



Lincoln Lore

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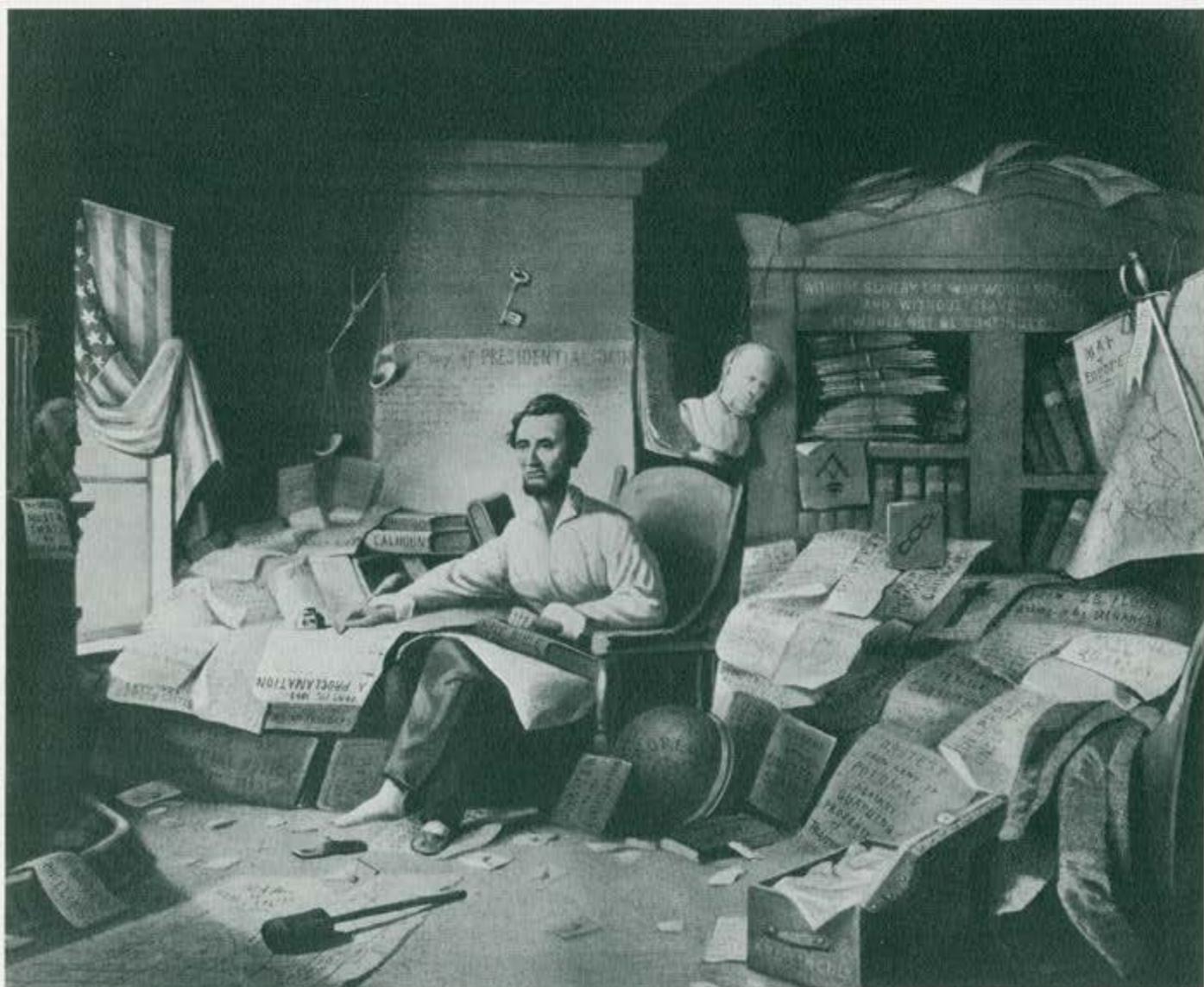
March, 1969

"President Lincoln Writing The Proclamation of Freedom, January 1, 1863"

Editor's Note: About two years ago, during the process of dismantling an old Fort Wayne house which was to be razed, a workman discovered a beautifully colored framed lithograph, in remarkably fine condition, entitled "President Lincoln Writing The Proclamation of Freedom, January 1, 1863." The lithograph was drawn and printed in color by Ehr Gott, Forbriger & Co., Cincinnati, Ohio, after a painting by David G. Blythe. It was published in 1864 in Pittsburgh by M. Depuy at No. 21 Wylie Street. It measures 14"x 19" plus margins. The Lincoln National Life Foundation was most fortunate in secur-

ing this exceedingly rare lithograph for its Lincoln Library-Museum.

Apparently the artist, David Gilmore Blythe, was an ardent Unionist, and his five paintings of which the editor has some knowledge reveal more than a passing interest in politics and the Civil War. I am particularly indebted to David A. Jonah, Librarian and Director of Libraries of Brown University, for calling to my attention a photograph of a Blythe oil painting titled "Lincoln versus Fremont." This has pretty much the same composition as the one under discussion, with



copies of contemporary newspapers and other documents scattered liberally throughout the picture. In 1942 the original painting was owned by a Philadelphian; however, its present ownership is uncertain.

The American Heritage Picture History of The Civil War (narrative by Bruce Catton) published by Doubleday & Company, Inc. in 1960 contains four of Blythe's productions. On page 258 a black and white print of the "Proclamation of Freedom" painting carries this cut line: "In the 1864 lithograph Lincoln is surrounded by such allegorical symbols as the Bible, scales of justice, and the Presidential oath, which, the artist intimated, aided him in drafting the Emancipation Proclamation." The cut for this print was made from the lithograph that is owned by the Library of Congress. A similar cut from the Library of Congress print appeared in *Presidents on Parade* by Milhollen and Kaplan, published by the Macmillan Company, 1948. Their cut line follows: "During the first year and a half of the Civil War the question of slavery lay in the background. The fight for the Union was the prominent issue. However, the forces against slavery had been marshaling their strength and insisted that the government take prompt action. In answer to these demands, Lincoln replied that his paramount duty was to save the Union, with or without slavery. Yet, slavery had no place in a country founded on the principle of freedom for all. Lincoln, who sincerely wanted the institution abolished, wrestled with the problem for many months."

A Blythe painting in color appears on page 327 of the American Heritage book depicting General Abner Doubleday's division crossing the Potomac. The original painting is the property of the National Baseball Hall of Fame Museum.

A second painting in color appears in the book on page 497. This is more in the nature of a caricature. The cut line which is descriptive of the subject follows: "In this symbolic 1862 painting by D. G. Blythe, Lincoln, armed only with a gun swab and fettered to strict constitutionality by Tammany Hall Democrats, tries to crush the dragon of rebellion."

The final Blythe painting in the Heritage book appears on page 500 and depicts the horrors of Richmond's Libby Prison where 1000 Union officers were confined in eight rooms of the former tobacco warehouse. The original painting is a part of the M. and M. Karolik Collection in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

It is believed that lithographs were only made of the "Proclamation of Freedom" painting. Today, original copies of the lithograph are owned by the Library of Congress (deposited for copyright in 1865) and The Lincoln National Life Foundation. It is hoped that the publication of this article will reveal that other copies of the lithograph are extant and are in the possession of private or institutional collectors.

About ten years ago one of the lithographs was advertised for sale by The Old Print Shop, Harry Shaw Newman, 150 Lexington Avenue, New York City. It was described as exceedingly rare. Dorothy Miller, in her biography of Blythe, stated that the original painting is gone. In reproducing the lithograph following page 112 of her book, she credits ownership to the Harry Shaw Newman Gallery in New York City.

Winifred Porter Truesdell published in 1933 (volume two) a fine book entitled *Engraved and Lithographed Portraits of Abraham Lincoln*. It was the compiler's intention, before his death, to publish volume one. After his demise, the Foundation secured his research material which reveals that he was familiar with the lithograph taken from Blythe's painting "Proclamation of Freedom." Truesdell tried to identify every engraved and lithographed portrait of Lincoln with a Lincoln photograph using the Frederick Hill Meserve classification. As the Blythe Lincoln head was unidentifiable, he planned to place it under the heading of "Fictitious". However, he must have liked the lithograph as he made a notation to reproduce it in his forthcoming volume one.

Shortly before Christmas the editor sent out forty 8 x 10 glossy photographs of the Blythe lithograph with a letter requesting the nation's leading Lincoln students to make some comment regarding the picture's true meaning and import. To some it may have appeared to be a caricature with an anti-Lincoln slant. However,

those who replied seemed to feel that the picture was filled with symbolism and meaning with a pro-Lincoln approach. I feel sure that in an analysis of the picture many did read from the clutter of the room what the artist was attempting to say. As these replies are so interesting, excerpts from some of the letters follow.

R. G. M.

"In his painting of Lincoln preparing the final Emancipation Proclamation, David G. Blythe seemed to be answering Adalbert Volck's bitter caricature of Lincoln writing beneath a portrait of John Brown as 'Saint Ossawatamie' and a scene of bloodshed in Santo Domingo. With his foot on a copy of the Constitution and a malignant scowl, Lincoln uses an inkpot held by a devil. The same half-uncovered window at the left and a gratuitous masonic emblem in both pictures indicate that Blythe knew Volck's caricature.

"Blythe saw Lincoln discarding mounds of precedent and pressure to prepare his proclamation with the aid of the Constitution and the Bible, held on his lap. A bust of Andrew Jackson stands on the mantelpiece as inspiration, while a bust of James Buchanan is lynched in the background. Before Lincoln is a map of the rebel states with a symbolic broom handy to suggest their fate. The Presidential oath hangs behind Lincoln to show his consciousness of his responsibilities. A map of Europe and the sword of Washington hanging together on the far right indicate that the artist had imperialist ambitions for the reunited nation. Above all, however, Blythe wanted to portray Lincoln as capable of reaching the right decision by holding firm to fundamental principles, putting behind him the results of the heated debate over slavery which had existed as long as the nation."

John Y. Simon, Executive Director
The Ulysses S. Grant Association

"It's a very interesting picture and one which I had not seen. As I read it, it is a pro-Lincoln production. Lincoln is depicted in an attractive way. His face is thoughtful and solemn, and rugged, but not ugly. He has his hand on the Bible as he composes the Emancipation Proclamation and is looking at a bust of Jackson and the latter's statement affirming the perpetuity of the Union. As I interpret the clutter in the room, the various documents are from both Northern and Southern sources and are intended to show that Lincoln had 'researched' widely before he wrote the Proclamation. They may be also intended as symbols of the sectional background of the war."

T. Harry Williams
L. S. U. Dept. of History

"I am inclined to think that the artist intended the lithograph to have a pro-Lincoln meaning. Lincoln's left hand is on the Bible, and here the artist may be suggesting that the President, though well aware of other references, had recently turned to the Bible for inspiration. Lincoln is pictured as being deep in thought, almost transfixed by thought and inspiration. The additional inspiration he seeks clearly is not to come from the clutter of books, documents, and other objects to the right or left of him—or behind him. He is attuned to ideals, ideas, and language closely related to what he has read in the Bible."

Holman Hamilton
Dept. of History
University of Kentucky

"I looked at the photograph you sent me for some time, trying to decipher the titles on the papers, books and other articles that were strewn around the room. My reaction was that these were probably the materials that Lincoln had consulted in checking to find the constitutional backgrounds of the Proclamation as well as for guidance in the Proclamation itself. I notice that the volumes include constitutional law, histories of the United States and many, many other documents which might have had some bearing on the Proclamation. As I look at it, I cannot think of it as being a caricature."

David A. Jonah
Librarian and Director of Libraries
Brown University

"Whether it is honest or ironic in the intention, I do not know. My own opinion is that it is honest, but clumsy."

Allan Nevins

Henry E. Huntington Library

"I think the Blythe lithograph is first-rate and certainly should be used. I think in a way, Blythe was a pre-runner of the "pop artist" of today. He seems to be creating the atmosphere of incredible pressure, tumult and disorder, as well as pressure that besets Lincoln as he strives to fulfill the obligation of his oath of office and his pledge to preserve the Union and free the slave. The Presidency is a lonely job and the holder of the office is confronted with decisions almost impossible for one man. A man of conscience and courage would be troubled in the position. This work does convey the loneliness and complexity of the office perhaps better than I have ever seen it before."

Ralph G. Newman

Abraham Lincoln Book Shop

"I have been cudgeling my brains over the lithograph you sent of Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation. It certainly can be interpreted in several different ways. However, I interpret it as an attempt to show the various forces being brought to bear on the President, and the difficulty of his decision. I believe the artist has attempted to include a great deal of symbolism such as in the key, scales, flag at the window and various impedimenta. If it has a slant, I would think it a mildly critical one. But to me the artist has some recognition of the difficulty Lincoln had in composing the proclamation. Many of the items portrayed may well have entered Lincoln's thoughts. The weight of the decision is present."

E. B. (Pete) Long

Oak Park, Illinois

"The only significance it has for me is that it portrays a man in a deep quandary. I am afraid I shall have to let it go at that. Our custodian of prints, a very knowledgeable woman, tells me that she believes this piece to be very rare."

Paul M. Angle

Chicago Historical Society

"I think the copy of the Blythe lithograph is as intriguing as any Lincoln item I have ever seen. I assume that each of the different items had some significance. As a Mason of some slight prominence I was intrigued by the Masonic emblem. The square and compass are upside down. All of the evidence indicates that Lincoln was not a Mason. I had never heard of this item nor of the artist. I would think that the relation of the symbols to Emancipation might call for a good deal of research and the occasional traveling up a blind alley."

Warren L. Jones

*U.S. Court of Appeals
Jacksonville, Fla.*

"I may be over simplifying the artist's intent but, in my opinion he was trying to indicate the pressure Lincoln was under in relation to the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. Almost every group, pro and con, is represented in some way in this cluttered room. If this was the artist's purpose, his grasp of the situation was unusual as even those close to Lincoln were not aware of the pressures to which he was being subjected."

James T. Hickey

*Curator, Lincoln Collection
Illinois State Historical Library*

"I do not get the impression that the lithograph is anti-Lincoln. It would appear to me that the artist very vividly shows Abraham Lincoln beset on all sides by all manner of problems. To me, I think the artist has realistically presented with his symbolism the harassment Lincoln must have had from all areas."

*King V. Hostick
Springfield, Illinois*

"The David Gilmore Blythe painting (as reproduced in this color lithograph) appears to me to be a pro-Lincoln work, and the artist was not one of the most talented painters of his day. In his rather primitive manner the artist attempted to symbolize, as well as graphically dramatize President Lincoln's act of Proclaiming freedom and emancipation in 1863. Perhaps the key to the picture and the cluttered situation in general is represented

by the key over Mr. Lincoln's head, and under the key on the wall, the oath the President took when he swore to preserve the Union. Even though the country was badly out of balance as shown by the scales and the tilted bust of Buchanan (also off-balance and literally hung-up), Lincoln himself sits firm and resolute amid the clutter.

"Lincoln's fist rests solidly on the Holy Bible, while, close at hand, the papers and books of Clay, Webster and Calhoun's writings tend to bolster and strengthen his position. The rail-splitter's maul lies on the floor upon a map of the United States, possibly a Lincoln-esque symbol of his early humble toil as well as the grass-root strength of the country. The American Flag at the window has been pulled back to shed light on his proclamation. The letters on the floor and the various protest broadsides in the room do not apparently hinder or withstand his considered action and meditation prior to signing the meaningful document. His right foot rests heavily on the Democrat's peace policy, apparently unacceptable to him, while his war policy, necessary to crush the rebellion, still stands. The one slipper (off his left foot) seems to convey the President's usual disregard for formality and neatness, in contrast to his determination to act on the all important matter, the question of freedom by the stroke of his pen."

Lloyd Ostendorf

*Author and authority
on Lincoln photographs*

"In fact, the picture comes directly out of the 19th century German romanticism transmitted to the United States by artists who studied in Munich or Dusseldorf; to get a full sense of the flavor of this work, one should see such works of Carl Spitzweg as *Der Arme Poet* (1839) or the last version of *The Bookworm* (1884). There seems to us to be a good deal of allegory in the depiction of Lincoln. There is no suggestion that he actually wrote the proclamation in this room, surrounded by these objects, and therefore one might see in the picture something fairly close to the political cartoon in method and in effect."

Alan Fern

*Prints and Photograph Division
Library of Congress*

"My only feeling is that the artist attempted to convey the many events and influences which brought about the Emancipation Proclamation."

Roy P. Basler

*Chief, Manuscript Division
Library of Congress*

"To me, Blythe has presented Mr. Lincoln, not as he himself saw him nor as we see Lincoln now, but as Mr. Lincoln saw himself in his time of torment, striving to arrive at the right decision regarding the public pronouncement of emancipation. Surrounded by contrary advices and smothered by petitions, appeals and threats by those who sought to confound him, Mr. Lincoln appears in the painting as a most unstatesmanlike figure. So he seemed to himself to be, in Blythe's interpretation. Alone with his thoughts, having gone without food and rest for many hours, and shivering with cold in an unheated room, Lincoln sees himself as a pitiful apology for the leader of a great nation. Yet Blythe's message in this painting, as I understand it, is that Lincoln was at this moment closest to greatness without knowing it himself. Lincoln's thoughts center on his Presidential oath and the scales of justice, tipped in imbalance but with the key to the dilemma poised directly above the oath. The philosophies of earlier great statesmen goad him. His left hand with fist tightly clenched rests on the Bible and the Constitution as he writes the text of the Proclamation with his right hand. The President has raised one corner of the flag at the window to give him light as he considers the petitions of the people: from the Quakers, concerned with conscientious objectors; draft riots; divisions within the churches. Over all these, the bust of former President Buchanan hangs quite useless from a corner of the bookcase. Lincoln is entirely alone as he considers the voices of all the people and fulfills his promise to them 'to do the best I can, in my own conscience, under my oath to the law'.

"Of unusual significance, if I read it correctly, is the Masonic symbol placed above that of the Eye of the

Lord. In the 1870's the Eye was used as a sign of a labor union by the Mormons in Utah but I do not know of its use with this meaning as early as 1863. The three links of a chain may symbolize the shackles of a slave or perhaps have some other meaning."

*Josephine Cobb
Specialist in Iconography
National Archives and Records Service*

"My guess would be that the artist had a pro-Lincoln approach, and that he was trying to show how the man reached his history-making conclusion in the face of so many distracting claims on his attention."

*Bruce Catton
American Heritage Publishing Co.*

"Clearly the artist is saying that Lincoln was under heavy pressure, for a variety of reasons and from a variety of sources, to do something about slavery. The artist is pointing out that in writing the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln was acting from mixed motives. It is obvious that the artist believes that the key to Lincoln's action was his responsibility to the people of the United States as their President, according to the oath he took when he was inaugurated. Thus the transparent symbolism of the key hanging above the 'Copy of Presidential Oath' directly behind the President's head.

"The artist recognized the importance of slavery in the Civil War by the prominent location of the sentence on the top of the bookcase. Lincoln's knowledge of American history, and specifically the history of the slavery controversy is stated; it is suggested that Lincoln was aware of the major statements concerning slavery made by famous Americans. All through the cartoon there appear three elements competing for his attention: (1) the absolute necessity of preserving the Union of American States; (2) the need to eradicate a great moral evil; and (3) the practical necessity of winning the Civil War. The importance of mobilizing world opinion behind the North is evident. The cluttered appearance of the room indicates the heavy burdens of the presidency, the conflicting pressures to which the President was subjected and the variety of major and minor situations he was expected to resolve.

"Certainly Lincoln acted from mixed motives when he issued the Emancipation Proclamation. The fact that he did so reflects his awareness of the diversity of opinion in the country but it is important to note that although he knew how divided the country was, he did not use the existence of divided opinion as an excuse for inactivity. I regard as quite significant, not only the placement of the 'Copy of the Presidential Oath' behind the President's head, but his posture in resting the Bible on his knee, with his left hand on its front cover."

*Clyde C. Walton
Director University Libraries
Northern Illinois University*

"The Blythe painting, the reproduction of which you sent me, is definitely a pro-Lincoln 1864 campaign document. What seems most weighty in support of this conclusion is the title of one of the broadsides displayed around the room. I refer to the one 'Protest from the Army of the Potomac Against Guarding Property of Traitors'. Since the Emancipation Proclamation was a Commander-in-Chief—War measure, the Army's role is of largest importance. Notice how tiny in comparison the 'U. S. Court' equivalent to the Army broadside is.

"I suggest also that Jackson's place on the mantel looking at Lincoln, the weighted scales of justice on the wall over his right shoulder, the copy of the Presidential Oath on the wall with a key symbolically pointing to it as the heart of his approach to emancipation, the map of Europe over on the left side suggesting another reason why emancipation was necessary—all these obvious and well known factors are brought forward here in a masterful manner."

*Harold M. Hyman
Professor of History
Rice University*

"Aesthetically, the artist seems to be focusing on the great need for a good house-cleaning at the Executive Mansion. Politically, he might be putting pressure on Congress to appropriate more money to hire additional domestics. Intellectually, I see the work as thoroughly pro-Lincoln. The artist put in all those papers and books,

ruining the picture's aesthetic appeal in the process, because he aims to show that the Emancipation Proclamation was written as the grand climax of all American history. All else, he is saying, leads up to that. He puts in a map of Europe and a globe to suggest that Emancipation is also the climax of all human history."

*William E. Baringer
Professor of History
University of Florida*

"David Gilmour Blythe's picture of 'President Lincoln Writing the Proclamation of Freedom, Jan. 1, 1863' appears to me to be the work of an untrained artist of average ability who never learned the art of arrangement. To my untrained eye I see no disrespect shown to President Abraham Lincoln in this engraving. Blythe has merely attempted to indicate all the many things which may have influenced his Proclamation. The artist's only example of poor taste is using the United States flag as a curtain at the window. Blythe shows it pulled aside to let more light in on the subject. Perhaps he wished to convey the impression that the Proclamation was not completely constitutional. In fact, Lincoln himself realized this and had the 13th Amendment introduced so that it would make the Emancipation Proclamation legal."

*Wayne C. Temple
Illinois State Archives*

"The presentation does not seem a caricature to me. Although cluttered after the fashion of the time, it appears to put the matter of the Proclamation in a favorable light. The following things struck me as I studied it:

—Lincoln is leaning forward, his facial expression is of a 'now-it-is-done' tenor.

—His left hand is on the Bible; in his right hand is the pen.

—The fact that he is in his shirt sleeves, neck open, no tie, probably suggests the difficulty that confronted him.

—I cannot figure out why one slipper is off (unless to ease his foot), but note that the other foot rests on a 'Peace Petition'.

—The bust of Jackson with caption seems significant as do the volumes of Clay and Webster on the floor.

—The background items are significant in balance: on the left, the Presidential oath, key and scales of justice; and opposite the bookcase and caption, the bust of Buchanan hanging certainly gives emphasis!

—I find the documents arranged on the floor and about, full of interesting meaning; for example, the globe indicating world involvement.

—Another striking thing is the flag draped in the window, and the light streaming in focusing on the Proclamation, Lincoln's hand and pen.

—I do not get the significance of the prominence given to the Masonic and Odd Fellow emblems—I shall look for something on them in your forthcoming comments.

—The letters scattered on the floor suggest the pressures pro and con which were so grave and important."

*Kenneth A. Bernard
Professor of History
Boston University*

"There are many things wrong with the picture, such as draping the flag over a window, but the artist has hung it the right way. I recognize the head, Jackson, on the mantel-shelf. The Masonic emblem is upside down. There is a great state of confusion everywhere, or does the inverted square and compass have some meaning in Masonry which I have forgotten or never knew? The three rings of the chain in the Odd Fellows, as you probably know, stand for the public meaning, Friendship, Loyalty and Truth."

*Stewart W. McClelland
Past President and present
Trustee of Lincoln Memorial University*

"I cannot resist sending you a note of thanks for your letter of December 12 enclosing the photograph of the lithograph of Lincoln in his office. It makes me feel so at home in my own study, which is so much similar in its appearance of messiness. I have never seen this print before."

*Earl Schenck Miers
Author and historian*