



Lincoln Lore

April, 1982

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Number 1730

Prisons and Politics in the Election of 1864

The Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum recently acquired one of the most curious broadsides of the 1864 Presidential campaign. Printed in Philadelphia, the pro-Lincoln poster contained a statement by a Pennsylvania cavalryman named Franklin Schwenk. Confederates had captured him on March 9, 1864, and he eventually landed in a hospital for prisoners of war in Richmond, Virginia. Schwenk was paroled when, in August, 1864, he promised the director of the hospital that he would go home to vote for George B. McClellan in the upcoming election.

It sounds like rank propaganda, does it not? Given the emphasis in the existing literature on the patriotic excesses of the Union-Republican campaign in 1864, one sniffs in this sheet a typical effort to brand the Democratic nominee with pro-Confederatism. Despite the trappings of officialdom which adorn the soldier's affidavit, the witnesses and the signature of local justice of the peace, one cannot help having a hunch that Franklin Schwenk, if he really existed, lied and that Messrs. Royer, Pannapacker, and Kratz were scheming Republicans.

Research beats hunches in history any day. A check of the *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion* reveals that the Confederate government did at least consider a scheme to parole Union prisoners of war who would vote against Abraham Lincoln in 1864. The idea came from Howell Cobb's fertile brain. Cobb, once a leader of the secession movement in Georgia and now a Confederate major-general in command of the District of Georgia, wrote the letter to the Secretary of War in Richmond:

HEADQUARTERS
GEORGIA RESERVES,
Macon, Ga.,
September 9, 1864.

Hon. JAMES A. SEDDON,
Secretary of War,
Richmond, Va.:

MY DEAR SIR: I was gratified to learn from your letter that you fully concurred in the necessity of an exchange of prisoners. The more I reflect upon it the more important do

I regard the necessity of effecting an exchange upon any terms that can be got. I venture to make another suggestion in the event the Yankees refuse to exchange at all. It is this: To find out all the prisoners (who are privates) who are opposed to Lincoln, and to parole and send them home, at the same time addressing a communication through Ould to their commissioner of exchange, saying that as they had attempted to deceive their people with the statement that we would not agree to a fair exchange, we send these prisoners home on parole as practical evidence of our wishes and views about an exchange. As the Yankees have at different times forwarded

our prisoners without notice or agreement they cannot complain or take exception to our doing the same thing. By this course we accomplish at least three things: First, we get clear of feeding and guarding that many prisoners; second, we give that many votes and influence against Lincoln's election; third, we show the Yankee people that Lincoln is refusing to exchange for political purposes. We effect everything except getting our own prisoners, and that, I think, will follow. With proper efforts the right kind of prisoners could be selected. Only be sure to let no more officers be exchanged. They should be held as hostages for the good treatment of our prisoners. I write in haste to send by private hands, but will add that the feeling in the army and country is improving.

Very truly, your friend,
HOWELL COBB.

Ulysses S. Grant, who realized that superior numbers were the greatest advantage the North possessed, had ended the prisoner exchanges the preceding spring on the theory that each Confederate soldier was more important to the Confederacy than each Union soldier was to the Union. Cobb's letter is one of many proofs that Grant was correct.

Cobb's letter is also proof that Franklin Schwenk's affidavit was not as fantastic as it may sound now. The letter gained careful consideration. Secretary of War Seddon referred it to

A STATEMENT BY A UNION SOLDIER!

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, ss.

Personally appeared before me, a Justice of the Peace in and for the said County, FRANKLIN SCHWENK, of Upper Providence Township, Montgomery County, and State of Pennsylvania, a private of Co. H, 13th Reg't Pennsylvania Cavalry, who, on his solemn oath deposes and says, that on the 9th day of March, 1864, he was taken prisoner near Bristoe Station, Virginia, and conveyed to Belle Isle Prison, and from thence to General Hospital No. 21, in Richmond. That on the last day of August, 1864, the Director of said Hospital waited upon him and proposed to parole him and permit him to return home if he would Vote for GEORGE B. McCLELLAN at the approaching Election. That he, the said Franklin Schwenk, in order to escape from Starvation and Rebel atrocity, did make said promise, and therefore was paroled. The said Franklin Schwenk further says, under his solemn oath, that all the prisoners of said Hospital, who frankly and positively said that they would Vote for ABRAHAM LINCOLN were not paroled, but retained in said Hospital.

BY
FRANKLIN X SCHWENK.
NAME.

WITNESSES PRESENT:
J. WARREN ROYER, M. D.
SAMUEL PANNAACKER.

Sworn and subscribed to before me, the eleventh day of October, 1864.

HENRY W. KRATZ,
Justice of the Peace.

From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 1. Broadside, 12" x 19-1/2".

Colonel Robert Ould, who was the Confederate officer in charge of prisoner exchanges.

SEPTEMBER 14, 1864.

Respectfully returned to the Honorable Secretary of War.

My view of the matter is that we had better send off disabled men and those whose term of service has expired to the extent of the remaining unexchanged Vicksburg men. I doubt the policy of going further. The Yankees will force the men whose term of service has unexpired into the field, regardless of any parole which they may give. They have done so heretofore. If we send more than the Vicksburg capture it will tend to weaken the pressure which is now bearing upon Lincoln, and which, I doubt not, will force him very soon into an exchange. I fully agree as to the policy of retaining officers (except disabled). Very much depends upon our holding on to this policy.

RO. OULD,
Agent of Exchange.

Although Ould steered clear of commenting directly on the political aspect of Cobb's scheme, he did add the important consideration that they should release mainly disabled prisoners so that the Union could not put them back in the ranks to fight again. That consideration is consistent with Schwenk's having been released from a Richmond hospital. Seddon finally wrote on Cobb's letter: "For conference with the President."

The results of that conference are not readily available. Schwenk's affidavit indicates that Jefferson Davis may have tried Cobb's stratagem, as amended by Robert Ould. Whatever the case, Cobb's letter is proof that the political charges which appear in flimsy broadsides and in the bloated rhetoric of candidates on the stump always merit the historian's careful attention.

Civil War Institute at Gettysburg College

The first Gettysburg Summer Institute on the Civil War will be held June 26 through July 2, 1983. The central themes of the Institute, the Civil War, the Battle of Gettysburg, and Abraham Lincoln will be approached from a wide variety of perspectives — history, literature, film, the arts, music, museum and battlefield tours, and more. The Institute will be open to all but may give preference to high school students, especially sophomores and juniors. The total cost is \$235. A nationally known faculty will teach at the Institute. The Director is Gabor S. Boritt, author of the acclaimed book *Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream* as well as of many articles in *Civil War History* and other journals and of the forthcoming history of the Civil War in *World Book Encyclopedia*. Inquiries about the Institute should be directed to Professor Boritt at Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania 17325.



From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 2. Pennsylvania Hall at Gettysburg College — an outstanding liberal arts college today — served as a hospital for both Confederate and Union troops in 1863. Students still debate the question whether General Robert E. Lee used the cupola as an observation post during the battle.

PROGRAM

Sunday, June 26

Evening Students arrive
Registration and Reception

Monday, June 27

Morning William C. Davis, "The Civil War—The Long View"
Afternoon Steven Sylvia and Mike O'Donnell, "Collecting Civil War Relics"
Evening *The Horse Soldiers*, starring John Wayne
Discussion of film led by William A. Frassanito

Tuesday, June 28

Morning Robert L. Bloom, "The Gettysburg Campaign: Then and Now"—A Slide Presentation
Afternoon "The Sights and Sounds of Battle"—The Electric Map and Cyclorama, Gettysburg National Military Park
Evening William A. Frassanito, "Gettysburg: A Journey in Time"

Wednesday, June 29

Morning Mark E. Neely, Jr., "Abraham Lincoln: The Looming Presence"
Afternoon Battlefield tour led by Col. Jacob Sheads
Evening Adam Boritt and Gabor S. Boritt, "The President Who Was to Die in 1866: Lincoln and the Marfan Syndrome"

Thursday, June 30

Morning John K. Lattimer, "The President Who Died in 1865: Medical and Ballistic Questions Surrounding the Lincoln Assassination"
Afternoon Bill Bowling, Becky Lyons, Steve Wright, "Civil War Times: A Conversation between Mr. Lincoln, A Woman, and A Soldier of the 1860's"—A Panel Discussion
Evening *The Red Badge of Courage*, starring Audie Murphy.
Discussion of film led by Robert S. Fredrickson.

Friday, July 1

Morning Harold Holzer, "Lincoln and the Artists"
Afternoon Civil War Encampment and Reenactment, Gettysburg National Military Park
Visit to the Gettysburg National Cemetery
Evening Picnic by the Pond
Civil War Music by the West Orttanna String Band

Saturday, July 2

Morning Students depart





ILLINOIS STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ILLINOIS HISTORY SYMPOSIUM

December 2-3, 1983

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Illinois State Historical Society is seeking proposals for papers, or sessions, to be delivered at the Fourth Annual Symposium on Illinois History, December 2-3, 1983. Papers, or sessions, will be considered on any aspect of the history, literature, art and culture, politics, geography, archeology, anthropology, and related fields of Illinois and/or the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys. The Symposium will be held in Springfield.

Individuals who wish to submit proposals should send a three hundred to six hundred word summary, along with resumes of intended participants, to

**ROGER D. BRIDGES, DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH
ILLINOIS STATE HISTORICAL LIBRARY
OLD STATE CAPITOL
SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS 62706**

Proposals must be received by April 15, 1983. Individuals will be notified of the Committee's decision by June 1, 1983.

Members of the Symposium Committee are Robert W. McCluggage, chairman, Loyola University of Chicago; Rodney O. Davis, Knox College; Raymond E. Hauser, Waubensee Community College; Carol Helwig, Eastern Illinois University; Patricia Henry, Sangamon County Historical Society; Robert P. Howard, Springfield; Robert M. McColley, University of Illinois—Urbana/Champaign; John Y. Simon, Southern Illinois University—Carbondale; Robert E. Sterling, Joliet Junior College; and Donald F. Tingley, Eastern Illinois University.

The Abraham Lincoln Association
in cooperation with the
Illinois State Historical Society
announces a

CALL FOR PAPERS

for the Eleventh Annual
Abraham Lincoln Symposium
February 12, 1984

The Association is seeking proposals for papers to be delivered at the Eleventh Annual Abraham Lincoln Symposium on February 12, 1984. It will be held in the Hall of Representatives, Old State Capitol, Springfield, Illinois. Papers on any phase of Lincoln's career or his relationships with associates or to events will be considered. Individuals are invited to submit a 300- to 600-word proposal or abstract along with a personal resume to

ROGER D. BRIDGES, Chairman
Lincoln Symposium Committee
Illinois State Historical Library
Old State Capitol
Springfield, IL 62706

The proposal must be received by August 10, 1983. Individuals will be notified of the Committee's decision by September 1, 1983. Papers accepted for the Symposium will be considered for publication by the Association.