



Lincoln Lore

Bulletin of The Lincoln National Life Foundation . . . Dr. R. Gerald McMurtry, Editor
Published each month by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana

1502 FORT WAYNE, INDIANA April, 1963

LINCOLN'S "SO-CALLED" FAILURES

Editors Note: In the February, 1963, issue of the *Reader's Digest* there appeared an article entitled "He Could Take It", by Arno B. Reincke. The publication of this article must have come as a great surprise to Lincoln students who had come to believe that the legends regarding Lincoln's "so-called" failures had been laid to rest.

The article was designated by the editors as a Special Request Feature with the following introduction: "Lowell Thomas, world-famous author, radio commentator, cinerama, television and motion-picture producer, has recommended that this article, which first appeared in the January 1939 issue of the *Reader's Digest*, be reprinted."

In 1939, when this article was first published, it was branded as purely legendary without any basis of fact. Dr. Louis A. Warren, then the editor of *Lincoln Lore*, published a criticism of the article in the weekly bulletin on April 3, 1939. The *Reader's Digest* article was also answered by R. D. Packard in a pamphlet bearing the title "Was Lincoln A Failure At Fifty?" Apparently, none of these criticisms reached the editors of the *Reader's Digest*.

This past February a number of *Lincoln Lore* subscribers suggested to the editor that he take up the matter with the magazine editors. A letter dated February 4, 1963, was directed to the magazine's editorial staff, with a copy being sent to Lowell Thomas. On March 11, 1963, a letter was received from one of the editors stating that "there seems to be more fable than fact in the Special Request Feature about Lincoln." While no retraction of the article appeared in later issues of the magazine, the editors expressed "regret" for "having perpetuated a myth in an honest attempt to show the value of perseverance." The letter further stated that "Inexplicably, the article did not go to our research department for the checking that regularly precedes the publication of material in the *Reader's Digest* and there was no record here of criticism following its earlier appearance in the magazine back in January 1939."

Kupcinet, one of the nation's most popular columnists, under "Kup's Column" answered the *Reader's Digest* article in his syndicated column, which among other newspapers, appeared in the *Chicago Sun-Times* of February 12, 1963. Referring to the Reincke article Kupcinet took the magazine, the author, and Lowell Thomas to task for reviving "an old chestnut."

In order to review Warren's criticism of the Reincke article, published twenty-four years ago, *Lincoln Lore* Number 521 is being reprinted in this issue.

R. Gerald McMurtry

"He Could Take It"

The portrayal of Abraham Lincoln as a constant and miserable failure until "destiny with one magnificent stroke" swept him into the Presidency may sound a note of encouragement to a man who has never made any progress in life, but such a presentation of the Emancipator has no value as a historical treatise. Arno B. Reincke, author of the monograph, "He Could Take It", states that his argument is "based on fact," and in so affirming invites criticism of his sources.

This Lincoln failure story appeared as the leading article in the January issue of the *Reader's Digest*, and because of the wide circulation of the magazine through educational institutions just previous to Lincoln's birthday, it was widely used just at a time when it would have its greatest appeal.

The legendary aspect of the story which deals with "unseen forces" and "magnificent strokes of destiny" is supplemented by a strange philosophy that a long and continued series of failures culminates in success. Most students in a democratic country are invited to work out their own destiny, and the urge to excel when properly directed does not usually pay off in failures.

Those who have given some attention to the study of Lincoln's life, immediately upon reading the Reincke story, began to take exceptions to his characterization of the Emancipator. Through both correspondence and personal interviews the editor of *Lincoln Lore* has been

urged to make some written comment upon the eight specific statements around which the discussion evolves.

Limited space will make it necessary, first, to greatly abbreviate Mr. Reincke's eight specific statements about Mr. Lincoln, and second, to exclude from the comments by the editor of *Lincoln Lore* the many sources of proof which might be submitted. Sufficient to say that each comment has either a duly authorized record to sustain it or a preponderance of evidence to support it.

1. "A young man of twenty-two, a partner in a store . . . sheriff sign on the door . . . lost every penny of seven years savings."

Lincoln at twenty-two had no partnership interest in any store, and he had no seven years' savings to lose as all earnings up to the time he was twenty-one rightfully belonged to his father. He was serving as a clerk in Offut's store. He saw no sheriff's sign on the door, and while still employed by Offut he enlisted as a soldier in a Black Hawk war and was immediately elected captain of his company.

2. "Second partnership after two years . . . failed again within two years . . . after years of miserable penury . . . on his thirty-ninth birthday (February 12, 1848) paid last dollar."

William Berry was Lincoln's first and only partner in the store business and this relationship was formed five months after Lincoln served as clerk for Offut. The partnership lasted but seven months and Lincoln sold his interest to Berry in April 1833. Berry ran the store as sole proprietor until August, four months after he had bought out Lincoln. Certain notes signed by Lincoln and Berry caused Lincoln to become involved financially, and when Berry died Lincoln assumed Berry's obligations. Three years later, however, Lincoln bought two house lots in Springfield and, before he was thirty-nine years of age, he purchased a farm for his parents and a house of his own in Springfield. He also made a successful race for congress.

3. "Offer of job as surveyor . . . But he never took the job . . . Destiny seemed to have singled him out for failure."

Lincoln served as deputy-surveyor for Sangamon County from the fall of 1833 until about the time he left New Salem in the spring of 1837. As late as January 6, 1849 Lincoln, upon request of a surveyor's convention at Chicago, presented a written expert opinion on a technical surveying question.

4. "Most crushing blow of his career . . . First and only enduring love (Ann Rutledge) suddenly died . . . Said his heart followed her to the grave . . . went down to verge of insanity . . . said he never dared to carry . . . pocket-knife . . . removed to parents' home where he was nursed back to mental health."

The Ann Rutledge story has been ignored by historians as mostly fiction. There is no truth whatever about the grave stories, his insanity at this time, the pocket-knife story or his visit to his parents. About a year after Ann's death he proposed marriage to Mary Owen, who was visiting in the same community where Ann had lived.

5. "Believing that this 'failure' might succeed in poli-

tics . . . friends secured his selection to Congress . . . again he failed . . . constituents refused to return him to Washington."

Before running for Congress on his own initiative in 1846, he had served eight years in the Illinois legislature and was the leading Whig in the state. It was agreed before he was elected that he would serve but one term. His constituency endorsed him in 1854 by again electing him to the Illinois legislature.

6. "Friends . . . forced political situation which placed him in direct line for nomination to U. S. senate . . . Forced to step aside and yield office."

Lincoln did lose the senatorship but he stepped aside voluntarily for the sake of the party to bring about a unity of divided factions. His party won.

7. "Series of debates . . . (Douglas) gave no quarter to this misfit and failure . . . overwhelmingly defeated."

The popular vote for the candidates to the legislature favoring Lincoln was five thousand in excess of the vote polled by the candidates favoring Douglas. Lincoln by the popular vote won the debates. The legislature voted fifty-four to forty-six in favor of Douglas, not an overwhelming defeat for Lincoln.

8. "He had been unable to achieve one single personal victory in thirty years of constant effort."

It is difficult to account for such a statement as the above. He was elected to Illinois legislature at twenty-five years of age and to the same office at each biennial election for eight years, or as long as he chose to run. At twenty-seven years of age he was floor leader in the legislature, at twenty-nine years he was potential leader of the Whig party in Illinois. At thirty-one he was presidential elector for Harrison, at thirty-five elector at large for Clay, at thirty-nine the lone Whig congressman elected from the state of Illinois. In 1849 he declined a tentative appointment as Secretary of Oregon. In 1854 he was again elected to the legislature and in 1856 with no effort whatever on his part he received one hundred and ten votes in the first National Republican Convention as a nominee for the Vice-Presidency.

Congressman Abraham Lincoln Witnessed The Death-Stroke of John Quincy Adams February 21, 1848

(Continued from March 1963 issue)

In the letter already alluded to, dated June 1, 1848, Lincoln wrote the Reverend Henry Slicer pointing out that as he was not a member of the sub-committee of Arrangements "he had no knowledge of it whatever." Lincoln explained to the Chaplain that Mr. Charles Hudson, a Massachusetts Whig representative, and also a minister of the Universalist Church, was chairman of both the general and the sub-committees. Lincoln could not recall the names of the other members of Congress who served on the sub-committee.

Lincoln answered Slicer's queries as follows:

"To your first special interrogatory, to wit 'Were you consulted in regard to my exclusion from the services?' I answer, I was not—perhaps because the arrangements I have stated excluded me from consultation on all points.

"To the second, to wit: 'Was objection made to me—and if so, on what ground was it placed?' I answer I know nothing whatever on the point.

"To the third, to wit: 'Did my exclusion meet with your consent or approval?' I answer, I knew nothing of the matter, and, of course, did not consent to, or approve of it; and I may add, that I knew nothing which should have justified me in any attempt to put a mark of disapprobation upon you.

"So entirely ignorant was I, in relation to your having been excluded from the funeral services of Mr. Adams, that, until I received your letter, I should have given it as my recollection, that you did actually participate in those services."

The coffin of Mr. Adams was covered with black velvet

and ornamented with silver lace. The silver breastplate presented the following inscription:

John Quincy Adams
Born
An Inhabitant of Massachusetts, July 11, 1767
Died
A Citizen of the United States,
In the Capitol of Washington
February 23, 1848
Having Served his Country for Half a Century
and
Enjoyed its Highest Honors

On Saturday, February 26, 1848, the body of Adams was interred in the Congressional Burying Ground. However, the remains were deposited there only a few days, as the final interment was at Quincy, Massachusetts. Congressman John Wentworth was the Illinois Democratic delegate of the Committee of Thirty that accompanied the remains to Massachusetts. In Boston a committee of the Legislature of Massachusetts took charge of the ceremonies at Fanueil Hall and of the burial at Quincy, Massachusetts, Adams' home.

By a House resolution Adams' seat was to remain vacant for a period of thirty days. However, a political movement was not long in getting underway to elect Charles Frances Adams, the dead President's son, to the vacated seat. These political plans did not materialize and Horace Mann received the nomination and was subsequently elected.

A considerate gesture on the part of the Congress was a resolution passed by both houses granting "That all letters and packets carried to and from Louisa Catherine Adams, widow of the late John Quincy Adams, be conveyed free of postage during her natural life" (she died May 15, 1852).

One of the final Adams entries in *The Congressional Globe*, dated March 3, 1848, is the letter Mrs. Adams sent to the Speaker to be read (March 1, 1848) before the House of Representatives:

"Washington, February 29, 1848

Sir: The resolution in honor of my dear deceased husband, passed by the illustrious assembly over which you preside, and of which he at the moment of his death was a member, have been duly communicated to me.

Penetrated with grief at this distressing event of my life; mourning the loss of one who has been at once my example and my support through the trials of half a century, permit me nevertheless to express through you my deepest gratitude for the signal manner in which the public regard has been voluntarily manifested by your honorable body, and the consolation derived to me and mine from the reflection, that the unwearied efforts of an old public servant have not even in this world proved without their reward in the generous appreciation of them by his country.

With great respect, I remain, sir, your obedient servant,
Louisa Catherine Adams.

To the Honorable Robert C. Winthrop,
Speaker of the House of Representatives of the U.S."

On June 20, 1848, another resolution relating to the lamented Adams was brought before the House. "Resolved that the Committee on the Library of this House be authorized to procure a monument of Quincy granite, with suitable inscriptions to be erected in the Congressional burying grounds in memory of John Quincy Adams."

Perhaps the last resolution relating to the demise of Adams is dated March 3, 1949 when Mr. Ashmun presented a resolution that a bust of John Quincy Adams, by the artist John C. King, which had been procured by voluntary subscriptions, be placed in the Speaker's room "to mark the spot, and commemorate the circumstances of his death."

Thus, Abraham Lincoln while a member of the 30th Congress, witnessed the death stroke of one of the great men of our country and an outstanding figure in the diplomatic affairs of our nation.

(See *Lincoln Lore* No. 854, "Lincoln and John Quincy Adams" August 20, 1945).

McMurtry's Speaking Engagements January - March 1963

Every winter the editor of *Lincoln Lore* makes an extensive speaking tour through some area of the United States. This year he traveled to a few of the New England, Eastern and Middlewestern States. His engagements, largely arranged by Lincoln Life general agents, included newspaper interviews, radio and television appearances and speeches before service clubs, universities, churches, historical societies, Civil War Round Tables and agency group conferences.

The high lights of this year's tour were McMurtry's appearance on the Arthur Godfrey CBS radio network show (taped in New York City 2/6/63 and released 2/12/63), the WNAC radio interview (Boston) on the Louise Morgan and Gus Saunders Show with the comedienne Phyllis Diller, the speech before the Lincoln Civil War Society of Philadelphia, the speech before the Civil War Round Table of New York on which occasion were present John C. Pemberton, Ulysses S. Grant and J.E.B. Stuart—all grandsons of Civil War Generals, and the speech before the Rotary Club of New York City.

The complete itinerary follows:

Date	Place	Group	Type of Program
1-7-63	Columbus, Ohio	WBNS-TV	.....Interview
	Columbus, Ohio	WTVN-TV	.....Interview
	Lindon, Ohio	Lindon Kiwanis Club	.....Speech
	Columbus, Ohio	Columbus Evening Dispatch	.....Interview
1-8-63	Columbus, Ohio	WOSU-TV	.....Interview
	Gahanna, Ohio	Gahanna Kiwanis Club	.....Speech
1-15-63	Louisville, Ky.	Lions Club	.....Speech
	Louisville, Ky.	WHAS Radio (Tape)	.....Interview
	Louisville, Ky.	WHAS-TV (Phyllis Knight)	.....Interview
1-17-63	Baltimore, Md.	WJZ-TV	.....Interview
	Baltimore, Md.	WMAR-TV	.....Interview
1-18-63	Baltimore, Md.	Park School (Students and Teachers)	.....Speech
	Baltimore, Md.	Civitan Club	.....Speech
1-21-63	Washington D.C.	Fulwiler Agency (Office Meeting)	.....Speech
	Washington D.C.	WRC Radio (Tape) (Betty Groebli)	.....Interview



Godfrey and McMurtry have a photograph taken in the CBS studio in New York City prior to making the radio tape on February 6, 1963.



Phyllis Diller and McMurtry discussing Lincoln on the Louise Morgan and Gus Saunders radio show (WNAC) in Boston.

Date	Place	Group	Type of Program
	Rockville, Md.	Civitan Club of Rockville	.....Speech
1-22-63	Washington D.C.	WWDC Radio (Art Brown) (Live)	.....Interview
	Washington D.C.	WTOP Radio (Tape) (Greg Oliver)	.....Interview
	Springfield, Va.	Lions Club	.....Speech
1-28-63	Pittsburgh, Pa.	Agency Meeting (N. J. Weidner)	.....Speech
	Pittsburgh, Pa.	KDKA-TV North Hills	.....Interview
	Pittsburgh, Pa.	Kiwanis Club	.....Speech
1-29-63	Carnegie, Pa.	Carnegie Rotary Club	.....Speech
	Rossllyn Farms, Pa.	Rossllyn Farms Grade School	.....Speech
	Rossllyn Farms, Pa.	Rossllyn Farms Men's Club	.....Speech
1-31-63	Harrisburg, Pa.	Harrisburg Kiwanis Club	.....Speech
	York, Pa.	York-Hanover Kiwanis Club	.....Speech
2-1-63	Harrisburg, Pa.	WHP-TV (Live)	.....Interview
	Harrisburg, Pa.	WHP Radio (Live)	.....Interview
	Harrisburg, Pa.	WHGB Radio (Tape)	.....Interview
	Harrisburg, Pa.	Susquehanna Township Sr. Hi.	.....Speech
	Harrisburg, Pa.	Holy Name Society (St. Catherine LaBoure Church)	.....Speech
2-6-63	Harrisburg, Pa.	Beth-El Temple	.....Speech
	New York, N.Y.	CBS Radio, Arthur Godfrey (Tape)	.....Interview
2-7-63	Philadelphia, Pa.	WCAU Radio, Ed Harvey Show	.....Interview
2-8-63	Philadelphia, Pa.	Villanova, University	.....Speech
	Philadelphia, Pa.	WPEN Radio ("Red" Benson)	.....Interview
2-9-63	Philadelphia, Pa.	Lincoln Civil War Society (Bronze Plaque Award Dinner)	.....Speech
2-13-63	New York, N.Y.	Civil War Round Table of N.Y.	.....Speech

Date	Place	Group	Type of Program
2-14-63	New York, N.Y.	Rotary Club of N.Y.	Speech
2-16-63	Boston, Mass.	Lincoln Group of Boston	Speech
2-18-63	Boston, Mass.	Office meeting (Forti Agency)	Speech
	Boston, Mass.	Mayor's Office	Interview
	Boston, Mass.	WNAC Radio (Phyllis Diller)	Interview
	Lexington, Mass.	Rotary Club of Lexington (Police Escort to WEEI)	Speech
	Boston, Mass.	WEEI Radio (Conversation Piece)	Interview
2-19-63	Boston, Mass.	Melrose High School	Speech
	Worcester, Mass.	Worcester Historical Society	Speech
2-20-63	Providence, R.I.	WJAR-TV	Interview
	Barrington, R.I.	Lions Club	Speech
2-25-63	Cranford, N.J.	Cranford Rotary Club	Speech
	Montclair, N.J.	Council of Churches	Speech
	Montclair, N.J.	Montclair Rotary Club	Speech
3-4-63	Portland, Me.	Portland Club	Speech

In addition to the speaking tour which began January 7th and ended March 4th, the Foundation Director and Editor of *Lincoln Lore* spoke in Indianapolis on March 12th before the Marion County Historical Society, and on March 18th before the Civil War Round Table of Lexington, Kentucky.

McMurtry's April calendar includes such engagements as the Cincinnati Rotary Club, the Purdue Woman's Club, the Rotary Club of Sturgis, Michigan, the Fort Wayne A.A.U.W., and the Salt Creek Civil War Round Table of Glen Ellyn, Illinois.

Postscript To The Life Magazine Article "What Happened To Lincoln's Body"

The February 15, 1963 issue of *Life* magazine carried an intriguing article by Dorothy Meserve Kunhardt entitled "What Happened To Lincoln's Body." The article was illustrated with rare photographs and revealed newly found facts all adding up to an incredible story, but one based on fact.

This article constitutes but a part of one chapter of a new book by Dorothy Meserve Kunhardt and Philip B. Kunhardt, Jr., soon to be published by Harper & Row. Philip Kunhardt, the son of Dorothy Kunhardt, is a managing editor of *Life* magazine. Mrs. Kunhardt has published a number of articles in *Life* within the last ten years. She is the daughter of the late Frederick H. Meserve who was nationally known as a collector of Lincoln and Civil War photographs.

The files of the Lincoln National Life Foundation revealed some information and photographs not incorporated in the *Life* article. Likewise, the Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield, Illinois, has some fifty different photographic views of the moving of the bodies of the Lincoln family from the temporary vault to the Lincoln tomb on April 24, 1901.

In the Foundation files there is an interesting clipping, dated April 28, 1901, taken from the *Chicago Post-Dispatch*. This newspaper article devotes considerable space to Robert T. Lincoln's failure to be present on this occasion and is critical of the fact that Lincoln's eldest son "was not present a year ago, when the remains were placed in the temporary vault."

Interestingly enough the reporter hinted that at some future date "it is intended . . . that the casket be opened at least once more." The last time this was done was April 15, 1887. The reporter's prediction came true, the casket was opened for the last time on September 26, 1901.

(Continued in May, 1963 issue)



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

Lincoln's casket resting on a hand car shortly after its removal from the temporary vault by a steam derrick. Some of the people in the photograph can be identified. The man at the extreme left with folded arms is Alfred Orendorff; next, in the square derby hat is Floyd K. Whitmore. The man in the front center with the umbrella is Sam H. Jones. The man with the light colored hat talking to Jones (man with umbrella) is Lieutenant Governor William A. Northcott (1897-1905). The lady is believed to be Mrs. Northcott. The two boys in caps by the casket are Alvin and Edward Keys. The man in the derby next to the bearded man at the extreme right is George Keys.