

# LINCOLN LORE

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## GENERAL CONTENTS OF LINCOLN PAPERS

The significance of the opening of the Lincoln papers at the Library of Congress on July 26th can hardly be over-estimated. H. G. Wells placed Lincoln among one of the half dozen outstanding characters since the beginning of time and certainly America has not produced a statesman of comparable stature. There can be no personal collection of American papers of greater value than those presented to the nation by the son of the Emancipator.

The far reaching importance of the collection has made it seem wise to share with the 5000 recipients of *Lincoln Lore* some of the incidents relating to the ceremonies of dedication as well as some comments on the contents of the collection. Already on account of the formal opening, the process of gathering the papers, the claims put forth for the supplemental papers, have been featured. This issue of the bulletin will attempt to give a general idea of the extent of the material in the collection as it has thus far been examined.

The papers totaling 18,350 pieces have been bound in 194 volumes chronologically arranged and also made available on microfilm. A general summary of the special subject contents as reported by the Library of Congress and supplemented by a few estimates from Lincoln students are tabulated roughly below:

Lincoln's own writings	1000
Cabinet members' letters	1100
Generals' letters	1200
Editors' letters	200
Clergymen's letters	100
Letters received as congressman	500
Threatening letters	100
Patronage requests	8000

One of the most valuable unpublished manuscripts written by Lincoln thus far discovered contains a paragraph which will some day rank among his many other philosophical sayings. Apparently it was prepared to deliver to the Kentuckians from across the River at Cincinnati but expediency caused it to be withheld. He had been urged to make some concessions before the inaugural which would "forestall peace to the country" but which would make him break faith with those who supported him in the election. Then he wrote these unspoken words:

"Nor is this a matter of mere personal honor. No man can be elected, he can not be installed, till he first appeases his enemies, by breaking his pledges, and betraying his friends, this government, and all popular government, is already at an end—demands for such surrender, once recognized, and yielded to, are without limit, as to nature, extent, or repetition—they break the only bond of faith between public, and public servants; and they distinctly set the minority over the majority. Such demands acquiesced in, would not merely be the ruin of a man, or a party; but as a precedent they would ruin the government itself—

I do not deny the possibility that the people may err in an election; but if they do—the sure cure is in the treachery of the person elected—"

The correspondence which came to Lincoln from members of his official family ranks high among the historical treasures closely followed in importance by the letters and telegrams from the generals in the field.

The letters which editors of influential newspapers sent to Lincoln in an attempt to direct his course will contribute much to the newspaper phase of the Lincoln story. Bryant of the *New York Post*, Greeley of the *New York*

*Tribune*, Bennett of the *New York Herald*, were the President's leading New York correspondents and each wrote a dozen or more letters to him. There were at least eighty-five letters from the editors of the Chicago *Tribune* including messages from Joseph Medill, Horace White, Charles H. Ray, and John Locke Scripps.

The clergymen also tried to keep Lincoln in line and several pieces of correspondence from Henry Ward Beecher are preserved. The Roman Catholic Archbishop, John Hughes of New York wrote eleven letters to Lincoln, and the same number were received from the Episcopalian Bishop, Charles McIlvaine.

One of the most valuable as well as one of the most voluminous collections of papers dated preliminary to Lincoln's nomination for the Presidency were received by him during his congressional term, 1847-1849. The greater number of the threatening letters which came to Lincoln after his nomination for the presidency were destroyed by his secretaries but enough of them were preserved to reveal their general character. Overwhelming all other classifications were the requests for patronage which one Lincoln authority claims embraces half of the collection.

At the time the manuscripts were opened ten papers were chosen from the collection to illustrate the variety and scope of the documents. They are presented chronologically here in the order of their importance which arrangement might also indicate the ranking of their monetary value.

1. **Emancipator Proclamation.** First drawn up and submitted by Lincoln to his cabinet in July, 1862.
2. **Farewell Address.** Delivered to the people of Springfield upon his departure for Washington on February 11, 1861.
3. **First Inaugural.** Closing paragraph which includes Lincoln's revision of the suggestions made by Seward.
4. **Message to Congress.** The last three paragraphs of the July 4, 1861, message.
5. **Letter to Mrs. Lincoln.** Written on August 8, 1863, with the salutation "My Dear Wife."
6. **Letter to Edward Everett.** Lincoln enclosed a copy of the Gettysburg Address with the letter which was dated February 4, 1864.
7. **Letter to Hon. N. Pope.** Relating to his decision to become an applicant for General Land office position appointment. Letter written at Springfield June 8, 1849.
8. **Letter from John D. Johnston.** Lincoln's step-brother informs him of his father's illness, written on May 25, 1849.
9. **Letter to William M. Meredith.** Correspondence dated March 9, 1849, relating to Illinois patronage.
10. **Anonymous Letter to Lincoln.** A writer signing his name "Joseph" on January 4, 1864, warns Lincoln of a conspiracy to take his life.

The lack of any sensational data which would reflect unfavorably upon Mr. Lincoln was a great disappointment to some of the members of the realistic school of Historians. A rumor was put into circulation that some one had found an off-color story and more interest was aroused than by announcement that the preliminary copy of the Emancipation Proclamation had been preserved. The risqué story however proved to be in a letter that some one wrote to Lincoln rather than from Lincoln's pen.