

# LINCOLN LORE

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## AN EARLY EXHIBIT OF LINCOLNIANA

One of the earliest exhibitions of Lincolniana was arranged at Chicago in 1886. Three different publications serve as sources of information about the collection and its display. A four page pamphlet entitled "Abraham Lincoln," which escaped both Fish and Oakleaf in their respective bibliographies, gives a general description of the exhibit and states that the collection could be seen day and evening at Room 207, Chicago Opera House Building. The admission price was twenty-five cents for adults and fifteen cents for children. A testimonial of Wisconsin's Governor Busk states that the collection "is the most interesting Exhibit of the Age."

A note in this descriptive pamphlet states that "This exhibition is in charge of Mr. William H. Herndon, Lincoln's old law partner, which is a guarantee of its genuineness." Letters written by Mr. Herndon to Jessie M. Weik give some information about Herndon's connection with the collection.

By December 1, 1886, William Herndon was already in Chicago and on that day wrote a letter to Jesse Weik stating that he had sent him some cards and pamphlets "explaining the Lincoln Memorial Collection owned by Messrs. Keys and Munson." Herndon further stated that he was in Chicago to help them in setting up their exhibition. He continues, "I am pushing the collection along as well as I can, do not know when I shall go home."

A letter which Herndon wrote Weik on December 13 states, "I am so tied up here that I have no time much to read the papers. I have to explain to visitors the nature, history, etc. of the Lincoln Memorial Collection; it keeps me blabbing all the time."

In this same letter Herndon states that as the collection is new in Chicago not a great many people have attended as yet, but he believes that it promises well and will be a good thing in the near future. Herndon further comments that Lincoln is growing in the esteem of the people and "the older the relics of him, the more valuable the collection will be." He states in this letter that "The people are crazy for autographs . . . Lincoln's autographs bringing from \$10 to \$20. . . . A candy man, Mr. Gunther, told me he had \$40,000 worth of autographs in his safe."

On January 7, 1887, Herndon wrote to Weik that he was asked by Messrs. Munson and Keys to inquire if he would dispose of "the old Bible record of which you sent me a copy, the one Dennis Hanks tore out and wore out, and that Mrs. Chapman gave you." Herndon wrote that the Lincoln Memorial Collection was also interested in securing "the leaf of Lincoln's copy or exercise book which I gave you several years since and has some poetry on it." By January 22 he was back in Springfield again having been in Chicago with the Lincoln Memorial Collection nearly two months.

The four page pamphlet issued by the collection not only gives a general description of the exhibit and informs us of Mr. Herndon's presence there, but it also states that there will be: "An illustrated life of Abraham Lincoln presented free to all visitors to the collection." The title of this pamphlet of thirty pages is "Sketch of the Life of Abraham Lincoln and a Catalogue of Articles (portrait) once owned and used by him now owned by the Lincoln Memorial Collection of Chicago."

The third piece of information associated with the collection is a sixteen page pamphlet entitled Lincoln Memorial Collection, and on the back cover is the name of S. B. Munson, secretary of the society with headquarters at 94 Market Street, Chicago. This is a catalogue of the 205 items in the collection with a brief description of each.

The manuscripts in Lincoln's own hand were the most valuable parts of the collection. There were altogether forty-six writings relating primarily to Lincoln's law practice. Three leaves from his Indiana school notebook and the interesting memorandum, "When you can't find it anywhere else look in this," were displayed. Documents relating to the leasing of his home, a few personal letters, and four pieces of correspondence of the war period were included in the compilation.

Among the valuable manuscripts were three pieces which related to Lincoln's most remunerative lawsuit, McLean County vs. Illinois Central Railroad Company. Lincoln had been approached with respect to the availability of his services by the defendant, but delayed long enough in reply to allow the county to engage him if it chose. A reasonable time having elapsed with no word from the plaintiff, he wrote to Mr. Brayman, attorney of the Illinois Central in Chicago, and said "you may count me in." This letter accepting the appeal is the first of three documents relating to the case and is dated October 3, 1853.

The second document associated with this famous case is a check for \$250 which was a retainer sent to Lincoln by Brayman when he was engaged by the defendant. The third document in the suit is a bill drawn up for legal services rendered the Illinois Central Railroad Company. The amount of the bill was \$5,000 and it was certified to as not being an unreasonable fee by the following lawyers: Grant Goodrich, N. B. Judd, Archibald Williams, N. H. Purple, O. H. Browning, and R. S. Blackwell.

The household goods in the exhibition were once used in the Lincoln Springfield home and consisted of a marble top table, a mirror, a sofa, six haircloth upholstered chairs, a hearth rug, bureau and stand, cupboard, mahogany table, and stand.

A hickory chair repaired by Abraham Lincoln for Caleb Carmen of New Salem was also included in the furniture display. The old rustic chair in which he was seated at the time he received the dispatch announcing his nomination at Chicago is another interesting item. When the chair was presented to the collection on May 13, 1886, by J. R. Stewart, editor of the *Sangamon Journal*, he said in the letter of presentation, "We shall be happy if you can find some man to sit in it, who was anywhere as great as Lincoln was."

The Lincoln law office exhibits consisted of a table, an old office desk and book case, an ink stand, and twenty-three books from the Lincoln law library. On April 14, 1886 Mr. James W. Keys of Chicago, one of the owners of the collection, wrote to Herndon about the history of the Lincoln desk and table purchased. Herndon replied that the walnut desk with the four shelves enclosed by two leaved doors and also the walnut table with two drawers were acquired by the partners Lincoln and Herndon about 1850.

The exhibit also included seventeen pictures of Lincoln, his associates, the Springfield home, etc. and one oil painting from life by A. E. Darling of Springfield. Two busts, three collections of medals, and a miscellaneous assembly of curios associated with the election, administration, and funeral gave variety to the exhibition.

After the exhibit at Chicago closed the Lincoln curios were shown in other cities.

The collection was sold at Birch's auction room at Philadelphia December 5th and 6th, 1894. (See Fish 582). William Potter, ex-minister to Italy, and L. C. Vanuxen, law partners, purchased most of the relics, and the newspaper report of the sale states that the purchasers "now possess the most valuable collection of Lincoln relics in existence."