

LINCOLN LORE

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PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S INTEREST IN CATHOLIC INSTITUTIONS

For the past few weeks the name of no city has appeared more often in the newspaper headlines than the city of Rome. All the people in America, regardless of religious affiliations, have prayed that the city might be spared the ravages of modern warfare. The Italian metropolis is of special interest to the members of the Roman Catholic faith, who are to be congratulated on the apparent escape of their sacred city from the fate of so many historic centers of population in Europe.

We are reminded that during the days of the Civil War Abraham Lincoln did not turn a deaf ear to the appeals for the preservation of the altars of God, and institutions dedicated to the betterment of humanity.

Three years after Lincoln was born in a Kentucky cabin, another structure, built of logs, located but a few miles away, became "the cradle of the Sisters of Charity." This infant order was the mother institution of a large number of societies which during the first century established over sixty branch houses, fifty schools and academies, and several hospitals, homes for the aged, and orphanages.

The mother house of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth was situated near Bardstown, Kentucky, which town was successively occupied by Union and Confederate troops. It looked at one time as if the buildings of the society might be devastated, however, President Lincoln sent the following note of assurance to Mother Columba to be used as a precaution against military interference:

"Let no depredation be committed upon the property or possessions of the 'Sisters of Charity' at Nazareth Academy, near Bardstown, Ky.

"January 17, 1865.

A. Lincoln."

Along with the original order preserved by the Sisters is this note which explains its origin.

"Senate Chamber, Washington,
"Jan. 17, 1865.

"Miss Columba Carroll,
"Mother Superior of Nazareth,
"Bardstown, Ky.,

"I received your letter of the 9th inst., two days ago. I called on the President this morning and presented your case for his consideration. He promptly gave me a safe-guard which I enclose herewith; it will protect you from further depredations. It affords me pleasure to serve you in this matter. If I can serve you further, command me.

"Respectfully,
"L. W. Powell."

Hon. James Guthrie, of Kentucky, also made an appeal to the President for the institution's protection, and an order of military significance was issued by Mr. Lincoln, declaring that "any violation thereof would incur his serious displeasure." Brig. General Th. J. Wood in a complimentary note assured the Sisters at Nazareth, "I beg you to dismiss all apprehensions on account of the presence of soldiers in your sacred neighborhood." A comment on the attitude of the general was noted during the First World War in these words: "What a contrast between the courtesy, the chivalry, the note of true Christian civilization in this document and the devastation wrought in venerated shrines in these days of European conflict."

While visiting in Colorado some years ago, the editor of *Lincoln Lore* was shown a subscription book entitled, "Managers of St. Vincent Orphan Asylum." For the year 1862, there appeared among other subscriptions this entry, "A. Lincoln.—\$20.00." This may have been the St. Vincent orphanage established in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1832, the first orphanage to be sponsored by the Sisters of

Charity of Nazareth. If this be true, then Lincoln had reason for wanting to protect the sponsors of the orphan enterprise to which he had subscribed.

The organizers of the Sisters of Charity could not have surmised in 1812 that a three-year-old boy, living a few miles away, would come to the protection of the Order in an hour of danger, and as President of the United States contribute to their ever enlarging work.

It is very likely that the President had more than a passing interest in Nazareth, as his own Uncle Mordecai Lincoln married into a prominent Catholic family, which emigrated from Maryland during the latter part of the eighteenth century, and settled near the Lincolns in Washington County. Some of the descendants of this family became affiliated with the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth.

The name of Mordecai's wife was Mary Mudd, and they named one of their children, Abraham, after Mordecai's father. When President Lincoln was born, he had an eleven year old cousin bearing the same name, who was brought up in the Catholic Church, and who has often been confused in his church relations as a youth with the son of Thomas and Nancy Hanks Lincoln.

Abraham Lincoln's first school teacher was also a member of one of the Catholic families of Maryland who migrated to Kentucky. It must have been in the year 1815 when Riney taught Abraham Lincoln, and his sister, Sarah, in a small log schoolhouse which stood near the present town of Athertonville, about two miles from the Knob Creek home of the Lincolns. Riney at this time was living on a tract of land once owned by Joseph Hanks, the traditional maternal grandfather of Lincoln.

Brother Benedict, a grandson of the old school teacher and a monk at Gethsemane, gives us this story about Riney's last days: "Zachariah Riney when ninety-four years of age came to Gethsemane in 1856, and I with him. He lived here a little more than two years. He died in 1859." There is some evidence to support the tradition that the first school teacher of Abraham Lincoln lies buried at the Abbey within the monastery enclosure, but the place of his burial bears no marker.

Away out on the western coast another interesting bit of evidence of Abraham Lincoln's beneficence toward Catholic institutions was discovered. At San Diego the story is current about Lincoln restoring the old San Luis Rey Mission to its rightful supervisors, and there is preserved at the Mission the original document of conveyance with this endorsement:

"In testimony thereof I Abraham Lincoln, president of the United States, have caused these letters to be made patent, and seal of the general land office to be herewith affixed."

The old mission of San Juan Capistrano once sold at auction by order of the last Mexican Governor of California, Pio Pico, for \$710, was restored by order of the President to the religious order on March 18, 1865, less than a month before Lincoln's death.

Many times when Lincoln was called upon to render some service to religious groups he must have recalled that he was born and had resided for seven years in the community where the Catholic Church first established itself in the Middle West, and not far away from the Knob Creek farm where Lincoln lived, from two to seven years of age, there was established a Trappist Monastery, known as Gethsemane Abbey. He often visited his Catholic relatives in Hancock County, Illinois, which would recall again the traditions of early Kentucky days.