

# LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation . . . . . Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor  
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Number 1024

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

November 22, 1948

## A WOMAN PLEADS FOR A NATIONAL FESTIVAL

There were several occasions during the Civil War when Abraham Lincoln was persuaded to carry out certain projects, advocated by one woman or a group of women. No single act of the President, prompted by a woman, has so greatly emphasized the religious character of the nation's origin, as the proclamation looking to the permanency and fixed time element of the Thanksgiving Festival. Here again the Lincoln Papers in the Library of Congress come to our aid in revealing the preliminary steps which led up to the issuing of the proclamation and in confirming the traditions already associated with the inauguration of the annual feast day.

It has been accepted generally that Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of the *Godey's Lady's Book*, was the moving spirit in nationalizing the Thanksgiving season and creating interest in fixing a certain date on which it might be observed in all the states. The first appeal was to the governors. The sympathetic reaction from them emboldened her to correspond with the President about a permanent annual celebration on a fixed day.

It has not been known until the discovery of the correspondence of Mrs. Hale, preserved in the Lincoln Papers, that she made such a complete and convincing canvass of the situation. Furthermore it is now evident that her appeal brought almost immediate results, her letter to Mr. Lincoln having been written on September 28, 1863, and five days later on October 3, 1863, the President fulfilled her request.

Mrs. Hale was at Philadelphia when her letter was forwarded with five enclosures—three editorials excerpted from her *Godey's Lady's Book* and letters from General Banks and Governor Morgan. These exhibits gave Mr. Lincoln an excellent account of the effort put forth by his correspondent. A brief statement from each one of these editorials will reveal the general tenor of the whole correspondence.

"The last Thursday in November was suggested because then the agricultural labors of the year are generally completed: The elections are over: Those autumnal diseases which usually prevail more or less at the South have ceased and the summer wanderers are gathered to their homes.

"Now we have but two days set apart for public rejoicing. The twenty-second of February is the day of national patriotism, the Fourth of July, the day of national jubilation. Let the last Thursday in November be consecrated by gratitude to God for his wonderful blessings on our people, the crowning of which is our national union."

*Godey's Lady's Book* July 1859.

"We believe our Thanksgiving Day if fixed and perpetuated will be a great and sanctifying promotion of this national spirit. 'Our whole people will then look forward to it, make preparations to honor and enjoy it.'"

*Godey's Lady's Book* February 1860.

"The way is already prepared. For the past ten years or more the idea of our American National Thanksgiving has been gradually growing in favor and becoming an observance in all our States and Territories."

*Godey's Lady's Book* November 1861.

The significance of the letter written to the President in which Mrs. Hale persuaded him to set apart the day seems to be of sufficient importance to print in full:

Philadelphia  
September 28, 1863

Honorable Abraham Lincoln  
President of the United States

Sir:

Permit me as editress of the "Lady's Book" to request

a few moments of your precious time while laying before you a subject of deep interest to myself and as I think even to the President of our Republic, of some importance.

This object is to have the day of our annual Thanksgiving made a national and fixed Union Festival.

You may have observed that for some years past there has been an increasing interest felt in our land to have Thanksgiving held on the same day in all the states. It now needs national recognition and authoritative fixation only to become permanently an American custom and institution.

Enclosed are three papers having printed thereon easily read which will make the idea and the program clear and show also the popularity of the plan. For the last fifteen years I have set forth this idea in the "Lady's Book" and placed the papers before the governors of all the states and territories. Also I have sent these to our ministers abroad and our missionaries to the heathen and commanders in the Navy. From the recipients I have received uniformly the most kind approval. Two of these letters, one from Governor (now General) Banks and one from Governor Morgan are enclosed. Both gentlemen as you will see have nobly aided to bring about the desired Thanksgiving Union.

But I find there are obstacles not possible to be overcome without legislation and that such states should by statute make it obligatory for the Governor to appoint the last Thursday of November annually as Thanksgiving Day or as this would require years to be realized it has occurred to me that a proclamation from the President of the United States would be the best source and most fitting method of national appointment.

I have written to my friend, Honorable William H. Seward and requested him to confer with President Lincoln on this subject as the President of the United States has the power of appointment for the District of Columbia and the territories, also for the Army and Navy and all American citizens abroad who claim protection from the U. S. flag. Could he not with right as well as duty issue his proclamation for a day of national thanksgiving for all the above classes of persons and would it not be fitting and patriotic for him to appeal to the governors of all the states inviting and commending them in issuing proclamations for the last Thursday in November as the day of Thanksgiving for the people of the United States. Thus the great Union Festival of America would be established.

Now the purpose of this letter is to entreat President Lincoln to put forth his proclamation appointing the last Thursday in November which falls this year on the twenty-sixth as the national Thanksgiving for all those classes of people who are under the national government particularly and commanding union Thanksgiving to each state executive. Thus by the noble example and action of the President of the United States the permanency and unity of our great American festival of Thanksgiving could be forever preserved.

An immediate proclamation would be necessary so as to reach all the states in season for state appointment, also to anticipate the early appointment by governors. Excuse the liberty I have taken, with profoundest respect.

Yours truly,  
Sarah Josepha Hale  
Editress of the "Lady's Book"