

# Lincoln Lore

The Bulletin of THE LINCOLN MUSEUM



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## Lincoln Lore

is the quarterly bulletin of

### THE LINCOLN MUSEUM

The mission of The Lincoln Museum is to interpret and preserve the history and legacy of Abraham Lincoln through research, conservation, exhibitry, and education.

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## We Cannot Escape History

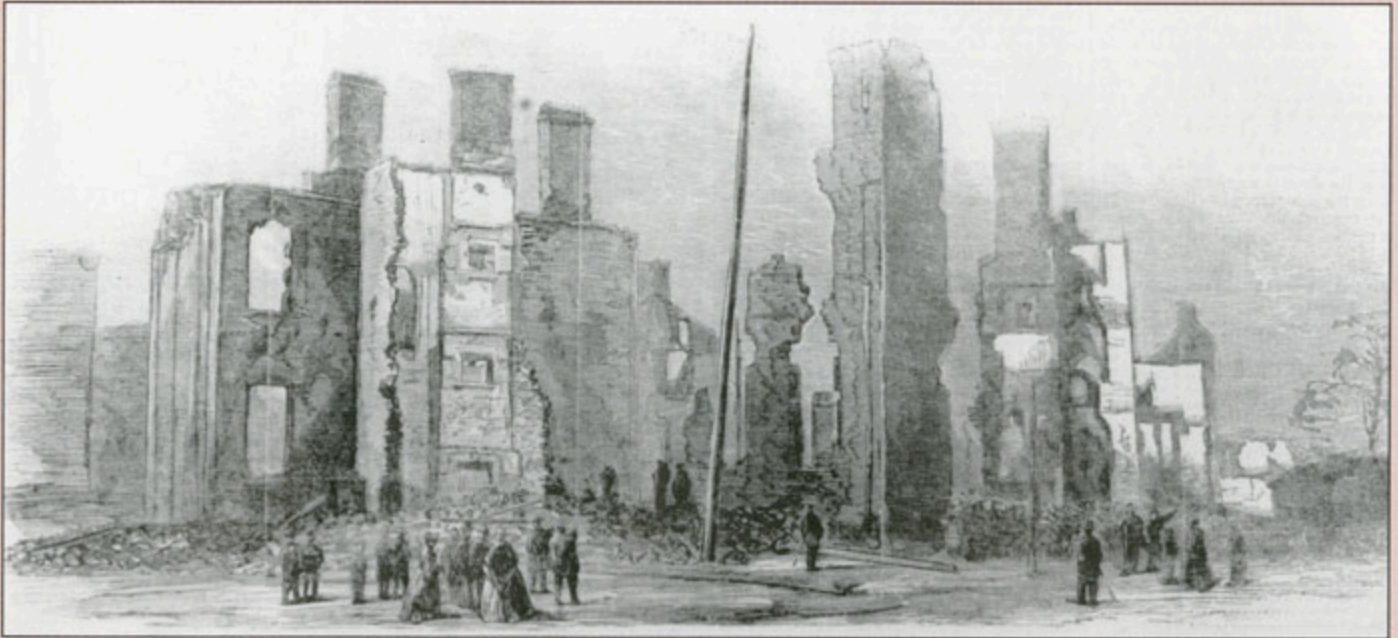
*What constitutes the bulwark of our own liberty and independence? It is not our frowning battlements, our bristling sea coasts, the guns of our war steamers, or the strength of our gallant and disciplined army. These are not our reliance against a resumption of tyranny in our fair land. All of them may be turned against our liberties, without making us stronger or weaker for the struggle. Our reliance is in the love of liberty which God has planted in our bosoms. Our defense is in the preservation of the spirit which prizes liberty as the heritage of all men, in all lands, every where.*

**Abraham Lincoln at Edwardsville, Illinois  
September 11, 1858**

In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln in his annual message to Congress made the following statement: "Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history... the fiery trial through which we pass will light us down in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation." Lincoln's words were eloquent, but not controversial. No one who heard them had any doubt that the struggle then raging between the free and slave states would shape the destiny of the nation, if not the world. None imagined that he could escape from history.

Today, in contrast, there are people who until very recently thought that America had done just that. Francis Fukuyama, in his influential 1989 essay "The End of History," argued that Western liberal democracy represented the endpoint of mankind's ideological development, and that history as we knew it had come to an end. The struggle of ideology against ideology, religion against religion, and culture against culture, Fukuyama argued, had ended with the inevitable triumph of the values of the United States. 1989 was of course the final year of the Cold War, which resulted in the decisive victory of capitalism over communism. As they watched the Berlin Wall crumble on their television screens twelve years ago, it was just possible for some people to take seriously the idea that history was at end.

On the cover: *Moody, Tearful Night*, bronze sculpture by Richard Masloski. The artist lent the piece to The Lincoln Museum in conjunction with the temporary exhibit *Now He Belongs to the Ages: The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*. For more information about this work, contact The Lincoln Museum, (260) 455-3798. (Photo courtesy of the artist)



September 11, 2001, brought wartime devastation to the continental United States for the first time since the Civil War. Above, the ruins of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, after it was burned by Confederate troops, from *Harper's Weekly*, August 20, 1864. (TLM #2948)

On September 11, 2001, those same television screens brought us images that shattered the illusion that we had escaped from history. Americans became aware that day that an extraordinary period of peace and prosperity was at an end, and that the present generation would have its own trials to pass through. History, of which we are again so clearly a part, suddenly regained its relevance as commentators scrambled to find lessons in the past, drawing comparisons with Pearl Harbor, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, or even Britain's 19th century Afghan wars.

What those commentators found is that history does not offer clear cut solutions to contemporary problems. When President Bush proposed legislation that would limit civil rights in the interest of wartime security, supporters were quick to point out that during the Civil War Lincoln temporarily suspended one of the most fundamental civil rights, the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus. Opponents, however, cited the Japanese-American internment camps of World War II as a historical example of wartime

paranoia leading to unjustified civil rights restrictions. They also had no trouble finding contrary words from Lincoln, such as those from the speech at Edwardsville quoted above, in which he warned that those who restricted the rights of others would soon lose their own: "Accustomed to trample on the rights of those around you, you have lost the genius of your own independence, and become the fit subjects of the first cunning tyrant who rises."

On this issue, as on almost every other, neither side can claim the undisputed support of history in general, or Abraham Lincoln in particular. Yet the debate is clearly enriched by the citation of historical examples. The quality of the decisions that we and our representatives make can only be improved by the perspective offered by an awareness of what others have done in other crises. Most of all, our courage can be sustained by the examples of those who, like Abraham Lincoln, found a way to pass, with honor, through their fiery trials.

GJP

# The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln: The Complete Documentary Edition

Reviewed by Gerald J. Prokopowicz

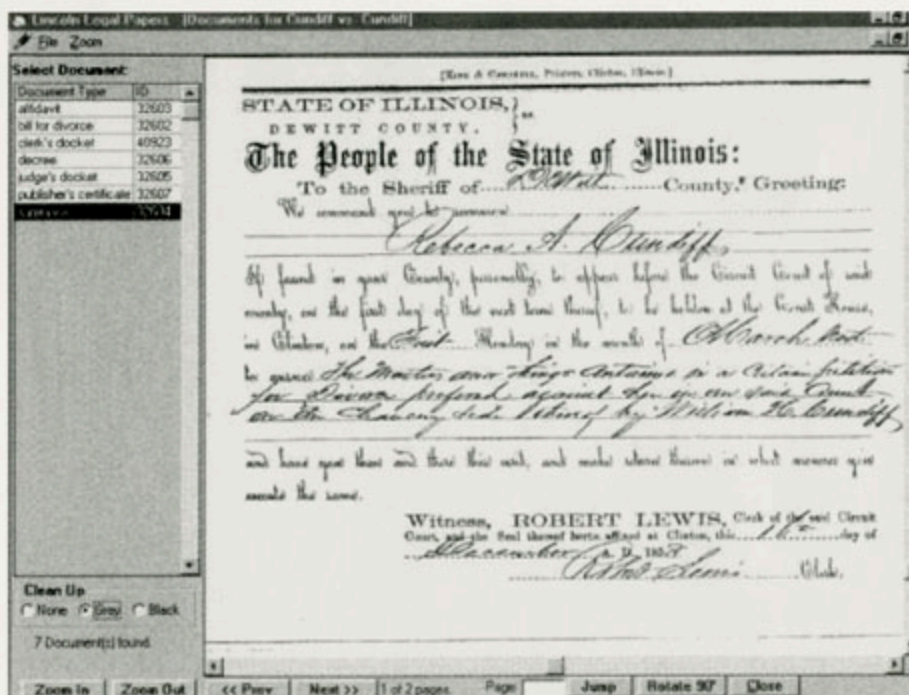
"Great president. Lousy lawyer." In four words, a movie character played by the late actor Walter Matthau thus summed up the career of Abraham Lincoln. For most of the 136 years since Lincoln's death, general readers and scholars alike have accepted this verdict. Occasional Southern partisans have tried to belittle Lincoln's greatness as a president, but no substantial challenges to his overall reputation appeared between Edgar Lee Master's vitriolic *Lincoln: The Man* in 1931 and Lerone Bennett's *Forced Into Glory: Abraham Lincoln's White Dream* in 2000. During that span, hundreds of other authors portrayed Lincoln in every possible light: dynamic leader or passive responder to events, cool religious skeptic or secret Christian believer, Burkean conservative or proto-20th century statist liberal, ideologue or pragmatist; but always an admirable and successful model of a particular way of thinking, which (by remarkable coincidence) generally tended to be that of the author as well.

Even rarer than a serious attack on Lincoln as a president has been a serious evaluation of Lincoln as a lawyer. Abraham Lincoln received his law license in 1836, and began practicing as the junior partner of John Todd Stuart (cousin of his future wife Mary Todd) in 1837. He ran the firm for two years while Todd served in Congress, and in 1841 left to become a partner of Stephen T. Logan. Three years later he established his own practice, with William H. Herndon as his junior partner, and (with the exception of a single term in Congress) spent the next seventeen years living in Springfield and devoting most of his energies to the law. Numerous books have described Lincoln's pre-presidential years, but John J. Duff's *A. Lincoln: Prairie Lawyer* (1960) and John P. Frank's *Lincoln as a Lawyer* (1961) remain the only two full-length studies of Lincoln's legal career (although others are currently being written).

## The Lincoln Legal Papers

One of the main reasons why scholars have been reluctant to tackle the subject has been the difficulty of gaining access to the sources. Roy P. Basler, in his edition of *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, published some items relating to Lincoln's law practice, but chose generally to exclude "law cases and documents appertaining thereto (such as receipts for fees, affidavits, declarations, praecipes, etc.)," which he declared were "arbitrarily relegated to separated volumes which the [Abraham Lincoln] Association proposes to publish at a later date." In 1985, forty-two years after Basler wrote those words, the Abraham Lincoln Association and other organizations gave their support to the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency when it launched the Lincoln Legal Papers project, which had as its goal the publication of the law documents that Basler had omitted.

Under the leadership of editors Martha L. Brenner and Cullom Davis, the project sent inquiries to libraries, museums, and document collectors across the country alerting them of the effort to find every piece of written evidence relating to the legal career of Abraham Lincoln. For the next ten years, LLP staff members scoured all the county courthouses in Illinois where Lincoln was known to have practiced, as well as several in Missouri and Indiana. Other researchers sought for Lincoln-related legal documents at the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and various specialized Lincoln archives scattered throughout the country, including The Lincoln Museum. Although the project experienced some setbacks, including the arrest of a former researcher who took advantage of his employment to steal a number of Lincoln documents (which were subsequently recovered), the results vastly exceeded the most optimistic projections.



This review appears with the permission of the Journal of Documentary Editing, which kindly furnished a copy of the work under review.

By 1995, the Lincoln Legal Papers project had generated some 250,000 photocopied pages representing almost 100,000 documents, an enormous quantity of material that made traditional publication impractical; even if each document and its accompanying annotation filled only half a printed page, the results would have easily filled a hundred large volumes, creating a publication more than ten times the size of the original *Collected Works*. The directors of the project therefore planned to publish a selection of transcribed, annotated documents in the traditional multi-volume printed format, as well as a comprehensive facsimile edition of all the documents on microfilm. To the great relief of every researcher who ever spent hours squinting at a microfilm reader, the computer revolution overtook the project in 1994, when it was decided to publish the facsimile edition on CD-ROMs. Even these would have been awkward to use, as the complete edition would have required as many as twenty-four discs of data. In 1999, DVD technology was adopted, resulting in the far more convenient three-disc set that was published in 2000.

## A Landmark Publication

*The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln: The Complete Documentary Edition* thus became one of the first major documentary collections to appear in electronic format. It contains 96,386 documents totaling 206,294 pages, drawn from 5,669 court cases and other legal matters. Had this mass of material been published on paper or microfilm, the editors would have been forced to choose a single method of organizing the documents, arranging them by date (the traditional choice), by case or subject matter, by author, or in some other form. By choosing an electronic format, the editors escaped the limitations of a single organizing principle. With the opportunity to employ multiple organizing strategies, however, came the responsibility of choosing wisely among the many possibilities, and offering the researcher a manageable number of useful choices. Here the editors of the Lincoln Legal Papers did a superb job in not only making Lincoln's documents available, but in taking advantage of the possibilities inherent in electronic publishing to make them easily accessible, even for the novice computer user.

## Technical requirements

*The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln: The Complete Documentary Edition* is published in an attractive clamshell case that resembles a legal volume and contains an 18-page manual and three digital video discs (DVDs). The minimum hardware requirements to use the publication are an IBM-compatible PC with a Pentium processor, running Windows 95 or Windows NT 4.0, and 32 MB RAM, 130 MB hard drive space, a 256-color display with 640x480 pixel resolution, and a DVD drive. There is no Macintosh version. Another technical requirement is a check for \$2,000 payable to the University of Illinois Press, to cover the list price of the edition, some four or five times the current price of Lincoln's *Collected Works*. At this price, the publication is clearly aimed at research libraries rather than individuals, but the same is true of most multi-volume printed documentary collections.

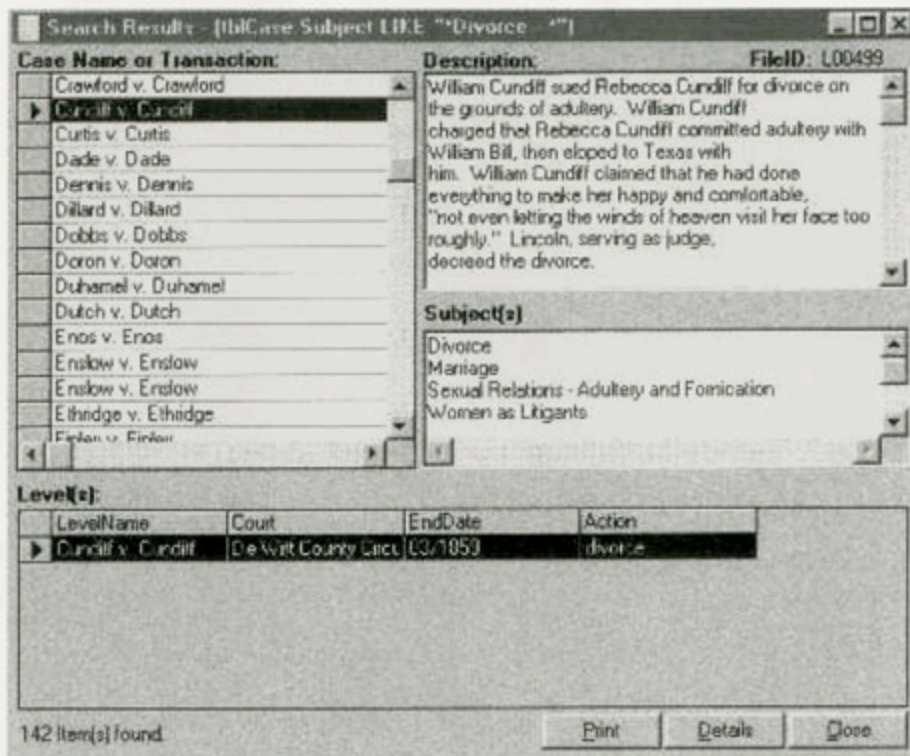
A few hints: the program assumes that the DVD reader is the D: drive. If that is not the case, no document images can be viewed until the user modifies the file "lincoln.ini" by changing "D" to the correct drive letter for each of the first three lines, labeled CD1, CD2, and CD3. The remaining lines, CD4 through CD 24 can be ignored, as they are historical artifacts of the years when the editors intended to put the work on 24 CD-ROMs rather than the current three DVDs. The user is also well advised to set the monitor to the recommended 800x600 pixels rather than the minimum 640x480 pixels, as some of the information at the margins may become unviewable at the latter setting.

For that hypothetical novice, the 18-page manual provides a non-threatening introduction to the program, as well as a simple and straightforward set of installation instructions. For those using the program in a library, where the manual may not be available, all of the manual's contents are online in the Reference section, which gives a more detailed introduction to the Lincoln Legal Papers project. In addition to explaining its carefully defined scope, its editorial guidelines, and the user's options for searching for documents, the Reference section contains substantial historical content in the form of narrative and statistical descriptions of Lincoln's law practice, a glossary of legal terms, biographical sketches of 199 historical figures, a set of maps and illustrations, an introduction to 19th century pleading and practice, an outline of the Illinois court system, an extensive bibliography, and such useful historical tools as a table converting the value of money in any period from 1809 to 1990 into its 1999 equivalent.

The most impressive aspect of the publication, besides its sheer size, is the efficiency of its search tools. There are four search screens from which to choose: General (the most useful); Type of Work; Document; and Direct. The General search

allows selection from a menu of subject headings, some of which have subheadings as well. A search for cases dealing with "African Americans" for example can be further narrowed to "Free Blacks" or "Slaves and Slavery." Additional search fields on the General search page include starting and ending dates, and case participants and their roles. Using the Boolean operators AND, OR and NOT, it is possible to search, for example, for all of Lincoln's cases from 1846 to 1850 involving free blacks in which he was a defense attorney, but which did not involve Billy Herndon (there aren't any). If the restriction against Herndon is removed, one finds the case of *Crowder v. Collier & Collier*, in which Lincoln and Herndon defended Nancy Collier, "a free woman of colour," against a mortgage foreclosure, and reached a settlement.

The Type of Work screen allows searches by case name, court name, type, and jurisdiction, and by any one of 163 kinds of legal action, from bankruptcy to manslaughter to "trespass quare clausum fregit" (which, the glossary explains, means "that the defendant damaged the plaintiff's real property by wrongfully entering within the boundaries of the plaintiff's property"). The Document screen includes fields for the type of docu-



as a "lousy lawyer." To have handled an average of more than 200 cases each year, for twenty-five years, indicates that Lincoln was an extraordinarily hard-working and much sought-after attorney. The statistical breakdown of Lincoln's career provided in the Reference section shows that Lincoln's workload was not only heavy but also diverse. Most of his cases involved civil matters, tried in common law or chancery courts (the distinction was largely procedural), but he also appeared as counsel in numerous criminal and bankruptcy cases. He represented plaintiffs more often than defendants, but only by a ratio of about three to two. The great majority of his cases were tried at the state circuit court level, but he also had hundreds of federal cases (even omitting those for which no records have survived), and appeared hundreds of times before the Illinois Supreme Court.

If the editors of the Lincoln Legal Papers did no more than fill out the picture of the sixteenth presidents' law practice, they would have performed a valuable, if narrow, historical service. What they have produced, however, is also a work of social history that affords remarkable insight into the role of law and lawyers in the frontier era of Midwestern settlement. This was a time of unusual ferment in American law, characterized by some legal historians as a "Golden Age" of jurisprudence. From 1820 to 1860, a period encompassing Lincoln's entire legal career, American lawyers and judges reacted to the novel social and legal problems generated by the twin engines of industrial revolution and westward expansion by rejecting obsolete English precedent and substituting common sense and a faith in the nation's economic and moral progress as the underpinning of the law. In few other eras could individuals with as little formal education as Lincoln become so successful as lawyers, and Lincoln was well aware of the prestige and power that lawyers like him wielded at a time when the law was so plastic. "Discourage litigation..." he wrote in an 1850 lecture for law students, "As a peacemaker the lawyer has a superior opportunity of being a good man." If Lincoln was representative of his peers as a lawyer, and "by all evidence, Lincoln and his partners had a typical practice compared to other attorneys during the same period in the Midwest," according to

ment, author, and signer, while the Direct screen allows searches by the unique ID number assigned to each document, for those who already know exactly what they are looking for.

There are numerous other useful features. A Print button on the case summary screen sends to the printer all the information on that screen, but neatly reformatted as a printed document, rather than simply capturing everything on the monitor. The document printing option automatically reformats the document for standard 8.5 x 11 paper. When viewing facsimiles of documents on the screen, one must frequently zoom in and out in order to read the handwriting, and it is a great convenience to find that this can be done with the left and right mouse buttons, putting the most often-used features where they are easiest to use.

In comparison with the massive effort involved in collecting all of these documents, and the care and intelligence that went into making them easy to use, the limitations of the project scarcely merit mentioning. Some were beyond the editors' control, such as the omission of many of Lincoln's federal cases, the documents of which were destroyed in the

Chicago Fire of 1871. Others are inherent in the facsimile edition format, such as the difficulty of deciphering some 19th century handwriting (although not that of Lincoln, which was remarkably clear). The extensive background material and individual case descriptions compensate in large part for the absence of document-specific annotation, but still leave the reader with the task of puzzling out the importance of each document. Finally, it will be welcome when some future data storage medium is invented that allows all the material to be stored on a single disk, eliminating the need to swap the three disks in order to access different documents. In the meantime, users may want to spend the ten or twenty seconds or so it takes for their computers to read a disk each time it is inserted to reflect on how much better it is to have only three DVDs to change instead of 24 CDs, or endless rolls of microfilm.

### Lincoln the Lawyer

Turning from process to content, what do all these documents tell us about Abraham Lincoln the lawyer? The first thing that a collection of 5,669 cases and other legal matters requires is the final rejection of Lincoln's outdated reputation

## Selected Cases

To complement the comprehensive electronic edition, the Lincoln Legal Papers staff is preparing a selective edition of four printed volumes that will include transcriptions of documents from fifty of Lincoln's most important cases, with detailed annotations. To help meet the scheduled publication date of 2006, and the Abraham Lincoln Association is currently soliciting contributions, payable to the ALA, at:

Lincoln Legal Papers  
Abraham Lincoln Association  
1 Old State Capitol Plaza  
Springfield, IL 62701

Donors of \$100 or more will receive a booklet describing the thirty judges and justices who rendered verdicts in Lincoln's cases.

the editors, then his legal papers can be taken as representative as well.

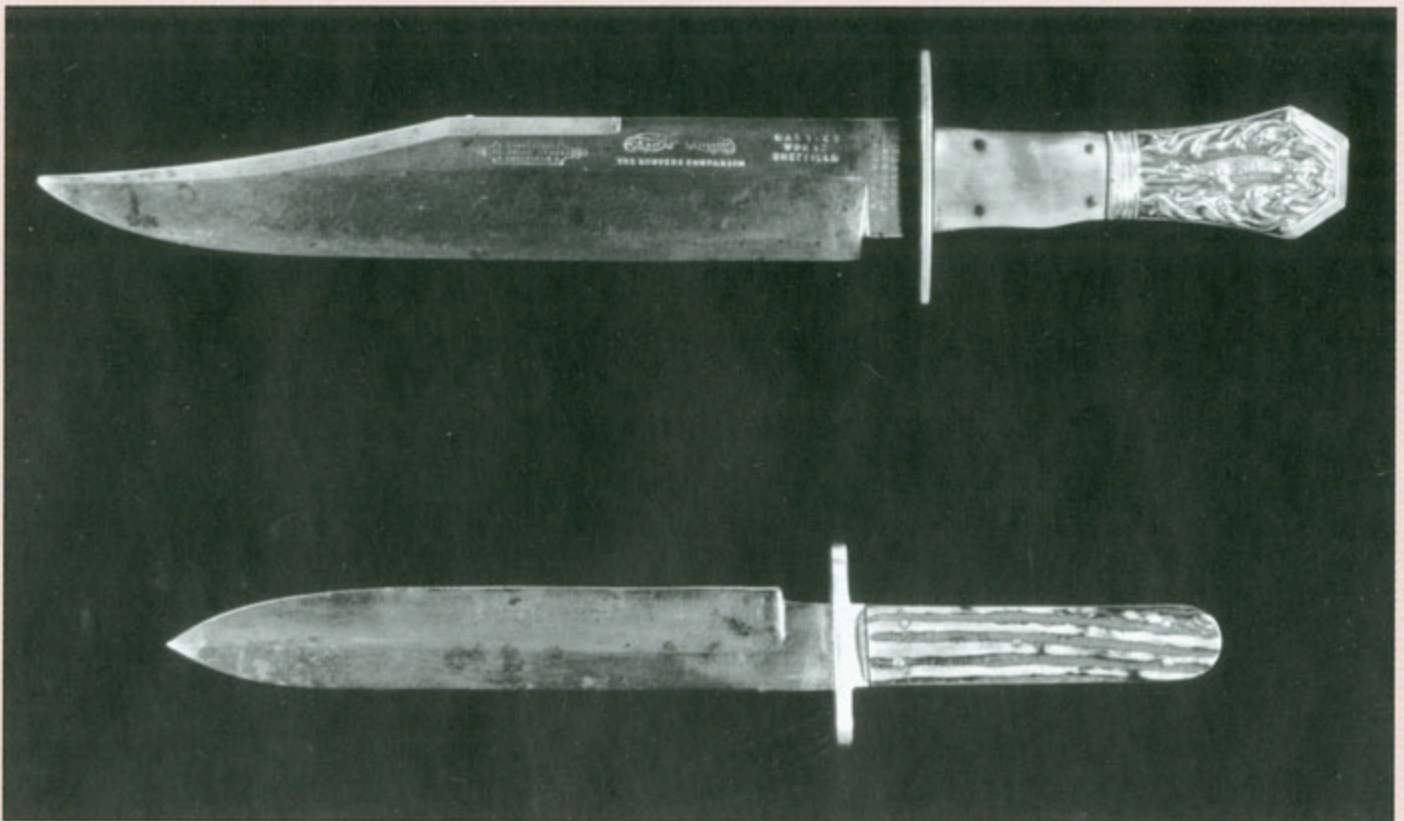
## The Future

Sixteen years after its inception, the team of editors and researchers that created *The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln: The Complete Documentary Edition* not only continues its work on the letterpress edition of selected cases, but has expanded its scope dramatically. In November 2001 the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency announced its intention to publish a new edition of the complete papers of Abraham Lincoln, with the legal papers to form the first series. The second series is to consist of Lincoln's other pre-presidential papers, and the third and final series, due to be completed in 2025, will cover Lincoln's

presidency. Now under the leadership of Daniel W. Stowell, the project formerly known as the Lincoln Legal Papers anticipates including not only Lincoln's own writings but his incoming correspondence as well; with more than two hundred letters arriving at the White House each day of Lincoln's presidency, this ambitious plan guarantees a final product many times the size of Basler's *Collected Works*.

It is an unfortunate fact of human nature that there is no field of interest or enterprise so specialized that it cannot be riven by senseless feuds, and the world of Lincoln manuscript editing is, alas, no exception. A committee of the Abraham Lincoln Association, which was the original sponsor of Basler's work and an early supporter of the Lincoln Legal Papers, has also

been planning a new edition of Lincoln's presidential papers. Although it would seem to be of obvious benefit either to combine the talents of the distinguished scholars on the Abraham Lincoln Association committee with the proven editorial expertise of the Lincoln Legal Papers staff, or to divide the scope of work between the two projects and assign the pre-presidential papers to one and the presidential documents to the other, neither solution has been accepted by both parties. As a result, for the time being both projects are set to proceed on parallel paths, competing for funding and confusing the public. One can only hope that the leaders of both projects will soon recognize that as a peacemaker, the documentary editor, like the lawyer, "has a superior opportunity of being a good man."



A tale of two knives: The Wilson "Hunter's Companion" Bowie knife, top, in the collection of D. Gary Lattimer, and the Robinson "Rio Grande" camp knife, in the collection of the Huntington Library. (Photo courtesy of Dr. John K. Lattimer)

*In the last issue of Lincoln Lore, Museum President Joan Flinspach described how the knife used by Lewis Powell to attack William Seward was transported from the Huntington Library to Fort Wayne for the current temporary exhibit, "Now He Belongs to the Ages: The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln." In response, assassination expert Dr. John K. Latimer notes that the War Department collected several knives as evidence against the conspirators, and argues that a knife owned by Dr. D. Gary Lattimer is actually the weapon that Powell carried on April 14, 1865.*

## But Which Knife?

*By John K. Lattimer, M.D., Sc.D.*

One of the artifacts featured in The Lincoln Museum's current temporary exhibit, "Now He Belongs to the Ages: The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln," is described as "the knife used by one of Booth's conspirators, Lewis Thornton Powell, to stab Secretary of State Seward."

We have in our family collection a different knife, which was the one actually used by Powell on the night that Abraham Lincoln was shot. After entering Secretary of State William Seward's house and attacking him in his bed, Powell dashed out the front door and across the street to where his horse was tied. A soldier who

heard the screaming of Seward's daughter came running toward the house at the same time, and saw Powell drop his knife as he climbed onto his horse. After Powell rode away, the soldier returned to the scene and looked for the knife, but could not find it in the darkness.

The next morning Seward's house servant, Robert Nelson, found the knife and brought it to army surgeon Dr. John Wilson, who had been sent to care for the Secretary of State and his sons Frederick and Augustus, all wounded in the previous night's attack. Wilson turned in the knife to the authorities for use as an

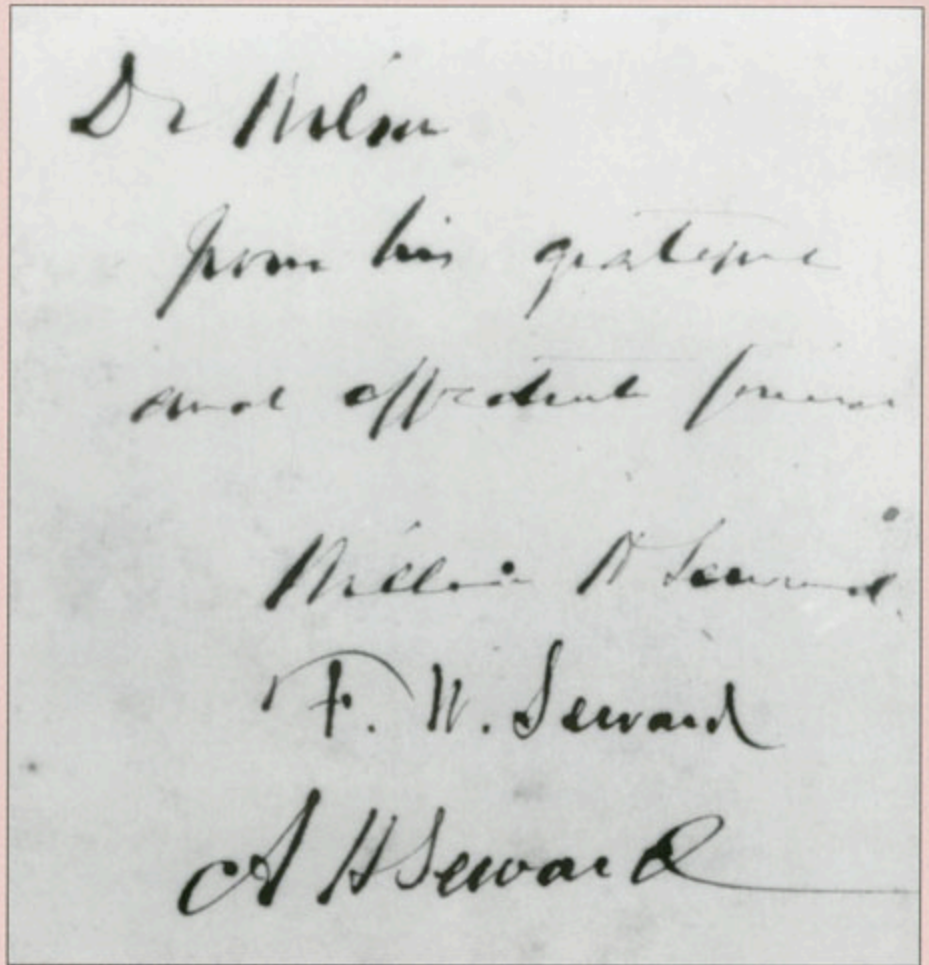
exhibit at the trial of Powell. He is said to have received a receipt for it, but this has not survived. When shown the knife at Powell's trial, Wilson stated unequivocally, "This is the knife I received from the colored boy who has just left the stand. He gave it to me in the library of Mr. Seward's house, about 10 o'clock on Saturday morning, the 15th of April." Robert Nelson likewise testified, "That looks like the knife I found opposite Secretary Seward's house, on the Saturday morning after he was stabbed. I gave it to an officer at the door first, and afterward to that gentleman," indicating Dr. Wilson. The design and workmanship



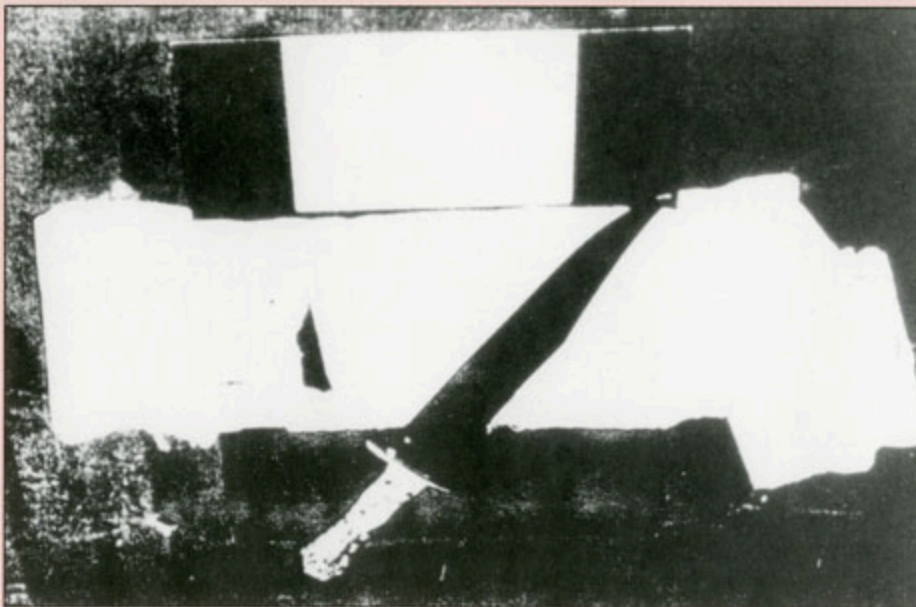
on the knife are very distinctive and it is unlikely that it would be mistaken for any other knife.

After the trial was over and Powell had been hanged, Dr. Wilson kept in touch with the grateful Seward family. He then asked them if it would be possible for him to have Powell's knife as a souvenir of the occasion. Seward quietly arranged for the knife to be given to Dr. Wilson. Seward and his sons also sent him an inscribed copy of the conspirators' trial transcript, published in 1865. Dr. Wilson had an impressive green velvet-covered case made for the knife and it became a valued relic in his collection. After Dr. Wilson's death the knife passed to other relatives, one of whom gave it to a friend. He sold it to a young collector, who in turn sold it to the present owner.

When Private (now Sergeant) George Robinson, the invalid soldier-nurse who had been guarding Seward, also decided that he would like the knife as a souvenir, he asked Secretary of War Edwin Stanton to procure it for him. Stanton wrote a note to the relevant authorities telling them to give Robinson the knife. Adjutant General Joseph Holt, obviously unaware that the knife had already been given to Wilson, directed his subordinates in the War Department to go to the large mass of exhibits from the trial and give Robinson the knife. The custodians of the many



"Dr. Wilson, from his grateful and affectionate friends, William H. Seward, F. W. Seward, A. H. Seward" — the inscription on the trial transcript that the Seward family sent to Dr. Wilson. (Photo courtesy of Dr. John K. Lattimer)



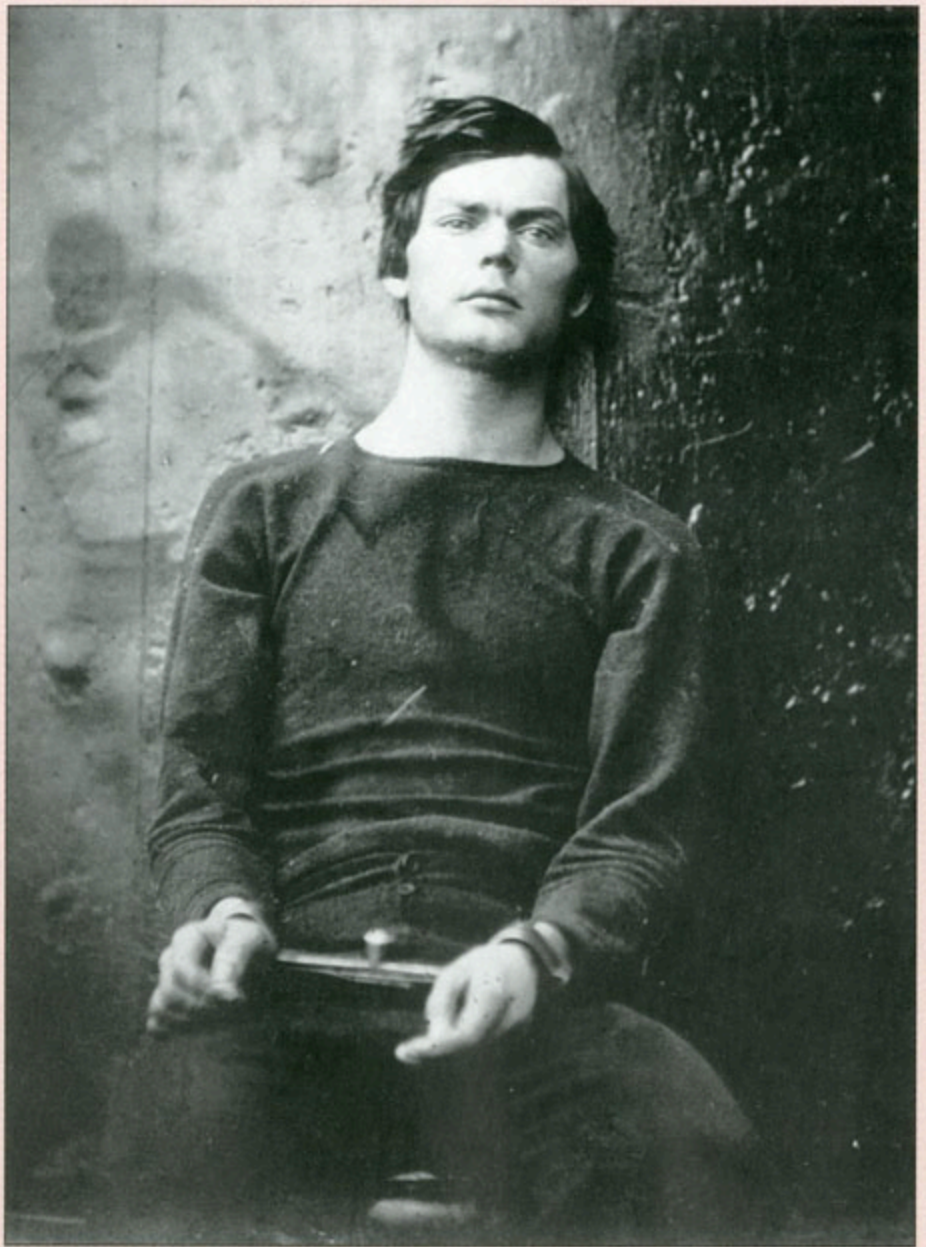
Left: The Wilson knife and Seward's bed sheet, showing the hole made during the attack. Right: Sample stab wounds in a sheet, made by the Wilson knife and Robinson knife. (Photos courtesy of Dr. John K. Lattimer)

stored exhibits were happy to please Robinson by giving him one of several camp knives belonging to the conspirators, indicating to him that it was in fact Powell's knife. At the 1867 trial of conspirator John Surratt, Robinson repeatedly testified that he believed that the knife he had been given was the one used by Powell, but admitted that he could not be sure because during the attack the knife "was in motion when I saw it so I could not tell exactly what kind of a knife it was."

In fact, the Wilson knife bears very little resemblance to the Robinson knife or any of the other Rio Grande camp knives associated with the conspirators (including John Wilkes Booth, who carried a weapon very similar to the Robinson knife at Ford's Theatre). The huge Bowie knife identified by Dr. Wilson at the trial as the one he saw on April 15, 1865, is so different that there is no way that he could have mistaken one for the other. It has a bright yellow horn insert on each side of the grip, and a large flared pommel of German silver with a raised sculpture of an alligator, whose scaly skin makes it easy to grip. The large blade is of the classical "Bowie" design, with a "clipped" point. The back edge of the blade is thick and square, consistent with the hole torn in the sheet that covered Seward, which is also somewhat squared at the top.

In contrast, the Robinson knife and the other Rio Grande camp knives that were in the large War Department collection of evidence associated with the conspirators have almost rod-like brown handles without pommels or other irregularities to help the hand to grasp. All the camp knives have "spear" points, with a false double edge, common on knives used for camp chores rather than combat. While the Rio Grande knives have "stag" handles, they are quite smooth and polished, and are much harder to grasp firmly than the Wilson knife. It is true that Booth managed to slash Major Rathbone with a camp knife after shooting Lincoln, but he did not stab at his victim repeatedly, as Powell did.

Had George Robinson been asked to produce his knife at the trial of John Surratt, it would have been possible for other witnesses to confirm that it was not the knife used by Powell, found by



Lewis Thornton Powell (alias Paine) was executed on July 7, 1865, for conspiring with John Wilkes Booth and attacking Secretary of State William Seward. (Photo reproduced from Daniel R. Weinberg and James L. Swanson, *Lincoln's Assassins; Their Trial and Execution*)

Robert Nelson, and given to Dr. Wilson. But Robinson was not challenged on this point, perhaps because no one desired to disappoint a national hero by calling into question the authenticity of his souvenir. Yet the spectacular differences between the weapons make it clear that what Robinson was given was not Powell's knife, which was clearly and unequivocally identified by its real recipient, Dr. John Wilson, and which is today a treasured part of the Lattimer family collection.

# Responses To Lerone Bennett, Jr.

On October 30, 2001, Lerone Bennett, Jr. delivered the 22nd Annual R. Gerald McMurtry Lecture at The Lincoln Museum. For the better part of an hour, he expounded passionately on the themes of his recent book, *Forced Into Glory: Abraham Lincoln's White Dream*, specifically that Abraham Lincoln was a racist politician whose actions against slavery were taken reluctantly and motivated by political necessity, and that far from deserving the title "Great Emancipator," Lincoln worked to slow the process of emancipation, and dreamed of an America without black people, free or slave.

Mr. Bennett expressed his appreciation to The Lincoln Museum as one of the first venues where he had been invited to express his views, and stated that one of his goals was to start a dialogue on the issues of Lincoln, race, slavery, and emancipation. Sharing his desire for such a dialogue, and having already offered my review of *Forced Into Glory* (in *Lincoln Lore* #1864), I am pleased to present some responses to Mr. Bennett from readers of *Lincoln Lore*.

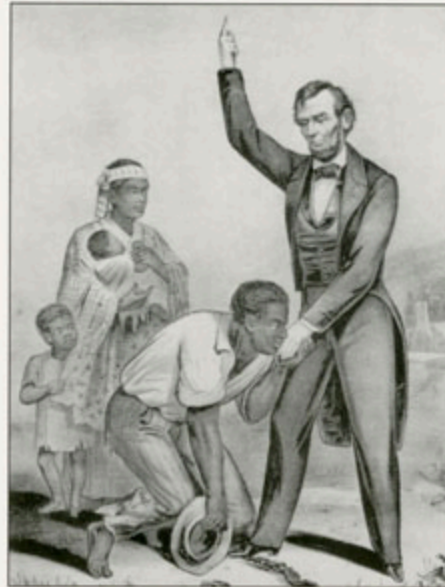
GJP

**Stan Clauss is a former professor of mathematics at Indiana University–Purdue University at Fort Wayne. He is currently a volunteer docent at The Lincoln Museum.**

In hog pens and chicken farms today, animals carry out the minimal functions of their design and helplessly wait to be used up by their masters and markets. For a long time Americans did this to their own species. The enormity of this crime against humanity makes any complicity in it unforgivable. The rage we feel against it is universal, but the intensity of that rage depends to some degree on our proximity and angle of perception.

Imagine your feelings if you were one of the direct heirs of the horrors of slavery, the scars of it looming large all about, and you discovered that a beloved and trusted friend, once considered the savior of your race and now the icon and guiding light of your struggle for healing, was in fact a betrayer? Moreover, what if you brought that discovery up for consideration only to be met by uncomprehending stares, incredulity, ridicule, and worst of all, that wall of embarrassed disregard that is silently erected when some blighted soul runs amok in a gathering of polite society?

If you have ever experienced a reception like that when you knew in your heart that you were right, what did you do? What next is there to do, after pointing out that two plus two is four, when the priests of received wisdom continue to assure the world that it is nevertheless only three? What Lerone Bennett Jr. does is to write an



Great Emancipator or Good Ol' Boy? In traditional portrayals, such as "Freedom to the Slaves," published by *Currier & Ives*, c. 1865 (left), Lincoln destroys slavery with a single gesture. Lerone Bennett's Lincoln, in contrast, was a racist teller of "darker" jokes, unable to rise above the prevalent prejudices of his era. (TLM #2793 and #162).

article for *Ebony* magazine in February 1968, "Was Abe Lincoln a White Supremacist?" It creates a brief storm of controversy, but in the longer run is pooh-poohed by the Lincoln industry. Bennett, however, does not slink away into the dark, content with having given it his best shot. He mounts a lasting crusade. In the next thirty years, with growing stridency born of understandable frustration, he gains a few converts. But the Lincoln fortress remains impregnable, and Bennett is ignored by the authors, professors, foundations, associations, museums and libraries with their boards of directors and army of employees

whose livelihoods depend on a favorable and engrossing image of "the Great Emancipator" in the mind of the buying public. Finally, in 2000 his crusade climaxes in the publication of a (big) book length statement of his findings and conclusions entitled *Forced Into Glory: Abraham Lincoln's White Dream*.

His assessment of Abraham Lincoln has hardened since 1968. Back then he wrote:

...it would have been difficult if not impossible for young Lincoln to emerge unscathed from this environment. By an

*immense effort of transcendence worthy of admiration and long thought, Lincoln managed to free himself of most of the cruelties of his early environment. But he did not—and perhaps could not—rise above the racism.*

Today he writes:

*The N-word went to Washington with Lincoln. Lord Charnwood said congressmen and other officials “were puzzled and pained by the free and easy way in which in grave conversation he would allude to ‘the nigger question’” (317) or question, others said, whether it was advisable to “touch the nigger.” Still others were pained by the free and easy way he interrupted official conferences to tell stories about “darker” preachers or “darker” arithmetic. (99)*

In writing this book and lecturing at The Lincoln Museum, Bennett has claimed that he wants a dialogue with today's Lincoln defenders. To what purpose? Parents of murdered children, holocaust survivors, victims of rape or other unspeakable crimes often cite the need for closure. Surely the heirs of enslaved ancestors, heavy with the shame and dread of that knowledge, belong to that list also. More ominously, Bennett argues, many white Americans use the Lincoln myth to perpetuate “Abraham Lincoln's White Dream” and thus continue to hold back Afro-Americans and other minorities from full citizenship. As he wrote in the *Ebony* article, “when daydreams...are used to obscure deep social problems and hide historical reality, it becomes a social duty to confront them.”

But the truth is that Bennett's indictments of Abraham Lincoln, insofar as Lincoln's views and policies with regard to the formerly enslaved African peoples are concerned, are not all that unknown. They can be found in basic Lincoln sources, such as the *Collected Works* edited by Roy Basler, and the biographies of Thomas, Oates, and Donald. Bennett's indictment of Lincoln may be summarized:

1. Abraham Lincoln used the N-word lots of times.
2. He was racist.
3. He did not intend his Emancipation Proclamation to emancipate.

4. He supported the Fugitive Slave Law.
5. He favored the segregation, and even deportation, of blacks.

By examining the evidence he presents for these shocking indictments, I have satisfied myself that Mr. Bennett's facts are correct, but his conclusions are wrong; or I should rather say, his negative conclusions regarding Lincoln's character, motivation, and suitability as a model of greatness do not flow inevitably from these facts.

Was Lincoln racist? Did he consider the Negro his inferior? Did he promote segregation, even deportation of blacks “to their native clime” remote from the shores of America? Was he loath to grant civil rights, other than freedom and the right to be let alone, to blacks in general? I think “yes” to all of the above. Did he gradually change those views, or repent on the last day of his life? To establish this is akin to proving a negative; I think it is improbable. But do these views disqualify him as a national hero? In considering these unappetizing propositions I think it is useful to draw a distinction between explaining Lincoln away and explaining Lincoln. We need not demand that he be one of us, especially if our goal is a meaningful dialogue and the uncovering of the real man.

Lincoln was different from us. If, as his partisan defenders demand, he was a moral genius and great humanitarian, he was so primarily as a result of logic. Sentiment he had, but it was consciously held subject to cold, calculating, unimpassioned reason. This, to me, is the key to his greatness. Despite fits of melancholy, or clinical depression, as we would say today, which alone would paralyze ordinary men, overlaid with near cosmic burdens of responsibility of office, he held to his method with iron discipline. If he was swayed by opinion from outside himself it was due to political calculation, or else a genuine logical realignment within, but never a mere climb onto the bandwagon. To arrive at truth by consensus was impossible for him.

In terms of race, his logic led him to note that there was a difference between

the black and white races, in color at the very least. He failed to conclude that the difference stopped with the skin, but what evidence did he have that should have impelled that conclusion? The condition of most black people within the scope of his observation was that of abject slavery or menial servitude. Late in his life, in the White House, he met Frederick Douglass and perhaps other emancipated and educated blacks. Was this not proof to him that all races of men are equal? No, it was proof, if proof were needed, that individual men are unequal.

On the other hand, did Lincoln detest slavery wherever it existed? Did he desire its extinction? Did he recognize humanity in the black race? In my mind, certainly yes. Logic told him so: “If A. can prove, however conclusively, that he may, of right, enslave B.—why may not B. snatch the same argument, and prove equally, that he may enslave A?” The “House Divided” speech and Lincoln-Douglas debates make his beliefs clear. He opposed slavery not just for its damage to the character of masters and the shame it cast on America in the eyes of the world; he hated it for its monstrous injustice to the enslaved. If he dragged his feet in implementing freedom, it was because he wanted to see society improve in a sure and stable manner. He compared slavery to cancer: to hack it out suddenly and violently might be harmful to the patient.

But isn't human bondage so repugnant to the sensibility of decent men that it ought to be expunged by reflex, without regard to secondary effects? Lincoln's answer was “no,” for here again he forced reason to prevail over humanitarian sentiment, as he did in the Civil War after a battle of staggering loss of life to the Union side, when he said he'd like to fight that same battle with those same results three more times, because the Confederate army, with its relatively smaller reserves, would then be totally wiped out. He was willing to lay costly sacrifices on the altar of freedom, but he also took care to see that those sacrifices would not be in vain.

If Bennett is correct in showing that Lincoln did not hold the racial views common to the late 20th century, then how

should we interpret him today? Can we understand him in our time, with our advanced social consciousness, any better than his contemporaries who often were angered and dumbfounded by his odd contrasts and quirky decisions? Is he a fit model today for thought and action? Sociologists, historians, docents, Lincoln practitioners, anyone with an ideology to promote or interest to protect and who wishes to make him so must do so without his cooperation. How would Lincoln himself regard attempts to make him a spokesman for a remote ideology? "In most instances they commemorate a lie, and cheat posterity out of the truth. History is not history unless it is the truth." With these words of Lincoln I suppose Mr. Bennett would agree.

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**Sarah Joan Ankeney, a regular *Lincoln Lore* contributor, sent the following letters. Their style is reminiscent of the pseudonymous "Lost Township" letters of 1841, written in part by Mary Todd and Julia Jayne, which satirized Illinois state auditor James Shields. Suspecting that Lincoln was the author of all the letters, the outraged Shields challenged him to a duel. Before Mr. Bennett offers pistols or sabers, the editor of this journal wishes to assure him that he had nothing to do with authorship of the following.**

Friend Gerry:

I seed by the magazine you sent that ther is a mighty contenshus book out on our friend Linkun. So I went up to the liberry and read it, and my, how my thots jest flew around in my head!

First off, I wrote to friend Linkun over to Washington City that I wuz so plum flabbergasted by this here book I couldn't sleep none and today I got his reply.

He sez, "Dere Aunty Sarah, Don't you fret none over this feller Bennett. It ain't the first time I hev takin a drubbing. I am used to it. You know how it is in this game I am a-playin. I always sez to hostile fellers like this'un, 'effen you hain't satisfied with

what we air a-doin over here in the capital, jest lift yor tails and hev at us. We could uze yor advice. And effen you ken do the job better, I'll gladly give up my presidensial chere for my old one back in the Linkun and Herndon law office."

Well, that made me feel a site better so I went back to the liberry and picked up some of friend Linkun's books fer a change. It shor was a big relief to rede some resonabel words after jumpin into that tub of hot wash water with that feller Bennett.

Now here is what friend Linkun sez in them big books, contrary to Mr. Bennett's assertion that he (friend Linkun) wants to git rid of all the black folk. He sez: "...there is an objection urged against free colored persons remaining in the country, which is largely imaginary if not sometimes malicious.... Is it true...that colored people can displace any more white labor, by being free, than by remaining slave?" Then friend Linkun sez no it ain't in the way he has of talking to folks using argumentation they can understand.

Then he sez: "But it is dreaded that the freed people will swarm forth, and cover the whole land?" Now he is asking this of other folks. He ain't expressing his own thots on the matter. For he sez: "The District has more than one free colored to six whites; and yet, in its frequent petitions to Congress, I believe it has never presented the presence of free colored persons as one of its grievances."

And now, jest goin back over this here Annual Message to Congress, December 1, 1862, which i am a-readin in the 5th volume of friend Lincoln's Colected Works, jest to make sure I ain't missin nothin like Mr. Bennett sed he jest looked and looked and looked and never could find one good word to say for our president, I read: "The third article relates to the future of the freed people. It does not oblige, but merely authorizes, Congress to aid in colonizing such as may consent. This ought not to be regarded as objectionable, on the one hand, or on the other, in so much as it comes to nothing, unless by mutual consent of the people to be deported, and the American voters, through their representatives in Congress."

So it looks to me like our friend Linkun ain't scared of black folk like Mr. Bennett sez, and he sez they ort to be able to stay here if they want to. Now I know I am jest a housewife and don't know much about these things, but this shor don't sound like what Mr. Bennett calls "racial cleansing" to me. Friend Linkun ain't forcin anyone on board ship and tellin anyone they hev to go.

Now some folks picks out the parts of this speech that makes friend Linkun look bad in the eyes of the black people. Then ther is others that only mentions the "fiery trial" part of the speech which makes it look like they air hiding the fact that friend Linkun had got the notion of askin black folk to go along with colonizashun. But ain't nobody sees where in this speech, friend Linkun is saying personal-like, there hain't nothing wrong with black folk stayin right here where they already is and us all livin together.

I remember how neighborly friend Linkun was with the Vances and how they being black was no difference to him, and how they took to him right off. Why, he was too kind-hearted to cause any livin sole any pain.

But you can tell he is plum tired out—jest fed up to the top of the trough with folks a-quarrelin and nobody willin to back down or coroperate. Told me long ago he warn't fit fer president and wanted to go to Congress whar he could speechify. Then he began to git the taste fer it. Then it warn't long before the South began to seeseed and Billy sez when friend Linkun left him that last time, he was right cheerful, but as they was goin downstares, he sed he shuddered when he thot about what lay ahead. He was right sorrowful to leave all his friends.

I wonder how it is a feller can be so cheerful like Billy sez and sorrowful at the same dang time. I reckon there ain't nobody, not even Billy, that understands friend Linkun, and that must make him feel right lonely sometimes.

Well, friend Gerry, I reckon I've jest about talked myself blue in the face. I had better be hangin out the wash and sloppin the hogs. But you'll be hearin from me agin after I track up more argyments at the liberry.

Until then, this is goodbye from Lost Miami Township.

Your friend,

*Sarah*

Friend Sara

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Lost Miami Township  
November 18, 1864

Friend Gerry:

It has been a spell since I wrote you at which time I promised that I would go to the liberry to track up more argyments in ray that Bennett feller. Since then I hev done a heap of reading.

First off, I want to clear one thing. Mister Bennett seemed to take exemption to Friend Lincoln addressing Sojourner Truth as "Aunty." Well, Aunt 'Becca never took no exemption to that nomenclature, and neither hev I. I reckon we allays figured it meant Friend Lincoln was partial to us. And I jest suppose Aunty Sojourner felt the same way.

Now you remember how Mister Bennett referred to Friend Lincoln's speeches as jest words. Well, what about Friend Lincoln's private letters not meant for nobody except one person? Them ain't jest words. Them letters is insights, insights into his soul, jest like they say that feller Shakespeare wrote solitaries that let his audience see right into the soul of the feller reciting the poem. Take fer instance Friend Lincoln's letter of around January, 1864, to James S. Wadsworth. You find it for yerself in Volume VII, pages 101-02, of Friend Lincoln's COLLATED WORKS.

"How to better the condition of the colored race has long been a study which has attracted my serious and careful attention," he says. This here ain't nobody talking big about what he is going to do like some other folks that we know. This here is somebody setting his mind seriously towards solving real problems in realistic ways. Friend Lincoln goes on: "hence I think I am clear and decided as to what

course I shall pursue in the premises, regarding it a religious duty, [that there underlining is mine] as the nation's guardian [same] of these people...." Folks who talks fancy in public don't talk in private about no "religious duty." Of course Mister Bennett would say that Friend Lincoln is allays talking about what to do but not doing it. That is because folks like Mister Bennett think they can wave a magic wand (or a sword) and git things to come up right, and they is the ones talking words, words, words—not our friend, Friend Lincoln.

I allays figured that Friend Lincoln felt more fatherly than patronizing or belittling towards folks, and they is a fine shade of difference there, by the way. But folks like Mister Bennett are going to have their pride hurt when spoke of as having a "guardian."

Now I think Friend Lincoln does look on black folk and American Indians and wimmen like me as his children jest the same as he feels protective of most of God's critters, and that is egsactly what makes Mister Bennett so mad. But I reckon we ought not to resent Friend Lincoln for feeling the responsibility of a father toward us. He don't feel as if he is better than us atall. What he feels is, as far as I can divine, is that he was born into a more advantageous position (as humble as it was it had its points) and that he owes it to the rest of us to help us best he can. The one lot of folks he ain't interested in is them that is only out fer themselves.

This letter to Wadsworth is about universal amnesty and universal suffrage both of which Friend Lincoln says he is for. Notice for yerself onct agin he ain't considering getting rid of nobody. "The restoration of the Rebel States to the Union," he says, "must rest upon the principle of civil and political equality of both races...." Laws a mercy, Friend Gerry, can't nobody want more than that. And it don't seem patronizing, either, do it?

There is a sad and mysterious story about this letter, as General Wadsworth was killed in battle, and Mister Basler, who collated these works, says he can't find the original, but that this part published in The Southern Advocate runs true to Friend Lincoln's FRAGMENT of August 26, 1863.

Now all the while Mister Bennett is bending himself out of shape, white folks down south are saying, well, they're sure the black folk will get part of that universal suffrage, but they (the white folk) ain't getting their share of universal amnesty!

I wouldn't want to be in Friend Lincoln's shoes, I can tell you. It jest seems to me a man is elected president jest so's he can be used as a scapegoat. And it seems like nobody in this here United States could agree or comprymize on anything, so they threw Friend Lincoln into the game to do it all for them.

But Friend Lincoln, he is sech a strong man, with no bitterness in him, he has jest climbed on top of all of it. Out here, we will be glad when he is back home laughing and talking and telling stories like he used to, as we miss him a right smart.

Well, Friend Gerry, I jest went on and on when I promised myself I'd cut it short this time. You will probably be hearing from me agin, though, for it is right easy and, natheless to say, enjoyable, to track up these argyments. So until the next time, I am

Your friend,

*Sarah*

Friend Sara

P.S. As you can see, since the last time, I hev improved my speling. S.

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Lost Miami Township  
December 6, 1864

Friend Gerry:

I hev been to the liberry very little as the weather has turned sour on us out here to Lost Miami Township and we are behind in our chores. However, I hev Friend Lincoln's Collated Works, Volume VIII, right here on my kitchen table and hev been perusing it.

Right off, Friend Lincoln writes to Mr. Isaac M. Schermerhorn (a name familiar to me as they was a Clara Schermerhorn that come to town two years ago, and we was

right friendly). Friend Lincoln is telling Mr. Schermerhorn (I don't know if he is kin to Clara) on September 9 of this very year that he is setting in the presidential cheer for "The sole avowed object of preserving the Union." Ain't he said that over and over again, and yet folks keep asking him what he is doing.

In this here letter he is heving to explain why he enlisted colored men and why he won't re-enslave them. But more on that later. Jest the way Friend Lincoln keeps saying, "to save the Union" (and not first of all to free the slaves) reminds me of how a while back he was saying, "One war at a time." Don't that explain how he figures it? How can you fight a foreign nation and your own civil war at the same time? I reckon Friend Lincoln felt that way about saving the Union and freeing the slaves.

Why, it would be like I was trying to hang out the wash in the back yard and bring in the corn from the fields at the exact same time. Now, Friend Lincoln cain't go for liberration first anymore than I can hang out the wash before I bring in the corn. If Friend Lincoln puts the black folks first (as he would like to do) he will lose the Union, and if I hang out my wash before I bring in the crops, the corn will rot, and we won't hev no income to see us through the winter. Now jest because I am putting the crops first, don't mean I don't care about the clothes. But ain't no use heving clothes to starve in, and ain't no good making a show about freedom jest to see the black folks consigned to slavery forever because the Seceshes has won the war.

I figure the more Friend Lincoln says he ain't doing nothing but save the Union, the more he is figuring how he can free the slaves for sure and keep it that way. But he knows that freedom will come with Union and that it won't come without it. As for the black folks freeing themselves, of course they are, but if the Seceshes have their way, nobody is going to be free except a small class of tyrants, which what Friend Lincoln has been warning us against all along. So first war first: save the Union.

What fellers like Mr. Bennett and them radials like Wendell Phillips don't take to account is that most white folks up

north don't care about black folks, and every time Friend Lincoln makes a move in their favor, the Union (Freedom) administration stands to be voted out of power. And as time goes by more and more folks is going to fail to appreciate the anti-black sentiment up here. Folks will come to think that all us whites up north cared about the blacks and that Friend Lincoln was jest slow or didn't care his own self.

Well, if Mr. Phillips and all of them had their way, declared immediate and universal emancipation, and snuck arms to the blacks down south, I could tell Mr. Bennett if he were a-listening: say, I kin make scientific-looking lists of things, too:

- 1) Southern whites would torture their slaves because of it
- 2) The slaves wouldn't receive enough arms.
- 3) Black men, women, and children would be murdered.
- 4) Egypt (the one in south El-a-noy) and the Northwest would join the Confederacy, outnumbering the southern blacks.
- 5) Friend Lincoln would lose Kentucky, making it probable that the Seceshes would win.
- 6) While all the blacks are being driven into worse conditions than ever before and while the Union is fragmented into tiny, warring states, Wendell Phillips and Et Al will be reading about it in the London and Paris newspapers where they will have beat a very hasty and safe retreat.

Yes, Friend Gerry, you hit it right on the head when you wrote in that little National Parks booklet that "restoration of the Union and the end of slavery" will "define Lincoln's great achievement." But the one had to come before the other. Like you said, "Had he truly desired nothing more than to save the Union, he might have done so the day after his election as president, simply by renouncing his antislavery views and agreeing to the South's demands...."

Friend Lincoln is a smart man. It is like he told that feller he sent out to Missouri to straighten things out: that if he gets lambasted about equal from each side, he is probably hitting it about right.

My final thots is that if this country don't honor Friend Lincoln as a great leader, or if in the future he is not honored, this country will lose the greatest thing it has besides its Constitution, something that the Constitution itself may depend on, and that is the rare and sacred combination of reason and compassion, a combination that Friend Lincoln has, and has never abandoned while dealing with folks that hev plum lost their heads.

Well, Friend Gerry, I reckon I hev done it again. I jest do go on and on. But I hev to get out to the fields as the rain has let up and we hev to save as much of the crop as possible. We worked plum through the last bad spell and all come down with the quinsy.

Until the next time, I am

Your friend,

*Sarah*

Friend Sara

# At The Lincoln Museum

## Temporary Exhibits

*Now He Belongs To The Ages:*



### Now He Belongs to the Ages: The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln

*Last Day January 27, 2002*

Don't miss the last chance to see the ground-breaking exhibit that may change the way you think about the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. The exhibit brings together items from the collections of many distinguished institutions: the Huntington Library; Ford's Theatre National Historic Site; the Chicago Historical Society; the Gilder Lehrman Collection on deposit at the Pierpont Morgan Library; as well as treasures from The Lincoln Museum's own collection.

### Dining and Diplomacy: White House China

*April 13–July 7, 2002*

Presidential china reflects the fascinating intersection of personal and public life in the White House. Some presidents brought personal china with them and used it for state dinners; most bought at least some china with public money, often to the dismay of taxpayers. The Lincoln Museum's exhibit will draw primarily from the largest collection of presidential china outside the White House itself, that of Set Momjian, a retired Ford Motor executive, friend of six presidents, and United Nations representative under President Carter.

#### New Area Code

**Please note that after January 15, 2002, the Museum's area code will change from 219 to 260.**

## Special Events

### Martin Luther King, Jr.: Celebrating a Legacy of Freedom

*Monday, January 21, 2002; 10 a.m.–5 p.m.*

Free admission to the Museum with special activities planned to celebrate the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Black History. The Friends of The Lincoln Museum gratefully acknowledge the Morrill Charitable Foundation for generously sponsoring this special program.

### Docent Training Course

*Tuesday/Thursday 9:30–11:30 a.m.*

*January 22–February 28, 2002*

If you are interested in learning more about the life and times of Abraham Lincoln, and enjoy sharing your knowledge with others, consider joining the Lincoln Museum docents. The training course, focuses on the history behind the Museum's permanent and temporary exhibits, and includes such other topics as presentation technique, museum theory, and artifact preservation. To become a Museum volunteer and register for the course, please call the Lincoln Museum's education coordinator at (260) 455-5606 or email [jshupert-arick@LNC.com](mailto:jshupert-arick@LNC.com).

### Author Appearance

*Saturday, January 27, 2002  
2 p.m.*

Daniel R. Weinberg, co-author (with James Swanson) of *Lincoln's Assassins: Their Trial and Execution* will discuss and sign copies of his work, an unprecedented visual record of more than 200 contemporary photographs, prints, and other documents, many previously unpublished.

