



Lincoln Lore

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BAKER'S SPIRIT MESSAGE TO LINCOLN

J. B. Conkling — Medium

One of the strangest letters Abraham Lincoln ever received was signed E. (Edward Dickinson) Baker. Today this original document is an item (Reel 30 No. 13578) in the Abraham Lincoln Papers of the Library of Congress.

The amazing aspect of this letter is that it is dated December 28, 1861, yet Colonel Edward D. Baker was killed at the Battle of Ball's Bluff on October 21, 1861. The letter of five pages is a mirror-written (can be read when held before a mirror) spirit message with a sixth page containing the entire message "translated" for easy reading. Because of Lincoln's close friendship with Baker it is not surprising that the mysterious letter was permanently preserved by the sixteenth president. The message is as follows:

"Dec. 28, 1861

"My friend will you please have this conveyed to his Excellency the president.

"My esteemed and best earthly friend.

"You will no doubt be surprised to receive this from me, but, I like millions of other disembodied spirits feel a desire to convey expressions of gratitude and hope to earthly friends. I am not dead. I still live, a conscious individual, with hope, aspirations (sic) and interest for the Union still alive.

"I experienced a happy reality—a glorious change, by the process termed 'death.'

"I would communicate with you personally, if not now, after the close of your official term.

"I will be with you in spirit, and with many others impress and strengthen you. Man lives on Earth, to live elsewhere, and that elsewhere is ever present. Heaven and Hell are conditions, not localities.

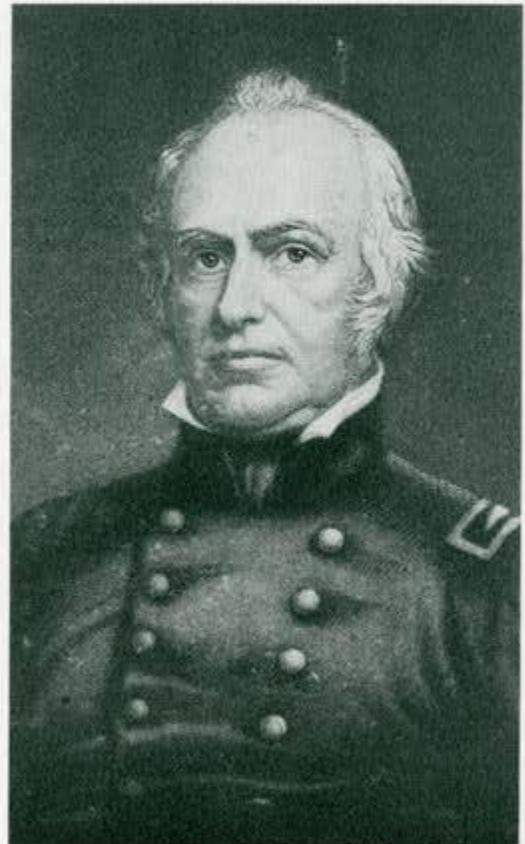
E. Baker"

The medium who transcribed this letter was J. B. Conkling (sometimes spelled Conklin) and the cataloguer of the Lincoln papers attributes, and rightfully so, this document to Conkling and not Baker. Very little is known about Conkling except that he was a writing medium whose New York City address was 599 Broadway.

Conkling may have written the E. Baker letter in an effort to arrange an appointment with President Lincoln. A wealthy spiritualist named Colonel S. P. Kase who headed a great many industrial enterprises in Pennsylvania provides some additional information on Conkling in his rare publication "The Emancipation Proclamation, How and By Whom, It Was Given to Abraham Lincoln in 1861." The only original copy of this thirty-one page pamphlet is to be found in the Brown University Library.

Colonel Kase is said to have visited Washington, D. C. in the early months of 1862, and he recorded the following information:

"I arrived about four o'clock P.M., and after getting fairly settled at the hotel I concluded to take a stroll to the Capitol grounds. Here I must digress a



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

COLONEL EDWARD D. BAKER

Baker was an Englishman who settled with his family in Belleville, Illinois. He served in the Black Hawk war as a private and moved to Springfield, Illinois in 1835 to practice law. He fought in the Mexican War, became a brigadier-general and distinguished himself at Cerro Gordo. He moved to California in 1852 and in 1860 served as U. S. Senator from Oregon. He was a close personal and political supporter of President Lincoln. The Lincolns named their second son Edward Baker (March 10, 1846 — February 1, 1850) in honor of this close friend. On March 4, 1861 Edward Baker accompanied President Buchanan, President-elect Lincoln and Senator James A. Pearce in the carriage that proceeded up Pennsylvania Avenue to take part in the inauguration ceremonies. Lincoln considered Baker's death as a real personal loss.

little. I had boarded at Mrs. Pearce's, in 1850, for about three months; the house was situated near the lower gate leading into the Capitol grounds, on Pennsylvania avenue. As I passed the house I saw the name of J. B. Conkling above the door. I knew him two years previously, in New York, as a writing medium.

"Just as the name attracted my attention I was startled to hear a voice at my right side say:

"Go see him; he is in the same room you used to occupy."

"I looked to see who spoke, as there was no human being within a hundred yards of me. The question passed rapidly through my mind—'Who knows that I ever occupied a room in this house?' Eleven years had passed since that time. An indescribable feeling came over me; I seemed paralyzed or riveted to the spot; there was a barrier, unseen, that prevented me from moving a step forward or from the house. It was only the work of a moment; I concluded to enter the house, and upon ascending the stairway to the third story, passed into the room which had been occupied by me in 1850, and here Mr. Conkling sat, just having finished a letter to President Lincoln and was enclosing the envelope as I entered.

"'Here, Mr. Kase,' said Mr. Conkling, 'I want you to take this letter to the President; you can see him, but I can't.'

"'O, sir,' I replied, 'I cannot take your letter; send it by mail. I have just arrived in this city and am not acquainted with the President; besides this, I am here on important business and must be formally introduced to him; therefore, I can not take your letter.'

"Mr. Conkling said: 'You must take this letter; you are here for this purpose; if you do not take it he will never see it.'

"At this moment a voice again saluted me, the same as I had heard on the street:

"'Go, see what will come of this.'

"This voice seemed just behind me. I was startled, dumfounded; I stood fixed to the spot. Finally, I said yes.

"'Give me the letter. Will you go along?'

"'Yes; but I can't see him. You can,' was the medium's reply.

"'Well, here's an omnibus just turning; we'll get in that.'

"The sun was just then setting behind the distant hills. We arrived at the Presidential Mansion in the dusk of the evening. I rang the bell; a servant appeared.

"Q. 'Is the President in?'

"A. 'Yes,' was the reply, 'he is at tea.'

"Q. 'Can I see him?'

"A. 'What is the name?'

"I gave him my name. He soon returned, saying: 'The President will see you after tea. Step up into the gentlemen's parlor.'

"Conkling and myself seated ourselves in the parlor to which the servant had directed us. Soon thereafter the servant appeared at the door, beckoning me forward, and opened a door leading to the President's room.

"The President was approaching the door as I entered. He stopped, somewhat disappointed, and stepped back one or two steps as I approached, I saying to him: 'My name is S. P. Kase, of Danville, Pennsylvania.'

"The President expected to meet S. P. Chase, then Secretary of the Treasury. His response was: 'O, you are from Pennsylvania?' showing me to a chair upon the opposite side of a long table. He took a seat directly opposite, and for some time drew me out respecting Pennsylvania.

"I told him that I lived in the town where the first anthracite pig-iron was manufactured, and where the first T-rail was made in the United States. And for a full half-hour various questions pertaining to the war and the prosperity of Pennsylvania were discussed, when I handed him the Conkling letter.

"He broke it open and read it, seemed a little surprised, saying:

'What does this mean?'

"My reply was, 'I do not know, but I have no doubt that it means what it says.'

"'You do not know,' responded the President, 'what this letter is, and yet you think it means what it says?'

"'Yes, sir; I think so,' I replied.

"'Well, said the President, 'I will read it for you.'

"Here is the letter:

"I have been sent from the city of New York by

spiritual influence pertaining to the interest of the nation. I can't return until I see you. Appoint the time. Yours, etc.

Signed. 'J. B. Conkling.'

After reading Conkling's letter Lincoln asked Kase, who was an ardent spiritualist, "What do you know about spiritualism?" Kase replied, "I know very little, but what I know you are welcome to." Kase then gave Lincoln a long discourse on the phenomena of spiritualism. After a lengthy discussion during which period "Lincoln seemed very much interested" the president said, "Tell Mr. Conkling that I will see him on Sunday, between 9 and 10 a.m." Kase's reaction was "O, no, write him a letter." Lincoln replied, "O, Yes, I will write him a letter." Kase, thereupon shook hands with Lincoln and called for Conkling in the gentlemen's parlor and they then went to their respective lodgings.

The question arises—Did Kase present to Lincoln the E. Baker letter at this meeting? Up to this date Lincoln had not had many contacts with spiritualism, although in February, 1861, according to the medium Nettie Colburn Maynard, the president-elect was warned by Charles Redmond, a medium, "of the danger (Baltimore plot) that faced him before he made that famous trip between Philadelphia and Washington."

Lincoln could have known little about spiritualism prior to 1848, the year the cult was founded. It was the Fox sisters (Leah, Kate & Margaretta) residing near Rochester, New York, who astounded their neighbors with "spirit-rappings" and brought about the movement known as modern spiritualism. The sisters became famous and seances were held throughout New England and the eastern states. Finally the Fox girls became alarmed over the movement they had started. Confessing the spirit rappings to be a hoax, their revelation was not sufficient to check those people who were eager to communicate with disembodied spirits.

During Lincoln's presidency spiritualism became a national craze or fad. The press carried many stories about "visitations" and spiritualistic seances. The mediums held forth in public parlors and on common carriers. People came out by the hundreds to witness the mysterious knocks, spirit rappings and to make verbal queries about the departed.

According to Jay Monaghan, one time editor of the *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, June, 1948, pages 171-173, "The cult was noticeably strong in centers which supported Fremont and Lincoln in 1856 and 1860. In fact it was part of the radical transcen-

My friend will
you please have
this conveyed to
his Excellency
: The President

Photograph made from micro-film of original document in the Library of Congress

J. B. Conkling's mirror-written spirit message translated as follows: "My friend will you please have this conveyed to his excellency the President"

My friend will you please have
this conveyed to his Excellency the
President.

My esteemed and best earthly friend,
You will no doubt be surprised
to receive this from me, but I like
to receive of other disembodied spirits full
permission to convey expressions of gratitude
and love to earthly friends. I am not
yet still living, a conscious individual,
with hopes, aspirations and intent "other
worldly" for the Union still alive.

I experienced a happy reality—a
glorious change, by the process termed
"death."

I would communicate with you
personally, if not now, after the
close of your official term.

I will be with you in spirit and with
many others in power and strengthen you
in your lives on Earth, to live elsewhere, and the
conditions, not localities. Heaven and Hell are
in the heart.

Photograph made from micro-film of original document
in the Library of Congress

The sixth page of J. B. Conkling's spirit message translated for easy
reading. (See printed contents of the message in article.)

dentalism of the period and it went hand in hand with the crusade for temperance and against slavery." For some unexplainable reason spiritualism was not a fad in the southern states.

The editor of the *Spiritual Scientist* is quoted in a book entitled "Nineteenth Century Miracles" by Emma Hardinge Britten, 1883, page 485, to the effect that "For four succeeding Sundays Mr. Conkling was a guest at the presidential mansion. Mr. Conkling has himself alleged to the author, that the Spirits not only urged the subject of the emancipation proclamation, but that they, in the name of the Independence Fathers, spelled out, letter by letter, the preliminary draft of that famous document. The result of these interviews was the president's proposition to his Cabinet to issue such a proclamation, and the final success of the stupendous work, is recorded in the national archives of the country. The influence exerted by the celebrated test medium Conkling, was not the only one brought to bear upon the good president . . ." Of course, only a spiritualist could believe that the Emancipation Proclamation can be attributed to spirit intercession.

The date of the E. Baker letter is December 28, 1861. Was this the Saturday that Kase and Conkling are believed to have visited the presidential mansion? Emma Hardinge Britten, in her book "Nineteenth Century Miracles" adds to the confusion by stating "that Colonel S. P. Kase, of Philadelphia, being deeply interested in railroad undertakings, was compelled to visit the capital in 1862 . . ." However, the title of the Kase pamphlet indicates that the spirit manifestation, that led to the writing of the Emancipation Proclamation occurred in the year 1861. One writer, Earl S. Haines, in "A Research Report" that is unpublished, was of the opinion that the first meeting between Lincoln and Conkling took place on Sunday, December 29, 1861 to be followed by three succeeding Sundays, thereafter.

Was Abraham Lincoln a spiritualist? The spiritualists say "Yes" and the historians say "No." A great deal of spiritualistic literature has been published, of which the Foundation has an abundance, concerning Lincoln's interest in the cult. Certainly there is ample evidence that Mr. Lincoln attended at least four seances, and

perhaps had several conferences with mediums in his office.

To be sure, Mrs. Lincoln took spiritualism much more seriously than her husband. She attended many seances in the White House and elsewhere. It has been generally agreed that after the death of Willie Lincoln on February 20, 1862, that Mrs. Lincoln believed in the communication with the invisible and she thought she could distinguish the apparition of the dead. However, in later life Mrs. Lincoln wrote: "Time . . . has at length taught & convinced me, that the loved & idolized being, comes no more." In 1864 she wrote: "I am not either a spiritualist but I sincerely believe our loved ones, who have only 'gone before' are permitted to watch over those who were dearer to them than life."

When one tries to relate these spiritualistic events chronologically, with which President and Mrs. Lincoln were involved, or to give some historical significance to the seances which they attended, the topic seems to become as illusive as the rappings of a medium.

One thing that we can be sure about, however, is that Lincoln preserved the spirit message from his old friend E. Baker.

"Lord Colchester" — Spirit Medium

Following the death of Willie Lincoln on February 20, 1862, Mrs. Lincoln, distraught with grief, turned to spiritualism with the hope that she might contact Willie's spirit. It was a Negro seamstress, Mrs. Elizabeth Keckley, employed in the White House, who induced Mrs. Lincoln to attempt to reach her dead son through the mediumship of Colchester.

Colchester claimed to be the illegitimate son of an English duke and according to numerous observers he often mystified his audience with his so-called manifestations. Most spiritualist mediums worked in the dark but Colchester could perform his spirit rapping in broad daylight.

In the summer of 1862 he induced Mrs. Lincoln to receive him at the Soldier's Home which was the summer residence of the Lincolns. Mrs. Lincoln was at first impressed with these so-called manifestations which produced messages from her dead son by means of "scratches on the wainscoting and taps on the wall and furniture."

Mrs. Lincoln told Noah Brooks about Colchester and invited him to attend a White House seance. He declined. Instead, Brooks, accompanied by an unbelieving friend, paid a \$1.00 admission fee and attended "a Colchester sitting." Brooks considered Colchester a fraud and intended to expose him. A group, holding hands, sat around a table, with the lights turned out. (Colchester could do so much more in the dark). Suddenly there was a thumping of a drum and a twanging of a banjo, accompanied by the ringing of bells. Brooks surmised that Colchester somehow had freed his hands from those who sat beside him and was making the strange sounds. Brooks' hands were held by unbelievers who allowed him to break the circle and lunge in the direction of the sounds, all the while shouting, "strike a light!" A match was lighted and there stood "the son of the duke" with the drum and bells still held in his hands. Brooks' forehead was covered with blood, having received a blow on the head from the drum which had been used as a weapon by Colchester.

The seance was suddenly ended and Colchester slipped out of the room. According to Brooks, Colchester was "so outraged by this insult that he refused to reappear." A day or two later he is alleged to have written Mrs. Lincoln a letter requesting a War Department pass to New York, with a veiled threat that if she refused he would have some unpleasant things to say to her.

Mrs. Lincoln immediately summoned Brooks and they made a date with Colchester the next day at a specified hour. When he arrived, Mrs. Lincoln introduced Brooks to Colchester and then withdrew. Brooks thereupon showed Colchester the unhealed scar on his forehead. Colchester insisted that he had been insulted, and Brooks called him a swindler and a humbug, and ordered him to leave Washington or risk being incarcerated in the

Photograph of Mrs. Lincoln with a so-called spirit photograph of President Lincoln



The following information about this photograph is taken from *The National Spiritualist*, February, 1945:

"In 1867, two years after Mr. Lincoln's death Mrs. Lincoln visited the photograph gallery of Mr. William Mumler in Boston, Massachusetts.

"She did not give him her name but went incog., and sat for her picture under another name. When she went to obtain her proof the lady in attendance said to her: 'Madam, a very strange result has come upon the plate with your photo. President Lincoln is standing behind you.' She answered: 'That is all right I am his widow.'

"Many copies were taken from the original negative and sold, both in Boston and the societies of the students of occult phenomena. One was copied on a half-tone plate in Paris, France, which was a true replica of the original photograph with Mrs. Lincoln. The publisher of this half-tone enlargement also had a proof from the original plate and knows the exact truth of obtaining the original negative, being intimately acquainted with Mr. Mumler's brother, after William Mumler had passed on to the next realm of life through the gateway of death."

This cut was made from a photograph taken from Catherine Coffin Phillips' book, "Cornelius Cole — California Pioneer and United States Senator. . . ." San Francisco, 1929, opposite page 267. Mrs. Lincoln sent this particular photograph to Olive Cole, the wife of Senator Cornelius Cole, along with some explanatory clippings taken from *The Present Age* of March 23, 1872, and from the *Boston Daily Herald*.

Other spirit photographs of Lincoln have been published from time to time but in many cases they strangely resemble those with a Meserve classification.

Old Capital Prison. So far as Brooks was concerned, Colchester was never heard of again.

Meanwhile, President Lincoln was very much concerned over his wife's interest in spiritualism, and at

the same time he was puzzled by Colchester's daylight seances. In view of this interest he asked Joseph Henry, the Superintendent of the Smithsonian Institution, to attempt to learn how Colchester produced the strange cracking sounds.

Colchester was interviewed by Henry, and with an attitude of insolent superiority the medium proceeded to confound the scientist completely. Henry did observe, however, that the sounds did not come from the room but from the person of the medium. Colchester ended the interview laughing.

Quite by accident Henry discovered Colchester's secret. While traveling on a train he happened to sit by a young passenger, and in making friendly conversation his traveling companion mentioned that he was a manufacturer of telegraph instruments. He even volunteered the information that "I also make them for spiritualists." The young man explained how his device would fit around the bicep, whereby the medium, by expanding his muscle could produce sharp clicks like a telegraph key. Henry's young friend said, "Have you heard of that Colchester fellow? He uses my equipment." Lincoln was pleased to learn the secret.

Laboring under the Brooks' threat of the Old Capital Prison, Colchester apparently did leave Washington for awhile. However, there is evidence that in January, 1865, Colchester was residing in the Capital and was astonishing many people with his tests. Warren Chase, a member of the Illinois general assembly, made the statement that "Colchester . . . often received from public men ten and twenty dollars for the tests given when he asked nothing. He was a very generous and a remarkable test medium but he told me he often cheated the fools as he could easily do it, but never deceived the honest and intelligent inquirer."

Editor's Note: For additional information on Lincoln and spiritualism see *Lincoln Lore* No. 888, April 15, 1946, "The Lincolns and Spiritualism"

"You Request My Autograph . . ."

Abraham Lincoln's mode of expression can not be excelled for briefness and simplicity, yet at the same time he had the knack of injecting into his writings a bit of his personality. His genius for original expression is to be found in his addresses, letters, endorsements, recommendations, orders and even bank checks.

In reply to an autograph collector Lincoln would usually write, "You request my autograph. Well, here it is," or "here 'tis." In the Foundation's collection there is a note addressed to Edwin A. Palmer, Jr., written at Springfield, Illinois on June 4, 1860. Lincoln wrote, "You request my autograph and here it is."

Stephen A. Douglas possessed no such literary flair. In a letter dated March 17, 1860, the original of which is in the Foundation collection, he wrote J. Parrish, Esq., an autograph seeker: "Sir, Allow me to comply with your request for my autograph by signing myself, Yours Respectfully, S. A. Douglas."

Springfield, Ill. June 4 1860
Edwin A. Palmer Jr
Dear Sir
You request an auto-
graph, and here it is
Yours truly
Abraham Lincoln

Washington, D.C.
March 17 1860
Sir
I will allow me to comply with
your request for my autograph
by signing myself
Yours respectfully
S. A. Douglas

From the Lincoln National Life Foundation