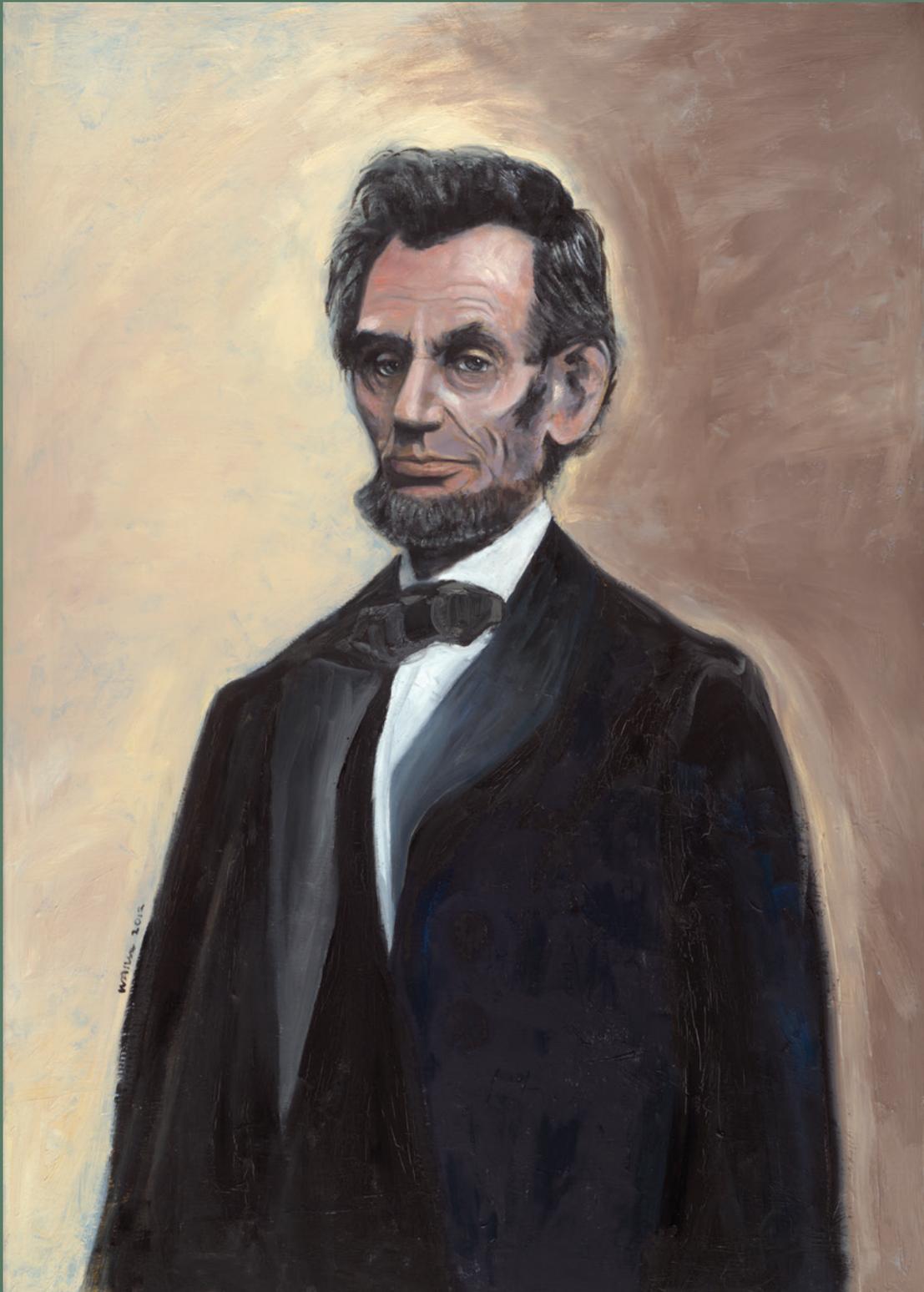


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# Lincoln LORE

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NUMBER 1917 SPRING 2018



LINCOLN LORE IS A PUBLICATION OF THE FRIENDS OF THE LINCOLN COLLECTION OF INDIANA

**CONTRIBUTORS**

WENDY ALLEN  
ALLEN C. GUELZO  
RICHARD HART  
HAROLD HOLZER  
CHARLES HUBBARD  
SAVANNAH ROSE

**ACPL**

JANE GASTINEAU  
EMILY RAPOZA  
LINCOLN@ACPL.INFO

**FRIENDS OF THE LINCOLN COLLECTION**

SARA GABBARD, EDITOR  
POST OFFICE ADDRESS  
BOX 11083  
FORT WAYNE, INDIANA 46855  
SGABBARD@ACPL.INFO  
WWW.ACPL.INFO  
WWW.LINCOLNCOLLECTION.ORG  
WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/LINCOLNCOLLECTION

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ISSN 0162-8615  
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THIS ISSUE OF LINCOLN LORE WAS MADE POSSIBLE IN PART BY A GRANT FROM THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN BICENTENNIAL FOUNDATION.

# Upcoming Events



## LINCOLN, THE POWER OF THE PARDON, AND THE 1862 SIOUX UPRISING

Presented by Roger Billings  
Sunday, April 22, 2018, 2:00 p.m.  
Main Library, Meeting Room A  
Allen County Public Library,  
Fort Wayne, Indiana  
Free and Open to the Public

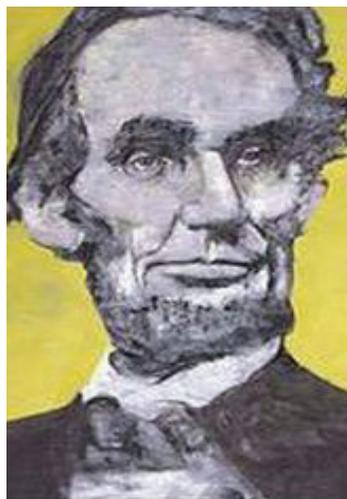
For more information, visit [www.LincolnCollection.org](http://www.LincolnCollection.org)



## 7TH ANNUAL ROLLAND LECTURE

Presented by Wendy Allen  
May 15, 2018, 7:00 p.m.  
Main Library Theater  
Allen County Public Library,  
Fort Wayne, Indiana  
Free and Open to the Public  
Sponsored by the Lupke Foundation

For more information, visit [www.LincolnCollection.org](http://www.LincolnCollection.org)



## THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE WARS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

23rd Annual Lincoln Forum Symposium  
Featuring: Edward K. Ayers, David W. Blight, Harold Holzer, John F. Marszalek, Craig L. Symonds, Frank J. Williams  
And Special Guest Novelist George Saunders, author of *Lincoln in the Bardo*  
November 16-18, 2018

Wyndham Gettysburg Hotel  
Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

For more information, visit [www.TheLincolnForum.org](http://www.TheLincolnForum.org)

# The Lincoln Forum

## When was your group founded?

Officially, we launched in 1996, but had come up with the idea for the group a year earlier—with the encouragement of Robert Maher of the Civil War Education Association (CWEA), Civil War tour impresario Pete Brown, and our late friends Chuck Platt, Maynard Schrock, and David Long. The idea germinated during down time at a 1996 CWEA conference in Florida. Until then, there was no annual Lincoln conference in the East, and no conference planned around the annual anniversary of the Gettysburg Address. We calculated there was a void to be filled, but we must admit we never imagined that from this germ of an idea we would be planning our 23rd consecutive symposium at Gettysburg with a current attendance of 300.



Harold Holzer at the Lincoln Forum

## Do you have an official mission statement?

Our mission is to educate, inform, and enlighten on the subject of Abraham Lincoln and the American Civil War. From the start we established our group to be a true forum, not just a scholarly symposium—so we could attract a “family” of Lincoln devotees not only interested in the subject, but eager for an annual experience of camaraderie and reunion. What we offer is an experience based on a shared pas-

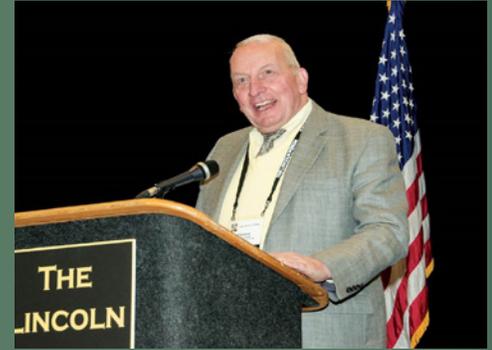
sion for history, augmented by the opportunity to forge new and sustained friendships. **What is your major annual event?**

We meet for our conference in Gettysburg every November 16-18—and many of our attendees stay in town an extra day to witness “Dedication Day,” the actual anniversary of Lincoln’s Gettysburg masterpiece on November 19. We feature lectures by superb scholars and writers, breakout sessions for small groups, battlefield tours, panel discussions, a bookstore and a group book-signing. For years, our beloved longtime member, the late James Getty, recited Lincoln’s speech each year at the Soldiers National Cemetery. Now that Jim is gone, another wonderful Forum member, George Buss, has become the “Gettysburg Lincoln”—both at the Forum and at the historic site.

## What are the awards/recognitions which are given by your organization?

For each of our 22 symposia, the Forum has bestowed its Richard Nelson Current Award of Achievement for a lifetime of major work. Honorees have ranged from Brian Lamb and Sam Waterston to historians James McPherson, David Herbert Donald, Doris Kearns Goodwin, Mark Neely, and most recently, Ron Chernow. It is a great tradition—and we are proud that we named this coveted prize for the great Lincoln scholar Dick Current, whom we miss very much, but lives on in the award named for him. In addition to honoring noteworthy individuals, we give the annual Wendy Allen Award to an institution that has advanced the study of Lincoln (honorees have included Ford’s Theatre, the Gettysburg Foundation, and the Friends of the Lincoln Collection of Indiana. The award is named for Gettysburg-based Lincoln artist Wendy Allen, and her Lincoln

portrait constitutes the actual prize. We also bestow annual Platt Family prizes for the best Lincoln essay by a college student. And we welcome teachers and students each year under a generous scholarship program designed to encourage Lincoln study “for a vast future also.”



Frank Williams at the Lincoln Forum

## Do you maintain a website?

Our website is [www.thelincolnforum.org](http://www.thelincolnforum.org), and we think users will find it both useful and informative.

## Please include information about membership.

Annual membership is available at many levels (\$35 for individuals, \$50 for families, and \$10 for students. Lifetime memberships are \$500.) Membership benefits include not only the opportunity to enroll at the annual symposium, and enjoy the fellowship and scholarship it offers, but also a subscription to our biannual Bulletin. We welcome new members—and both new and returning symposium attendees. They will find that the Forum is not just an organization—but a family.

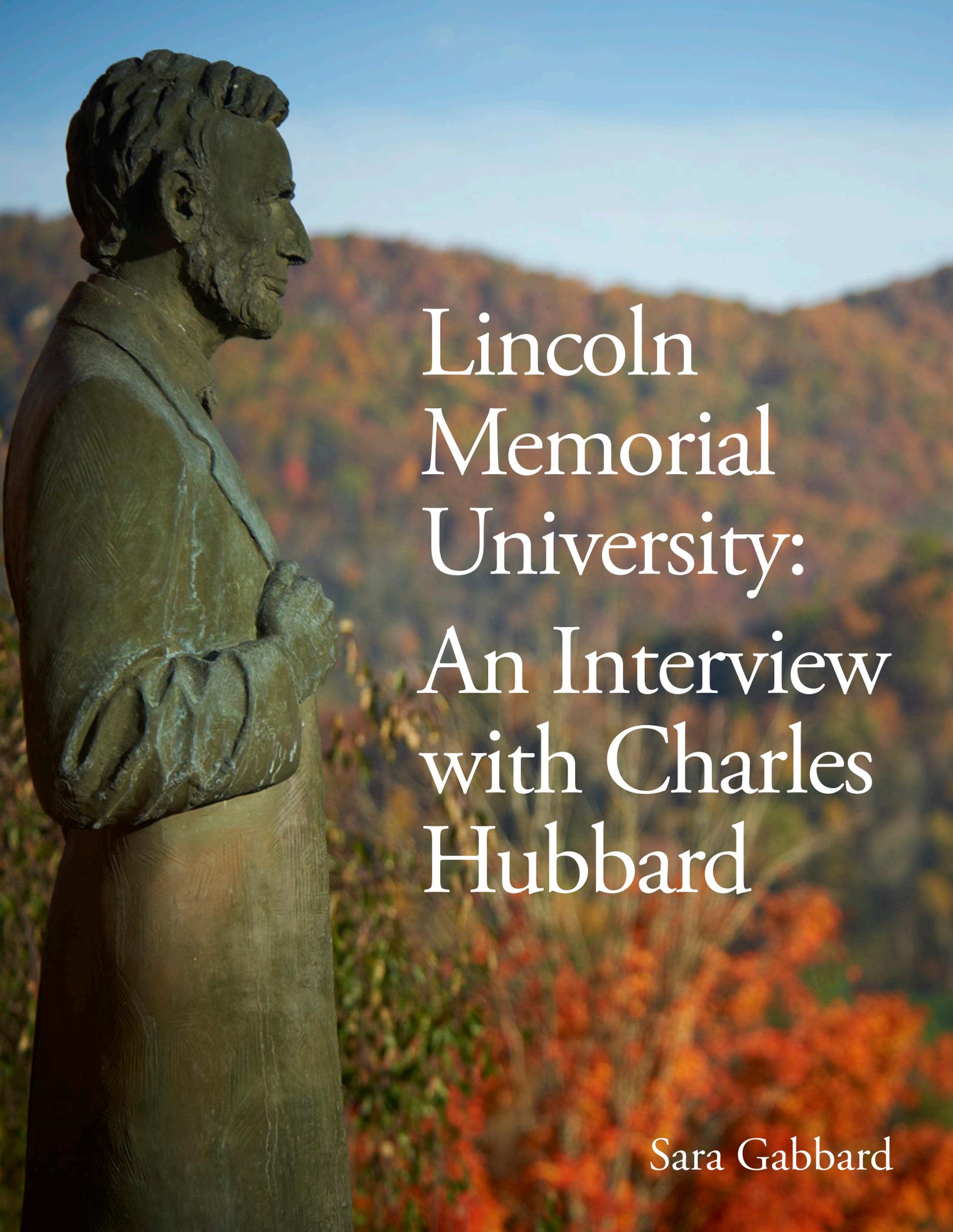
*(Editor’s note: On occasion, we plan to publish information about various national Lincoln organizations and sites. For more information please contact me at [sgabbard@acpl.info](mailto:sgabbard@acpl.info).)*



The 2017 Lincoln Forum

## On the Cover

The Friends of the Lincoln Collection of Indiana, which supports the Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection, was awarded the Wendy Allen Award by the Lincoln Forum at its 2017 Symposium. The Friends received this framed, signed print of an original Lincoln portrait by acclaimed Gettysburg-based artist Wendy Allen.

A bronze statue of Abraham Lincoln in profile, facing right. The statue is set against a background of autumn foliage in shades of orange, red, and yellow, with a clear blue sky above. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Lincoln  
Memorial  
University:  
An Interview  
with Charles  
Hubbard

Sara Gabbard

**Sara Gabbard: What is the history of Lincoln Memorial University?**

**Charles Hubbard:** Lincoln Memorial University enrolled its first students in 1898. The University is located deep in the Cumberland Mountains at the approach to the historic Cumberland Gap. Retired Union Gen. Oliver Otis Howard was instrumental in founding the University. In 1896 Gen. Howard traveled to the Cumberland Gap at the invitation of his friends who operated the Harrow preparatory school for mountain children. During their conversation, Howard recalled a meeting with Abraham Lincoln in 1863 in the president's office. At that meeting, Lincoln expressed his concern for the people of East Tennessee who had suffered for their loyalty to the Union during the war. Arthur A. Myers suggested to Howard that the mountaineers of southern Appalachia desperately needed an institution of higher education. Howard and Myers recognized the opportunity and made plans to create the institution of higher education that became Lincoln Memorial University. It was decided to enlarge the Harrow school, and Howard agreed to assist in raising the funds necessary to support future development.

It was obvious to the group that funds would have to come from sources beyond the isolated and impoverished region of southern Appalachia. The idea of connecting Lincoln to the emerging school was discussed. One idea was to raise money for a statue of Lincoln, but this would only honor Lincoln. Eventually, the idea was put forward that the University could be "A Living Memorial to Abraham Lincoln." Howard quickly adopted the idea and agreed to aggressively reach out to Lincoln devotees and admirers to raise funds for a "Living Memorial to the 16th President."

As the school expanded and more students arrived, there was an obvi-

ous need to expand the campus. An opportunity presented itself when the American Association, a group of British investors, declared bankruptcy for the luxury hotel they had constructed on the Tennessee side of the Cumberland Gap. After bankruptcy, the Association managed to maintain control of the property in the hotel. The hotel building was sold to a Chicago salvage company that dismantled most of the buildings and re-sold materials. The trustees of the University, with Howard's encouragement and support, acquired a large tract of land close to the Harrogate settlement adjacent to the Virginia state line with Tennessee. Over the years, the University acquired ad-

his friend Mark Twain to act as a master of ceremonies for an annual fundraising event. For several years the annual event was held at Carnegie Hall in New York City. Some of the most notable philanthropists of the age attended the gala event.

Gen. Howard was a man of deep convictions and wanted to impart to the descendants of the loyal Union people of Appalachia Christian values, hard work, education, service, and generosity. Howard associated all of these characteristics with Abraham Lincoln. To instill these values in a new generation of mountaineers would be a living Memorial to Abraham Lincoln.



*Statue of Oliver Otis Howard at Lincoln Memorial University, Photo: Charles Hubbard*

ditional property from a variety of sources until the campus grew to over 800 pristine acres of mountain land that today is the University campus.

Gen. Howard played a significant role in arranging the financing and raising the funds to pay off the University's debt associated with the acquisition. For the rest of his life Howard would organize fundraising events in major cities like Chicago, New York and Philadelphia to benefit the University. The General enlisted the services of

**SG: What were the feelings of people in Eastern Tennessee regarding Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War in the 1860s?**

**CH:** Most of the people living in East Tennessee in 1860 had previously supported the Whig party because of its opposition to the Jacksonian Democrats. When the Whig party collapsed in the early 1850s, the majority of East Tennesseans were left without an obvious political home. When Abraham Lincoln ran for pres-

ident in 1860, the few Republicans in East Tennessee found themselves in a minority. Most East Tennesseans voted with the rest of the state for John Bell and the Constitutional Union Party. Bell campaigned on a platform that was strongly pro-union and the belief that the Constitution was the supreme law of the land. Most East Tennesseans strongly favored the Union and the "Constitution as it is and slavery where it is." Lincoln and the Republicans had little to offer these mountain people.

After Lincoln's election, the secessionist movement gained strength, particularly in Middle and West Tennessee. The people of upper East Tennessee were overwhelmingly opposed to secession and voted against secession on two occasions. They were not particularly impressed with Lincoln but they agreed with his strong opposition to secession. The mountaineers of upper East Tennessee for years resented the political control exercised by the wealthy, slave-owning, planter class in the state capital. After the ordinance of secession was approved, several political leaders meeting in Greenville, Tennessee, petitioned the state for permission to separate from the rest of the state and remain loyal to the Union. The petition was denied,

and the petitioners were accused of treason. In July 1861 Gov. Islam Harris ordered Confederate troops into East Tennessee to maintain order and suppress Union sympathizers.

Tennessee voted to join the Confederacy on June 8, 1861, despite the overwhelming loyalist sentiment in the mountainous regions of the state. In the counties north of Knoxville toward the Cumberland Gap, it is estimated that less than 20% of the people favored secession. Horace Maynard, a local politician, was elected to represent the district in the House of Representatives. Maynard went to Washington and immediately began to press President Lincoln to send troops through the Cumberland Gap to protect the loyal people from Confederate reprisals. Lincoln acknowledged the need to protect the loyalists in East Tennessee and encouraged his generals to move through the Cumberland Gap and cut the railroad north of Knoxville. During the early stages of the war, Lincoln had little appreciation for the logistical difficulties of moving a large army through the narrow gaps in the Cumberland Mountains. Unfortunately for East Tennessee Unionists, it would be the fall of 1863 before Knoxville and East Tennessee

would come under the control of Union armies.

**SG: What are their feelings today?**

**CH:** Southern Appalachia, including East Tennessee, remained largely rural and relatively isolated from the larger metropolitan cities after the war and during Reconstruction. Since the Civil War, East Tennessee has generally supported Republican candidates for political office. Most people in the region acknowledge and appreciate Lincoln's accomplishments of saving the Union and ending slavery. Ironically, after the Civil War and during Reconstruction popular opinion swayed toward the sentimental movement of the "Lost Cause." Gradually over the last half-century the myth of the Lost Cause was realized and enthusiasm for it diminished. The region has opened up to development. Unquestionably, improved communication and large federal programs like TVA, investment in the Oak Ridge science complex, and federal support for education have contributed to a new appreciation of Lincoln and his leadership. Based upon the values and principles of Abraham Lincoln, Lincoln Memorial University has done its part to educate and empower the people of southern Appalachia. Over the last 100 years LMU has provided elementary and high school teachers and administrators throughout the tri-state region. As a result, generations of the mountain people whom Lincoln and later Gen. Howard wanted to help have benefited from the Lincoln legacy of ethical and principled leadership.

**SG: What is the geographic background of your students today?**

**CH:** Today's LMU students come from all 50 states and several foreign countries. The student body is very diverse and the University's undergraduate



*Lincoln Memorial University, Photo: Charles Hubbard*

curriculum includes courses that prepare students to pursue a variety of professions. However, the University's mission to serve the people of southern Appalachia remains the core of its vision. LMU's medical school continues to focus attention and offers opportunities for primary care physicians to practice in the underserved regions of Southern Kentucky, Western Virginia, and East Tennessee. The University continues to emphasize instruction for professional educators in the school of education and offers advanced degrees. It attracts students from throughout the South. The University has expanded from the original campus in Harrogate to include locations in Knoxville and other extended sites. The LMU law school is located in the historic pre-Civil War City Hall building in Knoxville. It is difficult to imagine a stronger foundation for a law school than the legacy provided by Abraham Lincoln. Although our students come from across the country and around the globe, a significant number come from the geographical region that Gen. Howard and the founders intended to serve.

**SG: Can you make a general statement about their feelings about Lincoln and the Civil War when they begin your course and when they finish?**

**CH:** The first question I ask students when they take my Lincoln class is: What did Lincoln accomplish that made him a great president? After a period of deafening silence, they will usually respond that he freed the slaves and won the Civil War. I then go on to explain that my objective is to help them understand what these two accomplishments have contributed to the American experience. If I'm successful, they will understand that Lincoln: saved the union and American democracy; redefined the presidency; set in motion changes to

the Constitution; and possibly most importantly reshaped the federal system. Another question I ask is, why do we study Lincoln? I hope that they leave my class with an understanding of Lincoln's personal commitment to make a difference for the greater good. Lincoln is an example of a person who values education, integrity, honesty, loyalty, humility and above all self-confidence. All of these characteristics Lincoln acquired, developed, and practiced throughout his life. If our students can learn from Lincoln's example, they will certainly contribute to a more inclusive, satisfying, and prosperous society.

**SG: Please tell our readers about your current book project.**

**CH:** My current book project does not focus directly on Abraham Lincoln or his presidency. The working title is, *The Trail Family of Indiana: A Saga of Three Generations of African-Americans Struggling for Freedom and Equality in the 19th Century*. I first came up with the idea when we discovered in our Lincoln collection 16 letters written by Sgt. Major Benjamin Trail of the 28th United States Colored Troops. These letters were written between 1863 and early 1865. It was only after the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 that African-Americans were able to enlist in the Union Army. On several occasions, Lincoln spoke eloquently and candidly in addressing the value

of African-Americans to the war effort. Very few documents, accounts, or correspondence written by African-American soldiers have surfaced. These letters are not only legible and grammatically

correct, but they are extraordinarily articulate and express the personal feelings of a well-educated, free African-American. A brief preliminary investigation revealed that Benjamin Trail was killed at the Battle of the Crater in 1865. I first considered editing and publishing these letters along with any other correspondence I might be able to uncover. My early in-

quiries revealed a tremendous amount of material and documentation not only about Benjamin Trail, but also about his two older brothers who served in the 28th Indiana, and more particularly about Benjamin's mother and father, William and Sarah Trail.

William Trail was a slave born in Maryland and sold as a young boy to a slave owner in South Carolina. In 1814 William ran away from his masters in South Carolina and traveled to the free territory and later the state of Indiana. William was pursued by slave catchers and kidnappers the rest of his life. Despite this constant threat, William married Sarah McKown, a free African-American woman, and settled on a farm in Henry County, Indiana. There they raised a family of seven sons and two daughters and established the African-American community known as "Trails Grove." All of the Trail children were well educated and contributed substantially to the development of a civil society in Indiana, in the hope that



Statue of Lincoln the Lawyer, Photo: Charles Hubbard

African-Americans would eventually be accepted as equals.

I hope that this book will inform and enrich our understanding of African-American history and its contributions to the overall American experience. Certainly, this book will provide opportunities for future research into the experiences of free African-Americans during the Civil War and Reconstruction decades. Of course, without Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and his determination to pass the Thirteenth Amendment eliminating slavery, the Trail story would certainly be different.

**SG: What is the greatest challenge today for those who are dedicated to the preservation of the legacy of Abraham Lincoln?**

**CH:** I think the greatest challenge that confronts Lincoln scholars and enthusiasts going forward is the same frustrating difficulty as in interesting students in liberal arts education. I believe there are wonderful opportunities to explore Lincoln's contributions to the emerging discipline of leadership theory and practice. Much more work is needed to relate and connect Lincoln's presidency with the battlefield realities of the war. The ebb and flow of public opinion, both in the loyal states and the rebellious states, provide interesting opportunities. The challenge, of course, is first to identify and convince students to study history and the related fields of the social sciences. For those with a passion to understand and interpret the past for the benefit of contemporary society, Lincoln will always be a place to begin.

Understandably, the students pursuing higher education today are seek-

ing specific professional training. It is often difficult to convince them that the creation of both ideas and critical thinking are necessary components of one's education. The overwhelming amount of information currently available because of advances in technology tends to limit the enjoyment of discovery. I often find people most interested in Lincoln, American history, and civil society are those who have achieved their professional goals and now realize the importance of enrich-



*Lincoln Statues at LMU, Photo: Charles Hubbard*

ing their lives through the study of the past and its relevance to contemporary society. I think the challenge for the future is to create an environment for the pursuit of liberal education that is accommodating and inclusive.

**SG: As a professor, author, and historian, do you see a chance for new emphasis on the Liberal Arts as schools at all level focus on STEM courses?**

**CH:** I absolutely do. The liberal arts are often overlooked in today's academic climate that emphasizes the hard sciences and STEM. In recent conversations with several medical school faculty members who serve on the admissions committee here at Lincoln Memorial University, I discovered that 20% of the 2017 freshman class had decided to major in the humanities as undergraduates. Students pursuing a "professional path" and expecting to further their profession-

al training at the post graduate level benefit from a liberal education. The skills that contribute to developing entrepreneurial instincts and innovation are at the core of the liberal arts. The ability to synthesize complex ideas and analyze multi-dimensional data complements technical competence by building connections and stimulating creativity. Students learn to write, communicate effectively, and think critically. All of these skills are necessary to be successful at the highest level in any number of professions. The professional path begins at the undergraduate level. University advisors and student mentors should continue to emphasize a balanced general education curriculum that prepares students for advanced training. In the age of robots and artificial intelligence, future generations will still require social connectivity to lead and embrace positive change.

*Charles Hubbard is professor of history and Lincoln Historian at Lincoln Memorial University. For twelve years he served as Director of the University's Abraham Lincoln Library and Museum. He is the author and/or editor of six books, including Lincoln Reshapes the Presidency and Lincoln, the Constitution, and Presidential Leadership.*



# An Interview with Lincoln Artist, Wendy Allen

Sara Gabbard



**Sara Gabbard: What first attracted you to Abraham Lincoln as a subject for your art?**

**Wendy Allen:** The first question people always ask me is, “Why do you paint Lincoln?” It’s never easy to explain a passion. Simply put, I am painting the exact location of America’s soul.

One of my favorite authors is the late Dr. Richard Selzer, a retired surgeon who taught and practiced at Yale-New Haven Hospital. He was a marvelous writer and poet. In his series of essays, *The Exact Location of the Soul*, he concluded that the human soul resides in its wounds—and that the strength and character of that soul are shaped by the wounds it works to overcome.

I believe that America’s soul, defined by the wounds of the Civil War, was born at the precise moment Lincoln concluded his address at Gettysburg on November 19, 1863. The strength and character of his words, shaped by the most horrific battle that has ever taken place on this continent, ennobled the nation’s sacrifices, made true our sacred charters of freedom—the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution—and forever changed the course of American and world history.

“Delicate durability” is another phrase Dr. Richard Selzer used to describe the human body in his book *Mortal Lessons: Notes on the Art of Surgery*. I read it many years ago, but the words still reverberate.

For many years my mother suffered from terminal cancer. She died while I was in college. It was sad, of course, but also oppressive to witness her decline with all of her anger and depression. Her final years, and then her painful death, transformed my life forever. I had always known that I was delicate. But I also found I was durable.

During this time, my college biology professor, Dr. Michael Autuori, challenged the class to consider “What most distinguishes humans from other animals?” We offered up the common observations, such as having a sense of morality. But—like God himself—he dismissed them all. “Humans,” he said, “have a sense of history.” I loved that answer. It was then that I decided to learn as much as I could.

In 1979, I moved from Connecticut to Northern California. It was a foreign land, and I felt liberated. My earliest jobs exposed me to art. As my interest grew, I began visiting all the art museums in San Francisco and Oakland. I flew back to New York in 1980 just to see the monumental Picasso exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. It was at about that time that I decided

*“Simply put, I am painting the exact location of America’s soul.”*

to become an artist. I had no formal training, but I wanted to paint.

My first paintings, naturally, were amateurish. But what bothered me the most was that I could not find a subject that interested me. Everything I painted felt unimportant. I read voraciously about the masters, learning their secrets and experimenting with different techniques, straining to ignite the canvas with originality. The problem was that I was trying to paint like the artists who inspired me.

Elaine de Kooning once wrote, “If [the artist] did not desire to change all art, he would never get past his love for the artists who first inspired him and be able to paint his own pictures.” That meant, to be original, I had to

rebel against the great modern artists I loved. But the more I studied and learned, the more I grew frustrated. I still had not found a subject that inspired me. I certainly did not find it in the art I had grown to love.

Finally, it hit me. Modern art contained no history, the very subject I had grown to value most. Artists had turned their backs on history! How, I wondered, could they ignore the very thing that defines us as human?

My life as an artist was defined. It was time for me to rebel.

In the summer of 1983, I attended the very first conference of the Civil War Institute, founded at Gettysburg College by my now dear friend Dr. Gabor Boritt, one of the world’s great Lincoln scholars. That experience changed the course of my life. I re-

turned to California inspired and eager to paint.

I was too poor to afford an easel, so I placed a blank canvas on the windowsill in the tiny kitchen of my small apartment in Mountain View. The moment I started painting, I became completely absorbed. I worked all night and into the morning.

Completing that painting was an extraordinary event in my life. For the first time, I had created something that had a life of its own. It was oil and spray paint and magic and my future. Finally, my heart and ambition had translated onto canvas. I had gone into Merlin’s cave and emerged with the secret of my universe. I had painted my first portrait of Abraham

Lincoln.

Looking back now, I wonder why Lincoln, the ultimate subject of my art, had eluded me for so long. I had carried him with me since childhood. I had loved him long before I understood the power of his achievements. To me, he represented the best of humankind. I had found my passion. And, through my art, the world would take a new look at Abraham Lincoln—the very best that history has to offer.

**SG: What aspect of Lincoln's image do you find easiest to capture? The most difficult?**

**WA:** Lincoln had a beautiful face. I love the daguerreotypes of him, especially the impeccably reproduced prints that show every fractaled flaw. The old portraits of Lincoln—the ones we admire today—are modest and rarely glamorized. Even in his most authoritative poses, he wears only a long black coat, a simple white shirt, and a twisted, uneven tie. On a good day, he might have combed his hair.

Signature shadows define him. The length of the shadow under his nose betrays its substantial size. The dark sockets of his eyes sink beneath strong brows. Lines are carved into his forehead. Unusually high cheekbones cast downward slashes that accentuate his sunken face. The creases between his eyebrows are so deep, so permanent, one would swear he had been born with them. His mouth is the most difficult to capture. There is barely an upper lip, except for the royal 'M' shape in the center. And his crazy bottom lip dips and sways, as if its designer did not have a chance to finish it.

**SG: What led to your decision to move your studio to Gettysburg?**

**WA:** I began visiting Gettysburg while I was in college. My sister, Caroline Allen, was a student at Gettysburg

College. I visited her often to enjoy her company and as an escape from increasingly difficult times at home; my mother was dying of cancer.

I fell in love with Gettysburg and remained a loyal visitor. By the mid-1980s, I began painting and selling paintings part-time through a gallery owned and operated by Lois Starkey. She gave me the break of a lifetime deciding to sell my work at her downtown Gettysburg gallery. During that time, I made many good friends in Gettysburg. In 2008, I quit my full-time position as a creative director for a children's publisher to open a studio and gallery in Gettysburg. I also had and continue to have the full support of my wife, Elaine. Her sister, Susan Florence Henderson, the inventor of the Bobby baby pillow was/is a generous patron and business supporter. My older sister, Amy Woodis, has now relocated to the area and is a tremendous supporter of my work and process.

There isn't a day that passes that I don't look out my window at Baltimore Street and think about Lincoln passing by this building on his way to deliver the Gettysburg Address. I always find inspiration in this special place.

**SG: How do you begin a new piece of work? Do you use preliminary sketches?**

**WA:** Each piece begins differently. Most paintings are impromptu and

quickly sketched directly onto the canvas. And there are other paintings where I'll develop a series of pencil sketches. I usually do these sketches when I am concerned about negative space and effective cropping. The end goal is to have the painting appear fresh. Overthinking a painting can wreck that freshness.

**SG: Do current events ever lead to a new portrayal of Lincoln?**

**WA:** This is a great question. Every Lincoln painting I complete is directly coming from a place that includes my current status in the events of the day. I don't consider myself an "illustrator" of Lincoln or a portrait painter.

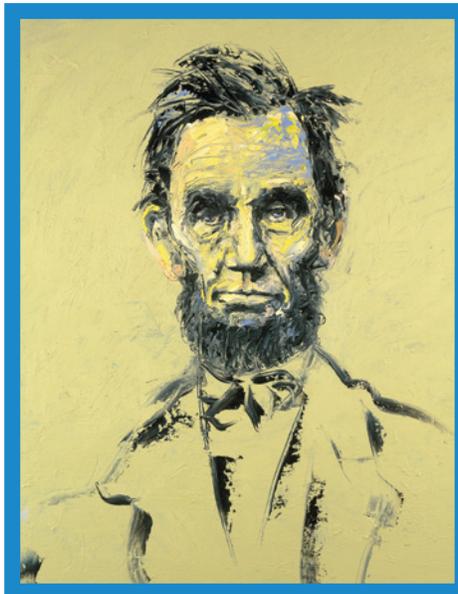
I am a post-modern artist of an incredible subject.

"Prejudices, it is well known, are most difficult to eradicate from the heart whose soil has never been loosened or fertilized by education: they grow there, firm as weeds among stones," Charlotte Brontë wrote in *Jane Eyre*.

America has a hard time admitting and dealing with its

prejudices. But I remain an optimist. I believe in the American Dream. And I thank our Founders, who—as Lincoln famously wrote in his Gettysburg Address—"brought forth, upon this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

There has been much discussion lately about the Founders and slavery. It's a shockingly horrid chapter in our history, and we all hate thinking about it. It's extremely difficult trying



*Lincoln 209, Wendy Allen, Oil on Canvas*

to make sense of the fact that the man who wrote the Declaration of Independence owned human beings. The nation had to wait almost a hundred more years for Lincoln to eradicate that horror.

America is a great democratic experiment, and for me, this great experiment based on new ideas, has been an expanding one. This idea, this proposition, is not so much the American Dream but rather the American Promise—the implicit promise that all men are not just created equal but will be given an equal chance.

True story—Not long ago, a good friend of mine told me she had been talking to a business acquaintance when the name of a female law enforcement officer came up. My friend started praising the woman, saying what a great officer she is and how dedicated she is to her work. Then the business acquaintance chimed in with the snide remark that she had heard the officer was a lesbian—so she was really only “half” a woman. Of course, when I heard the story, I gasped with a most uncomfortable response. This officer was only half a woman?! I was shocked, but pretended to laugh it off.

Then my friend said to me, “you must be used to that kind of comment.” But NO!!! I will never NEVER get used to that sort of comment. NO NO NO! To so casually diminish someone and reduce her to a fraction of who she really is, is eerily similar to the way people used to count slaves as three-fifths of a person.

The 60s and 70s were an interesting time for me growing up as a young gay girl. The Civil Rights Movement, the Women’s Rights Movement—these were thrilling and dangerous times. But in addition to the general upheavals going on in the outside world, I lived with a confused feeling—deep inside, you know you are different from other people—but you don’t

know how and you don’t know why.

Back in the late 60s, no one ever dared talk to anyone about being gay, so there was nothing for me to do but adapt. Like others like me, I had no choice but to keep my true feelings to myself. The problem was—I began to lie, and pretty soon my whole life became one big lie. And the older I got, the bigger the lies, which only magnified my feelings of isolation.

One of the pivotal things that separates being gay from all other minority concerns is the potential loss of love and support from one’s own family, particularly from your parents. My father and I always had a strained relationship, but when I was young, my mother was always wonderful to me. She was brilliant and I loved her and respected her opinions. But by the time I reached high school, her attitude had hardened toward me. She didn’t know anything about my private thoughts, but one day, after a typical mother-daughter squabble about nothing, she accused me of being mentally ill. She said that she had suspected it for a long time.

I had no idea how to handle that. After that, my relationship with her clearly changed, and I knew I would never be able to trust her or count on her again. She broke my heart. Sadly, it wasn’t long after that she was diagnosed with cancer and passed away.

For years I tried to work through the depression and find something or someone in my life I could really count on. When I moved to California, I came out and began to live truthfully. It was only when I stopped the lying that I became free.

It was in October 1983, 34 years ago, I painted my first Lincoln portrait.

**SG: When customers walk into your studio, do they usually have something specific in mind, or do**

**they just say, “I want something by Wendy?”**

**WA:** Someday I hope people “want something by Wendy.” I think that’s every painter’s dream. To be honest, I’m not sure what motivates people to buy my work. I guess you’d have to ask them.

**SG: What is your preferred medium? Which do you find most difficult?**

**WA:** I love oil paint and most of my paintings are oil on canvas. I think the most difficult is watercolor.

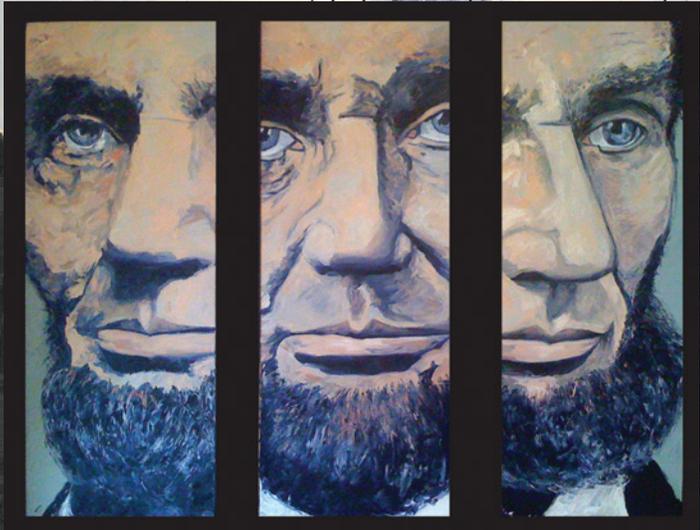
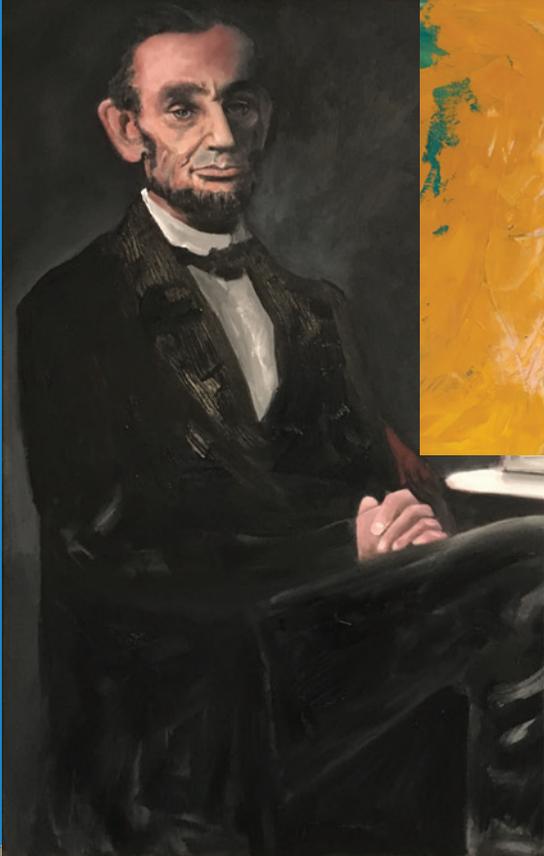
**SG: Is some of your work done on consignment? Is that easier or more difficult than creating something entirely on your own?**

**WA:** It is very difficult for me to create something on commission. I tense up and usually choke in the execution of the piece. It never measures up to what the buyer imagines, and I hate to disappoint.

**SG: Please explain the use of Lincoln in your creation of educational posters.**

**WA:** The idea of creating educational posters, using my paintings, was suggested by a high-school teacher here in Pennsylvania. He felt that the paintings combined with Lincoln’s words would be interesting to young adults. We worked hard to get a good cross section of paintings, representing different styles and matching them with valid quotes by Lincoln. We also worked very hard at reproducing them effectively so that we could sell them at a reasonable price.

*Artist Wendy Allen can be reached at: [lincolntoart@gmail.com](mailto:lincolntoart@gmail.com), or (717) 398 2561.*

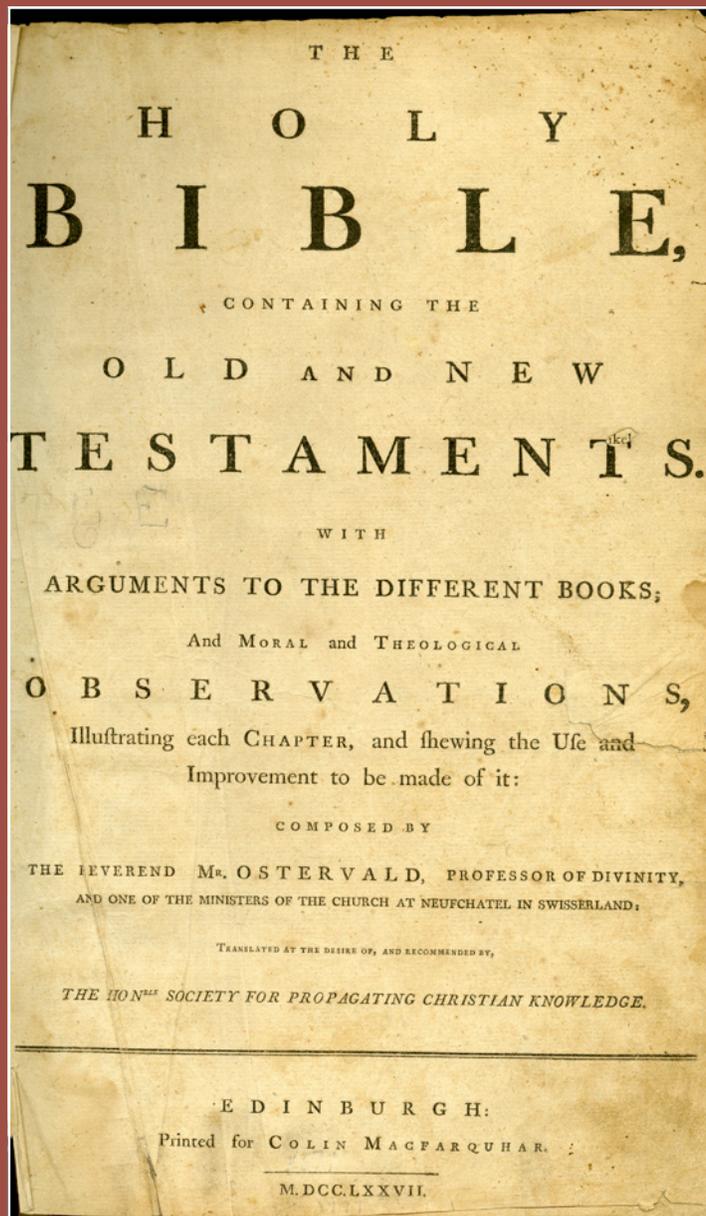


Lincoln Portraits by Wendy Allen

God

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*and*



Mr. Lincoln

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Allen C. Guelzo

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*The Holy Bible with commentary by the Reverend Mr. Ostervald (1777). The Thomas Lincoln family owned and read the 1799 edition of this Bible MQ5215*

On the day in April 1837 that Abraham Lincoln rode into Springfield, Illinois, to set himself up professionally as a lawyer, the American republic was awash in religion. Lincoln, however, was neither swimming nor even bobbing in its current. "This thing of living in Springfield is rather a dull business after all, at least it is so to me," the uprooted state legislator and commercially bankrupt Lincoln wrote to Mary Owens on May 7th. "I am quite as lonesome here as [I] ever was anywhere in my life," and in particular, "I've never been to church yet, nor probably shall not be soon." Lincoln blamed this on his own shyness and lack of social grace: "I stay away because I am conscious I should not know how to behave myself."<sup>1</sup>

But awkwardness was not actually Lincoln's principal reason for avoiding Springfield's religious life; it was because he did not have much religious life of his own to speak of. His stepmother, Sarah Bush Johnston Lincoln, would tell Lincoln's biographer and law partner William Henry Herndon that "Abe had no particular religion" as a youth, and "didn't think of that question at that time, if he ever did," or at least "never talked about it." It was not from ignorance. The young Lincoln "would hear sermons preached, come home, take the children out, get on a stump or log, and almost repeat it word for word," and do it so convincingly that he could make "the other children as well as the men quit their work" to listen to him. But it was all pure mimicry. Once Lincoln struck out on his own, he not only showed no interest in religion, but an actual aversion to it. During his brief years as clerk and storekeeper in New Salem, Illinois, Lincoln preferred the reading of the most famous anti-religious skeptics of the day—"Voltaire, Paine &c"—and wrote a short essay which was so scandalous in its contempt for religion that his neighbors "morally compelled Mr Lincoln to burn the book, on account of its infamy." Moving to Springfield did little to change Lincoln's attitude. "I Knew Mr Lincoln as Early as 1834-37," recalled James Matheny, the best man at Lincoln's wedding and the clerk of the Sangamon county court, and "Know he was an infidel."

*He...used to talk Infidelity in the Clerks*

*office in this city about the years 1837-40. Lincoln attacked the Bible & new Testament on two grounds 1st From the inherent or apparent contradiction under its lids & 2dly From the grounds of Reason sometimes he ridiculed the Bible & New Testament sometimes seemed to Scoff it, though I shall not use that word in its full & literal sense never heard that Lincoln changed his views though his personal & political friend from 1834 to 1860 Sometimes Lincoln bordered on absolute Atheism: he went far that way & often shocked me.*<sup>2</sup>

What should have been shocking, however, was not Lincoln's lack of religion, but the fact that Matheny should have found it shocking; or, to put it another way, the real surprise in Lincoln's lack of religious profile was that the rest of the American republic had such an unusually large one.

Religion—and for all practical purposes, this meant Protestant Christianity—permeated the life of early America, *first* because so many of the refugee colonies planted in British north America were the planned communities of fervent and persecuted religious sects in England—Puritan independents, Quakers, Catholics—and *second* because even those settlements which weren't the direct offspring of sectarian zeal (New York, Virginia) still transferred the state sponsorship of the legally established Church of England to their shores. "In eighteenth-century America – in city, village, and countryside – the idiom of religion penetrated all discourse, underlay all thought, marked all observances, gave meaning to every public and private crisis," wrote Patricia Bonomi. When the 18th-century evangelical revivals reached America in the 1740s as the "Great Awakening," they had the impact (said Richard Bushman) of "the civil rights demonstrations, the campus disturbances, and the urban riots of the 1960s combined."<sup>3</sup>

But then, of course, came the Revolution, which overthrew more than merely crown rule in America. The Church of England was nearly erased, as close to half of its clergy fled into exile.<sup>4</sup> But the other major religious alliances whose churches had dominated the pre-revolutionary landscape—Presbyterians, Baptists, Lutherans—also suffered, even though many of them

had volunteered to support the Revolutionary cause. "Perhaps no set of men, whose hearts were so thoroughly engaged in it, or who contributed in so great a degree to its success," wrote Peter Thacher, a Massachusetts parson, in 1783, "have suffered more by it." The Revolution not only disrupted the day-to-day habits of colonial society; it transformed governance into a new republican order based on hostility to authority and hierarchy.<sup>5</sup> After the smoke of the Revolution had cleared, the Revolution's first native-born historian, David Ramsay, was convinced that "This revolution has introduced so much anarchy that it will take half a century to eradicate the licentiousness of the people."<sup>6</sup>

It did not help, either, that the Revolutionary leadership was itself notably indifferent to religion. The men who founded the political order of the new republic had taken pages from the central political texts of the Enlightenment, and many of them, not stopping at politics, had absorbed the Enlightenment's distaste for religion as an explanation of the universe. "Boys that dressed flax in the barn," recalled Lyman Beecher, "read Tom Paine [the author of *The Age of Reason*] and believed him"; his fellow-students at Yale "were infidels, and called each other Voltaire, Rousseau, D'Alembert, etc., etc."<sup>7</sup> Liberty, John Adams wrote in his *NovAnglus* essays in 1775, "can no more exist without virtue and independence than the body can live and move without a soul." But Adams's own religion was a colorless Unitarianism which reduced the Christian Trinity to a single personality, and an exceedingly remote one at that.<sup>8</sup> Thomas Jefferson frankly considered himself "an Epicurean," which he defined as a belief that "the Universe" was "eternal" and composed of "Matter and Void alone." He did not doubt that there was a Creator of sorts and appealed in the Declaration of Independence to "Nature's God." But Nature's God was not the Christian one. As late as 1822, he was serenely predicting that "there is not a young man now living in the United States who will not die an Unitarian."<sup>9</sup>

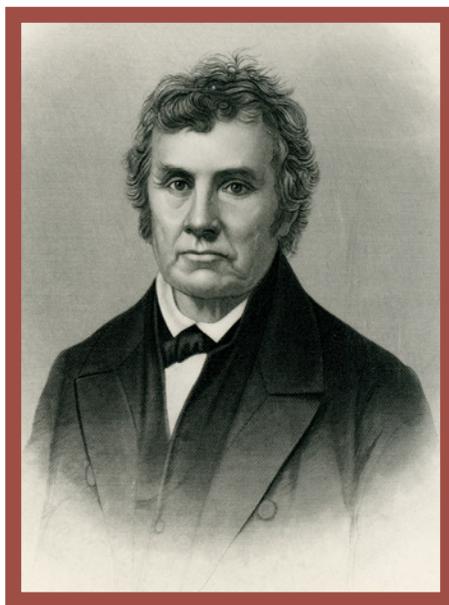
Jefferson was, of course, wrong. Between the year Jefferson left the presidency (which was also the year Lincoln was born) and the year Lincoln was elected president, the American reli-

gious landscape heaved upwards in a volcanic eruption of religious revival known as the Second Great Awakening. The results were even more remarkable than in colonial times. The total number of Christian congregations in the United States swelled from 2500 in 1780 to 52,000 by 1860—nearly three times the growth of the American population. And the more robustly evangelical their Protestantism, the more the churches grew: Baptist congregations soared from 400 in 1780 to 12,150 in 1860; Methodists grew from 50 to 2500. Even the staid Episcopalians were bitten by evangelical revival, sprouting evangelical dioceses, newspapers, magazines, and two theological seminaries. In the four years preceding the Civil War alone, the Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian and Episcopal churches netted increases of over 446,000 members, and Richard Cardwaine estimates that 40% of the American population identified itself as evangelical and Protestant, with perhaps another 20% falling within a circle of evangelical “hearers.” By the time he was inaugurated in 1861, Abraham Lincoln was on the verge of becoming an anachronism.<sup>10</sup>

Lincoln was not unconscious of how out-of-step he was with other Americans or of the political penalty he was liable to pay as a result. As a cocky twenty-something Springfield lawyer, Lincoln continued to draw inspiration from Sir Charles Lyell’s naturalistic *Principles of Geology* (1830-33) and Robert Chambers’ proto-Darwinian *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844). “Lincoln then had a smattering of Geology,” James Matheny recollected, and “was Enthusiastic in his infidelity.” But as the cultural climate changed and “he grew older, he grew more discrete—didn’t talk much before Strangers about his religion.” By the time he was in full mid-career stride in the 1850s, he had become so reluctant to talk about religion that David Davis, the rotund presiding judge of the Eighth Judicial Circuit, could conclude that not only did he not “know anything about Lincoln’s Religion,” he could confidently state that he didn’t “think anybody Knew. The idea that Lincoln talked to a stranger about his religion or religious views or made such speeches, remarks &c about

it as published is absurd to me.”<sup>11</sup>

Lincoln had good reason for reticence: a man with political ambitions like Lincoln’s was doing himself no favors by talking-down religion. “It was every where contended that no Christian ought to go for me, because I belonged to no church,” Lincoln complained in 1843, and this “levied a tax of a considerable per cent. upon my strength throughout the religious community.” When he ran for Congress in 1846, his opponent was the celebrated Methodist revival preacher, Peter Cartwright, who had no scruples about reminding voters in the 7th Congressional District that a vote for Lincoln was a vote against God. Lincoln was not inclined to change his colors just for an election, but he did not mind obscuring them a little, either. The handbill he circulated to counteract



Peter Cartwright 71.2009.085.10642

Cartwright’s charges conceded that the charge “That I am not a member of any Christian Church, is true.” But the balance of the handbill shrewdly concentrated on what Lincoln was not—“an open enemy of, and scoffer at, religion”—rather than what he was, which was a closeted scoffer.<sup>12</sup>

Lincoln also knew better than to make unnecessary trouble for himself within his own household and among his friends. His father, Thomas, and stepmother were lifelong adherents of a strict Baptist sect, the Separate Baptists, and when Lincoln received

word that Thomas Lincoln was dying in 1851, he was careful to phrase his farewells in terms that would offer the old man no parting grief. “Tell him to remember to call upon, and confide in, our great, and good, and merciful Maker; who will not turn away from him in any extremity. He notes the fall of a sparrow, and numbers the hairs of our heads; and He will not forget the dying man, who puts his trust in Him.” Personally, Lincoln was not sure of any survival of consciousness beyond death and frankly told a New Salem neighbor that he could not believe in “any future state.” For his father, however, he was gentler and more soothing: “he will soon have a joyous [meeting] with many loved ones gone before.”<sup>13</sup>

For James Matheny, comments of this sort were evidence that “Lincoln played a sharp game here on the Religious world.” Wanting to “avoid the disgrace—odium and unpopularity” of the “Atheistic charge,” he encouraged the religious-minded to “Come and convert me.” After the death of his second son, Edward Baker Lincoln, in 1850, he held long discussions with the minister of Springfield’s First Presbyterian Church, James Smith (himself an adult convert from “infidelity” of the Tom Paine variety), read Smith’s *The Christian’s Defence* (1843), and allowed people to conclude that “I am now convinced of the truth of the Christian religion.” But even that statement was ambiguous: being *convinced* was the result of logic, but it did not guarantee *faith* if the premises of that logic were in question.<sup>15</sup> The “evidence of Christ’s divinity came to us in somewhat doubtful shape,” Lincoln cautioned Springfield postmaster James W. Keyes; what was more obvious to Lincoln was that “the system of Christianity was an ingenious one, at least, and perhaps was calculated to do good.” So, the Christian religion could be more-or-less embraced because of its practical benefits even if its theological certainties were questionable. And for a politician who respected public opinion as the factor which “settles every question here,” Lincoln had to admit that “the universal sense of mankind...in favor of the existence of an over-ruling Providence” was an argument “men ought not, in justice, to be denounced for yielding to...or for giving it up slowly.” One could still

profess “a simple faith in God” while remaining uncertain whether “the author of our being” ought to be “called God or Nature,” and for Lincoln, it actually “mattered little which.”<sup>16</sup>

Leonard Swett, one of Lincoln’s closest legal associates and himself a Presbyterian elder, was sure Lincoln “believed in God as much as the most approved Church member.” On the other hand, he also recognized that Lincoln defined God on his own terms: “he judged of Providence by the same system of great generalization as of everything else.” It certainly produced no remarkable changes in Lincoln’s behavior. “He had in my judgment very little faith in ceremonials and forms,” Swett wrote, “Whether he went to Church once a month or once a year troubled him but very little.” The minister of Springfield’s Second Presbyterian Church agreed. “He makes no pretensions to piety. During the time I have known him, I never heard of his entering a place where God is worshipped.... He often goes to the railroad shop and spends the sabbath in reading Newspapers, and telling stories to the workmen, but not to the house of God.”<sup>17</sup> Nor did Lincoln care to associate himself with reform movements that smacked too strongly of religious zeal. Lincoln’s abhorrence of alcohol only enlisted his sympathy with the secular Washington Temperance Society, which “many

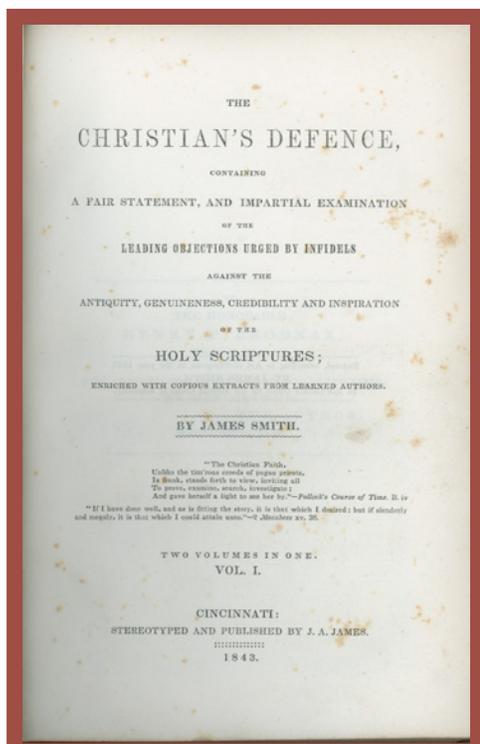
Christians” in Springfield “twisted up their noses at,” and his 1842 temperance lecture for the Washingtonians scorned the efforts of “Preachers, Lawyers, and hired agents” who “have no sympathy of feeling or interest, with those persons whom it is their object to convince and persuade.”<sup>18</sup>

And yet, the overall geography of Lincoln’s mind was not entirely a map of logic, or even skepticism. Orville Hickman Browning thought that “Mr. Lincoln had a tolerably strong vein of superstition in his nature.” Herndon, too, noticed that Lincoln “believed more or less in dreams—consulted Negro oracles—had apparitions and tried to solve them” and “sought the advice of the *spirits*.” After his oldest son, Robert, was bitten by a dog Lincoln feared was rabid, he took the boy to Indiana to be cured by the application of the Terre Haute “madstone.”<sup>19</sup> In June of 1863, he urgently wired Mary Todd Lincoln in Philadelphia to take away his youngest son Tad’s “pistol” because “I had an ugly dream about him” (and this is only part of a larger tapestry of fearful dreams Lincoln had about his own death, all of which became the stuff of legend after his assassination).<sup>20</sup> And for a man who was otherwise indifferent to formal Christian theology, Lincoln had some very decided opinions about specific practices. “He thought baptism by immersion was the true meaning of the word; for John baptized the Savior in the River Jordan because there was much water and they went down into it and came up out of it.” He considered the doctrine of the “endless punishment” of the wicked as contradictory, since “punishment was parental in its object, aim, and design, and intended for the good of the offender; hence it must cease when justice is satisfied.”<sup>21</sup>

Above all, Lincoln retained the deep impress of the stark Calvinist predestination taught by the Separate Baptists. He naturalized this as fatalism, insisting that “every effect must have its cause...in the endless chain stretching from the finite to the infinite” and that each individual was “simply a simple tool, a cog, a part and parcel” of a Great Mechanism of necessity “that strikes and cuts, grinds and mashes, all things that resist it.” Lincoln frequently invoked his “fatalism” as

an explanation for why he deserved no particular credit or blame for the outcomes of events he was guiding. “I attempt no compliment to my own sagacity,” he candidly explained to Albert Hodges and Archibald Dixon in 1864, “I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me.” But there was no mistaking the hidden hand of his ancestral Calvinism in such disclaimers. He admitted to Joseph Gillespie that “he could not avoid believing in predestination” since he could “never...reconcile the prescience of the Deity with the uncertainty of events.”<sup>22</sup> Like Herman Melville, Lincoln despaired of the existence of a personal God; yet, he was sure that if a personal God existed, it would be the Calvinistic one. In such a case, he explained to Aminda Rogers Rankin, “it is to be my lot to go on in a twilight, feeling and reasoning my way through life, as questioning, doubting Thomas did.”<sup>23</sup>

Lincoln might have been no more than one face in the crowd of tormented Victorian unbelievers who found themselves stranded amid the high tide of evangelical Protestant revival, and who (again like Melville) could “neither believe nor be comfortable in his unbelief”—had it not been for the Civil War.<sup>24</sup> Lincoln was saved from too much inquiry about religion during his 1858 Senate race against Stephen A. Douglas, or the subsequent presidential race against Douglas in 1860, largely because Douglas himself did not have much of a religious profile to tout. And in the early flush of his presidency, any comments of Lincoln’s which touched on religion were purely boiler-plate. As he left Springfield for Washington, he begged his neighbors to pray for “the assistance of that Divine Being who ever attended” the Founders, since “with that assistance I cannot fail,” and along the route to Washington, he made brief allusions to “the sustenance of Divine Providence” and “trust in that Supreme Being who has never forsaken this favored land,” but without attaching any more specific content. His inaugural address was devoid of religious allusions, apart from a Shakespearean appeal to “the better angels of our nature.”<sup>25</sup> In the Executive Mansion, Orville Hickman Browning recalled Lincoln spending Sundays “reading the bible a good deal.” But,



The Christian's Defence by James Smith 71.2009.084.00720

Browning told Isaac Arnold, he “never knew of his engaging in any other act of devotion. He did not invoke a blessing at table, nor did he have family prayers.” Even the Lincoln children’s babysitter in the White House, Julia Taft Bayne, remarked that Lincoln “read the Bible,” but did it “quite as much for its literary style as he did for its religious or spiritual content. He read it in the relaxed, almost lazy attitude of a man enjoying a good book.”<sup>26</sup>

But the ensuing war did not go well, and no one could miss how deeply Lincoln internalized the losses it inflicted. No one, he would later say, “expected for the war, the magnitude, or the duration, which it has already attained.” North and South alike “looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding.” He was deeply puzzled by what seemed to be the ease with which the Southern Confederacy resisted his efforts to subdue it, and the futility of Northern efforts to win the war without over-reaching into the slavery problem. He “believed in the progress of man and of nations,” but Confederate victories seemed to be nothing but the antithesis of progress.<sup>27</sup> “If I had been allowed my way, this war would have ended before this,” he wrote in reply to Eliza Gurney; “if it had been left to us to determine it, we would have had no war,” he admitted to Byron Sunderland, the pastor of Washington’s First Presbyterian Church (and the chaplain of the Senate). Instead, the war had not only dragged onwards, generating one horrendous casualty list after another, but had corkscrewed in ways that looked like anything but a Great Mechanism. By the “summer or fall of 1861,” Lincoln was asking question that startled Browning: “Suppose God is against us in our view on the subject of slavery in this country, and our method of dealing with it?” It was, Browning admitted, “the first time” he had ever had an inkling that Lincoln “was thinking deeply of what a higher power than man sought to bring about.”<sup>28</sup>

Characteristically, the lawyer who attempted to teach himself logic through reading John Playfair’s edition of Euclid’s *Elements of Geometry* now attempted to plot his puzzlement as though it were a geometrical proof, starting with a practical axiom: *The will*

*of God prevails.* This did not necessarily dictate who or what God was, but it did acknowledge that whatever God’s shape, the will of that deity must *prevail*, since that was in the nature of divine wills. The problem was discerning the direction of that will. “In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God.” This was certainly true of the Civil War, and certainly true of an America whose culture was brimming with theological energy. But now came the statements: “Both may be, and one must be wrong,” the reason for this arising from the law of the excluded middle, that “God can not be for, and against the same thing at the same time.” There is, of course, a third alternative: “In the present civil war it is quite possible that God’s purpose is something different from the purpose of either party,” and the reason for this statement is the sheer protractedness of the conflict. “By his mere quiet power, on the minds of the now contestants, He could have either saved or destroyed the Union without a human contest. Yet the contest began. And having begun He could give the final victory to either side any day. Yet the contest proceeds.” Ergo: the will of God must point to a goal which cannot be reached until the original goals of both sides – which each imagined, wrongly, to be God’s will – were exhausted and the real purpose of the conflict made manifest. “I am almost ready to say that this is probably true,” Lincoln conceded, “that God wills this contest, and wills that it shall not end yet” – or at least not until God’s more sublime purpose became apparent.<sup>29</sup>

But if this was “probably true,” then its truth demanded a more personal, more lively, more directing, more purposeful and more unpredictable God – a God who ends wars at a word or gives victories in a day – than the mechanical Providence Lincoln had heretofore invoked. Just *how* personal and unpredictable, showed up in the explanation Lincoln offered for the action he finally decided was the “something different from the purpose of either party,” the Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln drafted a presidential emancipation proclamation as early as June 1862, but did not discuss it in cabinet until July 22<sup>nd</sup> or issue it until September 22<sup>nd</sup>, five days after the battle of Antietam, based

on the argument made by Secretary of State William Seward that such a proclamation needed to come in the wake of a Union victory if it was not to look like a counsel of desperation. Lincoln agreed to wait, as a matter of political calculation; but his reasoning for the proclamation’s eventual release two months later was like no other decision he had ever reached.

When Robert E. Lee and the rebel Army of Northern Virginia invaded Maryland in the first week of September 1862 (he explained to his assembled cabinet secretaries on September 22<sup>nd</sup>), Lincoln “determined, as soon as it should be driven out of Maryland, to issue a Proclamation of Emancipation.” But he had done so, not as a political calculation, but on the strength of a “promise” he had made to “myself, and – (hesitating a little) – to my Maker. The rebel army is now driven out, and I am going to fulfill that promise.” As Navy secretary Gideon Welles recorded in his diary, Lincoln explained that he “had made a vow, a covenant, that if God gave us the victory in the approaching battle, he would consider it an indication of the Divine will, and that it was his duty to move forward in the cause of emancipation.”<sup>30</sup>

The astonishment which prevailed in that meeting at “the peculiar faith or trait here exhibited” was almost palpable. Lincoln acknowledged that rationales of this sort, especially in matters of high state policy, “might be thought strange,” an understatement so colossal that Treasury secretary Salmon Chase – beyond doubt the most committed evangelical Christian in the cabinet – “asked the President if he correctly understood him.” To the long-time political operatives who populated his Cabinet, it was hard to know what was more unprecedented: that a president would make monumental policy decisions on the basis of personal communications with the Almighty or that Lincoln would be the president to confess such communications. Either way, Lincoln simply repeated that “*I made a solemn vow before God, that if General Lee was driven back from Pennsylvania, I would crown the result by the declaration of freedom to the slaves.*” So there it was: “God had decided this question in favor of the slaves. He was satisfied it was right” and “was

confirmed and strengthened in his action by the vow and the results."<sup>31</sup>

William Herndon, who knew Lincoln nearly as well as anyone could, always insisted that Lincoln's allusions to God were invariably presented with an eye for how they would please the American masses. Even in the presidency, Herndon suspected, Lincoln's references to God were all for effect. "If he could get the Christians to pray for him," Herndon complained, "he could chain them to himself and throw them against disunion; he used the Christians, *as it were*, as tools."<sup>32</sup> But Herndon had some notorious axes of his own to grind on the subject of religion, and his intimacy with Lincoln did not extend to the presidential years. During those years, Lincoln's invocations of a personal, directing God multiplied, and John Todd Stuart was convinced that Lincoln "had no possible motive for saying what he did" about religion "unless it came from a deep and settled conviction." Lincoln told Noah Brooks (who had no particular

incentive for misconstruing him) that "after he went to the White House he kept up the habit of daily prayer." It was not extensive, confessional, demanding, or emotional. "Sometimes it was only ten words, but those ten words he had." The kinds of responsibilities which the presidency, especially in time of civil war, put on him persuaded Lincoln that he could not "hope to get along without the wisdom which comes from God and not from men." And he told Brooks at one point that among "the many philosophical books" he admired, he "particular liked [Joseph] Butler's *Analogy of Religion*...and he always hoped to get at [Princeton's] President [Jonathan] Edwards on the *Will*" – any-

thing but casual religious reading.<sup>33</sup> Nor were these comments mere political throw-aways, distributed for political effect: in the case of the Second Inaugural, it was actually quite the opposite. His Second Inaugural is one of those rare documents in presidential history – a speech worth reading and parsing – for it constituted something close to a meditation on the nature of justice, and how God's justice is a very different measure of things than human justice. "American Slavery," he said, is an offence for which all Americans – North and South alike – must plead guilty, and for which the war scourges North and South alike. No one side has a monopoly on right or on wrong. It might not please many Northerners to hear that they were complicit in slavery, and that God

*among ourselves, and with all nations.* Far from this tickling the political ears of the Northern electorate, Lincoln knew that they would not be "flattered by being shown that there has been a difference of purpose between the Almighty and them." But to "deny it, however, in this case, is to deny that there is a God governing the world." Not just creating, or presiding at a distance, but *governing*.<sup>34</sup>

Still, it is important to heed Herndon's caution in at least one respect: Lincoln's God never seemed to have become the Protestant Christian God. Jesus remained, for the most part, invisible, and Lincoln's only allusions to "the Saviour" as president came as part of two otherwise routine responses to the delegates of the American Baptist Home Mission Society and to the presentation of a Bible by the "Loyal Colored People of Baltimore." The letters and memoirs of Lincoln's White House staff are nearly blank of any religious utterances by Lincoln, apart from a brief "great good luck and God's blessing go with you" to John Hay in 1864. John Nicolay assured Herndon in May 1865 that "Mr. Lincoln did not, to my knowledge, in any way change his religious ideas, opinions or beliefs from the time he left Springfield to the day of his death." Not that Nicolay could say what those "ideas" were, "never having heard him explain them in detail; but I am very sure he gave no outward indication of his mind having undergone any change in that regard while here."<sup>35</sup>

Despite the well-meaning efforts of over-eager witnesses to claim after Lincoln's death that he had made special confessions of faith, or planned to be baptized, or to join a church, there is no evidence at all of any such intentions. "I have often wished that I was a more devout man than I am," he told a delegation of Baltimore Presbyterians, but this was not a very persuasive marker of deep religious convictions.



The First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation before the Cabinet by Alexander Ritchie LN-1488

has given "to both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence came."

But, Lincoln replied, those who rankled at this conclusion needed to argue with God, not him. In such a punishment as the Civil War had become, "shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him?" The titanic, looming sense of God's sovereignty and the pitifulness of human attempts to escape that sovereignty left only one appropriate response, to show malice toward none, charity for all, and *do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace,*

It was enough for Lincoln to add, "Nevertheless, amid the greatest difficulties of my Administration, when I could not see any other resort, I would place my whole reliance in God, knowing that all would go well, and that He would decide for the right."<sup>36</sup>

It is as unwise to dispute the sincerity of Lincoln's response as it is to make too much of it. He was, in the end, a child of the Enlightenment, and the Enlightenment's limited allowance for religion described the boundaries he accepted for it, personally and otherwise. But he was also too curious a mind to allow those boundaries to remain fixed forever, and too attuned to the shifts in American culture to remain utterly indifferent to them. As in so many other respects, he remains a mystery in American religion, but a tantalizing one – like Melville, neither a true believer, nor content in his unbelief.

*Allen Guelzo is the Henry R. Luce III Professor of the Civil War Era at Gettysburg College and the William L. Garwood Visiting Professor for the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions at Princeton University (2017-18).*

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*Standing Lincoln, Photo: Courtesy of Saint-Gaudens NHS,  
Cornish, NH*

## Augustus Saint-Gaudens's *Standing Lincoln:* A Biographical Monument to Abraham Lincoln and its Legacy

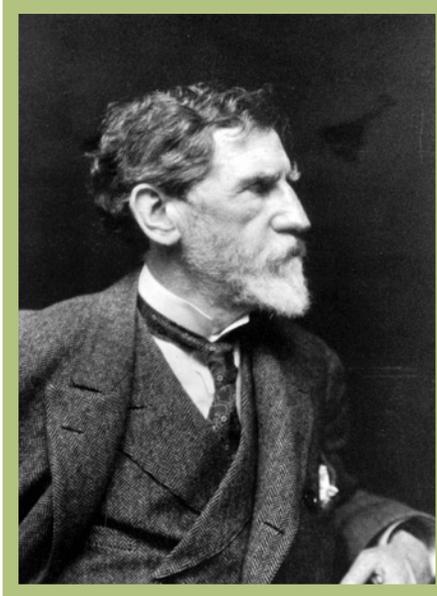
Savannah Rose

In a one-hundred-year-old barn in Cornish, New Hampshire, Augustus Saint-Gaudens reshaped the memory of Abraham Lincoln in sculpture as he spent months turning blocks of clay into the 16th President of the United States. With his 1887 sculpture, *Abraham Lincoln: The Man*, commonly known simply as *Standing Lincoln*, Saint-Gaudens redirected the legacy of Abraham Lincoln in sculpture away from a romanticized Lincoln to a simplistic and naturalistic statesman, preparing to speak before an audience as he so often did. Immediately following the death of Lincoln, sculptors and patrons of the President sought to preserve his legacy in bronze and marble, beginning with many romanticized images of the slain President. Using research and personal recollections of Lincoln, Saint-Gaudens created a Lincoln recognizable by the public, not a hagiographic figure, as he relied on Lincoln biographies for artistic themes. Saint-Gaudens's *Abraham Lincoln: The Man* redefined the interpretation of Abraham Lincoln in sculpture, influencing the memory and legacy of Lincoln in sculpture by reflecting numerous biographical themes of the 16th President.

It was in New York that Saint-Gaudens had his first encounters with the American Civil War and Abraham Lincoln. In his youth, Saint-Gaudens experienced the "great visions and great remembrances; the political meetings; the processions before the Presidential election, with carts bearing rail-fences in honor of 'Honest Abe, the Rail-Splitter.'" <sup>1</sup> He read newspapers of the great battles of the Civil War, and watched soldiers pass through the city, but one image stood in his mind above all others. Saint-Gaudens, years following the Civil War, wrote:

*But, above all, what remains in my mind is seeing in a procession the figure of a tall and very dark man, seeming entirely out of proportion in his height with the carriage in which he was driven, bowing to the crowds on each side. This was on the corner of Twentieth or Twenty-first Street and Fifth Avenue, and the man was Abraham Lincoln on his way to Washington. Perhaps it is the flight of time that makes this and all the rest seem much more heroic and romantic than the extraordinary events of our age.* <sup>2</sup>

In 1865, Augustus Saint-Gaudens received news of President Abraham Lincoln's assassination by John Wilkes Booth. In his *Reminiscences*, Saint-Gaudens recalls this period of his life by writing:



Portrait Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Photo: National Park Service

*I recall father and mother weeping, as he read of [the assassination] to us the morning at breakfast, before starting for work. Later, after joining the interminable line that formed somewhere down Chatham Street and led up by the bier at the head of the staircase, I saw Lincoln lying in state in the City Hall, and I went back to the end of the line to look at him again. This completed my vision of the big man, though the funeral, which I viewed from the roof of the old Wallack's Theater on Broome Street, deepened the profound solemnity of my impression, as I noticed every one uncover while the funeral car went by.*<sup>3</sup>

Saint-Gaudens witnessed the funeral procession of the body of Abraham Lincoln on April 24, 1865, as the casket was paraded down the streets of New York. The young sculptor passed in silence to view the slain President, viewing the body at a point on the funeral train where Lincoln no longer looked natural as many thought the body looked "grotesque, the skin discolored, the eyes and cheeks sunken."<sup>4</sup>

On November 11, 1884, Augustus Saint-Gaudens signed a contract with the Lincoln Monument Fund, agreeing to "execute a full length statue of

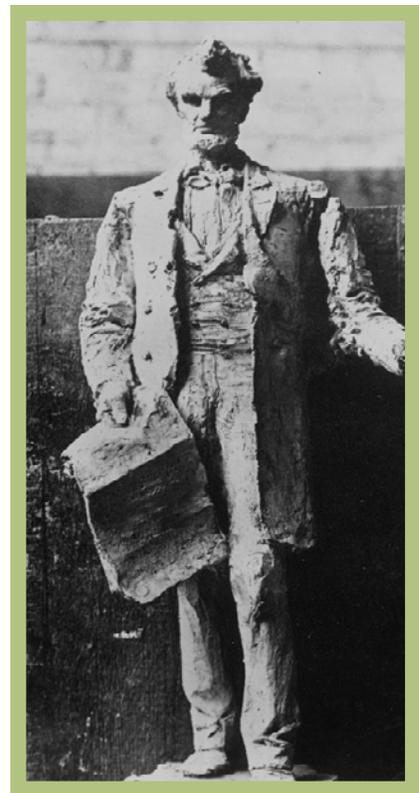
Abraham Lincoln former President of the United States" to stand on a granite pedestal.<sup>5</sup> Saint-Gaudens accepted the commission, immediately beginning work on the piece, conceptualizing the personification of Lincoln he would put to bronze. In 1885, to escape the heat and stress of New York City, Saint-Gaudens rented a home in Cornish, New Hampshire, which he would eventually purchase and live full-time. To convince the sculptor to move to New Hampshire, Saint-Gaudens's friend Charles Beaman, promised "plenty of Lincoln shaped men" in the area, a claim that held true for when Saint-Gaudens began work on the *Lincoln*, he found it easy to find a model for his work.<sup>6</sup>

As he made his move to his new home and studio for the summer in Cornish, Saint-Gaudens looked for the perfect likeness and pose for his work. Saint-Gaudens no doubt consulted numerous photographs for the work, most likely taking the photographs of Mathew Brady with him to his summer home in New Hampshire along with his personal recollections and memories of Lincoln. Saint-Gaudens may have found the January 8, 1864 photograph of Abraham Lincoln taken by Brady useful, as it features the President standing with his left arm behind his back, a gesture added into *Standing Lincoln*.<sup>7</sup> As for the "Lincoln shaped men" of New England, Saint-Gaudens found his "Lincoln" in Langdon Morse, who resided in Vermont. The sculptor carefully studied the physique of Abraham Lincoln, searching for a model who closely corresponded with that of the President, using Morse as his model during the duration of the creation of *Standing Lincoln*.<sup>8</sup> The sculptor had his model dress in a suit accurately tailored to replicate Lincoln's, being so meticulous as to have Morse walk around the property of his Cornish home until the clothes acquired the correct wrinkles.<sup>9</sup> Saint-Gaudens strove for perfection in all his statues, but given the coveted status of the Lincoln commission, he went to great lengths to ensure the statue was an accurate portrayal of the President.

Saint-Gaudens heavily relied on the life mask and casts of hands of Abraham Lincoln done by Leonard Wells Volk in 1860, taking several character-

istics from these and using them for his work. In 1886, an aide and friend to Saint-Gaudens, Richard Watson Gilder, noticed an intriguing mask of Abraham Lincoln in New York City, taking note of the realistic portrayal of the President. When discovered to be the life mask taken by Volk, Gilder borrowed the pieces, giving them to Saint-Gaudens to use for his sculpture. Gilder recalled that Saint-Gaudens was "greatly helped by the Volk life-mask in his modeling of the head of Lincoln."<sup>10</sup> Saint-Gaudens incorporated Lincoln's high forehead, large ears, deep-set eyes, and facial structures into his sculpture, adding tousled hair, bushy eyebrows, and a trimmed beard to give Lincoln a familiar look.<sup>11</sup>

In the final model of *Standing Lincoln*, Saint-Gaudens's conception of Lincoln became one as an orator and a man



Lincoln Clay Sketch, Photo: National Park Service

fraught with worry. Saint-Gaudens had created a Lincoln who was a "heroic and noble figure, deep in thought, who appears to have just risen from the chair behind him to begin and address."<sup>12</sup> His final conception of Lincoln was innovative for the time, a motionless President standing in front of the Chair of State. Saint-

Gaudens presented Lincoln “not as a man of action, but as a man in an intensely private, introspective moment, preparing to lift his head to address his audience.” *Standing Lincoln* features an Abraham Lincoln whose left hand grasps the lapel of his frock coat while his right-hand rests behind his back, loosely clenched into a fist. Lincoln’s left foot projects off the granite pedestal, designed by Saint-Gaudens’s friend Stanford White, into the realm of the audience.<sup>14</sup>

Augustus Saint-Gaudens devoted nearly three years of his life to the Lincoln statue as he embodied in bronze the “dignity and nobleness of the President’s character.”<sup>15</sup> On October 20, 1887, the bronze Abraham Lincoln was lifted into place on the granite pedestal in preparation of the dedication of the statue set to take place two days later. On October 22, over six thousand spectators and lovers of Lincoln gathered at Lincoln Park in Chicago, Illinois, to see the dedication of Saint-Gaudens’s monument.<sup>16</sup> In attendance was the sculptor, Lincoln’s son Robert Todd Lincoln and grandson Abraham Lincoln II.<sup>17</sup>

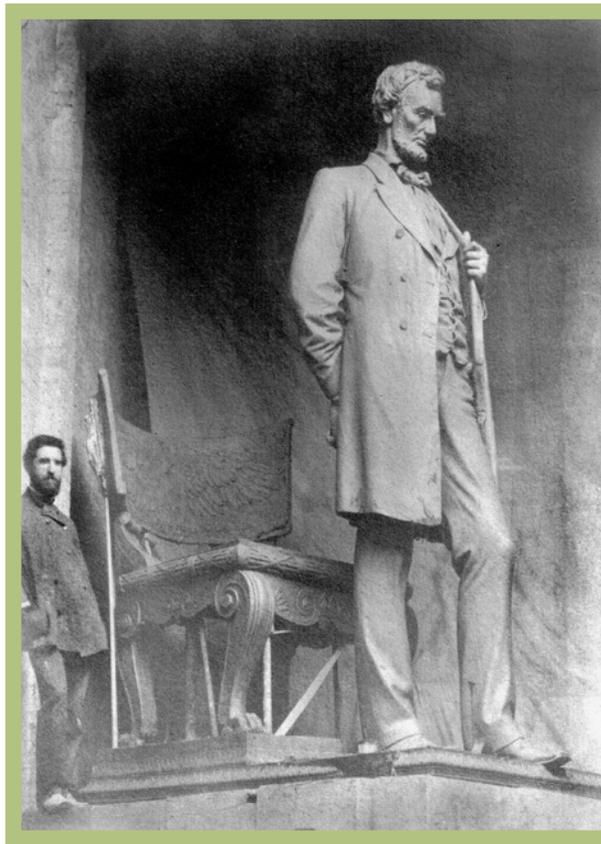
Saint-Gaudens placed great thought and diligence into the creation of *Standing Lincoln*, ultimately creating the most realistic statue of Lincoln, according to many of Lincoln’s contemporaries, including Lincoln’s son Robert. Lincoln simply stands before a chair, preparing himself to speak to an audience as he had done numerous times in life. Saint-Gaudens purposefully removed many of the biographical titles given to Lincoln, most prominently the “Great Emancipator.” His statue features a lone Lincoln, draped in a “modern suit of clothes,” as he grasps the lapel of his long, unbuttoned frock coat and the other hand remains empty behind his back.<sup>18</sup> Saint-Gaudens could have draped Lincoln in a toga or robe to romanticize the President, but instead opted to dress him in a suit to ensure that he remained a simplistic “man of the people.”<sup>19</sup>

Saint-Gaudens omitted any artificial sculptural devices in his *Standing Lincoln*, including items such as a scroll

or parchment document, which many sculptors before him had included.<sup>20</sup> Lincoln stands thoughtful in front of his audience, pondering what he is to say next at which he would lift his head and “tell them, out of his greater knowledge of the conditions besetting the Administration, all that he can safely publicize, and why he may not be able to grant all they ask.”<sup>21</sup> One of the few symbols that is present in *Standing Lincoln* is the Chair of State that rests behind the standing figure, which reflects a strong national symbol. Saint-Gaudens intentionally oversized the Chair of State to emphasize the power of the President as well as Lincoln’s presence as President during the American Civil

ated. The monument was created during an era where Lincoln’s memory was that of a martyred President, soon to become a venerated and romanticized figure and statesman. Saint-Gaudens portrays Lincoln not as a romantic figure in American history, but of a solemn statesman of the people, preparing to speak before a group of people. He stands, contemplatively thinking of his next line, prepared to address his audience.

*Savannah Rose is a 2017 graduate of Gettysburg College and former student of Allen Guelzo. She received a degree in History, Civil War Era Studies, and Public History. She currently works as a Pathways National Park Service Ranger at Gettysburg National Military Park, and is working towards her Masters degree at West Virginia University.*



*Saint-Gaudens and the Standing Lincoln, Photo: National Park Service*

War. This deliberate artistic choice highlights Saint-Gaudens’s praise of Lincoln, as the sculptor no doubt recalled his memories of Lincoln.

Saint-Gaudens offered his audience one of the most realistic statues of Abraham Lincoln. It is important to note that Augustus Saint-Gaudens’s *Standing Lincoln* pushed against the typical narrative of the life of Abraham Lincoln for the time it was cre-

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<sup>2</sup> Saint-Gaudens, *Reminiscences*, 42.

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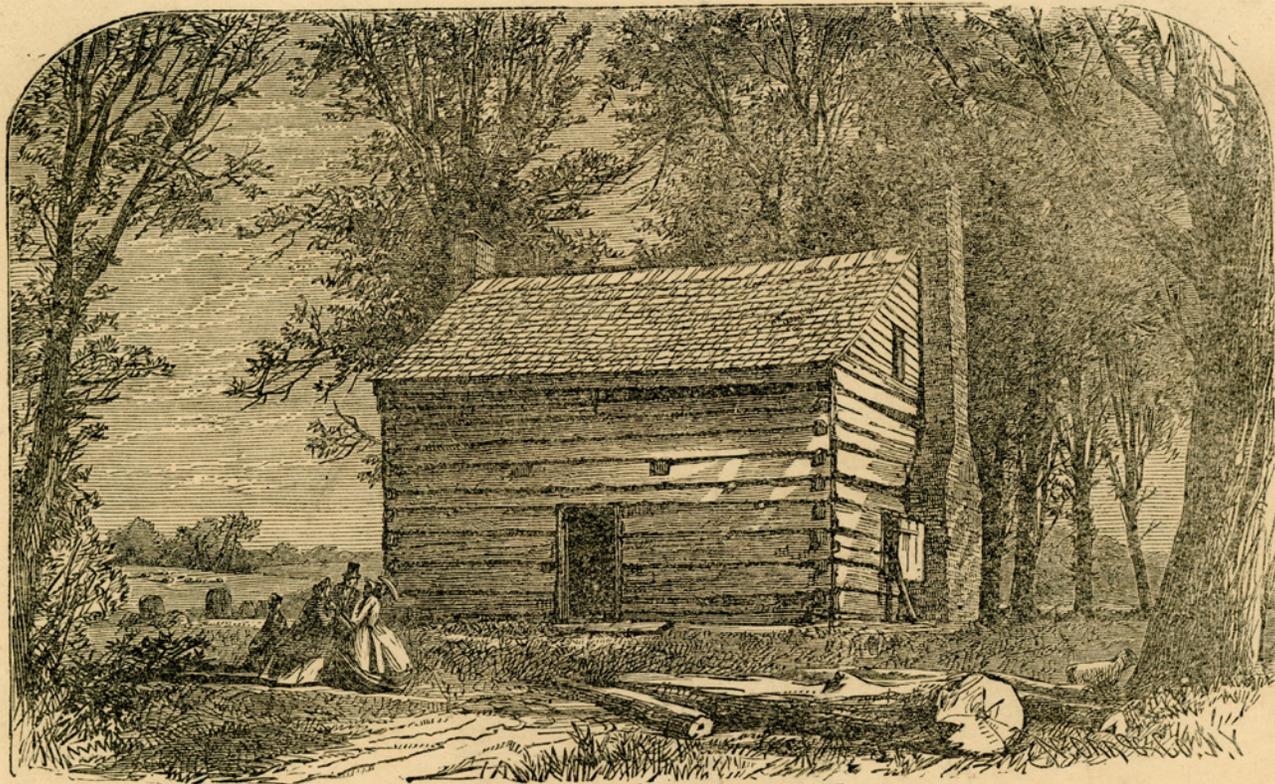
<sup>17</sup> “The Ceremonial,” *Chicago Inter Ocean*, October 23, 1887.

<sup>18</sup> “The Ceremonial,” *Chicago Inter Ocean*, October 23, 1887.

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<sup>20</sup> Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 122.

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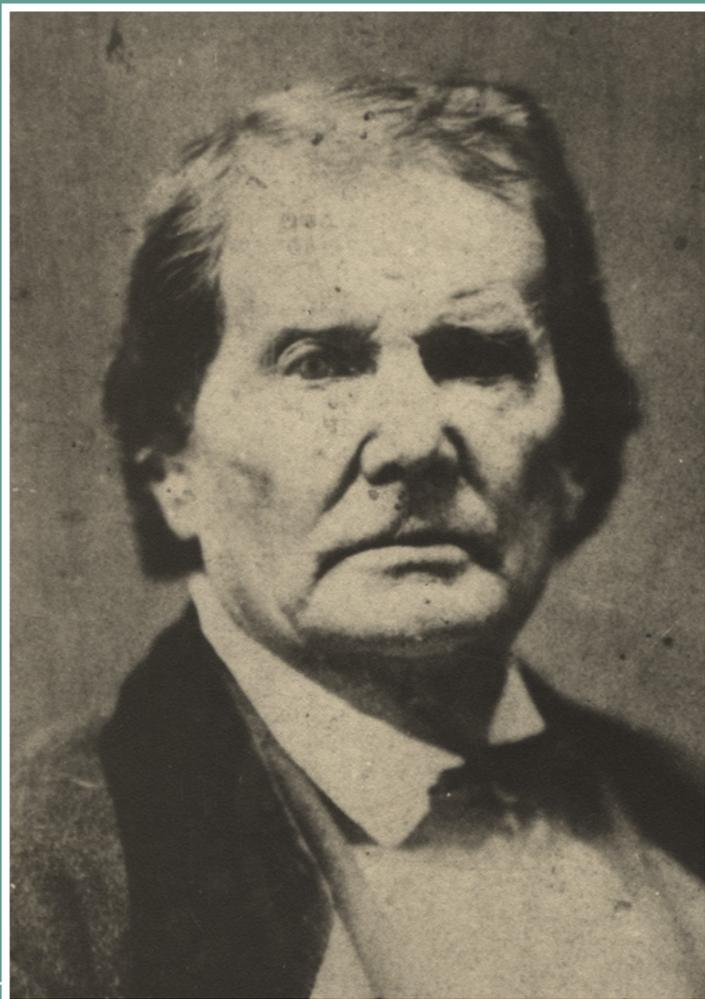


LITTLE PIGEON BAPTIST CHURCH,  
Where the Lincoln's worshipped, in Spencer County.

*Little Pigeon Baptist Church, Spencer County, Indiana*  
71200908510119

# Thomas Lincoln Reconsidered

Richard E. Hart



*Thomas Lincoln LN-1475*

Thomas Lincoln has been the subject of description and judgment since at least 1860 when a political biography of his son Abraham was written. Since then, thousands of books have been written about Abraham with most having brief descriptions of Thomas. Those written shortly after Abraham's death were assembled quickly to meet the demand for a record of Abraham's life and accomplishments. Some elevated Abraham to Biblical heights. Indeed, he became Father Abraham. As Abraham rose to the heavens, Thomas was pushed into a hellish abyss. From that postmortem period to present, most published critical judgments of Thomas conclude that he was a miserable failure both as a man and as a father. That is today's conventional wisdom among Lincoln historians. It is time to take a fresh look at Thomas and reconsider those judgments and that wisdom.

There have been a few historians who differed with the conventional wisdom. In 1942, Louis A. Warren wrote a critique clearly describing what he thought was the unfair demonization of Thomas Lincoln.

Thomas Lincoln has been the scapegoat for all who would make Lincoln a saint... As one writer put it: "Not a single one of Mr. Lincoln's deifiers has had the audacity to claim anything superior for Tom Lincoln." Folklore and tradition have made him one of the most despised characters in American history, and as long as he is portrayed as a vagabond, an idler, a tramp, a rover, and as poor white trash, lacking in energy, void of ambition, wanting in respectability, and a general failure in life, it will be impossible to trace any tendencies which the President may have inherited from his father.

Warren was not alone in his sympathetic view of Thomas. Some teachers, historians, writers, historical societies, and Lincoln aficionados who lived in Indiana and Kentucky agreed

with Warren's assessment of Thomas. Scholars distant from the Indiana-Kentucky scene ignored and brushed aside the locals as provincial defenders of their own and Thomas's home turf. The conventional wisdom that Thomas was a deplorable man and father survived and remains alive and well today.

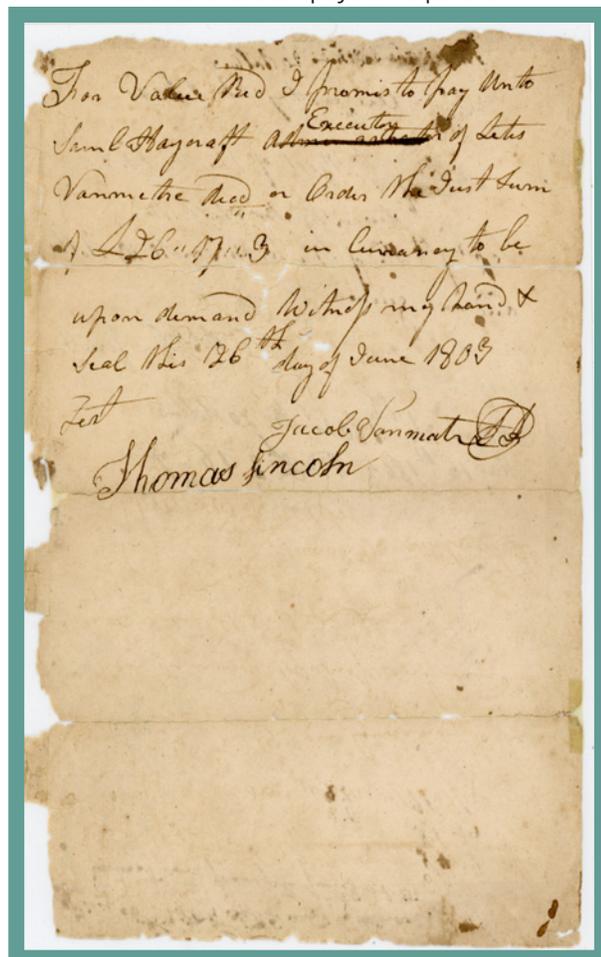
Until a few years ago, I accepted the conventional wisdom and was among those who judged Thomas a worthless failure. After all, these were the judgments made by several of my closest friends and preeminent Lincoln biographers. I was unaware of the small band of Indiana and Kentucky dissenters, the Warren school, and I had no basis for accepting their judgments and rejecting those of my friends and Lincoln biographers.

Then I discovered a whole new Thomas Lincoln. He was revealed to me by Indiana and Kentucky friends of the Warren school who are part of a growing, somewhat silent, unorganized, subculture of Thomas Lincoln revisionists. Their voices are quiet and unpretentious, but what they say resounded in my ears like a loud clap of summer thunder rolling across the Illinois prairie.

The revisionists strongly disagree with the conventional descriptions of Thomas Lincoln found in many contemporary biographies. To support their position, they point to Thomas's role in religious and civil affairs of the communities where he lived. He was quite active in his Baptist church, where he served as a well-respected counselor and contributor to the building of a new church meeting place. Before every meal he asked a simple blessing. *Fit and prepare us for humble service. We beg for Christ's sake,*

*Amen.*

He also served in many civil positions in Hardin County, Kentucky. He was a juror on many occasions, a jail guard, a member of the militia, a road commissioner and a tax payer. He paid for



Thomas Lincoln signature, June 26, 1803 71200908303000

the limited education of his children and stepchildren on every available occasion. He was not materialistic and was generous almost to a fault in assisting those in need. By the standards of the burghers of any small community, Thomas was a respected member of his community.

Thomas left no letters or diaries, but he did leave a body of work as significant as any writer or artist. His work is in the cabinets and cupboards that he created and left for us to see and enjoy. The revisionists generously shared photographs of these pieces and information about Thomas's abilities as a cabinet maker. And not just

a rough cabinet maker, but a master, whose pieces are treasured by private collectors, museums, and universities. The State of Illinois owns two magnificent pieces that unfortunately are in storage rather than on display.

As I learned more about Thomas's beautiful cabinets, I came to agree with the revisionists. Thomas was truly a master craftsman with superior artistic and mathematical skills. This became even more remarkable when I learned that Thomas was blind in one eye at least since he first moved to Indiana and that his eyesight continued to decline. By the time of his death, he was most likely blind in the other eye. In modern parlance, he was physically disabled and would have been eligible for public assistance. All of this important information was new to me as well it might now be to those biographers who have judged Thomas harshly.

As I examined other aspects of Thomas's life and character, I continued to discover a man unlike the one I knew from Lincoln biographers. He and his famous son were very different in their views of the world and their hoped-for positions in the future of that world. Thomas's view was simple. It was a matter of fact, unconscious acceptance of a hard and unjust life consumed by a-day-to-day survival on the edge of the American frontier and spiritually dependent on a literal and judgmental Lord. To the contrary, Abraham's world-view was cerebral. He consciously and expansively examined life and its possibilities beyond the day-to-day grueling fight for survival. Abraham's world-view was a luxury made possible by the preceding survival mentality of Thomas and the early pioneers. Their struggles made possible the fresh world-view of the next generation.

Despite their fundamental differences in world-views, they remained respectful and loving of one another. Their differences did not create hatred or disgust. In fact, their "differences" were nothing more than the age-old father-son rivalry and tension common to man since the beginning of time.

In analyzing and describing the relationship between father and son, some historians have interpreted letters and events to show Abraham's disrespect for his father. These interpretations need to be reexamined.



Reproduction of a corner cabinet built by Thomas Lincoln, Indiana State Museum

One such interpretation is of a letter that Abraham wrote to his stepbrother, John D. Johnston, regarding Thomas Lincoln as he lay sick and dying. The letter is dated January 12, 1851, five days before Thomas died, and 22 days after Willie Lincoln's birth,

and was in response to a letter from John requesting that Abraham come visit his father. Abraham's response letter said he could not come because Mary had just had a baby and was sick-abled. Some historians have offered certain parts of Abraham's letter as evidence of his disdain for his father. Here is Abraham's letter.

*Dear Brother [John D. Johnston]:*

*Springfield, Jany. 12. 1851--*

*On the day before yesterday I received a letter from Harriett, written at Greenup. She says she has just returned from your house; and that Father [is very] low, and will hardly recover. She also s[ays] you have written me two letters; and that [although] you do not expect me to come now, yo[u wonder] that I do not write. I received both your [letters, and] although I have not answered them, it is no[t because] I have forgotten them, or been uninterested about them---but because it appeared to me I could write nothing which could do any good. You already know I desire that neither Father or Mother shall be in want of any comfort either in health or sickness while they live; and I feel sure you have not failed to use my name, if necessary, to procure a doctor, or any thing else for Father in his present sickness. My business is such that I could hardly leave home now, if it were not, as it is, that my own wife is sick-abled. (It is a case of baby-sickness, and I suppose is not dangerous.) I sincerely hope Father may yet recover his health; but at all events tell him to remember to call upon, and confide in, our great, and good, and merciful Maker; who will not turn away from him in any extremity. He notes the fall of a sparrow, and numbers the hairs of our heads; and He will not forget the dying man, who puts his trust in Him. Say to him that if we could meet now, it is doubtful whether*

*it would not be more painful than pleasant; but that if it be his lot to go now, he will soon have a joyous [meeting] with many loved ones gone before; and where [the rest] of us, through the help of God, hope ere-long [to join] them.*

*Write me again when you receive this.*

*Affectionately,*

A. LINCOLN

Abraham's letter is beautifully poignant in its gentle words to be given to his father in his final illness. It is the Lincoln of our better angels. However, some have interpreted the letter as acceptable evidence of the low regard with which Abraham considered his father.

That interpretation, I believe, lies largely in Abraham's use of the word "painful" as a description of the sorrow he would feel if he were to see his father on his deathbed. But the pain that he would experience and that he intended to convey was not a loathing or disdainful pain, but rather a sorrowful pain. The loathing pain interpretation would be totally contrary to Abraham's nature, a nature that found it hard to harm an ant, turtle, turkey, or small animal, much less his father on his deathbed.

If the "loathing pain" interpretation were true, it would be Abraham and not Thomas who would and should suffer in repute. What son would write such a cruel letter to his 73-year-old father in his final moments of life? A dastardly, mean-spirited, and cruel son. Abraham had none of those characteristics.

When the letter was received, Thomas was on his deathbed. He was partially if not totally blind and very weak. He was probably beyond the point of being capable of reading Abraham's letter, let alone being able to understand what it said. His wife Sarah, however, was not. It would have been Sarah,

not Thomas, who would have been the recipient of Abraham's cruel judgment of Thomas. Surely, Abraham would have realized this as he wrote the letter, and he would not have hurt his beloved stepmother in this way.

To support the "loathing pain" interpretation, some point out that Abraham did not attend his father's funeral that was held only a short time after the January letter. Some suggest and some with great certitude assert that Abraham's absence is clear evidence of his disdain for his father.

But, one must ask, who would suffer the shame of Abraham's slight? Not Thomas. He was dead. It would have been Sarah, and Abraham would not have punished poor Sarah in this manner. Acts of intentional, harmful judgment were not something that were a part of Lincoln's character. It would be presumptuous to think that Abraham left us little clues of his hatred of his father, clues that future historians might examine like tea leaves and discern the truth of that relationship.

Common sense is often the best method to determine the meaning of human activity or inactivity. In 1851, communication and travel were slow. Burials were not. By the time Abraham learned of his father's death, arranged for the care of his Springfield family, and undertook a 100-mile journey across the January Illinois prairie to Coles County, the funeral would have been long over.

And if one accepts the premise that important deductions can be made about one's feelings for another by failure to attend a funeral, then why no similar analysis and judgment about Mary and her father, Robert Todd? Neither Mary nor Abraham Lincoln attended his funeral after his death at age 58, on July 17, 1849, in Lexington, Kentucky.

One cannot conclude that Abraham

did not attend his father's funeral because he disliked him or had extreme, unresolved issues with him. I believe that it was the living, Mary and the new baby boy Willie, and their needs that Abraham chose to care for rather than his father's final illness and death. To read more into Abraham's failure to attend his father's funeral defies common sense and is a real stretch.

I conclude that Thomas Lincoln was a man well suited for his place and time — on the edge of the 19th Century American western frontier with thousands of other like men. He moved into places where there was little or no semblance of western civilization and brought the rough, foundational elements of that civilization to those new places. He did so by establishing a home, raising a family, providing for them through subsistence farming and masterful cabinet making, participating in the churches, the militia, and public institutions of the communities where he lived and fending off the last resistances of the American Indians. He rightfully and thankfully demanded that his son assist in these tasks as he grew. Without the vanguard of Thomas and his ilk, the subsequent flow of American settlers could not have occurred. There would have been no Abraham Lincoln.

I respectfully urge Lincoln historians to take a fresh look at Thomas Lincoln and reconsider their judgments. To do so will not only be a pursuit of truth, but will also answer the call of the better angels within us.

*Richard E. Hart is Past President and current Board member of the Abraham Lincoln Association. This article previously appeared in the Association's For the People.*

*Lincoln* LORE

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