

LINCOLN LORE

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LOCKS OF LINCOLN'S HAIR

Locks of human hair carefully preserved in jewel cases are more often associated with the reminiscences which cluster around Memorial Day than the reminders of "fools errands" contrived on April first. While much emphasis has been placed on many threatening letters President Lincoln received, little attention has been called to correspondence which must have nourished his sense of humor. To fully appreciate a peculiar request made of the President for a lock of his hair, some preliminary observations must be made.

Sanitary Fairs were the primary sources for raising funds for the United States Sanitary Commission—the Red Cross units of the Civil War period. One, reading through the Lincoln Papers in the Library of Congress, must be impressed with the large number of letters soliciting from the President contributions to these popular money making exhibitions. The usual request was an autographed writing which might be sold at a good figure. The fact that the proceeds were used for the benefit of the soldiers in the field made it almost impossible for Lincoln to refuse such solicitations. Students are familiar with some major contributions made to these exhibitions by Mr. Lincoln.

The ladies conducting the Northwestern Fair for the Sanitary Commission at Chicago, Ill. in October 1863 asked Mr. Lincoln to donate for their enterprises his original copy of the Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln was conscious of the far reaching influence of this paper and recognized by statements with reference to its signing the importance of the document. That he reluctantly parted with it is evident from this brief sentiment, almost pathetic, in which he made the presentation: "I had some desire to retain the paper; but if it shall contribute to the relief or comfort of the soldiers that will be better."

His Gettysburg address was no sooner delivered than he was asked to donate it. Still later Edward Everett asked for a copy to be presented to a Sanitary Fair in New York. He sent the document to Everett on January 4, 1864 and on March 3 Everett thanked him for attending "to so small a matter" amid his many duties. It may have been a small matter but at one time a New York dealer appraised this same copy at \$100,000, nearly as much as the entire Lincoln estate was valued at the time of the President's death. Another copy of the address was made for the Maryland Soldiers and Sailors Fair at Baltimore and the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863 was solicited by ladies in charge of the Albany (N.Y.) Army Relief Bazaar.

On January 20, 1864 a peculiar request came from L. E. Chittenden Register of the Treasury residing right in the city of Washington. He wrote in part: "I am deputed by the ladies of this city to ask you for a contribution to the fair . . . to be held in the patent office." Chittenden then revealed to Lincoln how he might spend his time expediently while listening to prospective office holders. He suggested that close at hand the President might have small sheets of paper and while his guests were talking he could be writing sentiments such as the one he enclosed, and when signed they could be sold through the Sanitary Fairs for a minimum of ten dollars apiece. Mr. Chittenden further stated: "I claim no patent for the originality of the suggestion but beg to assure you if you can give it some attention you will make a most valuable contribution. . . Mrs. Chitten-

den will be happy to take charge and dispense of any autographs you may choose to send her." To this comment he added a postscript: "One sentence on a sheet will suffice." A statement from Lincoln's annual message to Congress was enclosed as a sample: "I shall not return to slavery any person who is free by the terms of the proclamation or by any act of Congress."

It would be interesting to have Lincoln's reaction to this unusual and almost ludicrous request coming from one high up in the Treasury Department. Possibly he compared the desired autograph writings to a new type of green backs. He must have been impressed with Mr. Chittenden's thoughtfulness in suggesting that but one sentiment on a sheet would "suffice." At least he would feel that while the task of directing the courses of the armies of the Republic was largely under his jurisdiction, he should not also be burdened with the financing of their auxiliaries by scribbling his signature on sheets of paper.

On January 22, 1864 two days after the Chittenden request, a Miss Jennings, interested in making a worthy donation to the Metropolitan Sanitary Fair at New York, wrote to Mr. Lincoln in part as follows:

"I am desirous to obtain a lock of your hair and also some from the heads of various members of your cabinet." With the Chittenden suggestion fresh in mind Lincoln's sense of humor would be challenged immediately by this equally absurd request. Undoubtedly he would have something to say to his personal secretaries about a President whose tonsorial duties, when he was not engaged in manufacturing autographs, would send him to the cabinet meetings with a pair of shears, with which to clip the locks from the heads of its august members. Certainly he would reflect on the genuineness of the hairs cut from Secretary Wells toupee and would probably suggest that Wells' chin instead of his scalp would be the proper place from which to remove the desired contributions. The same facial attack would go for bearded Stanton and Bates. Inasmuch as Seward had virtually a mane on his head Lincoln might have suggested that the Secretary of State be shorn for the entire cabinet installment.

Miss Jennings did not stop with scalping the cabinet but also advised the President that she would like specimens of hair from "other prominent and distinguished men of the day." This would have brought from Lincoln some statement relative to chasing celebrities all over Washington for the purpose of snipping from their balding heads what little hair they might have left. Miss Jennings then set forth in her letter the purpose to which she hoped to put these several locks stating: "With this hair it is my intention to embroider a device on velvet and then have it handsomely framed."

Within a very few days another request came to Lincoln for locks of hair, but this one cut right into Mr. Lincoln's own domestic circle. It solicited some of his wife's tresses. About this time we can imagine that Lincoln was in the mood of saving his own scalp and if possible preserve and prevent any further pulling of his wife's hair.

Lincoln often left the impression that the exercise of his sense of humor was quite necessary to his survival. If that be true surely his correspondence must have greatly stimulated him.