

# LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor,  
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Number 541

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

August 21, 1939

## HISTORIC LINCOLN PENS

An old arithmetic copy-book contains what is presumably the earliest writing of Lincoln now extant. When he was about fifteen years of age, he wrote on a page largely devoted to figuring, "Abraham Lincoln his hand and pen . . ." His pen was probably made of a goose quill, and, until he left Indiana in 1830, it is likely that most of his writing was done with one of these primitive instruments. Steel pens were invented in England in 1803, but it was not until about 1830 that they came to be used generally in the United States.

Upon reaching New Salem in August 1831, about the time of an election, Lincoln was asked if he could write, to which question he replied that he could make a few rabbit tracks. This seemed to be all that was necessary to allow him to qualify as clerk of the election. These crude beginnings gave little indication that the very pens with which he wrote would some day be preserved as memorials of important and far-reaching state papers.

### The Mayflower Pens

Two pens, one for black ink and another for red ink, were presented to Lincoln at the time of his first inaugural, according to an interesting story which appeared in *Comfort Magazine* for February 1908.

Isaac B. Reed of New York suggested to Secretary Chase the advisability of issuing war bonds with an additional interest feature which made them known as the "seven-thirty" bonds. When Reed was presented to the President he was introduced as "The Father of the Seven-thirty Bonds." A memorandum was handed to Mr. Reed which was signed by Mr. Lincoln on April 11, 1865 and read: "Please extend to the bearer every courtesy in visiting the government departments." The President then asked Mr. Reed if there was any other favor he could grant him, whereupon Mr. Reed replied, "There is no favor I can think of unless I might be so bold as to ask you to present me with the pen you signed that paper with."

Mr. Lincoln was reluctant to grant this request and replied, "That pen is a souvenir with quite a history . . . When George Washington was elected President of the United States a Patriotic Women's Association of Virginia presented him with a quaintly carved chest such as held surveyors' instruments . . . made from the lid of the captain of the Mayflower's desk." Lincoln then went on to explain that this box, after Washington's death, was made into two penholders which were presented to him at the time of his inauguration.

The President, however, did present the pen to Mr. Reed and promised that copies of the papers confirming the authenticity of the pen would be prepared for him. This was done, according to Secretary Hay, but because of Lincoln's assassination three days later, the papers were mislaid and Mr. Reed never received them. Reed was present with Dr. Taft at Fort's theater the night of the assassination.

The historic pen was taken to Europe by Mr. Reed, and used by many of the crowned heads of Europe in writing

their signatures for him. Among them was Queen Victoria whose signature bears the date of May 27, 1873. William Churchill of the British Museum offered Mr. Reed three hundred pounds for the pen, but the offer was refused.

The Reed story as told in *Comfort Magazine* does not reveal what became of the historic pen. We are also unable to discover any mention of the companion pen which was in Mr. Lincoln's possession at the time of his death.

### The Emancipation Pen

Abraham Lincoln signed the act abolishing slavery in the District of Columbia on April 16, 1862. Senator Sumner asked the President if he might have the pen with which he signed the act, whereupon taking up a handful of steel pens on his table the President remarked, "It was one of these. Which will you take, you are welcome to all." There was also a preliminary Emancipation Proclamation written on September 22, 1862, and the final proclamation on January 1, 1863. It is not strange that there has been some confusion about pens used in freeing the slaves.

In 1924 an Emancipation pen sold at auction for \$1,000. On February 27, 1929 the Anderson Galleries of New York sold another Emancipation pen for \$2,300. A woman living in Battlecreek, Michigan claims to own the original pen with which the famous document was written, and other pens are announced from time to time which are said to have been used in writing the famous document.

The Massachusetts Historical Society is confident that it is in possession of the pen which Abraham Lincoln used on January 1, 1863 in signing the most far-reaching of all the Lincoln state papers.

On Christmas morning 1862, Senator Sumner sent to President Lincoln a book on slavery, written by George Livermore, which was needed for reference purposes. On December 28 Sumner sent to Mr. Lincoln a note from Mr. Livermore requesting the pen with which he would sign the Proclamation of Emancipation. The proclamation was signed on January 1, 1863, the identical pen was secured by Mr. Sumner and sent to Mr. Livermore. On January 9 Sumner read to the President a letter from Livermore in which he acknowledged the receipt of the pen.

One year later, on December 27, 1863, some controversy about the pen already having arisen, Senator Sumner wrote to Mr. Livermore a letter in which he said:

"Some time before the Proclamation I asked the President to take note of the pen he used on that occasion and to reserve it for a friend of mine in whose recent work on colored persons and their rights he had been interested. This he promised to do. On the night of the Proclamation, or the day after, I was with him and promptly inquired after the important pen. He took it out of a drawer where he had carefully laid it away and handed it to me—saying, 'This is the pen.' That pen I forward to you."