AXES AND ANCESTRY:
LINCOLN NEVER SAID THAT

A popular cable show that highlights the skills and dangers of loggers felling tall trees is “Ax Men.” While modern loggers favor power saws over Abraham Lincoln’s traditional ax, this ancient tool still is useful in certain instances. Lincoln’s youth was spent learning how to wield an ax. This skill was necessary to clear land for farming, provide lumber for buildings, and split fence railing to keep livestock either in or out of fields and gardens. Lincoln’s association with the ax continued until a week before his assassination. He entertained troops at the Depot Field Hospital at City Point, Virginia on April 8, 1865, by picking up an ax and chopping a nearby pile of wood. In some accounts, Lincoln allegedly performed a grand finale by taking the ax handle in his right hand and lifting it slowly until it was at a right angle to his body, where he held it for several moments. Lincoln’s New Salem associates often commented on his strength and agility, which he maintained throughout his life.

A recent work of fiction by Seth Grahame-Smith, Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter, provides a whole new definition to Abraham Lincoln’s use of an ax. Instead of chopping down trees, Lincoln uses the ax to kill dreaded vampires who killed his mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln, as well as others. While the novel reflects the current Twilight novel craze of vampires and werewolves, it also underscores a number of spurious quotes attributed to Abraham Lincoln and axes.

A very good friend presented me with a gift some years ago, a paperweight with the phrase, “Chop your own wood, and it will warm you twice, A. Lincoln.” Undoubtedly a true sentiment but one not uttered by Abraham Lincoln. Rather, Henry Ford of automobile fame is credited with originating the quote. Two other quotes, however, are widely circulated on the Internet that are attributed to Lincoln but lack any information on when or where he said them:

“Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first 45 minutes sharpening the ax.”

“If I only had an hour to chop down a tree, I would spend the first 45 minutes sharpening my ax.”

Both reflect the same meaning and differ only in the amount of time spent in sharpening the ax. But did Lincoln say either of them?

The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln and The Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln fail to contain anything closely related to these quotes. The key words “sharpening” and “ax” are contained in a reminiscence by the sculptor Leonard W. Volk, who recalled Lincoln saying, “It is true that I did split rails, and one day while I was sharpening a wedge on a log, the ax glanced and nearly took my thumb off, and there is the scar, you see.” The key words “six” and “hours” are found in two newspaper accounts of Lincoln’s address to citizens of Lafayette, Indiana, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, both delivered as president-elect enroute to Washington, D.C. On February 11, 1861, Lincoln told the good people of Lafayette: “Now only six hours have elapsed since I left my home in Illinois where I was surrounded by a large concourse of my fellow citizens, almost all of whom I could recognize, and I find myself far from home surrounded by the thousands I now see before me, who are strangers to me.” Ten days later, Lincoln indicated to the residents of Philadelphia: “I must now get some refreshment, gentlemen. After that I shall be glad to shake hands with all of you that I can. But there are sufficient people here to keep me shaking hands for six hours.” In both instances, Lincoln uses the “six hours” reference in political terms: time lapsed from departing home to take the oath in Washington; and the political custom of pressing the flesh, or hand shaking. John Hay wrote to John Nicolay on July 19, 1863: “I ran the Tycoon through one hundred

(Continued on page 2)
Sources were readily available that Hill may have consulted in his research. Ida Tarbell with J. McCan Davis published a heavily illustrated book in 1896 entitled The Early Life of Abraham Lincoln: Containing Many Unpublished Documents And Unpublished Reminiscences of Lincoln’s Early Friends.

One of Tarbell's aims was to disprove allegations that Thomas and Nancy Hanks Lincoln were never married, as well as to demonstrate the distinguished lineage of the Lincoln family. Providing a facsimile copy of the marriage certificate of Thomas and Nancy Lincoln signed by the Reverend Jesse Head, Tarbell also provided an appendix containing an interview with centennial Christopher Columbus Graham who claimed to have witnessed the marriage of Abraham Lincoln's parents. The interview occurred in 1884. In it, Graham stated, "President Lincoln told James Speed: 'I don't know who my grandfather was, and am much more concerned to know what his grandson will be.'" Graham ends the thought with "I am not sure that we know, either, perfectly yet." But Tarbell asterisks the sentence and in a footnote argues: "The memoranda for Lincoln's genealogy (page 223), and the introduction to this work, as well as the first chapter, show that we do know now, beyond a doubt, who and what Lincoln's ancestors were."

The claim that Lincoln told this to James Speed is without a date or context. James Speed published several accounts of his recollections of Abraham Lincoln and none contain the quote or an event when the quote may have been uttered. James Speed's brother, Joshua Fry Speed, also published recollections of Lincoln but does not use the quote. Graham uses the quote to refer to Thomas Lincoln's father, suggesting that Lincoln did not know about his namesake. This may be true if Lincoln was referring to his mother's father. Yet we know from at least four separate letters and his autobiographical notes to John Locke Scripps, that Lincoln knew about his father's father, particularly his being killed by Indians on the Kentucky frontier.

Another possibility available to Hill was Eleanor Gridley's The Story of Abraham Lincoln: Or the Journey from the Log Cabin to the White House (1900). In Chapter 26, "Recovery of the Lincoln Folk-Lore Stories" (pp. 206-07), John J. Hall, Lincoln's step-nephew, recounted a bout of Lincoln's depression. Hall inquired "What's up, Uncle Abe? Are ye sad 'cause Ann Rutledge died?" Claiming that was not the cause of his blue mood, Lincoln finally admitted, "I can't bear to think I don't know who my grandfather was." Hall reminded Lincoln that he heard him many times recount the murder of Grandfather Abraham Lincoln by Indians. As Hall described Lincoln: "Abe looked at me solemn like and said, 'I don't mean him; I mean my mother's father.'"

These dueling reminiscences tug in different directions. One is recalled from a 100-year-old man and credited to Lincoln's last Attorney General who never used it in any of his writings about Lincoln, while the other is simply described as "folk-lore." The way that both Graham and Hill use the entire quote suggests Lincoln didn't care about his ancestors, only what the future would hold for his grandchildren. A darker use only cites the first portion of the quote and is used to support Lincoln's fears about his mother's alleged illegitimacy. Of note, however, William Herndon and Ward Hill Lamon had already raised this issue in print, so it was already taking on its own existence as legend. Lincoln's angst about his mother's origins was expressed in private to William Herndon in a buggy ride to the Menard County Court, published in the Herndon/Weik biography of Lincoln. A thorough search of the documentary record about Lincoln and Herndon's law practice does not comport with Herndon's recollection of time and place of Lincoln's revelation. Regardless, the origins of "I don't know who my grandfather was and am more concerned to know what his grandson will be" remains without a direct observer, date, or context. The quote varies in length and meaning, depending on the source. Much of it is determined by what authors wish to prove by it, either a belief in the future or fear of the past. It is likely that Lincoln's sharpened ax would have chopped it out of his narrative because of its questionable origins.

If the quote did not originate from someone Hill interviewed, what popular printed
Dear ALA Members,

This issue of For The People highlights the donors to the Abraham Lincoln Association Endowment Fund. We are very grateful to everyone who has donated to this Fund since it was established in 1999. Under the leadership and successful management of Robert S. Eckley, the Fund has prospered and been available for the support of the Association’s ongoing operations and special projects. The Association’s purpose in establishing the Endowment Fund was to further the Association’s mission to actively encourage, promote and aid the collection and dissemination of information regarding all phases of Lincoln’s life and career and to insure these activities will continue for the next 100 years.

In June the ALA Board of Directors held an informal meeting in Lincoln, Illinois. After the meeting, we toured Lincoln related sites in the area. We are very grateful to Lincoln College for hosting our meeting and the tour. We would also like to thank the Postville Courthouse for a fascinating tour of their site, which is pictured on the back page of this newsletter. We were pleased to have several of our new Directors attend this meeting, as well as many of our continuing Directors.

Brooks Simpson reports that he and his Sesquicentennial Symposium committee have developed a theme for the Abraham Lincoln Association Symposium as we commemorate the sesquicentennial of the Civil War. For the next 5 years the symposium will be held over two days. Please look on page 7 for complete details of the events planned for February 12, 2011.

Thanks to each of you for your continued support of the Abraham Lincoln Association; without our members we could not exist.

Robert J. Lenz
President

LINCOLN’S WIGWAM NOMINATION COMMEMORATED

On May 18, 2010, the Abraham Lincoln Association joined with the City of Chicago to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the nomination of Abraham Lincoln as a candidate for president at the Wigwam in Chicago. The event was held at the Chicago Cultural Center. Speakers included ALA President Robert J. Lenz, Chicago Alderman Edward Burke, former Senator Adlai Stevenson III, and John Elliff. ALA Board Member Daniel Weinberg was the Master of Ceremonies. The event concluded with a Presidential Press Conference featuring George Buss as President Lincoln, Bob Lenz as Lincoln’s Press Secretary and Chicago television journalist Mike Flannery as the press. A sellout crowd enjoyed the occasion.
CONTINUE THE LEGACY
CONTRIBUTE TO THE ALA ENDOWMENT

As we have just celebrated the bicentennial of Lincoln’s birth and are approaching a renewed recognition of his leadership during his Presidency and the Civil War, we increasingly encounter his legacy. We can assure the strength of his legacy by imparting a legacy of our own through a contribution to the ALA’s endowment. All contributions are welcome. It can be as simple as a check or can take the form of contributions of stock with the income tax benefit of no recognition of any capital gain, or could take the form of designating on death a part of your taxable retirement benefit or IRA, or maybe even designating the endowment on a part of your life insurance benefits that you took out to assure the kids a college education (and now they’ve long since graduated). Become a part of Lincoln’s Legacy by making a contribution to the ALA endowment. Create your own legacy in Lincoln’s footprints.

Robert A. Stuart, Jr., Chairman of the Endowment Committee

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25th Annual Lincoln Colloquium
September 17-18, 2010
LINCOLN BOYHOOD NATIONAL MEMORIAL
Lincoln City, Indiana

“Mary, Mary, we are elected.” With those words Abraham Lincoln announced to his wife that he had been elected the 16th President of the United States. This year marks the 150th anniversary of that historic 1860 election. The country was at a crossroads in that year. The tensions that had been mounting between the North and the South were reaching the breaking point. For many in the south, Lincoln’s election was seen as the last straw. Perceiving his opposition to the extension of slavery into the territories as a threat to the very existence of the institution, they decided that they had no other choice but to secede from the union. South Carolina was the first in December 1860, and was quickly followed by several others. Lincoln refused to acknowledge that secession was constitutional and the die was cast. When hostilities broke out in April 1861, he issued a call for volunteers to put down the rebellion and the civil war that had long been held at bay became a reality. The union that eventually emerged from that long and bloody struggle had been forever changed and the untested president, elected in 1860, had proven worthy of the challenge. The reunited union had experienced, in his words, a “new birth of freedom.”

The Colloquium will address the issues surrounding Lincoln's election in 1860. For information or assistance, please call 812-937-4541 or Email: mike_capps@nps.gov

Speakers:
Bruce Chadwick, author of Lincoln for President
Tim Good, Superintendent, Ulysses S. Grant NHS
Brian Dirck, Anderson University
Tim Townsend, Historian, Lincoln Home NHS
Bill Bartelt, Historian and Author

Telephone Registration: 812/464-1989 or 800/467-8600.

“Lincoln and Race”
8th Annual Lincoln Legacy Lecture Series, University of Illinois Springfield
October 7, 2010 at 7:00 p.m. in Brookens Auditorium at UIS.

In celebration of UIS’s 40th anniversary, two UIS faculty members will give this year’s lectures. Dr. Michael Burlingame, Naomi B. Lynn Chair in Lincoln Studies, will present a lecture titled: “Abraham Lincoln: ‘The White Man’s or the Black Man’s President’?” Dr. Matthew Holden, Jr., will give a lecture on: “After Lincoln: The Counter-Attack of White Supremacy.” Dr. Cullom Davis, Emeritus Professor of History, will serve as moderator. The event is free and open to the public; no reservation is required. Students and classes are encouraged to attend. Overflow seating will be available in Conference Room C/D of the Public Affairs Center. The lectures will be webcast live at: http://www.uis.edu/technology/uislive.html. The Annual Lincoln Legacy Lecture Series is presented by the UIS Center for State Policy and Leadership. This year’s co-sponsors include the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, ECCE Speaker Series, Illinois Issues, The Illinois State Library, University of Illinois Alumni Association, and WUIS Public Radio. For information: 217-206-6576.

“The Lincoln Legacy and Contemporary Political Science”
The Wepner Symposium
Presented by the University of Illinois Springfield

October 8, 2009
UIS Public Affairs Center

Presenters will include Fred I. Greenstein (Princeton University) and Stephen Skowronek (Yale University) on the Lincoln legacy and models of leadership; Pinky Wassenberg (UIS) on Presidents and military command; Tim Miller (UIS) and Katrina Miller-Stevens (Old Dominion University) on Abraham Lincoln as political scientist; Joseph Lowndes (University of Oregon); Wilbur Rich (Emeritus, Wellesley) on Lincoln and Obama; Adriana Crocker (UIS) on the Lincoln legacy and legislation on the rights of women; and Jason Pierceson (UIS) on the Lincoln legacy and the issue of same-sex marriage. Other papers are still under consideration.

October 9, 2009
Old State Capitol, Hall of Representatives

Presenters will include Rogers M. Smith (University of Pennsylvania) and others on teaching about the Lincoln legacy in higher education and in K-12 education.

Registration information: mhold3@uis.edu rschw2@uis.edu.

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC
“LINCOLN BECOMES PRESIDENT”
ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND THE CIVIL WAR
150TH ANNIVERSARY SYMPOSIUM

This coming February, the Abraham Lincoln Association, in conjunction with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum and Library, the University of Illinois at Springfield, the Lincoln Home (National Park Service), and the Old State Capitol (Illinois Historic Preservation Agency), will present the first of five symposia dedicated to examining Abraham Lincoln as president during the American Civil War. Coming at a time when Americans will be observing the sesquicentennial of the Civil War, these symposia will examine Lincoln as president, politician, and commander in chief, as he waged war, dealt with dissent, advocated emancipation, and wrestled with reconstruction.

The schedule of events, a product of joint planning among these five partners, promises to offer a sustained look at the Lincoln presidency. Michael F. Holt will deliver the keynote address for the 2011 symposium at UIS on the evening of February 11. The next day he will be joined by Russell McClintock, Jonathan White, and Jonathan Earle, as all four historians explore Lincoln’s coming to power in 1861.

The format is designed to facilitate communication between scholars and the general public as we embark upon learning more about understanding the crisis of disunion, war, emancipation, and reconstruction that was at the heart of Lincoln’s presidency.

Brooks D. Simpson, Chairman, Sesquicentennial Symposia

Brooks D. Simpson, Chairman, Sesquicentennial Symposia

WELCOME OUR NEW MEMBERS

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Visit our website at www.abrahamlincolnassociation.org

ABRAHAM LINCOLN ASSOCIATION EVENTS

Friday, February 11, 2011

6:30 p.m.
Keynote Address
Brookens Auditorium, University of Illinois Springfield
Michael F. Holt, University of Virginia
Lincoln’s Mistakes As President-Elect

Saturday, February 12, 2011

11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
Abraham Lincoln Association Symposium
House of Representatives
Old State Capitol

Jonathan Earle, University of Kansas
The Election of 1860

Jonathan White, University of Maryland
Lincoln, Civil Liberties, and Dissent

1:00-2:00 p.m.
Luncheon
Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Russell McClintock,
St. John’s High School, Shrewsbury, Massachusetts
Lincoln and the Coming of the War

2:30-4:00 p.m.
Round Table: Lincoln Becomes President
Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Jonathan Earle, Michael Holt, Russell McClintock, and Jonathan White
Moderator: Brooks D. Simpson

Other Lincoln Events

Saturday, February 12, 2011
8:30-10:30 a.m.
George L. Painter Looking For Lincoln Lectures
Visitor Center, Lincoln Home National Historic Site

Guy Fraker, Abraham Lincoln and Bloomington, Illinois
Wayne C. Temple, Abraham Lincoln and Pittsfield, Illinois
Staff of Lincoln Log Cabin State Historic Site,
Abraham Lincoln and Charleston, Illinois

Sunday, February 13, 2011
First Presbyterian Church
See details at lincolnschurch.org
Members of the ALA Board of Directors gather at the Postville Courthouse in Lincoln, Illinois. This gathering was a part of an all day Board meeting and tour of Lincoln sites in Logan County, held on June 24, 2010.

Who is this man? See next issue.