Pioneers) in 1935. At that time it was in the collection of Harry MacNeill Bland. It passed from Bland to a gallery in New York and from that gallery to the father of the man from whom the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum obtained it. Rufus Rockwell Wilson stated flatly that the Jarvis portrait "was one of the last likenesses of Lincoln painted from life." Unfortunately, there is not a scrap of evidence to support his assertion. Charles Wesley Jarvis, the son of artist John Wesley Jarvis, was a prominent portraitist in New York City, but he does not appear to have had connections in the political circles which often brought artists to Lincoln's White House. One searches in vain for evidence that an intermediary like



From the Louis A. Warren
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FIGURE 1. Oil painting of Lincoln by Charles Wesley Jarvis.



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FIGURE 2. Emancipation Proclamation lithograph.

Owen Lovejoy, who helped Francis B. Carpenter, or Gideon Welles, who commissioned Matthew Wilson, introduced Jarvis to the President. The details in the painting seem to be slavishly copied from the photograph on which the painting is based. Despite Wilson's assertion, the Jarvis portrait of Lincoln remains a pleasing example of the many portraits produced shortly after Lincoln's assassination.

When Louis A. Warren began gathering the collection which forms the heart of the library and museum now named for him, he used a sum of money left over from the purchase of Daniel Fish's book collection to obtain a large Lincoln print collection. Over the years, he and R. Gerald McMurtry added prints to the collection, and it now contains thousands of Lincoln prints. The number of Lincoln prints produced over the years is staggering, however, and it is still possible to make significant additions to this already very substantial collection. A recent example is the Gilman R. Russell lithograph of the Emancipation Proclamation. Lithographed by P.S. Duval & Son of Philadelphia and published by Russell, this highly decorative edition of the most important document of the Lincoln administration is one of fifty-two editions listed in Charles Eberstadt's *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation* (New York: Duschnes Crawford, 1950).

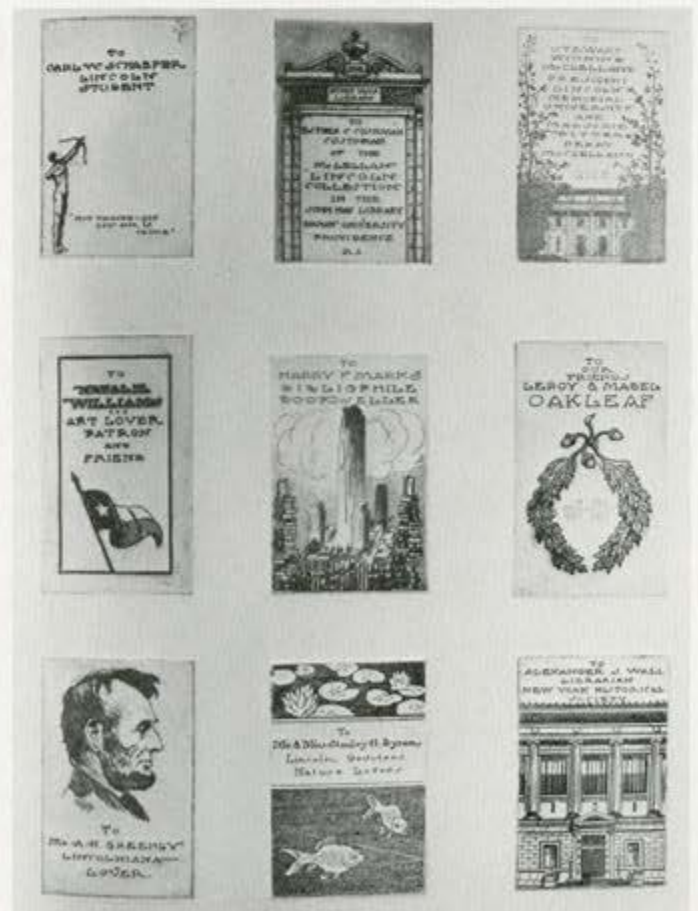
Acquiring this print brought some random observations to mind. First, the large number of print editions of the Emancipation Proclamation serves as a reminder that this document was deemed the great document of Lincoln's administration. It may have been written, as Richard Hofstadter said, "with all the moral grandeur of a bill of lading," but it did initiate the freeing of over three million people. There are no similar decorative editions of the Gettysburg Address printed in Lincoln's day, though that document is today far better known than the Emancipation Proclamation. Second, there is something special about the prints and facsimiles of the Emancipation Proclamation. The heart-stopping prices asked for them today are proof of this if nothing else is. Eberstadt's book alone is worth upwards of \$100. To be sure, the Proclamation is a great document, in an epoch-making class with the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. But there is another factor. Because the

original draft of the Proclamation burned in the Chicago fire, these are as close as one can get to the original, and this seems to make them even more desirable. Third, collecting Lincolniana requires persistence. The Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum does not yet own half the number of lithographed and engraved editions of the Emancipation Proclamation listed by Eberstadt.

Rare books suit practically every Lincoln collector's taste. In fact, most of the great Lincoln collectors were primarily book collectors. What is often overlooked is the fact that most Lincoln books are not rare. Lincoln lived in an era of mass production, at least insofar as printed materials are concerned. Many collectors' rarities were meant to be rare from the start; that is, their makers consciously defied mass production to produce instant rarities. Bernhardt Wall's book, *The Odyssey of the Etcher of Books*, is a prime instance of this form of rare book.

Bernhardt Wall was a somewhat eccentric etcher who, from 1931 to 1942, followed Lincoln's trail across the country to produce *Following Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1865*. This 85-volume set, originally costing \$500, contained etchings of nearly every building with which Lincoln was even remotely associated. He produced many other etched books as well and was much in demand as a maker of handsome and distinctive etched bookplates. In 1945 Wall, then over seventy years old, turned out eight trial copies of *The Odyssey of the Etcher of Books*, which he sold for \$125 a copy. He considered the book an "inventory" of his professional life. He selected the best etchings of his thirty-year career to reproduce in *The Odyssey*.

Figure 3 shows one of the pages of *The Odyssey*. The leather-bound volume contains the title pages of many of Wall's obscure works, *Following Andrew Jackson* and *Following Marquis de Lafayette*, for example. It shows his interest in California, Texas, military preparedness, handmade paper, and dogs. Lincoln, of course, dominates the subject matter of the plates in this beautiful autobiographical work. This copy of the book belonged to George Truman Carl. The page shown here (Figure 3) has dedications to some Lincoln students and collectors whose names will be



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FIGURE 3. Part of Bernhardt Wall's *Odyssey*.

Dear Charles:

I have read your book on Lincoln. It is a book for boys and girls of all ages, as Mark Twain says of his *Prince and Pauper*. That is to say, it is a book for me: I am one of "the boys" and I enjoyed your book immensely. It is simply fine, just the thing. I congratulate you on making such a hit.

Affectionately,
Lew,

Feb 11 1909

FIGURE 4. Lew Wallace's letter about a juvenile Lincoln book.

From the Louis A. Warren
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recognizable to many readers of *Lincoln Lore*.

Manuscripts remain the best items that any institution or individual can collect. With manuscripts, rarity is not even a question: every one is unique. The current mania for manuscript Americana (which has, in substantial degree, accounted for the booming success of certain New York auction houses) shows that the impulse to collect autographs is as keen as it was in Charles Henry Hart's day. Indeed, with the advent of the telephone for handling sensitive subjects, old manuscripts seem increasingly valuable for their candid and frank discussions of topics that modern politicians never put on paper. Likewise, the autopen, the typewriter, and photocopying make the old handwritten letters increasingly valuable because of their reliability and intimate connection with the historical figures who produced them. The advent of the "paperless office" with its ephemeral memos that exist only for a few moments on a computer terminal's screen gives the modern collector the feeling that the supply of manuscripts — worthwhile ones, anyway — is definitely finite. And the sickening decline in the modern world's ability to use words makes the words of a genuinely literate era like the nineteenth century seem most precious.

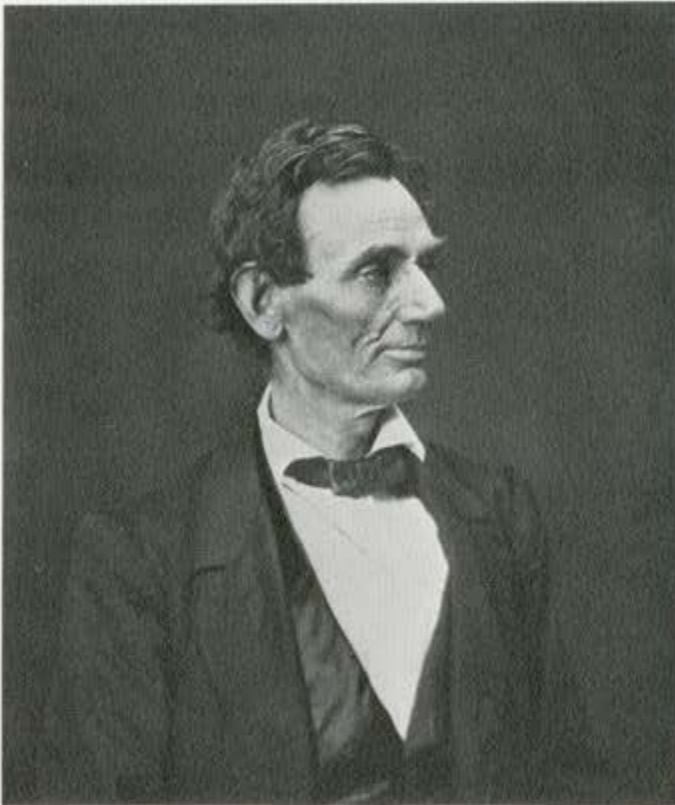
Among the many letters acquired recently by this institution is the charming one pictured in Figure 4. In it, Lew Wallace, the author of *Ben Hur*, congratulates the author of a book on Lincoln for young readers. Wallace was a Hoosier, and the recipient of the letter was doubtless Charles W. Moores, at one time the president of the Indianapolis Board of School Commissioners. Moores wrote *The Life of Abraham Lincoln for Boys and Girls*, published by Houghton Mifflin in January, 1909. The book was as well received by reviewers of children's literature as by Wallace and formed part of Houghton Mifflin's distinguished Riverside Literature Series.

The problem with collecting manuscripts is, to be blunt, money. In a recent catalogue from a Massachusetts dealer, two Lincoln letters were listed. A two-page letter about John Quincy Adams's funeral arrangements, written in 1848, is offered at \$12,500. The dealer asks \$9,500 for a Lincoln letter concerning his difficulties in gaining a patronage job from



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FIGURE 5. John H. Surratt.



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FIGURE 6. Alexander Hesler's photograph of Lincoln.

Zachary Taylor. Dealers view the increasing prices with mixed feelings. To be sure, the value of their stock goes up when prices do. Some dealers, however, worry that too much escalation in price will severely limit their market. To say that manuscripts are a hedge against inflation is to say that their prices rise faster than our incomes. That means fewer and fewer collectors are able to purchase such materials.

For the private collector with limited funds, there are strategies to help with the price problem. The best strategy is to specialize narrowly. Specialization limits the number of desirable manuscripts, and the collector can save his money for those select letters that suit his interest perfectly. It also gives the collector special knowledge which might someday allow him to purchase a manuscript rarer and more valuable than the dealer realizes. Another strategy is take an interest in things related to Lincoln. The Lew Wallace letter brings to mind the appeal of letters by, to, and about Lincoln's biographers. Letters written to Lincoln are important, too. Letters that mention Lincoln often provide valuable insight on the man himself. Buy only unpublished letters. Learn the arcane language of the law and collect legal documents. Some of these are routine, but all help document Lincoln's daily life. And some show his special flair for language. In sum, the collector should think about the problem and adopt some tactic to get around it. Here's a final word of caution: a strategy once adopted should be adhered to with some rigor. The great problem in collecting is proliferating interests — "collector's spread," it might be called.

All Americana is in vogue these days, but no category has risen faster in appeal (or price) than photographs. Once the uncatalogued stepchildren of historical collections, photographs are now much sought after. Although they have the troubling quality of duplicability, they do share with manuscripts the quality of being the real and largely uninterpreted McCoy. Gone are the days when Frederick Hill Meserve, the first great collector of American photographs, bought them by dozens in lots at auctions. Good ones are hard to come by. Figure 5 shows one of two photographs of John Harrison Surratt acquired by the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum this year.

Photographs of Abraham Lincoln are in a class by themselves. If there is a Lincoln collector who has resisted

their lure up to now, that collector will surely succumb after looking at James Mellon's wonderful book, *The Face of Lincoln* (New York: Viking Press, 1979). The book is a steal at \$75.00. The Lincoln photographs, reproduced in very large format by the most sophisticated printing techniques available, are stunning. No one with any appreciation for old photographs can look at the book in silence; it is bound to evoke murmurs of delight, if not louder sounds. The book is the sort that can only be the product of passion, and Mr. Mellon's search for the best existing prints of the photographs pictured could be the subject of a sequel to the book. And it would be as full of adventure as Mr. Mellon's first book, *African Hunter*.

The dust jacket of *The Face of Lincoln* reproduces two of the four photographs of Lincoln taken by Alexander Hesler in Chicago on June 3, 1860. The lamentable history of the original negatives of these photographs illustrates perfectly the problem which prompted the writing of *The Face of Lincoln*. Mr. Mellon sees the book's purpose as archival. He wants to capture for all time the best existing photographs, reproducing them before they deteriorate further with time. George B. Ayres purchased the Hesler plates after the Civil War and made a substantial number of mediocre prints from duplicate negatives. In 1933 someone foolishly mailed the original glass negatives, and they cracked in transit.

Figure 6 shows a superb print of one of the Hesler photographs recently acquired by the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum. Several factors determine the value of a photograph. Rarity of pose is often important. Sometimes the identity of the photographer makes a difference. If those factors are unimportant, then the nearness of the print to the original negative is the most important factor. The Hesler pose is common, and the photographer was merely competent. He was lucky to have a great subject on June 3, 1860, and this collection is lucky to have a print of such clarity, definition, and brilliance as to be certainly very close to the earliest history of that Hesler negative.

This issue of *Lincoln Lore*, more so than most, is an issue for collectors. Naturally, it stresses the more photogenic acquisitions. This has the unfortunate effect of underemphasizing manuscripts, books, and pamphlets. These are, nevertheless, vital parts of this collection, and their underrepresentation in this *Lincoln Lore* does not mean that they are undervalued here. These are also the things dearest to many collectors' hearts. From the "Big Five," who dominated Lincoln collecting at the turn of the century, to many of today's younger collectors, books and manuscripts remain the staples.

The role of collectors in the Lincoln field has always been important. Private collections formed the kernel of most of the great public collections of today. Louis A. Warren began this library by buying Daniel Fish's collection. The Library of Congress acquired Alfred Whital Stern's Lincoln collection, and Governor Henry Horner's collection is the basis of the Illinois State Historical Library's collection. Judd Stewart's collection forms the principal Lincoln holdings of the Henry E. Huntington Library, and Charles W. McLellan's collection was the beginning of Brown University's Lincoln collection. Happily, Lincoln collectors have a tradition of generosity. Sculptors consulted Frederick Meserve's photographs, and Carl Sandburg used Oliver R. Barrett's collection to advantage. This great tradition continues, and *Lincoln Lore's* articles are often aided by information and materials provided by today's private collectors.

Finally, as an antidote to the customarily boastful and exclusive tone of articles on museum acquisitions, one should add a note about "the ones that got away." This collection would have thrilled to add the rare California broadside of the Emancipation Proclamation, signed by Lincoln, which sold recently. The first printing of the Emancipation Proclamation in the South also got away. A rare copy of a satirical book on Benjamin F. Butler, illustrated by Adalbert J. Volck, also went elsewhere. Take heart, collectors, institutions do not always get what they want either, but few of them admit it.