

LINCOLN LORE

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Editor

MOVING A NATIONAL MUSEUM

One of the most impressive Lincoln birthday celebrations this year will be the formal opening of the Lincoln Room in Ford's Theatre, Washington, D. C., where Lincoln was assassinated. The building will shelter the collection of Lincoln relics displayed for many years in the old house where Lincoln died just across the street from the new quarters.

It is encouraging to know that the priceless mementos of the martyred president are already being transferred to the new room, which will, to a large extent, remove the serious fire hazard which has ever been present during the years the collection has been housed in the building at 516 Tenth St. N. W., where many thousands have viewed it.

The change in location will bring into their former environment many items in the collection which had their origin in Ford's Theatre. While there may be some objection to emphasizing the assassination of Lincoln by making a shrine of the building, it will create a proper atmosphere in which to display the many mementos of America's greatest tragedy.

Osborne H. Oldroyd was largely responsible for the gathering of this valuable collection—it was, in fact, the result of his life's work.

At the age of eighteen, the future relic-hunter opened a news stand in Mt. Vernon, Ohio, where he was born. It was in 1860, the year Lincoln and Hannibal Hamlin were the standard bearers of the newly-formed Republican party. Out of the bundle of new publications which came from a Pittsburg distributor one day there fell the book about "Abram" Lincoln. The young merchant read and re-read the engrossing tale of the Republican candidate's rise from obscurity to fame. There formed within him the conviction that any man who in the face of seemingly insuperable obstacles could accomplish all that Lincoln had, not only would make a good President but also would be worthy of a lifetime's study. This conviction gave rise to a determination by young Oldroyd to collect every scrap of printed material and every memento concerning Lin-

coln he could obtain by contribution or purchase.

In all parts of the country he unremittingly prosecuted his search and today the result stands unique among all Lincolniana. It ranges from the books the boy Lincoln studied in the rude log cabin of his youth, to the famous gray woolen shawl which the President wore.

There are in the collection several pieces of furniture used by Lincoln in the White House and when he was practicing law in Springfield. In one cabinet are three well-thumbed books which were the beloved companions of Lincoln's youth. They are the Bible, in which he scrawled his name. Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and Weems's *Life of Washington*. To a later period belongs a black locust rail split by "Abe" and taken from the fence around his father's home near Decatur, Illinois.

Among the most interesting relics in the collection is the flag which draped the theater box, and in which the assassin's spur caught as he jumped, tearing the flag and causing him to fall on the stage in such a manner as to break his leg. The rent made by the spur is plainly seen, and the spur which made it is hung on the wall near the flag. Here also are oil paintings of Mr. Lincoln, made in 1842 and 1846; several groups in which he appears, including the President and his cabinet; Lincoln studying at night by the firelight in his father's cabin. A corrected draft of the immortal Gettysburg speech; different receptions at the White House, including his last one; scenes in Springfield, portraying Oak Ridge Cemetery and the Lincoln Monument; the Globe tavern, where Lincoln boarded when he was a brilliant and popular lawyer, and where his son Robert was born; the proclamation of freedom, dated January 1, 1863; scenes on the night of the assassination, and photographs of places connected with the history of the capture of Booth are in the collection. A large photograph of the log cabin near Farmington, Illinois, and one of an interior of this cabin, with the remains of an old spinning wheel used by Lincoln's step-mother may be seen. It was in this cabin that Lincoln's father died in 1851, and in which his step-mother enjoyed the realization of her hopes of greatness for her foster son, as she lived here until after his election as President of the United States.

The collection originally was housed in the Lincoln home in Springfield, Illinois, which property Oldroyd was instrumental in having presented to the state by Robert T. Lincoln. Here the collection remained for ten years until the Memorial Association of the

District of Columbia invited Mr. Oldroyd to bring his famous collection to Washington, D. C.

The association had rented for the purpose of housing the collection the old Peterson house where Lincoln died. It is located just across the street from Ford's Theatre, the scene of the assassination.

In 1897 by act of Congress and sponsored by a Congressman from a southern state, the historic old home was acquired by the government for the sum of \$30,000. Here over a period of more than thirty years, with a small fee of admission as his only reimbursement, Mr. Oldroyd continued to display his remarkable collection.

The state of Illinois, realizing that a grave mistake had been made in allowing the famous collection to leave Springfield, bestirred itself, and proposals for its return were made to Mr. Oldroyd.

While the collection was still in the possession of Mr. Oldroyd, Henry Ford made an offer for the material assembled by the veteran collector, but public opinion which decreed that a collection of so national a character should not pass into private hands, was highly influential in bringing about its purchase by the government.

Mr. Oldroyd had always cherished the idea that the government might finally become the purchaser of his collection so that there would be no danger of his work of a life time being wasted by the scattering of this rare Lincolniana.

It was not until 1925, however, that there was any assurance that this hope would be realized. A bill was presented to Congress authorizing the purchase of the collection by the United States at a price of \$50,000. Loyal support was given to this project by Congressman Rathburn of Chicago, whose father and mother were in the box with the Lincolns the night of the tragedy.

The appropriation was made by the government for the purchase of the collection and Mr. Oldroyd was made curator emeritus with a salary which was sufficient to care for him the rest of his days.

Possibly one of the most cherished mementos secured by Mr. Oldroyd during his whole life was the pen with which President Coolidge signed the measure authorizing the purchase of the Lincoln collection.

While Mr. Oldroyd remained as curator emeritus of the museum up to the time of his death the oversight of the valuable collection was largely given over to Mr. Lewis G. Reynolds, the present efficient curator. Under his direction the removal of the relics to their new location is taking place.