

# LINCOLN LORE

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## A GOLD-HEADED WALKING STICK

A shawl or a tall silk hat would probably be noted as features characterizing Abraham Lincoln, and often an old fashioned umbrella is placed beside the tall hat as a symbol of the prairie lawyer. For some reason, however, a walking stick which Lincoln is said to have used habitually does not seem to find any place in the Lincoln legend.

There has just come to light an interesting but rather obscure reminiscence which would imply that even from childhood Lincoln had been accustomed to carry some kind of a stick; in adult years this evolved into a cane. Possibly the old fashioned umbrella of the prairie years was, in Lincoln's hand, a happy transition from the primitive dogwood club to the more elaborate gold-headed cane of the Presidential years.

A Washington correspondent tells the story of a friend's visit to Abraham Lincoln, on which occasion Lincoln expressed himself on the use of walking sticks. Inasmuch as the reminiscence was printed in the month of May, 1865, it bears the imprint of truth. The subject was introduced by the fact that the visitor to Mr. Lincoln carried a cane. The President reached for it and then expressed himself as follows:

"I always used a cane when I was a boy. It was a freak of mine. My favorite one was a knotted beech stick, and I carved the head myself. There's a mighty amount of character in sticks. Don't you think so? You have seen these fishing poles that fit into a cane? Well, that was an old idea of mine. Dogwood clubs were favourite ones with the boys. I 'spose they use 'em yet. Hickory is too heavy, unless you get it from a young sapling. Have you ever noticed how a stick in one's hand will change his appearance? Old women and witches wouldn't look so without sticks. Meg Merrilees understands that."

It is difficult to learn when Lincoln began to carry a stick of such dignified appearance that it might be called a cane. In Miss Walker's interesting study at Vincennes of the Lincoln family's migration from Indiana to Illinois, her bronze Lincoln appears beside the yoke of oxen drawing the covered wagon with a goad in his hand. The ox goad might be called the primitive walking stick of the pioneer, as he often leaned upon it for support in much the same manner as the shepherd upon his staff, with the sharp point elevated in much the same fashion as the herdsman's crook. The cattle driver in the Kentucky country, even now, is seldom seen without his improvised goad, or stock cane.

There are many canes in existence which are said to have belonged to the President. A cane made of wood taken from the Henry Clay home was supposedly carried by Lincoln during the debates. One presented to Lincoln in 1860 was studded with fourteen knots, each knot mounted with a silver crown bearing a letter in Abraham Lincoln's name. There was the Broderick oak cane presented to Lincoln with great ceremony in 1863, and bearing its interesting inscriptions on gold plates. The assassination cane made of black ebony with its nine dots representing the states which had withdrawn from the Union, is said to have been left by Lincoln in the box at Ford's Theatre on the night of his assassination.

The most famous of his many walking sticks, however, was one presented to him by John A. McClernand in 1857.

The McClernand stick is undoubtedly the one which he carried with him to Washington, and it finds a place in the First Inaugural picture. A contemporary account of Lincoln's appearance as he approached the platform on this eventful day is found in a press correspondent's description of him: "He was arrayed in a full suit of regulation black including a dress coat, a brand new silk hat, and a ponderous gold-headed cane. After standing hesitatingly a moment his cane in one hand and his hat in the other he got rid of the former by thrusting it up in the angle of the railing....."

After Lincoln's death this same gold-headed cane was presented to Dr. James Smith who was for seven years the spiritual adviser of the Lincoln family at Springfield, Illinois, and who was appointed by President Lincoln as United States Consul at Edinburgh, Scotland.

*Harper's Bazaar* for August 27, 1871 published a codicil from Dr. Smith's will which reads as follows:

"I give, devise and bequeath unto John Bright, Esq., member of the British House of Commons, and to his heirs the gold-mounted staff or cane which belonged to the deceased President Lincoln of the United States, and presented to me by the deceased's widow and family as a mark of the President's respect, which staff is to be kept and used as an heirloom in the family of the said John Bright, as a token of the esteem which the late President felt for him because of his unwearied zeal and defense of the United States in suppressing the civil rebellion of the Southern States."

Through the courtesy of Harlan F. Burket, an attorney in Findlay, Ohio, the attention of the editor of *Lincoln Lore* was called to an excerpt from "The Life and Speeches of John Bright" which was published in 1881. It confirms the fact that the famous cane reached its proper destination, as we see by the following notation:

"But perhaps the most interesting reminiscence relating to Mr. Bright and the United States is one respecting which we are able to give the following particulars. The staff used by President Lincoln was bequeathed to Mr. Bright by the Rev. Dr. J. Smith of Springfield, Illinois, the latter having first received it from Mr. Lincoln's family. The President's gold-headed staff, or cane, bears the following inscription on the gold head: 'J. A. McClernand to the Hon. A. Lincoln, June 1857;' and on a gold ferule below are the words, 'Presented to Rev. Jas. Smith, D. D. late pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Ills. by the family of the late President Lincoln, in memoriam of the high esteem in which he was held by him and them as their pastor and dear friend, 27th April, 1868'. On another gold ferule, lower down, is the following: 'Bequeathed by the Rev. Dr. Smith, U. S. Consul, Dundee, to the Right Hon. John Bright, M. P. in recognition of his tried friendship to the United States'".

It is interesting to know that on the mantle of the study in the White House at the time Lincoln was assassinated, there was displayed a portrait of John Bright. Certainly this famous cane found an appropriate home when it reached the hands of the distinguished English statesman who was ever in sympathy with the Union cause.