

# LINCOLN LORE

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## THE LINCOLNS AND SPIRITUALISM

This bulletin has presented from time to time certain numbers discussing religious influences exerted over the Lincolns by clergymen and laymen of the Baptist, Catholic, Disciple, Methodist and Presbyterian faiths. The discovery of an unpublished letter written by Mary Lincoln has prompted this brief monograph on the Lincolns and Spiritualism.

It has been accepted generally that after the death of Willie Lincoln at Washington in February, 1862, both Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln attended seances in the White House and elsewhere. Just how much they were influenced by these demonstrations is a matter of conjecture.

There is but one book worthy of attention, that sets forth the Lincolns' contacts with Spiritualism. It was written by a medium named Nettie Coleman Maynard. Mrs. Maynard states in the preface dated September, 1891, that the manuscript for her book "has been prepared at intervals during the past three years by the aid of an amanuensis." The long period of time intervening between the happenings and the recording, of course discounts to a large extent the accuracy of her reminiscences, which would try to recall the exact words used by participants in seances which occurred more than a quarter of a century before. Yet, the general statements identifying those present on some of these occasions can be depended upon.

Mrs. Maynard could not have been much younger than five years of age when she remembered the first demonstrations at her home in 1845 which would place her birth about 1840. At the time of her introduction to Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln in 1861 she must have been twenty-one or older. There is evidence that over a period of four years Mr. Lincoln may have attended at least four seances and Mrs. Lincoln undoubtedly was present more frequently.

Among the many pamphlets written on the Lincolns and the subject of Spiritualism, only one monograph seems to be of importance and that one especially for its illustrations which attempt to visualize the President's attendance at different seances.

A delegate to the Progressive Spiritualists Convention held in Springfield, Missouri, in 1896 made a statement which appeared in the St. Louis Globe Democrat for March 31 of that year, in which he claimed, "Lincoln, as is well established by history, was as firm a believer in Spiritualism as any member of the association."

In the centenary year of Lincoln's birth, 1909, Missouri spiritualists met in St. Joseph, Mo., and a dispatch to the Globe Democrat dated May 27 reported that a delegate claimed "Lincoln was the first Spiritualist of any consequence in this country," stating that "he had seances before he was elected to the presidency." This statement was somewhat modified by another delegate, Rev. Thomas Grimshaw who said, "It would hardly be fair to designate Lincoln as a Spiritualist, though he is known to have accepted in a general way the truths of our religion."

Some years ago the Lincoln National Life Foundation acquired a record book of the seances held at 1046 Bergen St., Brooklyn, from Oct. 15, 1910, to January 28, 1911, inclusive. The long-hand writing by the recorder, Charles McArthur, fills 400 pages of a ledger which is designated as volume number seven. Messages are recorded from such celebrities as: Aurelius, Beecher, Philip Brooks,

Channing, General Grant, Julia Ward Howe, Ingersoll, William James, Kant, Paine, Socrates, Queen Victoria, Zoroaster, and of course, Abraham Lincoln.

During this interval three Lincoln addresses of from 600 to 1200 words are copied which deal almost exclusively with moral and spiritual concepts of a general nature. The introductory words and a paragraph credited to Mr. Lincoln in a speech supposed to have been made on the night of Nov. 26, 1910, are sufficient to illustrate the general character of the remarks. The absence of any literary style comparable to Lincoln's, is noticeable.

"Good evening! I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to you again. I am glad to witness the faithfulness of those who have a definite purpose in view. . . . As I ponder it seems to me that there is so much we all should be thankful for. As we turn our gaze backward to times past and contemplate what the struggles of those far-away days meant, we cannot help but think those were days when souls turned to the Great One above and voiced their thanks that He had maintained the great Light House on the shores of yonder spheres."

The Progressive Thinker for July 7, 1927, presents a story by Mrs. Ruth Glenn who accompanied Mrs. Julia England, a Chicago medium to the tomb of Lincoln at Springfield on the preceding July 4th. Mrs. Glenn records a message which Mrs. England claimed was from the departed Lincoln which opened by Mr. Lincoln speaking as follows: "I am here to tell you that Abraham Lincoln is not dead. He has arisen. I am here to tell you that I walk the streets of your city and visit your consuls as I did of yore. . . . I was a Spiritualist from the crown of my head to the tips of my toes."

Lincoln in replying to a Chicago clergyman who had stated that his recommendation to the President, was "a message to you from our Divine Master," queried "Is it not odd that the only channel He could send it by, was the roundabout route by way of that awful city of Chicago?" Using the same type of reasoning Lincoln must have had some misgivings about individuals some of them without even elementary intellectual training, becoming vehicles which would bring him advice from the sages.

As late as 1845 there appeared in the February issue of The National Spiritualist a photograph of Mary Lincoln with what was described as a "Genuine Spirit Photograph of President Lincoln" in dim outline in back of her. The photograph is said to have been taken by Mr. William Mumler at Boston, Mass., in 1867.

But now we need not even speculate about the question of Mary Lincoln's affiliation with the body known as Spiritualists as she answers for herself in a long letter written in Frankfurt am Main on November 20, 1869, to Mrs. Orne then in Paris. The original letter is in the fine Lincoln collection at Franklin & Marshall College, Lancaster, Pa. Mrs. Orne's letter to Mrs. Lincoln which apparently brought up the question of Spiritualism is not available, but the excerpt from Mary Lincoln's letter forever settles the question of her affiliation with the society.

"My husband had the highest appreciation of your many excellences. I am not either a Spiritualist, but I sincerely believe our loved ones, who have only 'gone before' are permitted to watch over those who were dearer to them than life."