

LINCOLN LORE

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FORMAL OPENING OF LINCOLN PAPERS

Robert Todd Lincoln deposited in the Library of Congress on May 7, 1919 the papers of his father and on January 23, 1923 signed a deed of gift of these documents to the Library of Congress, specifying that they should not be opened until 21 years after his death. Robert Todd Lincoln died on July 26, 1926 which established the date of availability as of July 26, 1947.

The Lincoln Students Dinner

Luther H. Evans, Librarian of Congress gave an invitation dinner on Friday evening, July 25, in the Whittall Pavilion which set in motion the activities which were to culminate in the formal acceptance of the papers the following afternoon. Those seated at the table were Dr. Evans and four of his associates from the Library of Congress: David C. Mearns, Director, Reference Department, St. George L. Sioussat, Chief, Division of Manuscripts, C. Percy Powell, Assistant, Division of Manuscripts, and Verner W. Clapp, Public Relations Representative. The guests of honor were Major General U. S. Grant III, Paul M. Angle, Roy P. Basler, James W. Bollinger, Solon J. Buck, F. Lauriston Bullard, George A. Dondero, Edgar DeWitt Jones, Robert L. Kincaid, Harry W. Lytle, R. Gerald McMurtry, Frederick H. Meserve, J. Monaghan, Ralph G. Newman, James G. Randall, Carl Sandburg, Carl W. Schaefer, Freeman M. Sebold, William Springer, Thomas I. Starr, Alfred W. Sterne, Colton Storm, William H. Townsend, Louis A. Warren, John E. Washington, and Rufus Rockwell Wilson.

The Midnight Revelation

Shortly before midnight the Lincoln students withdrew to the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress where the ceremony for the opening of the vaults containing the papers was arranged for 12.01 A. M. July 26. The group was augmented by other invited guests and members of the press until about 200 people were crowded in front of the vaults.

Precisely on the minute, Dr. Evans read a portion of the deed of presentation which was immediately followed by the turning of the combination to the safe by Dr. Powell of the manuscript division, who directed the cataloguing and mounting of the documents. Press and newsreel photographers made numerous pictures of the opening of the records and views of Lincoln students with the newly released volumes in hand.

The Early Morning Treasure Hunt

After the official opening of the records the 194 volumes 11 x 14, with red leather spine-labels lettered in gold and containing the 18,350 mounted documents were removed to the Whittall Pavilion. Many of the Lincoln students worked on the papers until daylight and while they examined the manuscripts, a famous artist, Oscar Berger, prepared in caricature sketches of the students which later appeared in The Saturday Review of Literature for August 16th.

The Press Field Day

Those who had worked through the early morning hours searching for fresh facts, or timely treasures were put on strict promise to make no revelations as to their findings until the press conference later in the morning where representatives of all the more important news services were free to interview those who had seen the long impounded papers. These interviews were supplemented with releases prepared by the Library of Congress.

Radio Broadcasts

Shortly after noon Radio Stations began to tell the nation what was happening in Washington as the hour for the formal acceptance of the papers approached:

American utilized the air from 2:30 to 3:00; Columbia, 3:30 to 4:00; National, 4:00 to 4:30, and Mutual, 4:30 to 4:45. Two of the scheduled prearranged coast to coast broadcasts took the form of round table discussions. At the American Broadcasting Company's studio the guests were Dr. C. Percy Powell of the Library of Congress who had been the custodian and cataloger of the records, Dr. Roy P. Basler, Secretary of The Abraham Lincoln Association at Springfield, Illinois, and Dr. Louis A. Warren, Director of the Lincoln National Life Foundation of Fort Wayne, Indiana. Later the Columbia Broadcasting Company introduced Carl Sandburg, noted poet and authority, Dr. James G. Randall, Professor of History at University of Illinois, Dr. Paul M. Angle, Director, Chicago Historical Society, and Jay Monaghan, Secretary, Illinois State Historical Society. The National Broadcasting Company presented the program for the formal opening and the Mutual System a series of interviews.

Formal Acceptance of the Papers

The climax of the many private and public ceremonies associated with the opening of the Lincoln papers came at four o'clock when an audience of approximately 3000 people gathered in the main entrance hall of the Library of Congress. Following a statement about the gift of the papers, Dr. Evans who presided, introduced the Hon. C. Wayland Brooks, Senator from Illinois, who was chosen to introduce the special guests invited to the ceremonies. One by one as their names were called they stepped to the platform for recognition in this order: Robert Lincoln Beckwith, grandson of Abraham Lincoln; Ulysses S. Grant III, grandson of General Grant; Paul McClelland Angle, Frederic Lauriston Bullard, George Anthony Dondero, Robert Lee Kincaid, Robert Gerald McMurtry, Jay Monaghan, Ralph G. Newman, James Garfield Randall, Carl Sandburg, Thomas I. Starr, Alfred Whittall Sterne, William R. Townsend, Louis Austin Warren, John E. Washington, Rufus Rockwell Wilson, and Roy P. Basler, students of Lincoln and collectors of Lincolniana.

Dr. Roy P. Basler, Executive Secretary of the Abraham Lincoln Association followed these introductions with an address and the formal opening of the sealed collection was delegated to Dorsey Joseph Bartlett, chief page of the House of Representatives.

The Public Exhibit

With the collection formally opened some of the most important records were put on display in rows of exhibit cases which gave a maximum number of people the opportunity to see many of the rare items in the collection. The largest group attending the ceremonies from a distance was a delegation from the Detroit Lincoln Club which included besides Dondero, Jones, Springer, and Starr already mentioned the following members; Ray H. Adams, Otto Heber, Frank B. Howard, W. E. C. Huthwaite, Stanley S. Kresge, and William S. McDowell. A junior group consisting of Robert Hesse, David Huthwaite, Stanley Kresge Jr., Bruce Kresge, and Richard Starr accompanied them.

The editor of Lincoln Lore observed at the ceremonies several Lincoln students whose names should be associated with the opening of the Lincoln Papers but which do not appear in the various lists already submitted.

Edmund F. Babe, Robert S. Barton, Cecil K. Byrd, J. Walter Coleman, George B. Ehlhardt, Otto Eisenschiml, Sadavioe Goddin, Arthur C. Hansen, Stefan Lorant, Reinhard H. Luthin, Henry E. Luhrs, John D. Lippy, Jr., Bert Sheldon, Claude Simmonds, Herman D. Smith, F. M. Van Natter, Medora Vanscoy, Carl E. Wahlstrom, Oscar Winther.

Undoubtedly there were many other prominent Lincoln students present at the ceremonies who escaped the notice of the writer.