

# LINCOLN LORE

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## CLOCKS AND WATCHES OF THE LINCOLNS

The recurrence of the anniversary of Lincoln's assassination has recalled one of the first questions which was put to the Lincoln Foundation, upon its establishment fifteen years ago. It referred to the legend about the hands of dummy clocks, used by jewelers being set at the hour Lincoln was shot or the hour he died. As such clocks are invariably set at 8:18, it will be observed immediately, that inasmuch as Lincoln was shot about 10:30 P. M. and died at 7:22 A. M. the following morning, neither time harmonizes with the traditional 8:18. From the earliest statements of the tradition available, it seems to have originated with a New York tradesman who made dummy clocks for advertising purposes. A story in the *Des Moines Register* for February 12, 1909, attempted to trace the origin of the yarn to a signmaker in Germany.

Not all the watches Lincoln had presented to him have been accounted for, and while some have been identified as having once been in the possession of the President, others are no closer associated with him than the German signmaker's dummy clock. At the inauguration Lincoln is said to have received a watch made of California gold, presented by the California delegation. The receipt of another watch is acknowledged in a letter Lincoln wrote on Dec. 17, 1863. Some of the more familiar watch and clock stories are presented in this issue of *Lincoln Lore*.

### *The Speulda Time Piece*

According to the *Sioux City Journal* of December 13, 1928, W. H. Speulda, a Springfield, Illinois watchmaker, presented Abraham Lincoln with one of his time pieces when his fellow townsman was elected to Congress in 1846. Mr. Lincoln is said to have been carrying this same watch when he was assassinated. After Lincoln's death the Speulda family claimed that the President's widow gave the watch back to Mr. Speulda. Ownership of the watch caused litigation in the Speulda family.

### *Lady's Blue Watch*

A watch Lincoln is said to have purchased for Mary Todd, and then failed to make the presentation, was given much attention in the *New York Times* of February 10, 1936. The inscription in the watch reads, "To Miss Mary Todd from A. L. 1841." According to the news item the watch was presented to Miss Mary N. Curtis of Louisville, Kentucky, on a memorable January afternoon, 1841, after Mr. Lincoln had broken his engagement with Mary. The watch was later presented to Miss Elizabeth DeWitt and still later came into the possession of a Washington antique dealer, then passed to a New York furrier. The story about the same watch appears in the *New York Tribune* for January 4, 1932 in which it is claimed Lincoln paid \$300 for the watch.

### *A Silver Waltham*

Dennis F. Hanks, a kinsman of the President, visited Mr. Lincoln in Washington in 1864. On his way from his home in Charleston, Illinois to Washington, while changing trains at Altoona, Mr. Hanks had his watch stolen. Upon relating the incident to Mr. Lincoln, the President reached in a desk drawer and presented Dennis with a silver Waltham which was carried during the circuit riding days in Illinois. At ninety-two years of age Dennis Hanks made affidavit that Lincoln had given him the watch and identified it as follows:

"The watch he gave me is a silver 'Waltham' case No. E 279 W. M. Ellery movement—key winder—No. C 7613—Boston, Mass. The initials (D. F. H.) were engraved by Joseph Dikob of Charleston, Illinois, after I returned here."

Upon the death of Dennis Hanks the watch was sold to C. F. Gunther of Chicago, for \$500. It is now in possession

of a Chicago lawyer who Lincoln students like to think of as the dean of collectors of Lincoln curios.

### *The Presidential Gold Watch*

When Dennis Hanks received the gift of the silver watch from Mr. Lincoln, in Washington, in 1864, the President is said to have taken a gold watch from his pocket and made this statement, "Some of my friends here in Washington did not think my old silver watch was good enough for a President to carry, and they gave me this one." Possibly the story has been confused somewhat and the gold watch Lincoln carried as President may have been the same one presented to him by the *State Journal* of Springfield, Illinois and so inscribed. The watch further bears the inscription "A. L." and it also came into possession of C. F. Gunther. Later the watch was acquired by Frank C. Logan of Chicago and presented to the Chicago Historical Society.

### *The Hall Open-faced Watch*

The *New York Morning Observer* is responsible for the story of Lincoln's presentation of a gold watch to Charles Heyser on Christmas Day, 1864. Heyser is said to have been serving at this time as an orderly to the President and after the gift was made the President had this inscription placed in the watch:

"To C. Heyser, A. Lincoln, President. 1864." Heyser, desiring to raise money in 1889 to return to the place of his birth, in Prussia, sold the watch to C. B. Todd, of Pittsburgh, who later on sold the watch to Harry C. Campbell of the same city. The watch is a Hall, open-faced, gold watch with case No. 14,964.

### *Perpetual Motion Watch*

One tradition copied from a foreign newspaper stated that a watch made in 1659 was presented to Lincoln by the heirs of the maker. The news item further continued that "Lincoln always carried the watch during the war 1861-1865, and his generals set their watches by it. After the war Lincoln sold the watch to a French nobleman serving in the northern army." Lincoln is said to have donated the 40,000 francs received for the watch to people made destitute by the war. The watch was called a "perpetual motion" watch as it needed to be wound only at long intervals.

### *The Unclaimed Watch*

When the Japanese owners of the Ashe Jewelry Store in Los Angeles were disposing of their holdings recently, subsequent to the evacuation order, a watch inscribed, "Abraham Lincoln," which had been in their possession for many years, was sold. A newspaper account of the sale of the watch suggested that it was probably left there for repairs and never called for. The watch number is 8585 and on the inside of the back, inner case, is inscribed the name Abraham Lincoln.

### *The Black Marble Clock*

When Mrs. Lincoln sold some of her possessions in Chicago at auction in 1872, Mr. J. H. Windsor is said to have purchased at the sale a black marble clock. The *Des Moines Register Leader* of February 8, 1909 gave the following description of the clock:

"The clock is of black marble, with a yellow marble trimming, but the origin of these marbles is not definitely known. It is about eighteen inches in length and perhaps twelve or fourteen inches in height. It has brass or bronze ornaments on top, at one end there being a conical horn of plenty which does not have the twist of the ordinary cornucopia, and at the other end is a sitting figure with a scroll and at one side a small Greek lamp."