

For the People

A Newsletter of the Abraham Lincoln Association
Volume 2, Number 2 Summer, 2000 Springfield, Illinois

Ten “True Lies” About Abraham Lincoln Part 1

by Allen C. Guelzo *

In 1860, Abraham Lincoln told Chicago journalist John Locke Scripps: “Why, Scripps, it is a great piece of folly to attempt to make anything out of my early life. It can all be condensed into a single sentence . . . ‘The short and simple annals of the poor.’ That’s my life, and that’s all you or anyone else can make of it.” That, of course, was not true. No American life has ever been less capable of being telescoped into a single sentence; no American life has ever been so far removed from merely being “short and simple.”

Still, Lincoln was not exactly telling a lie when he told Scripps that his life was a chapter out of the simple lives of the poor. His life up to age twenty-one was, to the surprise of many who knew him in the 1850s, rooted in the harsh rural poverty of Kentucky (where he was born in 1809) and southern Indiana (where he grew up). And even at the height of his prosperity as a railroad lawyer in the 1850s, he could be “short and simple” in other ways. According to his friends, he could be socially aloof, “reticent,” “shutmouthed,” and likely to be telling funny stories one moment and plunging into manic depression the next.

Clustering around Lincoln are not so much truths or lies, as are a galaxy of “true lies”—exaggerations, paradoxes, and myths that almost always turn out to have something of a truth in them. It is true that he started poor, but it is also true that he was a social climber. It is true that he was the Great Emancipator, but it is also true

that he had to be nudged and urged toward abolishing slavery. His best solution for dealing with the slaves was, up until the last two years of his life, to deport them to Central America or Africa. Yet it is also true that he genuinely hated slavery from his earliest years. In the end, he put weapons in the hands of freed black men, and put the blue uniform of the United States on their backs, and demanded that they be given the same civil rights that any white citizen enjoyed.

It is in balancing each of these qualities that we learn to penetrate something of the mystery of Abraham Lincoln, and who really was our greatest president. So, let us consider a series of “true lies” about Abraham Lincoln and see if understanding him is really as great a “piece of folly” as it seemed to him.

LINCOLN WAS ILLEGITIMATE

Abraham Lincoln was the son of Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks Lincoln, born on a farm near Hodgenville, Kentucky. No birth certificate for Abraham Lincoln exists, and the only proof that he was born on the day that is celebrated as Lincoln’s birthday—February 12—is his own testimony in several letters and two short biographical sketches that he wrote for political campaign use in 1859 and 1860. There is, nevertheless, no real doubt that he was legitimate—that his parents were quite legally married at the time of his birth—because the record of the Lincoln-Hanks marriage in 1806 has survived. What may be true, though, is that Nancy Hanks Lincoln, who died when her son was nine years old, may have been illegitimate herself.

Lincoln’s Hanks relatives were a pretty crude lot: “*lascivious, lecherous*,” not to be trusted,” and whispers about Nancy’s origins may have filtered down to Lincoln’s ears as rumors that he himself was illegitimate. Whatever the reality, Lincoln took the whispers very seriously. In 1852, Lincoln told his law partner, William Herndon, that “his mother was a bastard,” the natural daughter of a high-class Virginia planter. What was worse, Herndon believed that “Mr. Lincoln was informed of *some facts* that took place in Kentucky *about the time he was born* (was told in his youth), that ate into his nature, and as it were crushed him, and yet clung to him, like his shadow, like a fiery shirt around his noble spirit.” Even if these were only rumors, they weighed heavily on Lincoln. He never glorified his poor farmer origins; if anything, they embarrassed him, and the suggestion that his birth or his mother’s were morally tainted intensified what Herndon called “his organic melancholy.”

LINCOLN HAD RELIGION

Lincoln was certainly born in a religious home. Although his father, Thomas, was an elder in the Separate Baptist Church, a rigidly exclusive Baptist denomination, Lincoln pulled shy of any religious commitments. This did not mean that Lincoln was unfamiliar with Christianity. He was gifted with an almost photographic memory, and he could mount tree stumps and replay the sermons of preachers he had heard almost on demand, or recite an obscure verse of the Bible that he had read. But he never joined a church. In fact, when

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he finally came of age and left his father's farm to become a clerk in a store at New Salem, he became notorious for sniping at Christianity. When he moved again in 1837 to Springfield to begin work as a lawyer, his Springfield friends described him as a "skeptic" or an "infidel." Mary Todd, whom he married in 1842, was also known as a religious agnostic, and there is no evidence that either of them belonged to a church for the first eight years of their marriage.

In 1850, Lincoln's second son, Edward Baker Lincoln, died of tuberculosis. The death of the child drove Mary Todd Lincoln to join the First Presbyterian Church in Springfield. Although Lincoln did not join the church with Mary, he began to show a noticeable softening of attitude. He began instead to speak of himself as a seeker, but a seeker who was not sure that he would be acceptable to God after all. "Probably it is my lot to go on in a twilight, feeling and reasoning

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Was Abraham Lincoln Forced Into Glory ?

Leone Bennett, Jr., shocked the American public with his famous February, 1968 article in *Ebony*, "Was Abe Lincoln a White Supremacist?" Claiming that Lincoln was not the Great Emancipator and that he represented the interests of his white constituents rather than enslaved blacks, Bennett concluded that Lincoln was the embodiment of the racist tradition in America. Herbert Mitgang of the *New York Times* and Mark Krug in the *Chicago Sun-Times* responded to Bennett's accusations immediately in the press with rebuttals. Scholars such as George M. Fredrickson and Don Fehrenbacher also wrote seminal articles exploring the limitations of Lincoln's views on racial equality.

Many of the scholarly explorations on Lincoln, race, and emancipation resulting from Bennett's provocative article are found in the Association's recent collection of essays available from Fordham University Press, "*For A Vast Future Also*": *Essays from the Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*.

Now, thirty-two years later, Bennett revisits these same themes at greater length in his recently released book, *Forced Into Glory: Abraham Lincoln's White Dream* (Johnson Publishers, 2000). Columnist Jack E. White writing in *Time* agreed with Bennett that a "conspiracy of silence," prevented the book from being widely reviewed and openly debated.

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The Abraham Lincoln Association to Sponsor the Lincoln Colloquium

The Abraham Lincoln Association Board of Directors voted to provide \$1,000 toward the cost of the 15th Annual Lincoln Colloquium that will take place on September 23 from 10:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. at the Lincoln Museum in Fort Wayne, Indiana. The event originated as a lecture series sponsored by the Lincoln Home in Springfield, Illinois. It has since expanded to

include the Lincoln Studies Center at Knox College and the Lincoln Museum at Fort Wayne. The speakers for "Now He Belongs to the Ages: Lincoln in the New Millennium," include Allen C. Guelzo, Eastern College, Harold Holzer, Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Thomas E. Schwartz, Illinois State Historian. The registration cost is \$35. For further information call 219.455.6087.

In Memoriam

Elmer Gertz, world-renowned Chicago civil rights attorney and recipient of the Abraham Lincoln Association's Lincoln the Lawyer Award, died on April 27 after complications from open-heart surgery in January. He distinguished himself in a number of landmark cases, including winning the release of Nathan Leopold from prison, overturning Jack Ruby's first trial conviction for the killing of Lee Harvey Oswald because of pretrial publicity, and successfully defending the publication of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* against the censorship statutes in Chicago. Perhaps his most notable accomplishment was chairing the committee that wrote the civil rights section of the 1970 Illinois Constitution. Gertz was ninety-three.

Linda Culver, vice president of Illinois National Bank, Springfield business and civic leader, and member of the Abraham Lincoln Association's board of directors, died suddenly on May 18. Culver, a native of Springfield, rose quickly in the banking industry from controller to senior vice president and executive vice president before being named president of First of America Bank (FOA), smashing the glass ceiling confronting female executives. When FOA was purchased by National City Bank, Culver was named regional president. She left National City Bank last year to help reestablish the locally owned Illinois National Bank. Every Springfield civic, cultural, and business organization board actively sought Culver because she was energetic, industrious, and caring. Her love of Springfield was legendary. Her brief tenure on the Abraham Lincoln Association board of directors produced a revised accounting system for the association. She also headed the task force to begin long-range planning for the association, which resulted in a retreat and planning document. Culver was forty-seven.

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Editorial pieces by Steve Chapman and Clarence Page in the *Chicago Tribune* have questioned Bennett's conclusions. It has not generated the same level of excitement in large measure because in the past thirty-two years scholars and authors have carefully examined Lincoln's views on race and emancipation. William Lee Miller,

Thomas C. Sorensen Professor of Political and Social Thought at the University of Virginia and author of a forthcoming book on the evolution of Lincoln's political virtues, has agreed to write a review essay on Bennett's book that will appear in the Summer, 2001, issue of the *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*. And so, the debate continues.

Welcome New Members!

This list reflects members enrolled from Dec. 1, 1999-May 31, 2000: Jonathan Reymann, Mr. and Mrs. Morton D. Barker, III, Robert G. Langford, Dr. E. Mark Bezzant, Carlton L. Smith, Jerry Slater, Susan Krause, Stacy McDermott, Harold J. Spelman, Sheila Riley-Callahan, Thomas Campbell, Matthew Glover, Muriel Underwood, Michael A. Myers, Ronald C. White, Robert and Janice Irwin, William A. Rolando, John S. Melin, Stratton Shartel, Dennis E. Suttles, William H. Jacques, Frank C. Ullman, Clifford and Shirley Greenwalt, Douglas and Jean McLain, Nancy Whalen, Rand Burnette, Shelby Harbison, Craig M. Chambers, Greg Walbert, Drew Davis, Susie Ripka, William and Nancy Simpson, Mark

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Save the Date!

September 23, 2000-May 31, 2001, "Picturing Lincoln: The Changing Image of America's Sixteenth President," Northern Indiana Center for History, South Bend, Indiana. The exhibit will feature the print and photograph collection of Jack Smith along with major artifacts from the collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, the Lincoln Museum, and other repositories. For additional information, call 219.235.9664, or visit the Center's website at www.centerforhistory.org.

September 23, 2000, The Fifteenth Annual Lincoln Colloquium, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana. The colloquium will feature presentations by Allen C. Guelzo, Harold Holzer, Thomas F. Schwartz, and the R. Gerald McMurtry lecture

by Frank J. Williams. For more information, call 219.455.6087.

October 13-14, 2000, Conference on Illinois History, Hilton Hotel, Springfield, Illinois. The conference will feature Ulysses S. Grant biographer Brooks D. Simpson and sessions on Lincoln's Illinois and the Civil War. For information, call 217.782.2118.

October 15, 2000, Abraham Lincoln Association Membership Dinner, Jacksonville, Illinois. Featured at the dinner will be noted Lincoln scholar Douglas L. Wilson. For more information, call John Power or Greg Olson at 217.245.6121.

And don't forget the Abraham Lincoln Association Banquet on February 12, 2001, featuring noted author and television commentator, Michael Beschloss.

A Lincoln in Name Only

by William B. Tubbs *

Abraham Lincoln may have been the most famous Lincoln to practice law in Illinois, but he was certainly not the only Lincoln to have done so. Warren J. Lincoln was one of the others. Abraham and Warren were both descendants of Samuel Lincoln of Hingham, Massachusetts (the progenitor of the Lincoln name in America). Though both Lincolns for a time lived in central Illinois and practiced law, the similarities all but end there.



Warren J. Lincoln

Abraham's great-grandfather and Warren's great-great-grandfather were brothers. Abraham and Warren's genealogical paths diverge at Mordecai Lincoln, Jr., Samuel Lincoln's grandson. One can follow the lineage of Mordecai's first son, John (b. 1716), to Abraham Lincoln (b. February 12, 1809). In 1830, Abraham and his family came to Illinois, and the rest is history. One can follow the lineage of Mordecai's eighth son, Thomas (b.

1732), to Warren Lincoln (b. December 11, 1878, in Mt. Pulaski, Illinois).

At the urging of John T. Stuart, Abraham Lincoln began his study of law in 1834. Within two years, Lincoln had a license to practice. In the spring of 1837, he and Stuart began a partnership that would last until 1841. From 1841 to 1844, Lincoln practiced alongside Stephen T. Logan. In 1844, Lincoln took as a junior partner William Herndon—a partnership that lasted until Lincoln's election to the presidency. Lincoln was involved in more than 5,600 cases during his career.

Warren Lincoln attended Chicago-Kent College of Law from 1913 to 1916, and for a time he was employed as a clerk at the office of Chicago attorney Henry W. Magee. In July of 1916, Warren sat for the Illinois Bar exam and on October 4 he was admitted to the Illinois Bar. Soon after, he resumed a professional relationship with Magee, this time as an attorney. He would also return to Mt. Pulaski and begin a partnership with George J. Smith. It is unknown how many clients Warren had, how many cases he tried, or whether he was considered competent as a lawyer. But his legal career was short-lived. After a nervous breakdown in 1918 and a month-long stay at Chicago's Alexian Brothers' Hospital under the care of nerve specialist A. B. T. Heym, Warren's legal career was over. At the suggestion of Heym that he find a less-stressful occupation, Warren moved to Wichita, Kansas, to study horticulture. In March of 1921, he returned to Illinois to open a greenhouse and truck-farming operation just north of Aurora. There he sold fruits, flowers, and vegetables. His knowledge of the law, or at least one tenet of it, however, remained with him.

Corpus delicti is defined in *Black's Law Dictionary* as the "body (material substance) upon which a crime has been committed, e.g., the corpse of a

murdered man, the charred remains of a house burned down. . . . the objective proof . . . that a crime has been committed." Warren's firm grasp of this definition became quite evident in January of 1924 when he confessed to and was charged with the murders of his second wife Lina and her brother Byron Shoup.

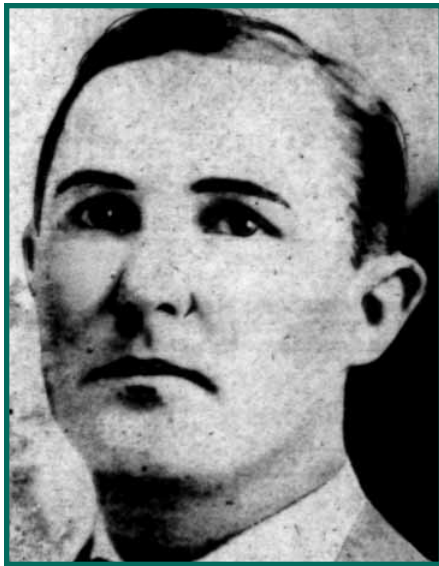


Lina (Shoup) Lincoln

Warren and Lina Shoup were married in Lincoln, Illinois, on September 7, 1912. At the time, Warren was the postmaster at Mt. Pulaski and Lina was his assistant there. It is unknown whether Lina's older brother Byron accompanied the couple to Chicago when Warren began law school, but by the time that the Lincolns moved to Wichita, Byron was clearly in the picture. Byron continued to be a member of the Lincoln extended family once the couple moved to Aurora, helping out with Warren's greenhouse business.

The confession to the murders brought to a conclusion a twelve-month roller coaster ride for Warren Lincoln. The previous January his wife tried to poison him, and his brother-in-law severely beat him. In March of 1923, Warren filed for divorce. On the morning of April 30, 1923, Warren disappeared. His house

was found ransacked. Blood was found in the house, in the greenhouse, and on clothing recovered from a nearby well. As a nationwide search began for Warren it became clear that all had not been well at the Lincoln household for some time. Reports of several occurrences of abuse were told by Edward Lincoln (Warren's brother and business partner) and John Lincoln (Warren's son from his first marriage). Soon, the prevailing opinion was that Warren had been killed or kidnapped by his wife and his brother-in-law.



Byron Shoup

On June 12, 1923, however, Warren reappeared in Chicago telling a tale of a kidnapping, an international drug ring, and a daring escape in Buffalo, New York. He returned to Aurora and tried to pick up his life where it left off, but before long, Warren disappeared again. Some suggested that another nervous breakdown had caused him to seek treatment with specialists in Michigan.

Late in 1923, requests for money from Lina were received by her relatives in Mt. Pulaski, and a check drawn on Byron's account and endorsed by him turned up at his Aurora bank. At the urging of Lina and Byron's relatives, another search for Warren was instigated. On January 8, 1924, Dr. F. C. Van Hook of Mt. Pulaski received a written request from Warren for a letter of recommendation. Van Hook

contacted the authorities and Warren was arrested on January 12 in Chicago and charged with obtaining money under false pretenses. Once in custody, Warren began telling the tale of his life with Lina and Byron in sordid detail. He also, in the span of twelve days, made several different confessions as to the murders and/or possible whereabouts of his wife and his brother-in-law.

Eventually, Warren confessed to the murders of both Lina and Byron. But a confession is not enough to convict someone of a crime. Warren knew that, and for twelve days seemed to enjoy the notoriety that the case brought him, as the newspaper reporters swarmed around him making him a local celebrity. There was no evidence that the murders that Warren had confessed to had occurred. Warren claimed, alternately, that the bodies were burned in the furnace of his greenhouse, buried, or taken away by persons unknown. Searches of his property turned up nothing. Warren even returned to his house to reenact the crime to hopefully jog his memory as to what happened to the bodies. But nothing came from that. On January 25, 1924, once Warren decided that he'd had enough fun, he made his final confession. The following day, he took the authorities to the North Lake Street city dump in Aurora and led the search for a concrete block that he had unloaded there the previous June. The heads of the two victims would be found inside.

Warren was sentenced to life in prison on February 18, 1925, and was sent to the Illinois State Penitentiary at Joliet the next day. He died there of complications following gall bladder surgery on August 11, 1941.

*William B. Tubbs is the editor and designer of this newsletter and the Associate Editor of the *Journal of Illinois History*.

Author's note: The above is but a synopsis of the odyssey that was Warren Lincoln's life. The whole story is the subject of a book-length treatment that has been my obsession for nearly four years. Although an incon-



Jailer Pete Fatten displays pieces of the concrete block that concealed the heads of Lina (Shoup) Lincoln and Byron Shoup.

sequential and ancillary fact to the focus of my ongoing research on the case, the relationship of Warren to Abraham Lincoln has been inescapable. In recounting the incidents at Aurora, reporters made room for Warren's claims of kinship with the Sixteenth President, even though his actions and his other claims were more than enough to fill the columns of newspapers from around the state and the country. Most would hope that none of Warren's claims were true.

The photographs for this article were taken from the January 14, 1924, *Chicago American* and the January 28, 1924, *Chicago Daily Journal*.

Unless otherwise indicated, all photographs are courtesy of the Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield.

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my way through life, as questioning, doubting Thomas did,” Lincoln told Aminda Rogers Rankin. After his election to the presidency in 1860, he began to speak in almost personal terms about his need for the help of God and his confidence that Divine Providence would bring the war and the emancipation of the slaves to a successful conclusion.

Still, Lincoln pulled shy of identifying with any organized religion. While his Illinois political friend Orville Hickman Browning noticed that Lincoln frequently spent Sunday afternoons reading the Bible, Lincoln never prayed, either before meals or anywhere else. Julia Taft Bayne, who babysat the Lincoln children in the White House in 1861, thought it was odd that in a time when “many families conducted some sort of family worship . . . I do not remember that the Lincoln family did.” Bayne never heard Lincoln “pray or saw him in the attitude of prayer.” Even when he read the Bible, he read it “quite as much for its literary style as he did for its religious or spiritual content.” In his last great speech, his Second Inaugural, Lincoln spoke as no other American president has ever spoken about God and God’s direction of human affairs. But he spoke only of God as Judge, not theologically as Father, Forgiver, or Redeemer. Lincoln was, as Herndon remarked, a very religious man, but it was a religion of his own making, not the religion of the Bible or of any other organized religion.

LINCOLN WAS AN HONEST LAWYER

In Lincoln’s time, as much as in our own, the words “honest” and “lawyer” are often classified as contradictions. Lincoln, however, developed an outstanding reputation for honesty and fair play in his own legal practice. He told Noyes Miner, a Springfield neighbor and Baptist minister, that “he would never take a case unless he

thought there was merit in it.” In a series of notes that he compiled for a lecture on lawyering in the 1850s, Lincoln warned “young lawyers” to “never stir up litigation” just to get business. “Resolve to be honest at all events; and if, in your own judgement, you can not be an honest lawyer, resolve to be honest without being a lawyer. Choose some other occupation, rather than one in the choosing of which you do, in advance, consent to be a knave.”

This did not mean, however, that Lincoln was any sort of legal Robin Hood. By the 1850s, his experience in the circuit courts and his network of political connections had won him agreements to represent most of the major railroad corporations in Illinois. The legal work that he did for them often involved evicting farmers from lands claimed by the railroads, protecting the railroads from lawsuits by businessmen whose freight was damaged or spoiled by the railroads, and winning exemption from local property taxes for the railroads. By the mid-1850s, at a time when an ordinary workingman earned only about \$300 to \$500 a year, Lincoln was earning over \$3,000 a year as a lawyer. In one case for the Illinois Central Railroad, he took home a fee of \$5,000.

Still, there was no sense in which Lincoln was greedy—he was still representing \$3.50 trespass suits. He did not have “the avarice of the get,” remembered Herndon, but he did have “that avarice of the keep.” He was, in other words, stingy. He was furious, as president, to discover that Mary had overspent the congressional appropriation for refurbishing the White House, despite the obvious fact that the White House in 1861 was falling down around its’ occupants ears. He also hoarded large portions of his presidential salary, to the point where two uncashed salary warrants were discovered in his desk after his death.

LINCOLN WOULD BE A DEMOCRAT IF HE WERE ALIVE TODAY

The fact that Lincoln was the first Republican president has always provided good political capital for Republicans and irritated embarrassment for everyone else. That embarrassment, however, has developed a double edge in recent years. The consensus among historians seems to be, as Andrew Delbanco remarked in a *New York Times* review of a recent Lincoln book: “In the old days the good guys were the Republicans; now it’s the other way around.” This suggests that the party of Lincoln has drifted away from Lincoln and that possession of Lincoln needs to be claimed by another party. This has been encouraged by another lawyer-politician, Bill Clinton, who has tried to establish that a new Democrat is really more loyal to the principles of Lincoln than the Republicans are.

But any proposals for Democratizing Lincoln need to cope with the fact that Lincoln was driven by a deep-seated hatred of the Democratic Party from almost his earliest days in politics. Herndon wrote that Lincoln “hated Jefferson, the man and the politician,” and Jefferson was, of course, the father of the Democratic Party. Lincoln ran his first political campaign against the Democrats of President Andrew Jackson and piled sarcasm and invective on Democratic heads whenever he had the chance. After his election as president in 1860, he set a new record for federal government job firings by dismissing over fifteen hundred Democratic office holders to replace them with Republicans.

It is true that Lincoln tirelessly preached the virtues of freedom and democracy, but what he meant by freedom and democracy was economic opportunity, in which an individual “may look forward and hope to be a hired laborer this year and the next,

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A Lincoln Vignette

by Thomas E. Schwartz

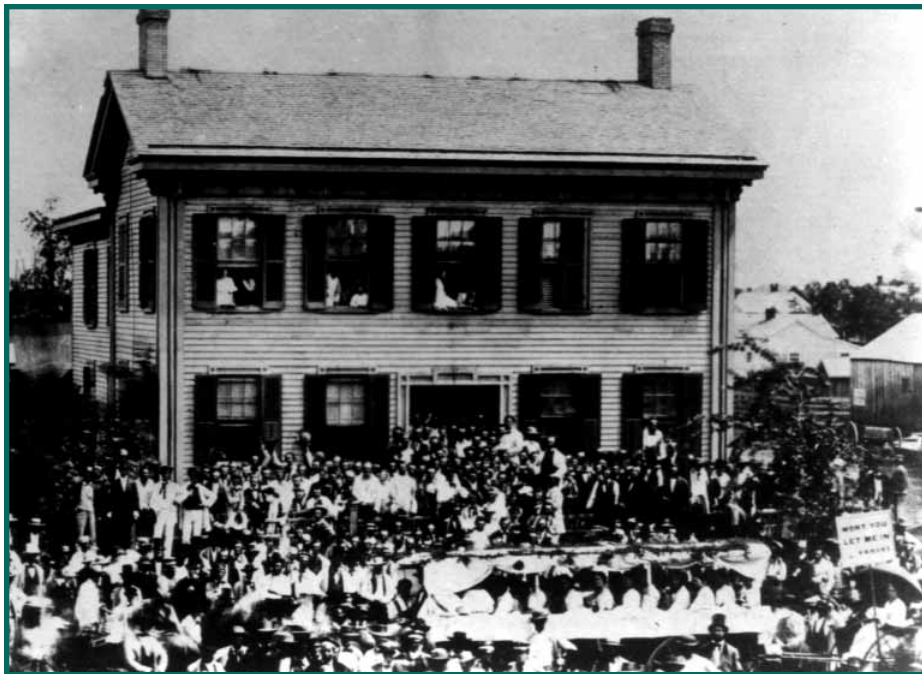
One of the most recognized Lincoln photographs shows the presidential candidate dressed in a white summer suit standing in the doorway of his home on August 8, 1860. He is among a throng of spectators watching a giant parade pass by his home on the way to the fairgrounds, then located west of the city in an area that is now bordered by the streets of Governor, Washington, Douglas, and Lincoln. Approx-

mately 180 special train cars transported the party faithful to the monster Springfield Republican rally. The parade photograph shows a wagon carrying girls in white dresses representing the thirty-three states of the Union. A lone sulky trailing the wagon has a girl carrying a sign, "Wont you let me in Kansas" (lower-right-hand corner below), a reference to the battle over whether Kansas should be admitted as a free or as a slave state. The recollection of Almeda J. Harrison sheds further light on this

rally as well as Lincoln's reaction to the plight of Kansas.

Almeda Jane Bone was born on April 1, 1846, at Rock Creek, an area several miles south of New Salem, Illinois. She married Robert P. Harrison on January 29, 1868, and lived in Pleasant Plains, Illinois, for the remainder of her life. When the local newspaper, the *Pleasant Plains Argus*, published a special issue in 1928, they included the following entry about Almeda Harrison: "Mrs. Harrison is well preserved in mind and body and has a most enviable memory. She knew Abraham Lincoln, and tells an interesting story of having been one of a group of girls, each wearing a badge and representing one of the States of the Union, who rode in wagons in a campaign parade. A girl riding alone in a sulky depicted Kansas, then seeking admission into the Union. When the procession halted in front of the Lincoln home, Abraham Lincoln came out, and taking the little girl from the sulky, lifted her into the wagon with the other States."

Lincoln's symbolic granting of statehood to Kansas became a reality on January 9, 1861, two months before he took the oath of office. "Bleeding Kansas" would join the ranks of free states just as the nation divided on the slavery issue along sectional lines.



APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

Please enroll me as a member of the Abraham Lincoln Association in the category indicated:

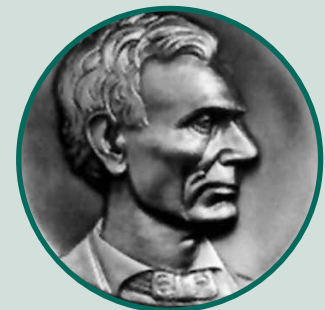
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work for himself afterward, and finally to hire men to work for him.” Lincoln thought of the Democrats as the party of bad faith; as a party that preached that America was divided into hostile groups of oppressed and oppressors, of rich and poor, of free and slave, and that the business of government was to ease the pain of the poor and the oppressed with subsidies—in the form of cheap land or slaves—and allow the great plantation owners to rule the country. Lincoln thought of the Republicans as the party of the middle class and the small businessman. He saw no permanent antagonism of rich and poor in America, no conspiracies of the oppressed and oppressor, only the ambitions of the talented and the envy of the lazy. To be free, for Lincoln, was to be able to enjoy a socially open and economically mobile society. To be a slave was to have every social relationship frozen hopelessly in place, with the great white planters making sure that no poor boys (like Lincoln) ever upset the social ladder by trying to climb it. On those terms, there is not much doubt who Lincoln would have voted for at the last presidential election (and it would not have been for the present incumbent).

LINCOLN WROTE THE GETTYSBURG ADDRESS ON THE BACK OF AN ENVELOPE WHILE ON HIS WAY THERE

In November of 1863, two years into the Civil War between the North and the South and four months after the great battle at Gettysburg, Lincoln was invited to deliver the dedication remarks at the opening of the national memorial cemetery at Gettysburg. The legend that Lincoln wrote his remarks on the back of an envelope while on board the train taking him there arose from a story published in *Scribners' Magazine* in 1906 written by Mary Shipman Andrews. Andrews's story was intended to be a piece of fiction and it was supposed to underscore how spontaneous and natural Lincoln's imagination was—that the words of the Gettysburg Address could come to him almost at the last minute. That made them seem more like divine revelation. The story, however, lodged itself in popular imagination the same way that the story of Christopher Columbus denying that the world was flat did: by being read aloud in schoolrooms by schoolteachers who didn't know the difference between fiction and fact (a book version of Andrews's article was actually

printed for school distribution in 1910, and remained in print until 1956).

In reality, Lincoln had been working on a draft of his remarks for weeks in advance. When he arrived in Gettysburg the night before the cemetery dedication, he only reworded the final sentences to get them as letter-perfect as possible, and probably recopied them to make a final draft the morning of the dedication. It would not have been like Lincoln to leave any important public utterance to the last minute. He usually prepared his speeches with painstaking care, sometimes memorizing them word-for-word before delivering them, and he frequently refused to speak at all if invited to do so without warning or preparation.

*Allen C. Guelzo is the Grace E. Kea Professor of American History and the dean of the Templeton Honors College at Eastern College in St. Davids, Pennsylvania. He is the winner of the Lincoln Prize for his book, *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President* (1999).

The conclusion of “Ten ‘True Lies’ About Abraham Lincoln” will appear in the autumn issue.

For the People

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