

# LINCOLN LORE

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## LINCOLN'S AUTOGRAPH

There is something about an autograph that makes it the most personal of all the mementoes which one may acquire. This fact has made the collecting of autographs an interesting hobby. The signature of Abraham Lincoln is the most desirable of all the presidents, and every collector of Lincolniana hopes that some time he may be fortunate enough to acquire one.

There was much controversy in the early days about the spelling of the Lincoln name, due to the carelessness of scribes who incorrectly copied it. The Lincolns always spelled it correctly, and a member of the Kentucky branch of the family had occasion to make affidavit in 1812, as to the proper spelling of the name of Abraham Lincoln, the grandfather of the president. In the course of the settlement of the pioneer's estate in the court proceedings, the deponent, Thomas Lincoln, brother of the Pioneer Abraham Lincoln, was asked this question by Mordecai Lincoln, eldest son of the pioneer:

"Do you know how my father, Abraham Lincoln, spelled his name?"

Thomas Lincoln answered, "He spelled his name 'Abraham Lincoln'."

It was this Grandfather Abraham Lincoln for whom the president was named. There is no evidence in the early records of Kentucky and Virginia of any Lincolns who could not write their name. They all spelled it consistently, LINCOLN.

When Lincoln was a boy he usually wrote his full name in his copy books, but by 1832 he had come to use the signature "A. Lincoln." His announcement as a candidate for the Legislature, placed in the Sangamon Journal on March 15, 1832, was signed "A. Lincoln." As most of his opponents signed with their full name it was apparently a personal inclination rather than a custom which he followed in abbreviating his signature. Possibly he felt his first name was burdensome. Lincoln continued to sign his name in this manner consistently until his election to the presidency. But few instances are found where it was written out in full up to the year 1861.

Upon receiving the nomination as the presidential candidate for the Republican party, he wrote to Hon. George Ashmun, President of the Republican National Convention, accepting the nomination, and signed his name "A. Lincoln," as was his custom. Later on he had occasion to write Mr. Ashmun concerning the spelling of his first name for which he had merely used the initial "A." The letter follows:

Springfield, Ill., June 4, 1860.  
Hon. George Ashmun.

My dear sir:

It seems as if the question whether my name is "Abraham" or "Abram" will never be settled. It is "Abraham," and if you think fit, have my signature thereto printed "Abraham Lincoln." Exercise your judgment about this.

Yours as ever,

A. LINCOLN.

The three presidents who preceded Abraham Lincoln—Millard Fillmore, Franklin Pierce, and James Buchanan—had been in the habit of using their full names as their usual signatures. With Abraham Lincoln it was different, as he had an abbreviated name. Upon his nomination he was confronted with the problem of deciding how it should be spelled, considering the obligations of his new office. The Ashmun letter undoubtedly called for the first serious thought he had given to the matter, but it was soon to confront him with the signing of every official paper.

The following brief was recently submitted to the editor of *Lincoln Lore* by an attorney, as his explanation of Lincoln's consistent practice of signing his full name on all official documents:

"The President of the United States had no recognized official signature prior to the incumbency of Abraham Lincoln. Some time after President Lincoln had been inaugurated he took up this question with the United States Supreme Court, and, after deliberating upon same for several weeks, the court handed down a friendly decision under the title, "Per Curium." This decision may be found in the sixtieth volume of the United States Supreme Court Precedents, and since that time the President of the United States is required to sign his name in full on all official documents and executive orders."

Possibly the most outstanding and unusual characteristic about Lincoln's signature, which appears in nearly every instance in his pre-election correspondence where he signs "A. Lincoln," is the presence of two dots, instead of one, after the "A." This habit continued throughout his life, but with much less consistency after he became president. There are some instances where he appears to have made two dots and then having observed this inaccuracy made the two dots into one.

As Lincoln's correspondence became heavier during his administration, his handwriting changed somewhat. The number of letters and memorandums bearing his signature which are listed in the compilations of his writings now total twenty-five hundred and eleven. This list does not include the hundreds of legal documents and gov-

ernment papers he signed. On January 19, 1860, Abraham Lincoln wrote a letter to Alexander H. Stephens containing fourteen hundred and four words. In his last paragraph he said, "This is the longest letter I ever dictated or wrote."

At the Child's sale, held in the Freeman Auction Gallery, Philadelphia, a letter which Abraham Lincoln wrote to Hon. Nathan Sargent in 1859 sold for \$11,750.00. Just ten years before writing the letter to Sargent, Lincoln wrote the following reply to one who had asked for his autograph:

Washington, Jan. 5, 1849.

Mr. C. U. Schlater.

Dear Sir:

Your note, requesting my "signature with a sentiment" was received and should have been answered long since, but that it was mislaid. I am not a very sentimental man, and the best sentiment I can think of is, that if you collect the signatures of all persons who are no less distinguished than I, you will have a very undistinguishing mass of names.

Very respectfully,

A. LINCOLN.

On some occasions, however, Lincoln prepared a very formal reply to the oft-repeated request for his autograph as will be observed by this note:

Executive Mansion,

Washington, May 20, 1862.

Mr. Lyon has informed me that Lady Villiers has expressed a wish for my autograph. I beg that her Ladyship will accept the assurance of my sincere gratification at this opportunity of subscribing myself

Very truly,

Her Ladyship's obedient servant  
A. LINCOLN.

Not only were his admirers favored with his signature, but he evidently treated all comers alike as this reply indicates:

Springfield Ills., June 1, 1860.

F. A. Wood, Esq.

Dear Sir:

Yours of May 24th is received. You say you are not a Lincoln man; but still would like to have Mr. L's autograph. Well, here it is.

Yours with respect,

A. LINCOLN.

More often, however, he replied very briefly to an autograph request, as is illustrated by his letter, in possession of the Lincoln National Life Foundation:

Springfield, Ill., June 4.

Edwin A. Palmer, Jr.

Dear Sir:

"You request an autograph, and here it is."

Yours truly,

A. LINCOLN.