

LINCOLN LORE

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BEST LINCOLN MAGAZINE ARTICLE FOR FEBRUARY

The Lincoln Advisory Group has selected as the best Lincoln magazine article for February 1942, a contribution by Dr. Harry E. Pratt, entitled, "Lincoln's Petitions for Pardon," which appeared in the February issue of the *Illinois Bar Journal*. There is room for only a few excerpts from the excellent discussion with special attention given to the newly discovered writings of Lincoln, which Dr. Pratt used as the basis of his argument. The name of the individual pardoned and the approximate date of the pardon is used as a caption for each Lincoln endorsement.

LINCOLN'S PETITIONS FOR PARDON

By Dr. Harry E. Pratt

"Abraham Lincoln's acts of clemency and pardon as President are among the foundation stones of his reputation. His acts of mercy and thoughtfulness were without number and his desire to do justice to the individual soldier in the Civil War is well known. Not so well known, however, are his pleas to the Governors of Illinois for the pardon of criminals in the 1840s and '50s.

"Twenty original petitions for pardon in which Lincoln was one of the petitioners have recently been discovered in the Archives Department of the Illinois State Library. The first is dated April 2, 1842, and the last August 8, 1860. Fourteen of the twenty petitions were granted by the Governor. Lincoln wrote a short note on three of the petitions after his nomination for the Presidency, May 18, 1860. In each case the Governor granted the pardon."

Michael Hill, 1842

"The undersigned, your petitioners, respectfully represent that Michael Hill has, at the March term (now in session) of the Sangamon Circuit Court, been tried on an indictment for manslaughter, and a verdict of guilty, and that he be confined in the penitentiary for the term of one year and ten days found against him, that your petitioners are the jurors that rendered the verdict; that, under their oaths, they felt it their duty to render such verdict as they did, but that, considering the circumstances, they deem Mr. Hill a most fit subject for the Executive clemency; that he is an elderly, respectable, and peaceful citizen with a large and respected family; that he was highly provoked by oft repeated and long continued abuse, to strike the fatal blow, and that when he did strike, it is agreed by all, he had no intention of killing, or very seriously hurting the unfortunate deceased. They therefore respectfully request that your Excellency will grant him a full pardon of the entire punishment imposed by the law in the case."

Sigler H. Lester—1847

"There are circumstances which in our opinion render it proper that the Executive clemency should be extended to him."

J. A. L. Crockett—1852

"I assisted in the defense of J. A. L. Crockett, and, of course, heard and noted the evidence, and I concur generally with the statement of Mr. Thornton above. I think him, most clearly, a proper subject of Executive Clemency."

William D. Davis—1853

"I assisted in his defense, and I thought his conviction was right, but that the term fixed was too long under the circumstances. I told him that if he should behave himself well for a considerable portion of the time, I would join in asking a pardon for the remainder. He has a young family, and has lost one of his arms. He has now served

about five-sixths of his time, and I understand, the Warden, who is now in Springfield, testifies that he has behaved well. Under these circumstances I hope he may be released from further confinement."

John Hibbs—1857

"We defended John Hibbs, mentioned in Judge Davis' letter above; and we concur with the Judge, that a pardon now, after his having served about fourteen months of his two years, would not be improper."

Moses Loe—1857

"I defended Moses Loe . . . and, with the exception of the assistance of a younger man at the trial, who volunteered merely to try his hand, the whole defense rested on me. I know Loe to have been a very young man at the time of the offense, and that more than half his time, (originally eight years) has elapsed since his conviction. As to his previous character, or his conduct in the State prison I know nothing; but willing to trust the numerous and very respectable gentlemen who speak on these points, I cheerfully join the request that he be pardoned for the remainder of his term."

George High—1857

"I have been acquainted with the circumstances of George High's case from the time of his arrest and I cheerfully join in the request that he may be pardoned."

Samuel Jones and James Jones, 1858

"Samuel Jones and James Jones, at court here last week were found guilty of stealing five shoats, or small hogs. I have been appealed to, to say something in favor of their being pardoned. They are father and son. I know nothing to say, except that he is an old citizen (I mean the father) and his neighbors appear more anxious that he and his son should be pardoned, than I have known in any other case. This is really all I can say. I was not concerned in this trial; and consequently did not listen to the evidence."

David Thompson—1858

"I was appointed by the court to defend in part the above named David Thompson. I thought at the time his conviction was wrong, and I am now clearly of the opinion he ought to be pardoned. I have recently been at Woodford; and the universal sentiment there seems to be in favor of a pardon."

Orin B. Jones—1858

"I was at the Champaign Circuit Court at the time of the conviction of Jones, but was not engaged in the case. From what I heard there as well as from the above statement of the Judge and Prosecuting Attorney, I concur in the recommendation that he be pardoned."

Thomas Patterson—1860

"Considering the absence of a previous bad character of Patterson himself, the necessities of his family, the excellent character of all his family connections and the very numerous signed petition of his neighbors, I recommend that he be pardoned at once."

Emanuel Fowler—1860

"Believing that Judge Emerson knows what is right in this case, I join in the recommendation he makes."

Patrick Cunningham—1860

"I think it is almost always safe to pardon a convict, when, as in this case, the Judge before whom he was convicted, recommends it."