



# Lincoln Lore

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## LINCOLN'S WORLD: ITALY

by Mark E. Neely, Jr.

Any reader of *The Tributes of the Nations to Abraham Lincoln*, that imposing old volume of flowery nineteenth-century diplomatic correspondence occasioned by the murder of Lincoln, will be surprised by the section devoted to Italy. It proves to be fairly large (almost three times the size of the section devoted to Spain), and the letters printed in it show a remarkable acquaintance with the facts of Lincoln's life. Most important, the Italian tributes reveal an astonishing amount of passionate feeling for the American president and his cause.

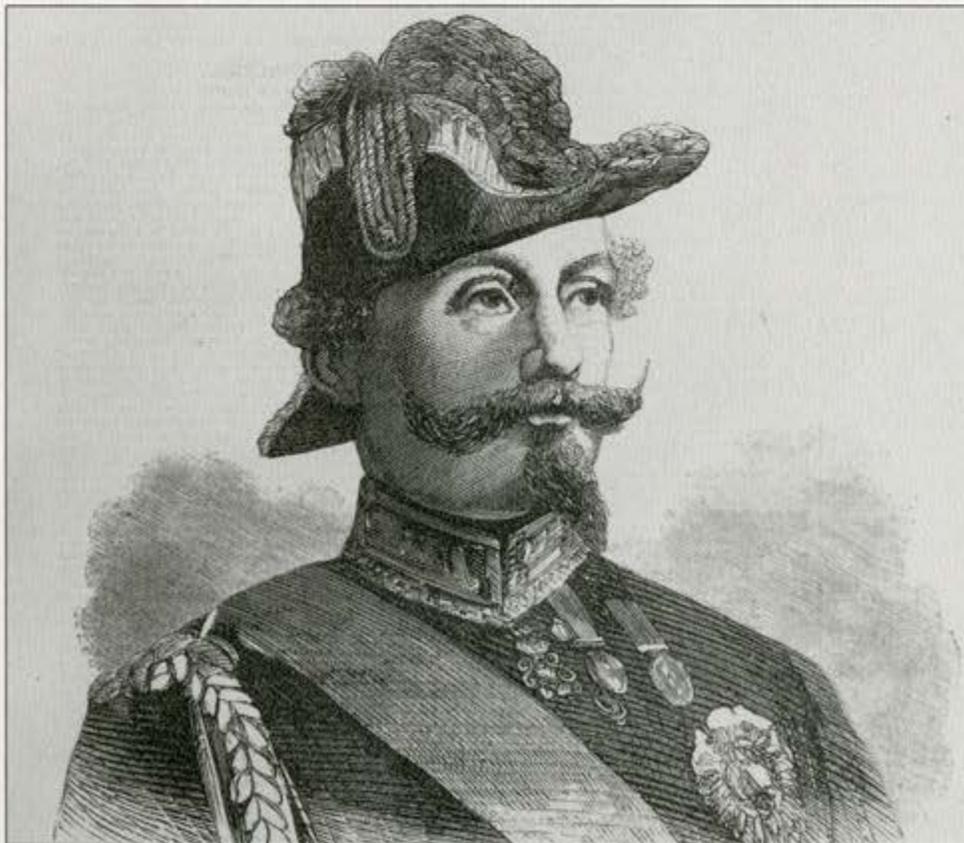
All of this can fairly be called "surprising," "remarkable," and "astonishing" because Italy shared so many of the cultural barriers that kept Spain ignorant of and little interested in Lincoln. Italy was, of course, a Catholic country that had by mid-century sent very few immigrants to the United States. Its government was monarchical, and the language and cultural barriers were, if anything, greater than Spain's, for Italy possessed no colonies near the U.S., where local inhabitants might learn about their American neighbor.

Other important developments in recent Italian history, however, served to balance those cultural impediments to identification with or interest in the Northern cause in the American Civil War. First, both nations were engaged in wars of national unification at about the same time. The Italian prime minister told the American representative in Italy, in 1862, that his country held "the strongest possible interest in the success of the constitutional authorities in crushing the rebellion." "It is with me," the Baron Ricasoli said more than once, "not merely a matter of political opinion, but of earnest personal sympathy and feeling." For his part, President

Lincoln assured Italian Minister Charles Joseph Bertinatti, in remarks sure to be noted by the press and quickly transmitted across the Atlantic, the friendship of Italy with the U.S. during "this unhappy fraternal war, in which we are only endeavoring to save and strengthen the foundations of our national unity." This calculated statement, for which Secretary of State Seward had prepared Lincoln, may well have underestimated the feelings of the Italian people toward the American war. The countries had in common, wars of unification, all right, but for some Italians identification with American liberalism went deeper. The Risorgimento, or Italian unification movement, had brought powerful democratic and libertarian sentiments into prominence. Though these forces did not ultimately triumph in the unification of Italy, which took place under rather conservative auspices that guaranteed a monarchical rather than a republican form of government, they remained potent, if latent, in the hearts and minds of some parts of Italian society.

These liberal Italians poured forth their grief and homage to Lincoln's memory as soon as word of his murder reached the

Mediterranean nation. Even the Italian government went further in their identification with the North's cause than mere agreement with the idea of strengthening foundations of national unity. After Lincoln's assassination the Italian parliament "resolved to express to the American nation, in their sad bereavement, all those sentiments of genuine admiration which our nation entertained for the eminent man who, through times so fraught with danger, so wisely and steadily directed the policy of emancipation of the noble republic of North America." President Lincoln had



From the Lincoln Museum

FIGURE 1. This is a flattering portrait of the ferocious-looking King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel II, whose hunting-lodge manners and skirt-chasing horrified polite society.

spoken to Bertinatti only of "national unity"; "emancipation" was a different matter. The Italians draped the flag in front of the Carignani palace in mourning for three days. The minister of foreign affairs, speaking for King Victor Emmanuel II and the government, fully concurred in the sentiments expressed by the parliament.

Thus Italy's government spoke of "freedom and civilization" where the Spanish government had spoken only of "authority." Naturally, Italy's middle and working classes spoke with an even more liberal voice, and many did speak: the Italian Emigration Society of Ancona; the citizens of Abruzzo and Acireale; and numerous mutual aid societies and workingmen's unions. Typical of the vigorous rhetoric employed by these elements of Italian society in eulogizing Lincoln was the letter from Ancona:

Lincoln, promulgator of liberty, defender of the rights of man, a faithful follower of the doctrine taught by the gospel, desired to banish slavery from free America, and to put an end to this stigma upon a civilized people. Seeing that any compromise with the oppressor was impossible, he was able, through the energy of his will and eloquent words, to initiate a holy war, which, owing to the valor of his soldiers and the free sacrifices of the northern people, was finished by federal victories and the planting of the holy flag of humanity upon the fortified strongholds of the slaveholders.

Infamous and cowardly men! guided by fanaticism and selfishness, through the arm of an assassin struck the man of the people and benefactor of humanity, with other illustrious victims, at the very moment when the Americans

were rejoicing over their triumph....

Lincoln was the true friend of humanity.

Lincoln was a citizen of the whole world.

Lincoln is a martyr to a holy principle.

The Italian emigration...have always followed, with great anxiety, the alternations of this war between civilization and barbarism....they can only pray God for the pacification of the United States, and for the abolition forever of the market of beings made in the image of God, that sublime object which was the aim of the illustrious martyr of whom we now lament the sudden and bloody death.

The accuracy of the Italians' reading of recent American history is not the issue here. Certainly they misinterpreted the Civil War. Even Lincoln disputed the idea of its being a "holy war," at least in the sense that God was leagued directly with either side's battalions. And he did not set out from the start of his presidency with the goal of ending slavery.

What is noteworthy in the Italian letters is their intensity of sentiment and their specificity of social content. By May 4 these Anconans already proclaimed Lincoln "a citizen of the whole world," and they denounced his enemies as barbarians, fanatics, and selfish dealers in human flesh. It would be difficult to find equally intense feelings expressed among any broad section of European society elsewhere.

And such views were not the peculiar property of Anconans. The Italians of Abruzzo identified themselves directly with the Northern cause:

Your history is the same as ours. From Camillus and Cin-



*From the Lincoln Museum*

FIGURE 2. Although Great Britain and the United States had their differences in Lincoln's day, they were as one in popular hatred of the Catholic Church by their Protestant majorities. The hero of this London *Punch* cartoon is Giuseppe Garibaldi, dressed here in his characteristic guerrilla uniform with its butcher's blouse (colored bright red). General Ambrose Burnside was photographed at the beginning of the American Civil War in a militia uniform obviously modeled on that of Garibaldi's "red shirts."

cinnatus to Franklin and Washington, from Lincoln and Seward to Garibaldi and Mazzini, the tradition of the great struggle between good and evil, liberty and slavery, civilization and barbarism, national autonomy and the rule of foreign despots, has ever been the same.

To draw specific parallels between the Italians' heroes and the figures from a culture so foreign seems especially noteworthy.

As usual, basic principles of foreign policy and of domestic politics were at work in forming Italian liberal sentiment. One of the great enemies of Italian liberal nationalism was the Pope in Rome, and in the United States majority opinion loathed the Roman Catholic Church. Americans showed considerable interest in Garibaldi's career, as they did in the works of most men who made war on the Papacy. Since Rome's geographical location made the Papacy a special barrier to Italian unification, even the Italian government, conservative though it was, felt considerable antagonism to the Papacy. By contrast, Spain had no such quarrel with the Pope, and thus sharing no common "enemy" with the United States as a largely pro-Protestant nation, Spanish public sentiment proved much cooler toward the U.S.

Moreover, Italy had not in 1865 reached the modern borders of today's nation. Venice was still held by Austria. Thus, when the Ladies' Society of Bologna wrote President Andrew Johnson, they said, "We, maidens, spouses and mothers of suffering Italy, are waiting hopefully for the time when America, restored to her former strength and glory, and to her rightful station among the great nations of the earth, will come to our aid and relieve us from foreign oppression." Surely they were thinking of the areas still under Austrian control. Perhaps the "studious youths of Naples" expressed the meaning of America to Italians best when they said:

Despotism, priestly and political, diplomatic hypocrisy, and a tradition of blood have fettered the Italian emancipation with so many snares that we, overwhelmed with grief and disgusted with this depraved Old World, turn with confiding looks to the New one, and our souls rejoice at the grand spectacle you show us. Oh, Americans! you who have conquered your own independence by your virtue only — in the sacredness of the laws constitutes only one a free family, without kings or myrmidons, without priests or deceitful idols.

The domestic principle was similar. Where liberal and democratic forces lost out to more authoritarian and conservative regimes in government, they often sought surrogate foreign heroes whose praises were meant as tacit condemnations of domestic political foes. This principle worked most obviously in dictator-plagued France, but it clearly worked to some degree in Italy. The mechanics, artisans, and working class unions that praised Lincoln thereby condemned King Victor Emmanuel II and his government ministers by holding up a republican head of state as hero.

Still, the intensity of this liberal Italian sentiment appears to reach deeper than these rather negative factors. There really is more to politics than the systematic organization of group hatreds, and perhaps this can be seen in the Italian letters of condolence in 1865.

A notable feature of these is their occasional references to John Brown. The common council of Chieti, for example, told the American people: "Your sacrifice was immense in the four years of gigantic war for the great principles of brotherly love between black and white, and for the murder of John Brown, and on the 14th of April; but you may be proud of it now, for a holy cause was never more bravely sustained, with greater abnegation, in the paths pointed out by Washington, Franklin, and Lincoln, and you may be sure it will not fail to reach the glorious bourne." Likewise, the Democratic Association of Florence denounced the Confederacy by saying, "The furies of despotism and of servitude, deceived in their infamous hopes, incapable of sustaining any longer their combat against liberty, before falling into the abyss which threatened them, strengthened the arm of a murderer, and as they opened the fratricidal war with the gibbet of the martyr of the cause of abolition, John Brown, so they ended it, worthy of themselves, in the most ferocious and stupid of all crimes, the murder of a great citizen."

The Italians were surely unaware of the irony of their comparisons of Lincoln and John Brown, whom Lincoln had himself denounced as an assassin infatuated with absurd plans to free the slaves. Nevertheless, the mention of Brown emphasizes their identification with the antislavery impulse in the Northern war effort rather than its nationalism. It also shows that Italian liberals followed American events before the Civil War began and that they identified with the cause of abolition when national unity was not at issue. Antislavery was a sincere aspect of liberal ideology in the Western world, and the Italian liberals' embrace of it was made easier by the circumstance of Italy's having no colonies where slavery was practiced. Whatever the case, the Italian liberals' identification with the Northern cause was a bit more than a matter of political surrogates and common opposition to the Pope in Rome.

The letters of condolence came from all over Italy, but they by no means represented common opinion in that country. Northern Italy sent more letters than southern, but Sicily was well represented (Acireale, Catania, Messina, and Marsala). The geography of pro-Lincoln sentiment in Italy was much less important than the sociology. Only a handful of letters came from the citizens or common councils of Italian towns, representing to some degree public opinion. The heavy majority of letters were written by workingmen's societies, mechanics' mutual aid societies, sons of labor, artisans' fraternities, democratic or republican political clubs, and masonic lodges. The members of the Fraternal Association of Artisans of Leghorn mentioned their awareness "that the valorous champion of the American Union was born an artisan," and the Constitutional Rights Association of Florence referred to him as "Honest Old Abe." The Italian Society of United Mechanics of Turin, whose honorary president was Giuseppe Garibaldi, showed their "high regard, particularly for one mechanic like us, who was born in Kentucky, and whose genius elevated him to the highest rank in the nation that trusted its destiny to his care."

The fact of Lincoln's common origins was but a conveniently appealing quality in a man who stood, in Italian liberals' eyes, for the republican cause throughout the world.



*From the Lincoln Museum*

**FIGURE 3.** Pius IX, the Pope during Lincoln's presidency.

## CUMULATIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY, 1989-1990

by Ruth E. Cook

*Selections approved by a Bibliography Committee consisting of the following members: Dr. Kenneth A. Bernard, 50 Chatham Road, Harwich Center, MA 02645; Arnold Gates, 168 Weyford Terrace, Garden City, NY 11530; James T. Hickey, Box 55, Elkhart, IL 62634; Ralph G. Newman, 175 E. Delaware Place, 5112, Chicago, IL 60611; Lloyd Ostendorf, 225 Lookout Drive, Dayton, OH 45419; Hon. Fred Schwengel, 200 Maryland Avenue, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20515; Dr. Wayne C. Temple, 1121 S. 4th Street Court, Springfield, IL 62703; Frank J. Williams, 300 Switch Road, Hope Valley, RI 02832. New items available for consideration may be sent to the above persons or the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum.*

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**BORITT, GABOR S.**

1989-9

How Big Was/Lincoln's Toe?/or/Finding A/Footnote/A sometimes irreverent account of a shoemaker's and a historian's adventures/more than a century apart/Gabor S. Boritt/Gettysburg College/Lincoln Memorial Shrine/Redlands, California/February 12, 1989/

Pamphlet, paper, 9 1/4" x 5 1/2", 22 pp., illus., price, \$3.00. Requests should be sent to the Lincoln Memorial Association, 125 W. Vine St., Redlands, CA 92373.

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The Shadow/Of A/Coming War/Robert V. Bruce/Professor of History, Emeritus/Boston University/28th Annual/Robert Fortenbaugh Memorial Lecture/Gettysburg College/1989/

Pamphlet, paper, 9" x 5 1/2", fr., 29 (6) pp. Requests should be sent to the Civil War Studies, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, PA 17325.

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Papers From/The Third Annual/Lincoln Colloquium/October 15, 1988/(Picture)/(Quotation)/President Lincoln's Annual Message to Congress/December 1, 1862/Cosponsored by/Lincoln Home National Historic Site,/the Sangamon County Historical Society,/and the Lincoln Group of Illinois/[1989]

Pamphlet, paper, 11" x 8 1/2", 39 (7) pp., illus., price, \$4.95 plus \$2.00 postage. Requests should be sent to the Eastern National Park & Monument Assoc., 426 S. Seventh St., Springfield, IL 62701.

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Lincoln/Herald/(Device)/Spring 1989/Vol. 91, No. 1/[Harrogate, Tenn.]

Pamphlet, paper, 10 1/2" x 7 1/2", 31 pp., illus., price per issue, \$5.00.

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Same as above, except this is Vol. 91, No. 3, Fall 1989.

**LINCOLN MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY** 1989-15

Same as above, except this is Vol. 91, No. 4, Winter 1989.

**LOUIS A. WARREN LINCOLN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM** 1989-16

(Illustration)/Abraham Lincoln/And The Trent Affair:/Christmas, 1861/A Holiday Exhibit/At The Louis A. Warren/Lincoln Library/And Museum, 1989/

Folder, paper, one sheet, folded twice, (3) pp. Requests for this free folder should be sent to the Lincoln Museum, 1300 S. Clinton St., Fort Wayne, IN 46801.

**LOUIS A. WARREN LINCOLN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM** 1989-17

(Illustration)/Lincoln and the Germans/[1989]

Folder, paper, one sheet, folded once, 7 1/4" x 5 1/2", (2) pp. This exhibit folder is no longer available.

**LOUIS A. WARREN LINCOLN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM**

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Folder, paper, 11" x 8 1/2", 4 pp., illus. Number 1799, The Lilly Library's Collection of Lincolniana; Number 1800, A Chronology of the Trent Affair (Part I); Number 1801, A Chronology of the Trent Affair (Part II); Number 1802, Eric Foner's *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution 1863-1877*; Number 1803, Stephen W. Sears' *George B. McClellan: The Young Napoleon*; Number 1804, Confederate Lincolniana.

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Book, cloth, 11 1/2" x 8 1/2", 194 pp., illus., price, \$29.95. Requests should be sent to George B. Simpson, P.O. Box 303, Sturgis, KY 42459.

**SLOAN, RICHARD, EDITOR**

1989-21

The Lincoln Group/Of/New York/Tenth Anniversary/Commemorative Booklet/1978 to 1988/Richard Sloan, Editor/with/Milton Seltzer and Arthur F. Loux/[1989]

Pamphlet, paper, 8 1/2" x 5 1/2", 62 (6) pp., illus. This is copy No. 77 of 150 copies. Requests should be sent to the Lincoln Group of New York, 3855 Arthur Ave., Seaford, NY 11783.

**TIERNEY, TOM**

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Abraham Lincoln/and His Family/Paper Dolls in Full Color/Tom Tierney/Dover Publications, Inc., New York/[1989]

Pamphlet, paper, 12 1/4" x 9 1/4", (32) pp., illus., price, \$3.95. Text gives history of Lincoln family and clothes shown. There are 5 dolls, 32 costumes, full color throughout, and printed on one side only. Requests should be sent to Dover Publications, Inc., 31 East 2nd St., Mineola, NY 11501.

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**NEELY, MARK E., JR. AND HAROLD HOLZER** 1990-1

The/Lincoln/Family/Album/Mark E. Neely, Jr./& Harold Holzer/Doubleday/New York London Toronto Sydney Auckland/[September 1990, first edition]

Book, cloth, 11" x 8 1/2", xiv p., 172 (90) pp., illus., price, \$35.00.

**RECK, W. EMERSON**

1990-2

When The Nation Said Farewell To Lincoln/By W. Emerson Reck/Springfield, Ohio/(Picture)/Bulletin of the 46th Annual Meeting/of/The Lincoln Fellowship of Wisconsin/held at Milwaukee, Wisconsin/April 16, 1989/Historical Bulletin No. 45/1990/(Cover title)/

Pamphlet, paper, 10" x 7 1/2", 28 pp., illus., price, \$5.00. This edition is limited to 250 copies. Requests should be sent to Lincoln Fellowship of Wisconsin, Steven Rogstad, 1923 Grange Ave., Racine, WI 53403-2328.