



# Lincoln Lore

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## R. Gerald McMurtry Lincoln Scholar, Gentleman, Friend

by Kenneth A. Bernard

*Editor's Note: Kenneth A. Bernard, President, Emeritus, of the Lincoln Group of Boston, read this tribute to R. Gerald McMurtry at the February 4, 1989, meeting of the Lincoln Group at Bridgewater State College, Bridgewater, Massachusetts. Long a member of the Bibliography Committee for Lincoln Lore, Dr. Bernard is a Lincoln scholar who had a long association with R. Gerald McMurtry, the second director of what is now called the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum. We are grateful to Dr. Bernard for allowing us to print his tribute here.*

M.E.N., Jr.

There was once a Lincoln scholar, known all over this country, highly respected, greatly liked, loved and admired; a gentleman, a warm and friendly person, who, after his retirement, wrote out in book form an autobiographical essay which he entitled *My Lifelong Pursuit of Lincoln*. Just a few months ago, Gerald McMurtry's "lifelong pursuit" ended. He died on October 29, 1988.

What Gerald McMurtry accomplished during his twenty years at Lincoln Memorial University and seventeen years at the Museum and Library at Fort Wayne is truly astonishing.



From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 1. R. Gerald McMurtry.

Not only were the Lincoln resources at both institutions greatly enriched through his efforts, but on his annual speaking tours audiences everywhere benefitted from his evergrowing reservoir of Lincolniana.

But that, of course, is not all. Somehow he found time to write some twenty books and pamphlets and 200 issues of *Lincoln Lore!*

Consider, for example, the background information that was necessary in the preparation of *one* issue of *Lincoln Lore* (January, 1969) — information on Lincoln letters in 1861 (a sparse year), on coinage during the war years, on the first known publication of the Gettysburg Address in pamphlet form, on who would most likely have finally become President in 1860 if the election had been thrown into the House of Representatives, or who was Joseph Lane? Multiply by 200, and the trails of a lifelong pursuit only *begin* to become apparent!

One of the most fruitful and pleasant aspects of Gerald McMurtry's "pursuit" was his contact with fellow Lincolnians. One might say that he came to know them all, from Dorothy Lamon Teillard and Carl Sandburg to Dr. John Washington and Isaac Diller.

Of one three day trip from Cumberland Gap to Springfield with some twenty-five Lincolnians including Ralph Newman, Carl Schaefer, Frederick H. Meserve, Lester Schriver and Isaac Diller, McMurtry commented: "I could not have been in more distinguished company." Mentioning two members of the party in particular, he continued, "Dr. [F. Lauriston] Bullard in addition to being a very handsome and cultured gentleman with a white goatee was a Pulitzer prize-winning editorial writer. . . . He had written and would write some of the most scholarly monographs to augment the great body of Lincoln literature. On the other hand, Dr. Harry E. Pratt probably excelled all the authorities, living or dead, as to the minute details of Lincoln's life. He was the expert of the experts and besides that one of the best friends that any man would hope to encounter in the fascinating search for the elusive Lincoln."

McMurtry considered 1959 the best year of his career because of the many activities in observance of the Lincoln Sesquicentennial in which he was continually involved. And the climax seems to have been his ten week Far Eastern Tour arranged by the State Department to spread the word there about Abraham Lincoln. He visited Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand, Malaya, and Indonesia, and lectured to 20,000 people in these several countries.

He had been thoroughly briefed on each country by State Department experts, and so was prepared for hostile or unfriendly receptions. In Korea, for instance, he was advised *not* to emphasize democracy, but to stress Lincoln's success in saving the Union, whereas in Taiwan it was suggested that he avoid the Union theme as Taiwanese had no desire to be united with Communist China.

Chinese liked references to Sun-Yat Sen as an admirer of Lincoln, but in Singapore one student asked if Lincoln would recognize Communist China. Another insisted that slavery still existed in the United States. Indonesians were, perhaps, the least receptive to McMurtry's presence and ideas, but, in contrast, Thailanders were very friendly — perhaps because of the elephants of Civil War times!

There were minor distractions, unusual in American experience, such as dogs wandering on and off the lecture platform, or a pack of rats stampeding across the stage followed at high speed by several cats!

But, all in all, McMurtry enjoyed the experiences involved in the tour, and felt that he had accomplished some good in the realm of good relations between the Asiatic countries and the United States. He proved to be an able diplomat as well as an effective speaker.

In the mid-nineteen eighties, Gerald McMurtry was hospitalized and was forced to slow down, but he did not give up. "I am making a slow but sure recovery," he wrote in January, 1986, "my greatest trouble is my stomach's reaction to 13 pills a day. I find the best therapy is writing historical articles, I have written three since I came away from the hospital."

The true measure of a man's greatness is not in what he does for himself alone, but what he does to enrich and stimulate

worthwhile and laudable pursuits in others. Gerald McMurtry's life and pursuit of Lincoln have done that for many Lincolnians, and all are thus grateful for his life and achievements.

## ***Come Retribution and Clandestine Activity in the Civil War***

*by Sarah McNair Vosmeier*

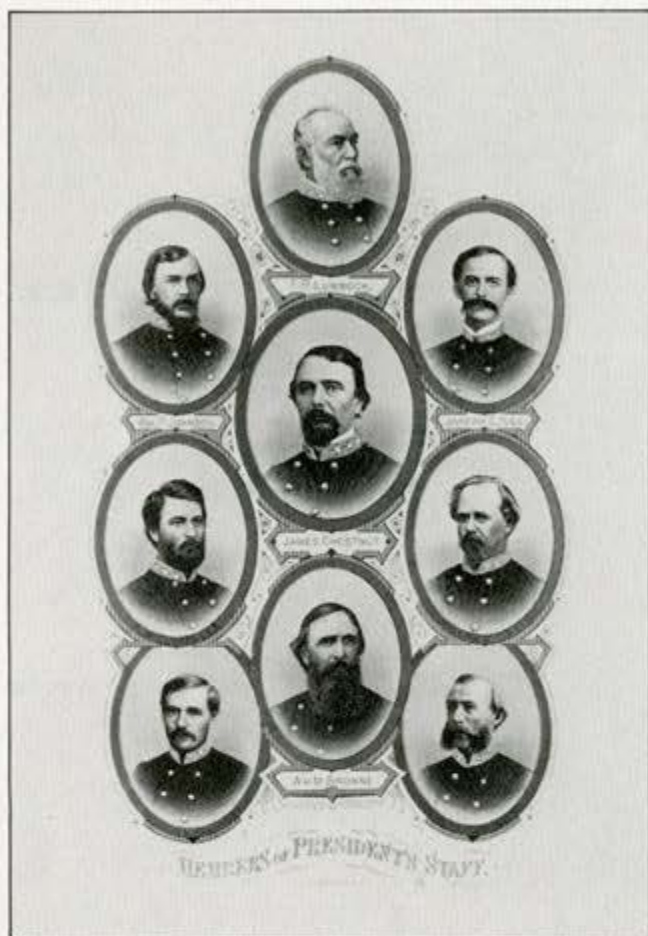
*Come Retribution: The Confederate Secret Service and the Assassination of Lincoln* is lovingly and carefully researched; the authors obviously went to great lengths to track down obscure sources and to trace connections between people and documents; and yet, tragically, their book is of little value to historians because the assumptions upon which it is based will not support their arguments. The authors, William A. Tidwell, with James O. Hall and David Winfred Gaddy, are not professional historians: Tidwell and Gaddy are "career intelligence officers with an interest in history," and Hall is a lawyer who has studied the Lincoln assassination extensively. Their thesis is that John Wilkes Booth was a member of a sophisticated Confederate system of clandestine operations directed by Jefferson Davis. The authors explain that Davis, with other Confederate leaders, began planning to capture Lincoln in 1864 and began to consider assassination in the spring of 1865. By April 14 the situation had changed, but Booth, hampered by poor communication, completed the assassination anyway.

Although Tidwell and Gaddy's experience as intelligence officers might give them some insights into the political and military maneuvers during the Civil War, traditional training in history would have helped them understand how two false assumptions weaken their book. First, they insist that twentieth-century procedures and attitudes can explain nineteenth-century behavior, and, second, they argue that many bits of circumstantial evidence can make a case when there is no conclusive evidence.

The authors' first assumption is essentially ahistoric. For example, Tidwell, Hall and Gaddy assume that nineteenth-century spying and counter-intelligence had to have been organized and planned in roughly the same way that it is now. They admit that "staffs in the era of the Civil War were less well structured and trained [than "staffs nowadays"]" but insist that "there is a logic in technical matters that prevails even if the technical question is not recognized by those affected" (p. 17). As an example, they give the reader two checklists of "questions that should be taken into account in planning almost any operation," and these checklists read as if they were quoted out of a CIA manual. Not only is the language of the checklists anachronistic (referring, for example, to "the military establishment" and "logistical support"), but they address issues nineteenth century leaders did not worry about. For example, one question was "What will be said publicly about various parts of the operation if a public explanation is needed? . . . Several explanations may be needed, each for a different audience." This question presupposes an executive staff of people to prepare information for the press. Executive staffs during the Civil War were small and executive contacts with the press were informal: there were no press releases or press conferences, much less "spin doctors." In fact, Tidwell, Hall and Gaddy knew that Lincoln did not control the press because they discuss how Southerners used Northern newspapers to gather information about the Union armies.

If the authors' first mistake is in using twentieth-century sources ahistorically (assuming that twentieth century theories and practices fit the nineteenth century), their second mistake is using nineteenth-century sources ahistorically. In "A Word to the Reader" the authors admit that,

The evidence presented in this book is largely circumstantial. Basically, we are trying to tell our story by putting together many small pieces of information. Each item is well documented. . . . This is a tricky game to play, and one can easily misinterpret a given piece of indirect evidence. The strength of the procedure, however, is that if one finds enough items to form a consistent pattern, the outcome does not



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**FIGURE 2.** Jefferson Davis' staff. Twentieth-century executive staffs are much larger. For example, there were so many people on Ronald Reagan's staff that they were never photographed as a group.

depend on correct interpretation of one or two items but of the overall pattern (p. xiii).

Circumstantial evidence is suggestive, and it is especially helpful because it can focus one's attention on areas where more convincing evidence might be found, but it is not conclusive in law or history.

Tidwell, Hall and Gaddy complain that those who believe that Booth acted alone in killing the president, "develop elaborate rationales to explain why he could have killed a man so obviously great and good," but when they rely on circumstantial evidence, they sometimes have to create elaborate rationales of their own to make the evidence fit their arguments. For example, the authors describe two young men's experiences at a "school for clandestine operations" in a resort in Buffalo Springs, Virginia.

While at the resort the brothers were apparently taught how to write reports in the form of personal letters. At least, they both wrote letters to the same nonexistent persons on the same days, a technique used by Confederate agents in other circumstances. Cryptic remarks in the journals suggest that they may also have been taught observation and other techniques of the spy.

One may surmise that the brothers attended a four-week school for clandestine operations. A remote resort would be a suitable place for such a school. (p. 150)

Just because a resort was a suitable place for a spy school does not mean that it was a spy school. The authors' explanation for the brothers' writing letters to "nonexistent" people (that they were using a spy technique) is much more elaborate than the obvious one: the correspondents existed but no other evidence is extant to document their existence. Further, examining the cited sources shows that what the

authors refer to as "cryptic remarks" about "observation and other techniques of the spy" are (more likely) a young man's bragging about his knowledge of human nature.

What follows is an extended quotation from the diary Tidwell, Hall and Gaddy cite as the source for their "spy school" (from L. C. Baker's *History of the United States Secret Service*, pp. 186-187). Although this quotation does include every entry that could possibly suggest clandestine activity, it does not support the authors' elaborate explanation.

[August] 4th [1863]. Took a long walk in company with Mr. Frank Hobbs, of Md.; talked of dear old Maryland.

5th. Large arrivals; unlimited scope for the study of human nature; to me a look, word, or mere motion of body, hand, or head, will often analyze a person's character; first impressions are often lasting, and generally correct.

6th. Each trying to outwit the other. Grouping of nature.

7th. Wrote to Captain Carlisle, Moseby's Cavalry, and to my friend E. N. Spiller, Atlanta, Ga.

12th. Enjoyed myself by dancing; find very little intellectual conversation; thus far during my visit have not heard a solid subject discussed.

13th. Like a butterfly on the wing, pursuing pleasure.

14th. How various are the classifications of the mind; some appear to be guided by reason, others by a species of brutal instinct.

20th. What a fine place to show a person's breeding. Train up a child, &c., &c.

21st. This day to me is a memorial one, no one can tell my feelings, perhaps the thoughts of another one the same; whether it is a day of folly or happiness, the future will show. My intention was honest, howsoever this affair may terminate; perhaps sympathy was the cause of my action and words. I must say, I do not understand myself in this case. Wrote a long letter to my friend Spiller.

22d. Miss Lucy A. Merritt, of Brunswick County, Va., returned to Buffalo; a long walk and confidential talk with her. Having noticed my letter to Mr. Spiller, asked to see it. Miss Merritt had no evil intentions when she made this request, this I firmly believe; I complied with her wish, as it seemed to be a test of friendship.

23d. Placid as a lake, nothing unusual transpired.

24th. In some young people the milk of human kindness seems long since to have curdled; I would advise a little soda to correct the acidity of their nature. A lady should at all times command her tongue, especially in a public assembly, where a word is an index to intellect and character.

Although the discussion of the Milburn brothers is a minor part of the book, the authors make similar elaborate explanations elsewhere. The most significant of these is the section in which they describe how Booth might have been enlisted in a secret plan to capture Lincoln. Booth's name was found on a hotel register on July 26, 1864, along with four other men who listed themselves as being from Canada and Baltimore (places with Confederate activity). To Tidwell, Hall and Gaddy this "had all the earmarks of a conference with an agenda. The inference is that agents of the Confederate apparatus in Canada had a need to discuss something with Booth. Capturing Lincoln? . . ." This inference "becomes even stronger" to the authors when they could not find records of the four men in the cities they gave as their addresses. "Thus the names appear to be aliases" (p. 263). A much less elaborate explanation would be that these men had no permanent address, and therefore were never documented as living in the cities they gave as their most recent address. In fact, like Booth, they might have been actors — who would not be likely to stay in one town long enough to leave a record of their having lived there.

There is some useful research in *Come Retribution*. The authors have been especially diligent in tracing the relationships between Confederate sympathizers, and yet even this useful research is hidden in a text that is poorly indexed. One can certainly admire the authors for what must have been a labor of love, but most historians and Lincoln buffs will be disappointed in this book.

## CUMULATIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY, 1986-1987-1988

by Ruth E. Cook

Selections approved by a Bibliography Committee consisting of the following members: Dr. Kenneth A. Bernard, 50 Chatham Road, Harwich Center, Mass. 02645; Arnold Gates, 168 Weyford Terrace, Garden City, N.Y. 11530; James T. Hickey, Box 55, Elkhart, Illinois 62634; Ralph G. Newman, 175 E. Delaware Place, 5112, Chicago, Illinois 60611; Lloyd Ostendorf, 225 Lookout Drive, Dayton, Ohio 45419; Hon. Fred Schwengel, 200 Maryland Avenue, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20515; Dr. Wayne C. Temple, 1121 S. 4th Street Court, Springfield, Illinois 62703; Frank J. Williams, RFD, Hope Valley Road, Hope Valley, R.I. 02832. New items available for consideration may be sent to the above persons or the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum.

1986

### LOUIS A. WARREN LINCOLN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM 1986-28

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Folder, paper, 11" x 8 1/2", 4 pp., illus. Number 1769, A Confederate in the North; Number 1770, Some French Views of the American Civil War; Number 1771, Sherman: Time for a New Image?; Number 1772, The Origins of Constitutional Problems Under Lincoln; Number 1773, Grant and Civil Liberties: Some Clues from his Early Service in Missouri; Number 1774, Index for 1986.

1987

### CORRIGAN, B. C., EDITOR 1987-28

Who Shot Lincoln's Grandfather/A Lincoln Trivia/(and not so trivial)/Quiz/Copyright 1987 A. D. Service/[Compiled and edited by B. C. Corrigan]

Pamphlet, paper, 8 1/2" x 5 3/8", 76 pp., illus., price, \$2.95. Requests should be sent to AdS Press, P.O. Box 5837, Springfield, IL 62705.

### INTERNATIONAL LINCOLN ASSOCIATION 1987-29

International Lincoln Association/Volume 1, Number 1 Quarterly Newsletter/July-September, 1987/(Cover title)/

Pamphlet, paper, 11" x 8 1/2", 4 (1) pp., illus. Requests should be sent to International Lincoln Association, P.O. Box B, Idyllwild, CA 92349.

INTERNATIONAL LINCOLN ASSOCIATION 1987-30  
Same as above, except this is Volume 1, Number 2, October-December, 1987.

### LINCOLN COLLEGE 1987-31

Lincoln/Newsletter/(Device)/Volume VII, Number 4 Lincoln, Illinois Spring, 1987/(Cover title)/

Pamphlet, paper, 11" x 8 1/2", (8) pp., illus.

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(Device)/The Lincoln Legacy/A Quarterly Publication of the Lincoln Group of Illinois/Volume 1, Number 1 October, 1987/(Cover title)/

Folder, paper, 11" x 8 1/2", 4 (1) pp., illus. Requests should be sent to the Lincoln Legacy, Illinois Benedictine College, 5700 College Rd., Lisle, IL 60532-0900.

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(Continued); Number 1779, Stabbing the Constitution; Number 1780, What Do Young People Know About Lincoln?

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Same as above, except this is Number 1781, July 1987 to Number 1786, December, 1987.

Number 1781, Don E. Fehrenbacher in Text and Context; Number 1782, Freedom and the Genre of Historical Fiction; Number 1783, One Day's Run: The President at Work; Number 1784, Jean Baker's *Mary Todd Lincoln*; Number 1785, Imperial Lincoln (Conclusion); Number 1786, Index for 1987.

1988

### A. LINCOLN 1988-1

(Silhouette)/A. Lincoln/Christening and Launching/of the Aircraft Carrier/Abraham Lincoln CVN72/Newport News Shipbuilding/Newport News, Virginia/February 13, 1988/(Cover title)/

Pamphlet, paper, 11" x 8 1/2", 32 (14) pp., illus.

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The Doubled Images/of Lincoln/and Washington/Marcus Cunliffe/University Professor/The George Washington University/26th Annual/Robert Fortenbaugh Memorial Lecture/Gettysburg College/1988/

Pamphlet, paper, 9" x 6", fr., 34 (6) pp., illus. Requests should be sent to Professor Gabor S. Boritt, Department of History, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, PA 17325.

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Book, paper, 9 1/2" x 6 1/4", ix p., 222 (4) pp., price, \$12.00, postpaid. The text is in French. The book is available from the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum.

### GORE VIDAL'S LINCOLN 1988-4

Gore Vidal's/Lincoln/An NBC Mini-series, Sunday, March 27 and Monday March 28, at 9-11 PM (ET)/(Device)/On The NBC Television Network/(Caption title)/[1988]/

Folder, paper, 11" x 8 1/2", (4) pp., folded twice, inside is an advertisement for the mini-series.

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(Photograph)/The/Lincoln Legals/A Documentary History/of the Law Practice of/Abraham Lincoln,/1836-1861/(Cover title)/[1988]

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Pamphlet, paper, 8 1/2" x 5 1/2", 9 pp.

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Fred/Saberhagen/After The Fact/Baen Books/[1988]

Book, paper, 6 3/4" x 4 1/8", 285 (11) pp., price, \$3.95. This is a work of fiction about the assassination of Lincoln. Requests should be sent to Baen Books, Dept. BA, 260 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10001.

