

LINCOLN LORE

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GIFTS EMBODYING SENTIMENT

The clamor of selling which is so prevalent during the days preliminary to the modern Christmas was almost unknown in Lincoln's time. There were no shopping lists to be checked and no mercenary Santa Clauses to help pep up sales. The humming of home industry was the order of the day as the Christmas season approached when the finishing touches were put on useful presents which had been started many weeks before. The hushed conversation on entering a room, the hasty exit with concealed items and the general atmosphere of mystery which kept the children tense until the early morning hours of Christmas Day is now supplanted by an impatient commercial emphasis that may begin even before Thanksgiving. There were no price marks to be removed from the home manufactured gifts, but woven into each piece of fabric and resident in every type of handicraft were sentiments of inestimable value.

The cold winter season in which Christmas Day is oriented contributed much to the type of home made gifts of a century ago. The day symbolical of Peace invited gifts which would bring comfort to the recipient. Such a gift came to President Lincoln from a distant relative, Mrs. Susannah Weathers, then living at Rossville, Indiana, which he acknowledged and referred to in these words: "A pair of socks so fine, and soft, and warm, could hardly have been manufactured in any other way than the old Kentucky fashion." Lincoln might have said and possibly did imply, "Socks like my mother used to make."

Shawls have come to be associated with Abraham Lincoln as items of wearing apparel which apparently brought him much comfort. One which he is said to have worn the night of the assassination has just been presented to The Lincoln Museum in Ford's Theatre at Washington. This identical shawl was made in Edinburg, Scotland, and sent to the President as a gift from the mother of Alexander Williamson, who was tutor of the Lincoln children at the White House. Lincoln acknowledged the gift in these words: "The plaid you sent me is just now placed in my hands by your kind and worthy son. I thank you for that pretty and useful present. . . ."

A lady of eighty-one years of age donated to the Brooklyn Long Island Sanitary Fair in 1864 a "superb silk bed spread" which was so greatly admired that it was presented to the President "on behalf of two hundred subscribers limited to one dollar each." Lincoln's reply indicates that he was deeply impressed by the gift which he acknowledged in these words: "Permit me to return the most cordial thanks for the beautiful present transmitted by you and for the kind and graceful manner in which it was presented."

Many of the gifts received by Lincoln while they may not have contributed to his physical comfort did bring a warmth to his soul and were likewise appreciated for they too embodied sentiments of good will. Often his gracious reply more than compensated for the effort put forth and really left the donor under a new obligation to the recipient. It is well known that Henry Clay was Lincoln's political champion. Through the medium of her son, Thomas, the widow of Henry Clay, then eighty-one years of age and living at the old Clay home at "Ashland near Lexington, Kentucky," sent to Abraham Lincoln "a snuff box of not much intrinsic value," but which once belonged to her lamented husband. The letter of presentation contained two of Henry Clay's famous expressions and with one of these, "I would rather be right than be

President," the letter was brought to a close expressing the wish of the writer with respect to the above quotation: "I hope may ever be yours."

How Lincoln's letter of acceptance must have brought comfort to the heart of the aged widow of the deeply revered Clay, when her son read the reply of the President:

"The snuff-box you sent, with the accompanying note, was received yesterday. Thanks for this memento of your great and patriotic father. Thanks also for the assurance that, in these days of dereliction, you remain true to his principles. In the concurrent sentiment of your venerable mother, so long the partner of his bosom and his honors, and lingering now where he was but for the call to rejoin him where he is, I recognize his voice, speaking, as it ever spoke, for the Union, the Constitution, and the freedom of mankind."

Abraham Lincoln received many requests for his autograph, primarily because he was occupying the office of chief executive of the nation, but seldom was he presented with a rare document. Shortly after his first inauguration he received the gift of an autograph from a niece of John Hancock which he is said to have greatly appreciated. In her letter of presentation Mrs. Mary Hancock Culyer wrote: "I take pleasure in presenting you with the enclosed interesting relic, a share ticket issued by the province of Massachusetts Bay in 1765 for the rebuilding of Faneuil Hall, signed by John Hancock and endorsed by Abraham Lincoln, written by one of your ancestors, nearly a century ago. Humbly trusting it may prove a happy augury of our country's future history, 'The Cradle of Liberty,' rebuilt by the joint efforts of John Hancock and Abraham Lincoln." Lincoln immediately acknowledged the autograph and wrote, "Permit me to express my cordial thanks for the interesting relic, as well as for the flattering sentiment with which it was accompanied." The Abraham Lincoln who signed with John Hancock was not a direct ancestor of the President but he was a Minute Man who saw service in the siege of Boston and a grandson of Mordecai Lincoln, the great great grandfather of the President.

Books in more recent years have offered desirable tokens and here the field of selection seems to be unlimited. Probably the most widely utilized publication distributed at Christmas time has been the Holy Bible. It would be impossible to over emphasize the intensity of the hopes and aspirations entertained by the donors which have accompanied without verbal expression this incomparable volume which contains the Bethlehem story and its message of hope for the ages.

Abraham Lincoln, upon a visit to the home of his friend Joshua Speed in Kentucky, was presented a copy of the scriptures by Lucy G. Speed, mother of Joshua. For some unknown reason Lincoln had occasion while he was President to present Lucy G. Speed with his photograph. He inscribed upon it this sentiment: "For Mrs. Lucy G. Speed from whose pious hand I accepted the present of an Oxford Bible twenty years ago."

Abraham Lincoln himself by virtue of his office was placed in a position where he could present the most princely gifts at the Christmas season because he had the power to pardon a man condemned to death. Many doomed men, some of them on Christmas Day, received from the President the gift of life.