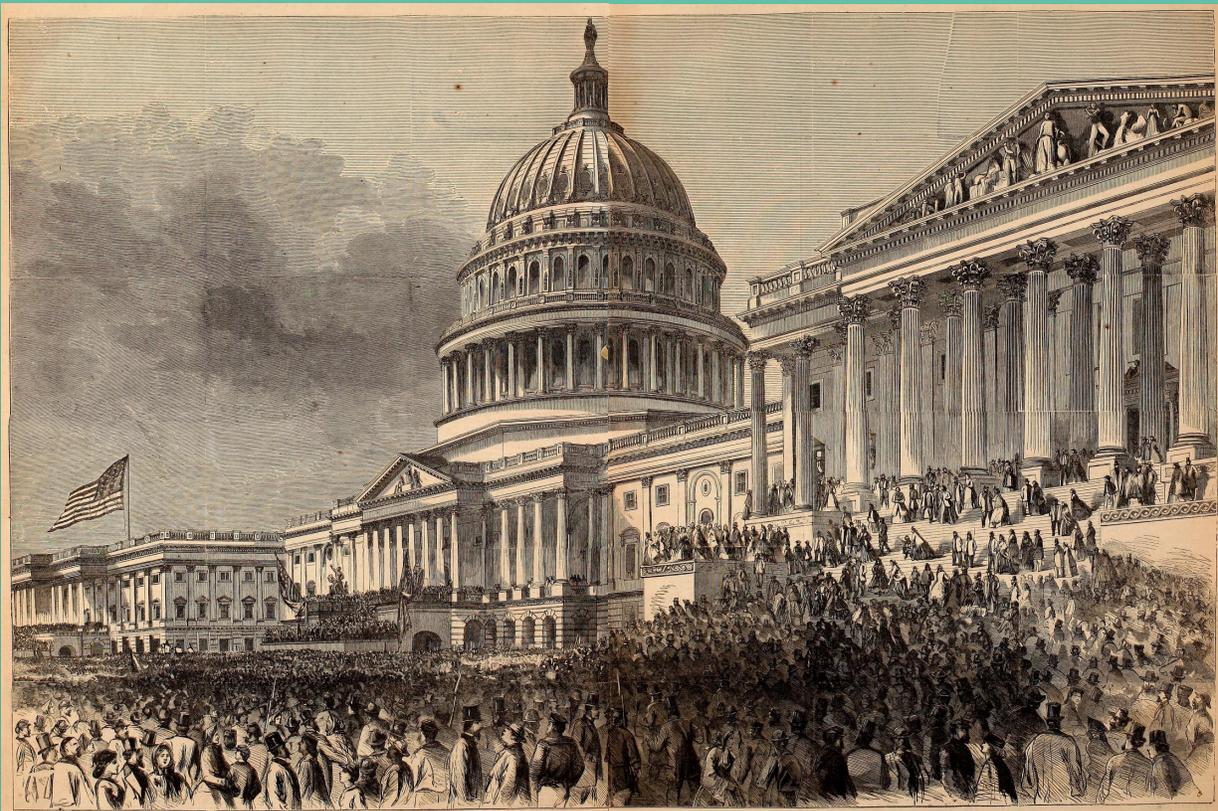


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# Lincoln LORE

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PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S REINACURATION AT THE CAPITOL, MARCH 4, 1865.—PHOTOGRAPHED BY GARDNER, WASHINGTON.—[SEE PAGE 164.]



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## Indiana State Museum & Historic Sites



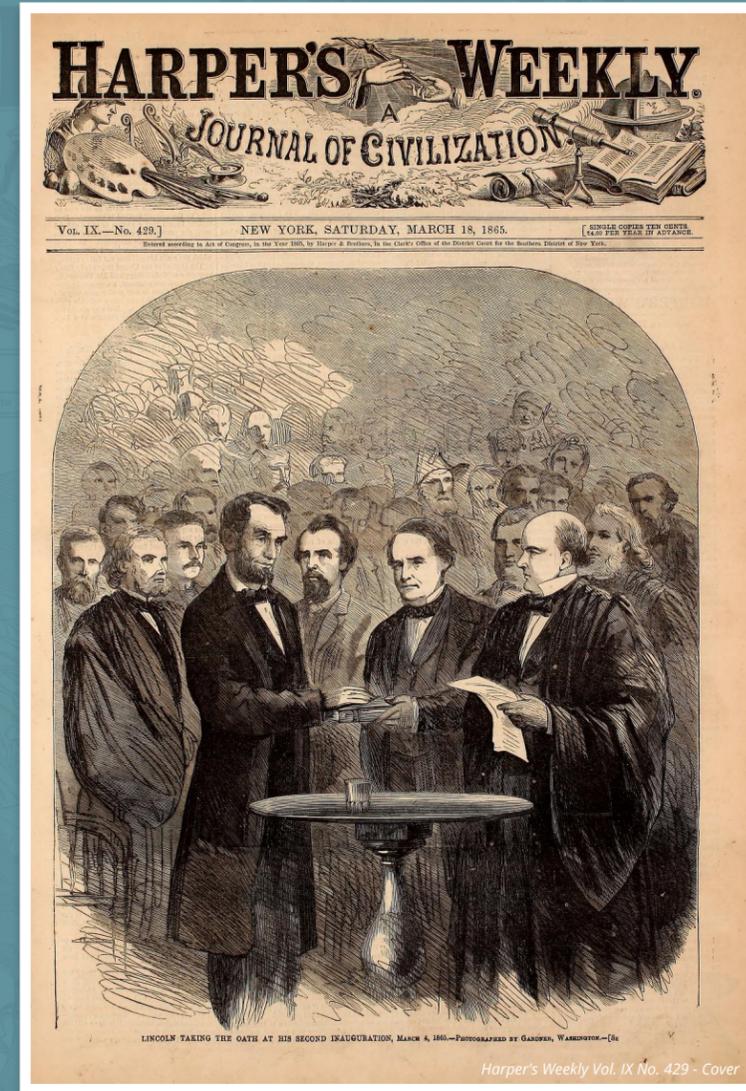
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[www.indianamuseum.org/historic-sites/levi-catharine-coffin-house](http://www.indianamuseum.org/historic-sites/levi-catharine-coffin-house)

On The Cover: Harper's Weekly Vol. IX No. 429 Pg. 168, Harper's Weekly Vol. IX No. 429 Pg. 169



# MYSTERY SOLVED

## Why the HARPER'S WEEKLY Close-Up of Lincoln's Second Inaugural Credited A Photo By Alexander Gardner

by Harold Holzer

Students of mid-nineteenth-century image-making know that engravers and lithographers of that period—along with painters and sculptors—had become increasingly dependent on the medium of photography to provide source material for portraits. One of the great beneficiaries of this phenomenon was Abraham Lincoln, who had only limited time to pose formally for artists, but did sit for many photographs destined for adaptation into paintings, busts, and statues. Decades earlier, Mathew Brady had told Samuel Morse that he planned to make photography “as far as possible an auxiliary to the artist.” That is precisely what he, and others, did.

Appropriately, photographers often received credit for the images that inspired graphic artists. When periodicals like Harper’s Weekly and Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper adapted photos into woodcut engravings—especially originals by celebrity photographers like Brady and Alexander Gardner—they often acknowledged the source material: “From a photograph by Brady” or “From a Photograph by Gardner.” No doubt, the photographers earned not only credit, but remuneration, for providing models for woodcuts.

Yet not all such attributions make sense to modern eyes. And one of the most stubbornly puzzling of all is the close-up illustration, published on the cover of Harper’s Weekly two weeks after the 1865 inaugural, and entitled: Lincoln Taking the Oath at his Second Inauguration, March 4, 1865—Photographed by Gardner, Washington.

But how to explain this credit line? Yes, Alexander Gardner had indeed set up his camera outside the U. S. Capitol that momentous day. From the edge of the crowd, he made a series of remarkable pictures, some showing Lincoln seated on the East Portico waiting to be introduced, and the most famous of them showing him standing before a small lectern delivering his iconic Second Inaugural Address. But all these images were exposed from a significant distance, with Lincoln’s features unavoidably blurred. So how could Gardner



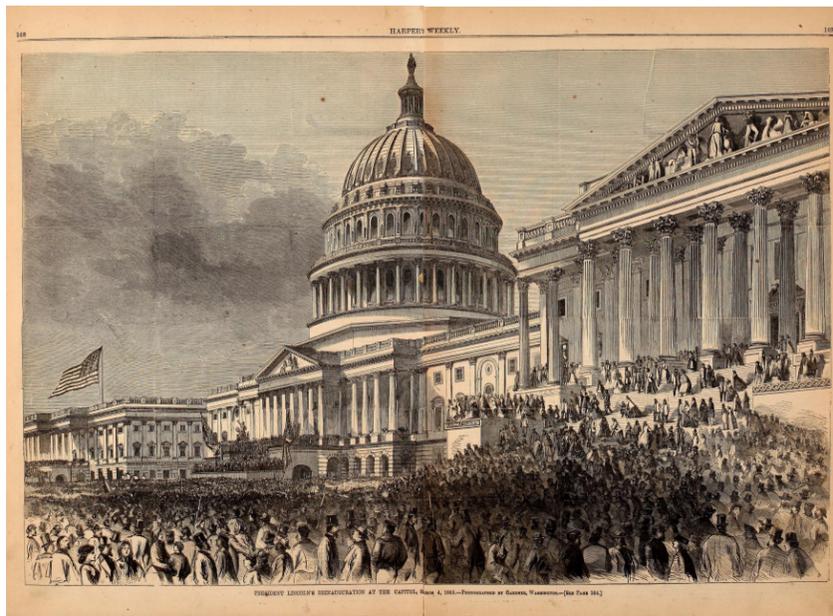
Gardner's Photo LN-1135

possibly have moved his camera close enough—quickly enough—to so clearly capture Lincoln, hand on bible, taking the presidential oath from Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase? How had Gardner managed to record Lincoln’s expressive face, along with such onlookers as outgoing Vice President Hannibal Hamlin and Lincoln’s private secretaries, John G. Nicolay and John Hay? No photographic source has ever been unearthed for the woodcut, so we have long assumed it never existed, even as we hoped it might instead be lost and waiting to be re-discovered.

Purely in chronological terms, the chance to make such a photo could have presented itself. In those days, an incoming president gave his inaugural address first, and only then took the oath of office, the opposite

of the ceremonial procedure today. But Gardner was simply too far away to position himself for a close-up of the swearing-in so soon after photographing Lincoln delivering his brief speech from afar. Tellingly, Gardner had failed to manage just such a feat back in 1863. That November 19, he succeeded in taking some crowd shots from the back of the throng attending the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery at Gettysburg—but then proved unable to get his camera close enough to the speakers’ stand to capture Lincoln delivering his Gettysburg Address. If we are really meant to believe the Harper’s photo credit from the inauguration, then how had Gardner managed to be in two places at once on March 4, 1865?

For decades, I had simply assumed that the credit line on the inaugural engraving was gratuitous—added because the public likely knew that Gardner had been present at the inauguration and might believe he could be responsible for the close-up. The attribution certainly made marketing sense for Harper’s, which had long boasted of its access to work by prominent camera artists.



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There the matter rested—at least for me—until Civil War photography expert Bob Zeller contacted me in April 2021 to ask anew if I could explain the Gardner credit on the oath-taking illustration. As Zeller pointed out: “The close-up, a well-known engraving, shows an impossible camera position basically in midair... Could the engraving be a representation of the heart of a ‘lost’ Gardner photograph? One would think Gardner would have wanted to photograph the swearing-in, too. Or perhaps the engraving is misattributed to a Gardner photograph.”

The inquiry inspired me to think afresh about this mystery. And because of Zeller’s prodding, I gave the problem another look. This time the light finally dawned. The answer was always there—in reverse. No, Gardner did not use a dolly crane or some other yet-to-be-invented conveyance to zoom-in on Lincoln’s oath-taking. But no, the Harper’s woodcut wasn’t exactly misattributed, either. Here is what happened.

Gardner produced no adaptable close-up of the swearing-in on March 4, 1865. So Harper’s, coveting such an illustration for the cover of its inauguration issue, resorted to image manipulation to produce it. The New York weekly simply turned to an indoor photograph Gardner had made at his Washington studio back on November 8, 1863. That day, Gardner took several magnificent portraits of Lincoln—at the request, it might be noted, of yet another artist who needed photos as source models: sculptor Sarah Fisher Ames. And then, as John Hay testified in his diary, “Nico[lay] & I immortalized ourselves by having ourselves done in a group with the Prest.” Therein lies the long-overlooked clue to the 1865 inauguration woodcut. It was based on an outdated 1863 photo—yes, by Gardner—of Lincoln with Nicolay and Hay. Harper’s Weekly had actually published an altered version of that group pose previously—a woodcut published in 1864—so there can be no question that its artists had access to it.

When one re-examines Harper’s swearing-in engraving in this light, one immediately recognizes its obvious debt to the 1863 studio shot. To fashion its 1865 woodcut, a Harper’s engraver simply copied the three individual 1863 photos and placed them within the new scene, without carving them in reverse, as faithful reproductions required. As a result, the figures appear in the inaugural tableau as mirror images of their original source—effectively disguising them for readers of the day—and for all observers since. Harper’s simply deconstructed Gardner’s 1863 studio shot and reconstructed its individual elements for its inaugural cover, inventing the overall design from scratch, or perhaps from a reporter’s personal observation.

Now we know why the resulting Harper’s close-up of Lincoln bears so little resemblance to the haggard president’s actual appearance in March 1865. As photos from that winter reveal—February 5 (also by Gardner) and March 6 (by Henry Warren)—Lincoln had cut his hair short and trimmed his beard back to a near-goatee before the inaugural. To witnesses at the second inaugural, the President’s face looked thin and careworn. So why had Harper’s decided not to adapt Gardner’s more up-to-date February 5 photos? One can only speculate that the “real” Lincoln was simply not ready for his close-up: he looked so painfully gaunt in the last few weeks of his life that Harper’s apparently preferred to show him as he had appeared earlier.

Hence its inaugural cover presented a Lincoln with a fuller beard and a neat pompadour, looking robust, smiling benignly and casting his eyes slightly downward—precisely as he had at Gardner’s studio two years before. Harper’s would show Lincoln standing, not seated as he had posed at the gallery in 1863, now cleverly superimposed onto a blow-up of the body Gardner photographed on inauguration day from afar. As for the presidential aides who stand in the background in Harper’s, they, too, are precise mirror-image copies of Nicolay and Hay as they had appeared at Gardner’s alongside

their boss—but now separated from the original pose, and manipulated to float within the knot of people surrounding Lincoln outside the Capitol.



Lincoln with Nicolay and Hay OC-1536

Mystery solved, composite parsed, and photo credit explained. The Harper’s engraving of Lincoln taking the oath at his second inaugural is indeed from a photograph by Gardner. But it was a photograph taken 16 months before the great speech, and ironically, only days before Lincoln had delivered an earlier masterpiece of oratory.

**Harold Holzer is the Jonathan F. Fanton Director of Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College.**

*This article was originally published in the journal Battlefield Photographer, Vol. XIX, No. 2 (July 2021).*



Execution of the 38 Sioux Indians 71.2009.081.1731



Lithograph of the massacre 71.2009.081.2886

# LINCOLN & THE 1862 MINNESOTA SIOUX TRIALS

by Burrus M. Carnahan

One hundred and fifty years ago the Upper and Lower Sioux Reservations were located in southwestern Minnesota on a thin strip of land on the south side of the Minnesota River. After their traditional hunting grounds had been depleted by fur trapping and white settlement, the Dakota, or Sioux, ceded the rest of southwestern Minnesota to the U.S. government via a series of treaties in exchange for annual monetary payments. The government payment was usually distributed in June. In 1862, however, it was late in arriving.

On August 17, 1862, four young Dakota men from the Lower Sioux Reservation went hunting for game. One of them found some eggs in a hen's nest near a white settler's farm. When another warned that taking the eggs would cause trouble with the whites, he was accused of being a coward, afraid of the white men. Accusations and denials flew back and forth, and tempers rose. In the end, to prove they were not afraid of them, the four hunters killed five white settlers at random, three men and two women.

When the young men returned to the Lower Reservation the next morning, the Dakota leaders realized that they would have to either turn them over to the U.S. and Minnesota authorities or go to war. The Minnesota Dakota had suffered years of dishonest treatment at the hands of white traders and government agents. The money due them by the treaties was two months overdue with no guarantee—or faith that it would ever arrive. Although several Dakota leaders pointed out their dismal odds of winning a war against the United States, and accurately predicted that their people would lose their remnant of land in Minnesota as a result of waging the war, the contentious debate nevertheless resulted in the final decision to go to war, under the leadership of a chief named Little Crow.

Over the next week, Little Crow led the main body of Dakota warriors in attacks on the government Indian Agency at Redwood, the town of New Ulm and the Fort Ridgely army post.

Little Crow  
71200908406503

Smaller Dakota bands fanned out to attack homesteads and settlements. Adult men were generally killed, but women and children were often taken captive. Another battle occurred on September 2, when Little Crow's force attacked a detachment of soldiers from the 7th Regiment of Minnesota Volunteer Infantry camped at Birch Coulee. According to a contemporary historian, the brief war killed 42 Dakota, 93 Minnesota Volunteer soldiers and 644 white civilians.

By Civil War standards the battles with Little Crow were small skirmishes, with fewer than a thousand men engaged on each side, but they terrified the people of Minnesota. On August 21, Minnesota Governor Alexander Ramsey telegraphed Secretary of War Edwin Stanton that the "Sioux Indians on our western border have risen, and are murdering men, women, and children." When the uprising broke out, Lincoln's secretary John Nicolay and U.S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs William P. Dole were both in Minnesota to negotiate a treaty with the Chippewa. On August 27 they and Minnesota Senator Wilkinson sent a joint telegram to President Lincoln asserting that they were "...in the midst of a most terrible and exciting Indian war. Thus far the massacre of innocent white settlers has been fearful. A wild panic prevails in nearly one-half of the State." In response, on August 19 Governor Ramsey appointed Henry H. Sibley as a colonel of Minnesota Volunteers and ordered him to lead an expedition against the Indians.

Sibley, a wealthy fur trader, was also a popular Democratic politician who had represented the Minnesota Territory in Congress and served as the state's first governor when it received statehood in 1858. On September 19, Sibley's command advanced north from Ft. Ridgely towards Little Crow's camp.

The decisive battle of the campaign came at Wood Lake on September 23, where Little Crow's forces were defeated. After Sibley told them that he only wanted to punish the guilty, anti-war Dakota leaders seized control of the captives and offered to surrender, while Little Crow and his followers fled. Two days later, the remaining Dakota surrendered 91 "pure white women and children," along with approximately 150 captives of mixed ancestry. On October 9, General John Pope, commander of the Department of the Northwest, reported to Washington that the "Sioux war may be considered at an end."

General John Pope  
LN-0935

After securing the captives, Sibley reported to General Pope that he immediately "issued an order appointing a military commission, consisting of ... Colonel [William] Crooks, Lieutenant-Colonel [William] Marshall, and Captain [Hiram] Grant, for the examination of all the men, half-breeds as well as Indians, in the camp near us, with instructions to sift the [background] of each, so that if there are guilty parties among them they can be arrested and properly dealt with." Rev. Stephen R. Riggs,

who had been a missionary to the Dakota and accompanied Sibley's force as chaplain, was also involved in investigating possible charges. There was a general assumption in Minnesota that almost all the captured women had been raped, and the commission members appear to have believed that female captives would be more comfortable discussing sexual mistreatment with a man of the cloth rather than a panel of militia officers. One of the captives, Sarah Wakefield, described the process as follows: "In the afternoon they had a sort of court of inquiry, and we [captives] were all questioned by Col. Crooks and [Lt. Col.] Marshal (sic), ... [Rev.] S.R. Riggs and others. I was the first one questioned. I related to them briefly what [happened] ..., after which, Col. Marshall said 'If you have anything of a more private nature to relate, you can communicate it to Mr. Riggs.' I did not understand until he explained himself more fully. I told them it was just as I related, it was all. They thought it very strange I had no complaints to make, but did not appear to believe me."



General Sibley  
7120099406503

On September 28, Colonel Sibley issued an order converting the military commission from an investigating body to a trial court. Two additional members were added, Captain Hiram Bailey and First Lieutenant Rollin Olin, and the commission was directed to "try summarily" those brought before it and "pass judgment upon them, if found guilty of murders or

other outrages." A local lawyer and volunteer militiaman, Isaac Heard, was detailed to record the trial proceedings, and the results were to be reported to Sibley for review. Finally, Sibley's order instructed the commission members to "be governed in their proceedings by Military Law and usage."

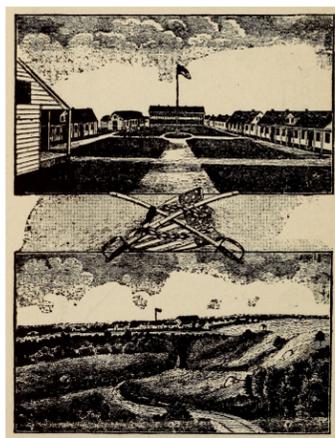
Unfortunately, none of the members knew very much about military law and usage. That included the senior member, or president, of the commission, Colonel Crooks. Although he had attended West Point (class of 1854), he left the Academy before graduating to pursue a career as a civil engineer.

The trials began on September 28 at Camp Release, the military post where the captives were first received. Initially the commission proceeded carefully. By October 4, twenty-nine trials had been held, but shortly thereafter Colonel Sibley made a decision that greatly expanded the commission's case load. According to Isaac Heard, as a result of the "evidence before the commission indicating that the whole (Dakota) nation was involved in the war," he ordered all the Dakota men who had surrendered to be disarmed, arrested and brought before the commission, which now had to deal with almost 400 defendants. A standard form of charge was developed and reproduced, with a blank space for the name of the accused:

*"In this that the said \_\_\_\_\_, Sioux Indian did join with and participate in the murders, outrages and robberies committed on the Minnesota Frontier by the Sioux Tribe of Indians between the 18th day of August 1862 and the 28th day of September 1862 and particularly in the Battles at the Fort, Birch-Coulie [sic], New Ulm and Wood Lake."*

This form gave the accused no effective notice of the real charges against him. Moreover, under this charge a Dakota man could be convicted and sentenced to death for simply participating in battles against white soldiers, such as the

two attacks on Ft. Ridgely or the final battle at Wood Lake. As Isaac Heard explained, all that was required for conviction was evidence, or an admission by the accused, "that he had fired in the battles, or brought ammunition, or acted as commissary in supplying provisions to the combatants."



Recollections of the Sioux Massacre pg 38  
71200908407157

By November 5, the commission had tried 397 persons and sentenced 307 to death. Sixteen, who had not participated in battles or raped or murdered civilians, were sentenced to prison for looting. The last 272 cases were tried in ten days. Sometimes forty cases were disposed of in one day, and death sentences imposed after trials lasting five minutes.

Sibley, by now a Brigadier General, approved all but one of the death sentences. However, he had earlier told General Pope that he was "somewhat in doubt whether my authority extends quite so far" as to order the executions to be carried out, and therefore requested guidance from Pope. Sibley's doubts were justified. In the summer of 1862 Congress had passed an act providing that in courts-martial and military commission trials, "no sentence of death, or imprisonment in the penitentiary, shall be carried into execution until the same shall have been approved by the President." In the evening of November 7, General Pope telegraphed President Lincoln the names of 300 Dakota who had been condemned to hang. He began the telegram by

informing the President that the, "following named Indians have been condemned to be hung by the military commission assembled at the Lower Sioux Agency for the massacre [sic] of men & women & Brutal violating of women & young Girls in the late Indian outrages in Minn." The lengthy telegram cost the U.S. government \$414.04. The President read the telegram the next day and two days later directed Pope to, "forward as soon as possible the full and complete record of their convictions; and if the record does not fully indicate the more guilty and influential of the culprits, please have a careful statement made on these points and forwarded to me."

Tweaking Pope for his long telegram, President Lincoln added, "Send all by mail." The General, never known for his reticence, shot back the next day that "the only distinction between the culprits is as to which of them murdered most people or violated most young girls[;] all of them are guilty of these things in more or less degree." Pope's certainty on this point is remarkable, since the records of trial did not arrive at his headquarters in St. Paul until several days later, on November 15.

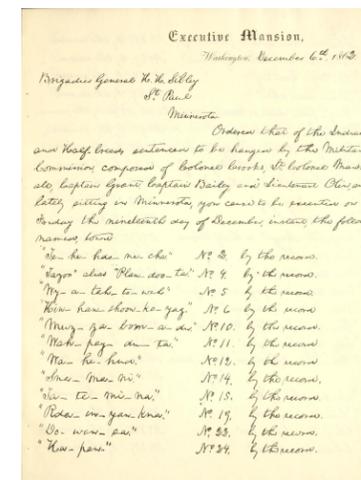
Lincoln's decision to review the Dakota trial records has taken on a certain mythic quality, stressing the time and care the busy President personally devoted to the 300 records of trial condemning to death members of a people despised by their white neighbors. For example, David Herbert Donald wrote that

*"... the President deliberately went through the record of each convicted man, seeking to identify those who had been guilty of the most atrocious crimes, especially murder of innocent farmers and rape."*

More recently, William Lee Miller described how Lincoln "personally - in the midst of Civil War pressures and woes - went through the records, one by one, of the convicted Sioux," and "worked through the transcripts for a month." Unfortunately, the chronology does not allow for the extensive examination by the

President described by Lincoln's biographers. According to Chaplain Riggs, he delivered the 300 records of trial to Pope's headquarters on November 15.

The President reported to the Senate on December 11 that the records of trial were not received at the White House until "two or three days before the present meeting of Congress," on December 1. That would put the date of arrival at November 27 at the earliest. On November 26 and 27, Lincoln was visiting the Army of the Potomac to confer with its new commander, General Burnside, so the earliest he would have seen the records was probably November 28. Lincoln's telegram to General Sibley approving 39 executions was dated December 6, so at most Lincoln and his advisers had nine days to sift through 300 case files.



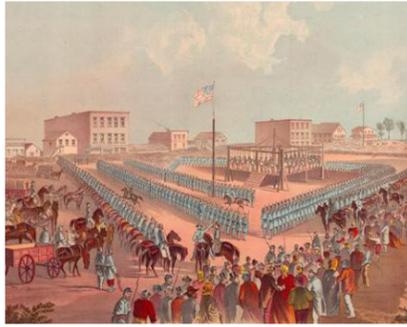
Lincoln's Response  
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When he first glanced at the records of trial, the President was undoubtedly appalled. From years of legal practice before the Illinois courts, and his review of courts-martial and military commissions as president, he knew what a proper record of trial looked like. In contrast, the Minnesota records were a mess, hastily written on sheets of paper of different sizes and colors, even on half sheets torn in two. Some records had obvious defects, such as a failure to record that witnesses had been sworn in before testifying.

Having requested the trial records, the President found he did not have the time, or perhaps the desire, to deal with the messy and politically divisive issues they raised. Minnesota had been a solidly Republican state, but when it was revealed that the President was even considering clemency for the Dakota, there was massive public outrage. Governor Ramsey wired the President that if Lincoln didn't want to approve the hangings, Ramsey was willing to do it for him. General Sibley, who had ordered the trials and approved the sentences, was a Democrat and a local hero for having rescued the captives. The Republicans had already suffered electoral losses in the fall of 1862, following the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation.

Reviewing these records was the last thing the President needed as Congress reconvened and General Burnside prepared to attack Lee's army at Fredericksburg. Lincoln asked his adviser on military law, Judge Advocate General Joseph Holt, whether he could delegate the task of approving the sentences to a subordinate; Holt replied that he could not.

Two subordinate officials, Francis A. Ruggles of the State Department and George C. Whiting of the Interior Department, were called to the White House to examine the records and ascertain which defendants had committed rape and to determine "those who were proven to have participated in massacres as distinguished from participation in battles." Applying these criteria, Ruggles and Whiting reported back on December 5 a list of 40 names, two of whom had been convicted of both rape and murder, and the rest of murder. The next day, the President, having decided to accept the military commission's recommendation to commute one prisoner's death sentence to imprisonment, wrote a telegram to Sibley approving the execution of 39 Dakota. Another defendant later received executive clemency, and the remaining 38 were hanged at Mankato on December 26.



Execution of the 38 Sioux Indians  
71.2009.081.1731

Lincoln did not refer the records to Judge Advocate General Holt for a legal review as was the usual practice for military death sentences. As fortune would have it, on November 27, 1862, Holt began prosecuting the court-martial of General Fitz John Porter, a task that would fully occupy him until the following January. While both Ruggles and Whiting were lawyers, they were merely asked to determine whether any of the defendants merited executive clemency, based on the President's instructions, and not to determine the legality of the proceedings. However, the President's instructions to them embodied an important legal principle. In effect, Lincoln decided to treat the Dakota warriors the same way Confederate soldiers were treated. If captured, the latter were not punished for treason or murdering Union soldiers in battle, but held as prisoners of war. Similarly, the Dakota who had merely participated in battles would be kept in custody, but not punished for combat against armed whites.

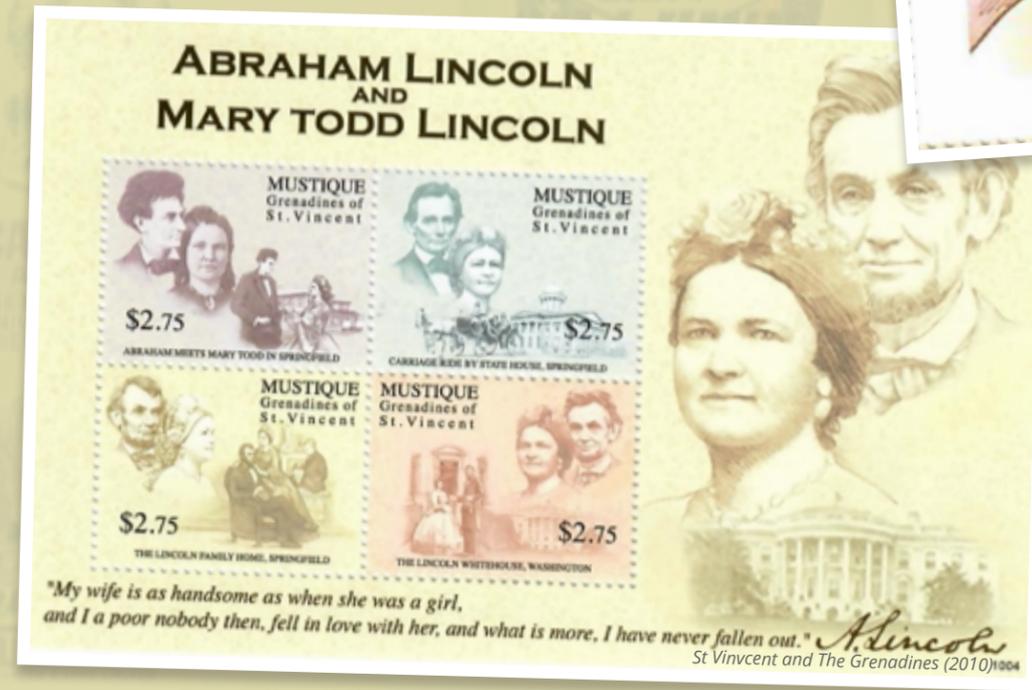
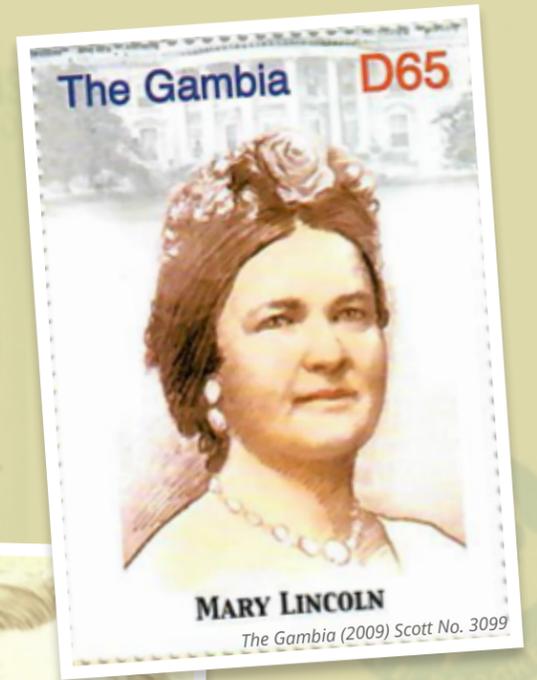
One may wonder why Ruggles and Whiting, two undistinguished mid-level bureaucrats, were selected to review the records. There is a suggestive precedent from earlier in 1862. On February 27, Secretary of War Stanton, "by order of the President," appointed General John Dix and Edwards Pierrepont to examine the cases of all political prisoners being held without trial, "to determine whether in view of the public safety and the existing rebellion they should be discharged or remain in military custody."

Dix was a Democrat and Pierrepont a Republican, thereby insulating the administration from charges that prisoners were released or held based on their political persuasion. Similarly, Ruggles was a Republican politician, a former Whig and Know-Nothing who played an important role in merging the New York Know-Nothings into the state Republican Party. Whiting was a Democrat, having been appointed to a patronage position by President Van Buren in 1838, and promoted to Commissioner of Pensions in 1857 by President Buchanan. He must have had anti-slavery credentials, since the Lincoln administration retained him to coordinate the prosecution of slave traders.

Again, the administration was insulated against accusations that it overturned 262 death sentences because Sibley was a Democrat, or that by this unpopular act Lincoln had failed to take the interests of the Minnesota Republican Party into account. Even after the hangings, President Lincoln continued to avoid the issue. In March 1863, on a visit to Washington, Governor Ramsey asked the President what he would do about the Dakota still in military custody. He replied that "it was a disagreeable subject but he would take it up and dispose of it." He never did. He may have found the subject even more disagreeable a few days later, when a letter arrived from Sarah Wakefield, who reported that a Dakota man, who had saved her life and the lives of her children when they were captives, had been hanged by mistake, in place of a man with a similar name who had murdered a woman. For whatever reason, Lincoln could never bring himself to decide the fate of all the captive Dakota, and many were still in custody at his death. As predicted by some of their leaders, the Dakota eventually lost all their land in Minnesota and were moved to a barren reservation in the Dakota Territory.

**Burrus Carnahan is Adjunct Professor of Law at George Washington University in Washington, DC.**

*This article was originally published in the August 2012 issue of the Lincoln Cottage Newsletter.*



# GETTING RIGHT WITH MARY TODD LINCOLN

*by William D. Pederson*

George and Martha, Abraham and Mary Todd, Franklin and Eleanor, Jack and Jackie, legendary First Couples so familiar to the public that their names blend into one. The near-universal recognition of Abraham and Mary Todd, the high profile Team Lincoln, includes the large number of books written about both Mary Todd and Abraham. In fact, Lincoln, who captured the presidency with considerable help from his politically savvy and ambitious spouse, is the subject of more books than any other democratic political leader in world history. Sharply contrasting how this early “power couple” is remembered in millions of written words is their philatelic legacy, their pictorial tributes on the ubiquitous postage stamp. Lincoln is one of the most prominent American presidents in philately; Mary Todd’s absence from postage stamps in North America, including the United States, is a notable contrast. This paper attempts to explain why Mary Todd has not been honored with even one postage stamp in North America, and it will review the change in perception about her, a dramatic shift that has occurred in recent decades.

### Changing Historical Minds

After ratification in 1920 of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, women journalists and historians began to re-assess the traditional view of Mary Todd that had been chiseled onto the pages of history by male historians and perpetuated by subsequent male historians. They portrayed her unkindly as an additional burden for “Saint Abraham” to bear during the American Civil War. In the wake of Abraham’s assassination in her presence and her abrupt removal from the Executive Mansion, she was committed to an asylum by her only surviving son, an indelible social stigma. Her post-First Lady circumstances became fodder for sexist jokes at professional conferences—then exclusively male. Later, Hollywood movies magnified her situation on the big screen. The plight she faced as a widow especially underscored the U.S. Constitution’s silence about a role for the presidential spouse. Yet, in

the next century Eleanor Roosevelt, another strong-willed First Lady, did not let the lack of constitutional definition prevent her from further transformation of that nebulous role into an important new one. She championed relief for Americans suffering from the Great Depression by using her voice and position to endorse her husband’s novel “New Deal” as an antidote to the impoverishment and subsequent social upheaval that wracked the nation. Considered the first modern president of the Twentieth Century, Franklin’s bold programs helped to secure his place in presidential history. Today, he consistently ranks among the top three presidents in polls of scholars. Eleanor is number one among First Ladies.

Her expansion of the First Lady’s role, co-commitment with the rise of the modern American female, was foundational for the belated fresh evaluation of Mary Todd that historians commenced beginning in the late 1980s and continued into the Twenty-first Century. As a result of revisions in the pre-existing assessment, Mary Todd was recast as a genuine role model for Eleanor Roosevelt, Jackie Kennedy and the First Ladies who followed them. Mary Todd’s considerable influence was reinforced by the conclusion of journalist and multi-volume biographer Sidney Blumenthal: without Mary Todd there would be no Abraham Lincoln.

### Mary Todd Philately Abroad

Abraham Lincoln, the autodidactic frontiersman, talked about traveling abroad. He never did. Nonetheless, his enduring democratic imprint continues to be felt in every part of the world. Unlike her husband, Mary Todd traveled abroad. Like Jack Kennedy, Lincoln couldn’t speak French. Mary Todd, however, spoke French. And Jackie famously spoke it to adoring crowds on an official trip to France, prompting President Kennedy to quip that he was the man who accompanied Jackie Kennedy to France.

Lincoln never traveled beyond America’s borders, but his legacy did. There are stamps, schools and streets around the world that honor him. North America, Europe, the Middle East and Asia all have issued stamps honoring Abraham, but not Mary Todd. However, in Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific Islands, her image has appeared on stamps in nations that accord her the same honor as they have bestowed on Abraham.

Central America was the first to put Mary Todd on its stamps. In a scene depicting the assassination at Ford’s Theatre, a Honduran stamp shows her throwing her arms in the air in horror as her husband is shot. These airmail stamps were issued as part of an eleven-stamp series showing different scenes that were to commemorate the centennial of Lincoln’s presidency. They were re-issued twice. The first re-issue occurred in 1963, overprinted with the date of Kennedy’s assassination. In 1964 they were again re-issued during the Olympic games.



Honduras Scott No. CO108a (1964)  
Souvenir Sheet

The revision of the historical verdict about her occurred in the 1960s, the fraught decade that separates the “old Mary Todd” as traditionally depicted by male historians from the more nuanced Mary Todd that emerged with the rise of female biographers. They came to see her as a victim, but did not limit her to a single dimension. Instead, they portrayed her as an equal in her marriage, the First Lady who did more in the Executive Mansion than

any of her predecessors, and the pioneering First Lady who established the model for her successors.

During the turbulent ‘60s when there was global upheaval of status quo, so-called “third world” countries were challenging institutionalized colonialism and racism, and, to a lesser degree, sexism. That societal recalibration is reflected especially in “the new Mary Todd” featured on postage stamps abroad that originated from Africa to the Pacific Islands to the Caribbean during, as well as after, the bicentennial of Lincoln’s birth in 2009.

The best example from Africa comes from The Gambia in western sub-Saharan Africa, which gained independence from the British in 1965. Davida Jawaru became its first president as a republic (1970-1994) and set a Lincolnesque democratic precedent for The Gambia, unlike in many newly independent African nations. From that foundation, The Gambia became one of the most enduring democratic political cultures in Africa. In 2009, The Gambia set the precedent of issuing a series of stamps that featured consecutive First Ladies of the United States, similar to the U.S. presidential stamp series.



The Gambia (2009)  
Scott No. 3099

A second series of First Lady stamps was launched in 2017 (Scott No. 3740). The most impressive stamps and souvenir sheet, however, was issued in 2015. The first of the four stamps in the souvenir sheet showed Mary with sons Robert and Tad. The stamps were acknowledgement of Mary’s international stature as former First Lady of the United States.

The tribute to both parties in the Lincoln marriage next surfaced in the South Pacific during Lincoln’s Bicentennial. The souvenir sheet was an unprecedented attempt to portray a timeline of his life. The four stamps each show a portrait of Lincoln at different points in his life while the background on the souvenir sheet includes First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln in the upper right corner and notes the Lincolns marriage in 1842. In the lower right corner, Mary Todd is partly visible sitting next to Lincoln at Ford’s Theatre, a less dramatic assassination scene than appeared on the 1960 Honduran stamp.

Palau comprises hundreds of islands spread over three million square miles in the western Pacific Ocean, but only eight islands are inhabited. First a Spanish colony in 1710, it became a German colony in 1898, followed by Japanese control after World War I. After World War II, Palau was under U.S. administration through the United Nations Trusteeship. It became the Republic of Palau in 1980 and in 1994 became the last territory in the United Nations Trusteeship to achieve independence.

Located near Palau are more than six hundred islands, collectively the Federated States of Micronesia. Like Palau they once were a Spanish colony before becoming a German one in 1899, and then Japanese from World War I until 1947 when it became a trust colony of the United Nations and placed under U.S. administration. Full independence was finally achieved in 1991. Its 2010 souvenir sheet features four Lincoln stamps. One is a portrait of Lincoln delivering the Gettysburg Address and another shows him reading the Emancipation Proclamation. Also in the group, for the first time on a stamp Mary Todd and Abraham Lincoln photographs appear side by side. There are no known photographs of them together.

The most elaborate Mary Todd presentation on a stamp to date is from Latin America. It shows eight images of the couple together as well as a Lincoln quote praising Mary

Todd. Mustique, a part of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, located in the middle of the Caribbean Islands, issued the stamps. St. Vincent is the largest island and about one hundred smaller islands make up the Grenadines. The British took over St. Vincent in the 1760s, the French in 1779 and the British again in 1783 until St. Vincent gained independence in 1979. These Lincoln stamps suggest the Lincolns were equals.



St Vincent and Grenadines (2010)

### Conclusions

Just as the Old South had to “get right” with Abraham Lincoln, historians both North and South had to do the same with Mary Todd. To a large degree that was achieved in the biographies by Jean Baker, Catherine Clinton, and Stacy McDermott.

In short, Abraham and Mary Todd each learned from the other and they treated each other as equals well before the presidency. When he became president, Abraham insisted upon completion of the Capitol Dome as a symbol of American democracy. Similarly, Mary Todd insisted on transforming the Executive Mansion into a suitable residence for the president, another democratic symbol. However, back in Illinois, she had known that the first step on her journey to the Executive Mansion was to insist on transforming her backwoods spouse to make him presentable in public.

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# A NEW LINCOLN DISCOVERY

*Family of Lincoln enthusiast finds unprecedented autograph collection & Lincoln-related items*

*by Jason Emerson*

Some new Lincoln relics have surfaced recently, owned by the family of a man who had met and “known” Abraham Lincoln and had spent decades traveling the world talking about the Great Emancipator. While today we all carry cell phones in our pockets and record life in selfies, this man, Rev. Francis D. Blakeslee, traveled through his later life with an autograph book in his pocket, and met some of the most important and fascinating people of his generation. His book contains not only Abraham Lincoln’s signature (and five other US presidents), but also a number of signatures connected to the Lincoln family, the Civil War, and the 1865 assassination. A second book owned by Blakeslee describes how he acquired many of the autographs, a Lincoln-signed envelope, and a unique 1860 Republican Party Lincoln badge. Blakeslee also left for posterity numerous written recollections of his meetings with and sightings of the great Civil War president, including one experience that historians have since used to verify Lincoln’s location on the afternoon of his assassination. Like most such discoveries of previously unseen historical artifacts, Blakeslee’s family had these items in their possession but only found them about 10 years ago, and did not really understand the importance of what they had. Nobody outside their family has seen the artifacts since probably the 1930s.

## Who was Francis Blakeslee?

Blakeslee was known for much of his life as a national authority on Abraham Lincoln. He spoke across the country and around the world on Lincoln, wrote two booklets and numerous articles, and was labeled during his life as one of the last people to see Abraham Lincoln alive on the day of his assassination. “I probably have had more contacts with Mr. Lincoln than any man living,” Blakeslee said in 1939.

Francis Durbin Blakeslee was born Feb. 1, 1846, in Vestal, N.Y. During the Civil War, being too young to enlist without his parents’ permission, he was quartermaster’s clerk in the 50th New York engineers in Rappahannock

Station, Va., in 1863-64, and a clerk in the quartermaster-general’s office at Washington, D.C. in 1864-65. After the war, he got married and had three children. He became an ordained Methodist Episcopal minister in 1870. Blakeslee served in numerous positions as educator, administrator, and pastor throughout his life; he was also an ardent temperance advocate, and served many years as superintendent of the Binghamton, NY chapter of the Anti-Saloon League. During his life, Blakeslee traveled the world — and lectured as he went. During his early years, his main topic was prohibition and the evils of alcohol. Starting in the 1920s, Blakeslee’s lectures began to mix his views on temperance with his belief in Abraham Lincoln’s disdain of liquor. Finally, his lectures came to focus solely on his personal recollections of Abraham Lincoln and his belief in the Great Emancipator’s historical worth. Blakeslee was also an inveterate writer. He contributed articles to newspapers across the U.S. in which he detailed his national and world travels as well as his connections to Abraham Lincoln. In the 1920s, after he moved to California from Binghamton, he wrote articles about numerous subjects, including a detailed description of his visit to Lincoln’s Home in Illinois and his personal recollections of Abraham Lincoln.



Lincoln Home LFA-0391

## Blakeslee and Lincoln

While a clerk in the War Department in 1864-65, Blakeslee saw Lincoln often, as the president was a regular visitor. But mostly, the 18-year-old clerk saw Lincoln at public functions and in public places. He saw the president sometimes at the theater, outside the White House, at church, and at public events while Lincoln

gave speeches. “While engaged in my position as a clerk in the Quartermaster General’s Office, I had many excellent opportunities of seeing Lincoln, and in fact I had often met him,” Blakeslee wrote in 1909.

But certain moments stood out to Blakeslee, and these he spoke of often in his Lincoln talks. One such moment was how his father, Rev. George H. Blakeslee, a Methodist minister from Binghamton, met the president and obtained his autograph. The senior Blakeslee was on leave from his pastoral duties in response to a call from the U.S. Christian Commission asking all men of the cloth to go to the front and minister to soldiers on the battlefields and in the hospitals, and to hold religious services among the troops. George did this from Oct. 4 to Nov. 4 and, stopping in Washington on his way home from the battlefields to visit his son Francis, decided to call upon the president at the White House.

According to the elder Blakeslee’s dairy, he watched the president interact with a number of people — and his reactions are not what modern-day people would expect of the historic figure who is typically characterized as almost Christ-like in his kindness and forgiveness:

“Four young men approached the president who were anxious to get his aid relative to a matter which I did not understand. But Mr. Lincoln, who was seated in his chair, replied to them kindly but firmly, ‘I can do nothing for you.’ When they urged that their papers should be read, he replied, ‘I should not remember if I did. The papers can be put into their proper places and go through their proper channels.’

A lady next appeared and presented a paper. He took it out and read it and replied, ‘This will not do. I can do nothing for your husband.’ ‘Why not?’ said the lady. ‘Because,’ said Mr. Lincoln, ‘he is not loyal.’ ‘But he intends to be; he wants to take the oath of allegiance.’ ‘That is the way with all who get into prison,’ replied the President. ‘I can do nothing for you.’ ‘But you would,’ said the lady,

if you knew my circumstances.' 'No, I would not. I am under no obligation to provide for the wives of disloyal husbands.'"

After watching Lincoln's interactions, George Blakeslee and his companion, Rev. E.W. Breckinridge (no relation to John C. Breckinridge, one of the four candidates for President in 1860, which the reverend told Lincoln when they met), watched Lincoln dispatch another widow in the same way, then shook hands with the president, and Blakeslee asked for the president's signature. Lincoln "cheerfully" gave his autograph "For G.H. Blakeslee" in a memorandum book of the Christian Commission, given to George as one of the delegates of that service.

"I treasure as prized possessions the leather-bound book which contains the autograph inscription in Lincoln's own hand, and my father's diary relating how he secured this precious memento that memorable day," Francis wrote in a 1927. In a later newspaper article he stated, "The ink is as black as the day it was written." Francis also saw the president as an official visitor himself on Jan. 2, 1865, with two women from his boarding house. "Shook his paw with gusto," Francis wrote in his diary.

Three months after meeting the president, Blakeslee was present for what would become Lincoln's last two public addresses before his death, which he delivered from a second-story window of the White House on April 10 and 11, 1865 shortly after Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee had surrendered his army to Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse on April 9.

In the April 10 speech, Lincoln responded to calls for impromptu remarks by declining, and promising he would speak the next day. The April 11 speech was "long and formal," read from a written draft, and delivered to "an immense throng of people, who with bands, banners, and loud huzzahs, poured into the semi-circular avenue in front of the Executive Mansion," wrote reporter Noah Brooks. Lincoln's remarks that night focused on the topic of Reconstruction, especially as it

related to the state of Louisiana. Within that speech, Lincoln expressed his support for black suffrage for the first time in public. Francis Blakeslee was at the White House and part of the immense crowds cheering Lincoln at the successful conclusion of the war. In his diary that night, Blakeslee's anticlimactic description of that momentous April 11 speech simply stated, "It was about 20 minutes long and related to the problems confronting the nation at that crisis of its history, and may be found today among his published writings."



Navy Yard  
LN-0112

Blakeslee also saw Lincoln on the afternoon of April 14, 1865 — the day the president was assassinated. Blakeslee and a few of his friends had gone to the Navy Yard to admire the ironclad ships damaged in the battle at Fort Fisher, and which were docked for repairs. As the friends stood on a platform in the Yard, the president and Mrs. Lincoln drove up in their carriage and stopped at the opposite end of the platform. "We saluted, and the salute was returned," Blakeslee wrote. He also told a correspondent in 1910 that it was between 5 and 6 o'clock that day that he saw the Lincolns at the Navy Yard. "He and Mrs. Lincoln came there in their carriage on their afternoon drive. They came within a rod or two of where I was and I saluted him," Blakeslee wrote.

Blakeslee recounted that in later years he met former Speaker of the House and former Vice President Schuyler Colfax following one of Colfax's lectures on Lincoln. "Mr. Colfax told me that he knew for a fact that I saw the great man later than did any of his Cabinet. He said to me, 'I know where they all were

that day and evening, and not one of them saw Mr. Lincoln as late as you did.' No credit to me; only one of the accidents or incidents of my early manhood. 'But I am ahead of you,' he continued; 'I was talking with him at the White House when he entered the carriage to go to the theater.'"



Colfax  
LN-0465

Decades later, Blakeslee was told by Lincoln scholars that the "disputed question" of where the Lincolns actually took their final carriage ride on that fateful day seemed to hinge on his own testimony, with nobody apparently knowing that they even went to the Navy Yard until Blakeslee made it known. His story is recounted — either by quoting his 27-page monograph, "Personal Recollections and Impressions of Abraham Lincoln," or by his correspondence — by Lincoln scholars John W. Starr (New Light on Lincoln's Last Day, 1926), Rufus Rockwell Wilson (Intimate Memories of Lincoln, 1945) and W. Emerson Reck (A. Lincoln His Last 24 hours, 1987).

That night, April 14, 1865, Blakeslee went to bed early in his lodging just down the street from Ford's Theatre. Despite the noise and crowds out on the street that night after the president had been shot and lay dying in a boarding house on 14th Street, Blakeslee slept through the entire event. The next morning, he went to his usual restaurant for breakfast and noticed it was unusually quiet. "While the waitress was filling my order, the only other man at my table turned his daily papers — and then I read the black headlines telling me of the awful event of the night before," he wrote in his diary. "My father, living hundreds of miles away ... knew of the tragedy

before I did."



Lincoln's body at the White House  
71.2009.081.0304

While Lincoln's body lay in state in the White House, Blakeslee stood in line for hours and eventually got in. He stood by the casket and "looked into the cold face of him whom I had saluted in life a few hours previously." As a civil servant, Blakeslee also watched and participated in the grand funeral procession of the president's remains down Pennsylvania Avenue from the White House to the Capitol on April 19. He also spent two days attending the military trial of the assassination conspirators on the third floor of the Old Arsenal Penitentiary (nowadays on the grounds of Fort Lesley J. McNair). Blakeslee also met, on May 2, 1865 — six days after Lincoln's assassin John Wilkes Booth was killed by Union troops — Boston Corbett, the soldier who killed the actor. Blakeslee said he was at a regular class meeting at McKendree Chapel (Now McKendree United Methodist Church, on Lawrence Street NE in Washington, DC) when he noticed a stranger present, who turned out to be Corbett. "I had a chat with him, got his autograph. He told me what I never saw in print, that the gun with which he shot Booth and for which he had been offered over \$1,000, when he went to get it to loan to the Sanitary Commission Fair at Chicago, it was stolen," Blakeslee wrote.

Coincidentally, more than 30 years later, Blakeslee serendipitously met more people with direct connections to Abraham Lincoln, including his only surviving son, Robert. When Blakeslee became president of Iowa Wesleyan University in 1898, the president of the board that elected him (and the university's former president), was former U.S. Senator James Harlan,

who had been a personal friend of President Lincoln and had been named a cabinet member shortly before the assassination. Harlan was also the father-in-law of Robert T. Lincoln, the oldest and only surviving son of Abraham and Mary Lincoln. When Harlan died in 1899, Blakeslee spoke at the funeral in the college chapel. During the funeral, he met Robert Lincoln and his wife, Mary Harlan Lincoln and, a few years later, interviewed Robert in Chicago when Lincoln was president of the Pullman Car Company.

### Blakeslee's autograph collection

Francis Blakeslee's autograph book, as mentioned above, was an 1864 memorandum book given to his father, George H. Blakeslee, as a member of the U.S. Christian Commission. George started the practice of obtaining autographs in the book not with President Lincoln, but with Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, whose signature — along with the signatures of 11 members of his senior staff: Brig Gen. John A. Rawlins, Gen. O.E. Babcock, Lt. Col. Theodore S. Bowers, Lt. Col. E.S. Parker; Lt. Col. W.S. Duff; Lt. Col. M.R. Morgan, Lt. Col. Cyrus B. Comstock, Lt. Col. Adam Badeau, Brig. Gen. Rufus Ingalls, Gen. John C. Barnard, and Lt. J.H. Oberteuffer, Jr. — George obtained during his time in the field when he stopped at Union headquarters in City Point, Va.

While the autograph book — about 5x7 in size, rebound in the 1930s in black leather, but with worn, browned pages — contains signatures of people from all walks of life from across the globe, there is a certain Lincoln-centric aspect to it. In addition to Lincoln and Grant, autographs Blakeslee obtained include poets Edwin Markham (Oct. 13, 1913) and Carl Sandburg (January 1937), both of whom wrote about Abraham Lincoln, and E.J. Edward, the daughter of the sister of Col. E. D. Baker, one of Lincoln's close friends. There are also Lincoln-related signatures that should be in Blakeslee's book, but are not. In his many writings, Blakeslee said he obtained the autographs of James Harlan and Boston Corbett, but neither is in there. Blakeslee

never said he got Robert Lincoln's autograph, but it seems highly unlikely that he would have met Lincoln's son at least twice and never asked for his signature. However, Robert's signature is also not in Blakeslee's book.

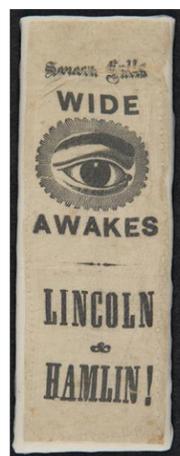
Perhaps the most amazing set of names that should be in the memo book but are not are the members of the nine-member military tribunal that tried the Lincoln assassination conspirators in May-June 1865. In his writings, Blakeslee said he attended two days of the assassins' trial and, while there, he obtained the autographs of every judge by passing his autograph book across the bar. Again, those signatures are not in the book. A Binghamton newspaper, recording an interview with Blakeslee in April 1909 for the centennial of Lincoln's birth, mentioned Blakeslee's securing of the assassination trial judges' signatures and called it, "what is considered to be one of the most valuable mementoes in the United States." The article stated, "It is doubtful if there is a duplicate of this collection in the country, and needless to say Dr. Blakeslee prizes it highly. In the same collection is a signature of Lincoln which was secured not a great while before the assassination."



Old Arsenal - Execution of Lincoln Conspirators  
LN-1490

Why none of these autographs are in Blakeslee's book, although they should be, is unknown. However, there are four pages in the book that have been neatly excised. It is logical to conclude that the signatures were on those pages and Blakeslee, or maybe one of his descendants, at some point cut them out. Blakeslee's current living relatives have no idea about the missing pages.

Blakeslee often referred to his autograph book in his Lincoln lectures, and more than once he pulled the book out of his pocket to regale his audience with the book that Lincoln signed. In August 1934, the Poughkeepsie Eagle-News mentioned Blakeslee's autograph book, starting with the news that the Los Angeles-based man had brought his book to the city and, while there, taken it to a local bindery for repairs. "A little black memorandum book has been handled gingerly these past two days at the Glendon Bates book bindery company. So highly is it regarded that it has reposed for the greater part of 48 hours in a huge fire-proof safe," the article stated. "The yellowish, almost brittle pages saw the light yesterday when the press representative of a neighboring summer theater saw in it the value of a drama 'news story.' It contained drama of the past, but its interest may be even greater in the future."



Wide Awakes  
71.2009.082.0183

The article also describes as "probably the most interesting bit of Lincoln memorabilia" in the book is the 1860 Wide Awake Lincoln-Hamlin campaign ribbon, which is tucked in a clear folder inside the front cover. Blakeslee told the reporter that the badge may have been worn at the Republican nominating convention in 1860. Blakeslee wrote in one of his articles that he spent decades researching the 1860 Wide Awake campaign ribbon and never found another like it, nor anyone who

had ever seen or heard of a similar ribbon. He believed his ribbon may be the only one of its kind in existence. "I have been investigating it for 15 years," he wrote in 1936, "holding it up before G.A.R. posts, and other audiences asking for a duplicate, without avail. The four great collections of Lincolniana haven't it. Those badges and buttons of such organizations are almost never preserved. How this one came to be saved I cannot tell." James Cornelius, former Lincoln curator at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Ill., said the campaign ribbon is "highly unusual" and one that he has never seen before — although there is no way to say if it is indeed one-of-a-kind.

In addition to the Lincoln-related signatures that are (or are supposed to be) in the Blakeslee autograph book, there are numerous others from different years and numerous places around the world. The approximately 50 pages of autographs in Blakeslee's book contain the names of many famous world characters. The presidents in the book include not only Lincoln and Grant (although Grant's signature was obtained before he was president) but also William Howard Taft, Theodore Roosevelt, Herbert Hoover, and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Other American political names in the book include U.S. Senator Hiram Johnson and 19th century U.S. Senators Daniel Webster, Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun. There are also world leaders, soldiers, scientists, explorers, and entertainers.

Blakeslee also created a second, hand-written book in which he described the circumstances in which he obtained some of these signatures. His description of meeting Taft is interesting in that he stated that he told the former president, "I have with me tonight the autograph of Abraham Lincoln and I want to couple you on with Abraham Lincoln." As I extended my fountain pen and the autograph album. "I should be most happy," was his reply and he proceeded to write his name. Blakeslee also intrigued Theodore Roosevelt and got his signature in

the book in a similar way. A Blakeslee associate called on the former president at his home in Oyster Bay, N.Y., a few months before Roosevelt's death. Blakeslee said that Roosevelt, an ardent Lincoln admirer, was "more interested in the [1860 campaign] badge than in anything else in the book. I believe that he had never seen one like it."

#### The Blakeslee family artifacts

Blakeslee's autograph book and accompanying artifacts have been in his family's possession since the 1860s — or more than 150 years. Francis stated more than once that he found his father's memo book and personal diary in the attic after George's death. Apparently, Francis' children likewise kept all his items. His great-grandchildren found the Blakeslee autograph book on a bookshelf in the Blakeslee family home about ten years ago and, when they were cleaning the house out after their grandparents' death, they made sure to take the book with them.

In addition to Francis Blakeslee's autograph books and Lincoln campaign badge, another family member owns additional historic family heirlooms, including a photograph of Abraham Lincoln that once belonged to her great-great grandfather Francis. The photo is mounted in a frame along with an envelope addressed to R.S. Thomas, Esq., with return address signed by A. Lincoln. There is no visible date, postal stamp, or address visible on the envelope, as it has faded from decades of exposure to sunlight. Richard Symmes Thomas was a lawyer in Virginia, Illinois, and an active Whig. The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln show that Lincoln wrote to Thomas in the 1840s and early 1850s, including when Lincoln was a member of Congress in 1847-49.

#### Blakeslee's final years

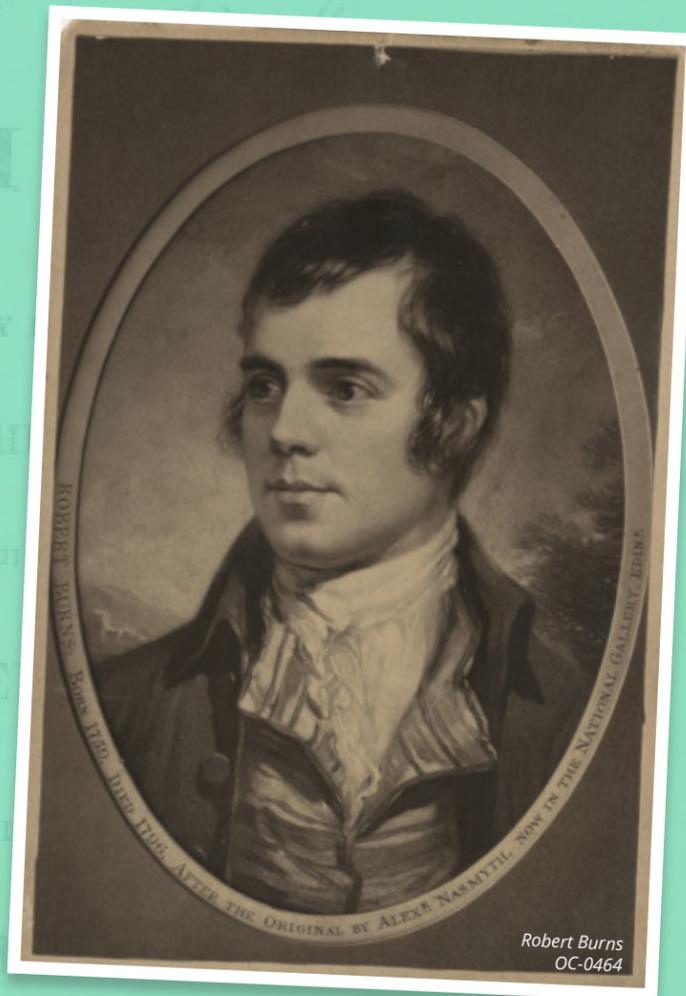
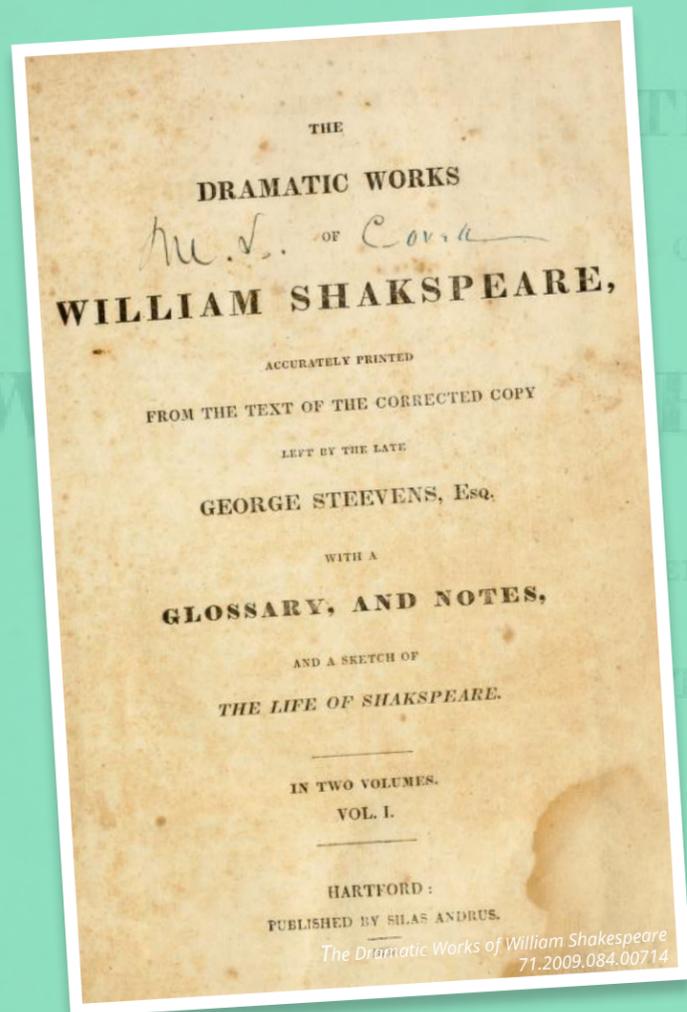
Francis Blakeslee was a prolific writer, speaker and traveler. After moving with his wife to California in the 1920s, Blakeslee criss-crossed

the country preaching, and speaking about prohibitionism and Abraham Lincoln. It was in the 1920s that Blakeslee printed his two Lincoln-related pamphlets, and during that decade and the next he continually submitted articles to newspapers across the country. By the 1930s and early 1940s, Blakeslee was known nationwide not only as a Lincoln scholar and lecturer, but as the oldest living person to have met Abraham Lincoln, shaken his hand, heard him speak, seen the funeral, and more. When Blakeslee died in 1942 at age 96, the news was carried in numerous newspapers across the U.S. "Another chapter in American history closed yesterday with the death of Dr. Francis Durbin Blakeslee, 96, believed to be the last remaining person to have seen Abraham Lincoln the day he was assassinated," stated the Los Angeles Times.

Perhaps the best look at Blakeslee was printed in February 1942, seven months before he passed away, in the Los Angeles Times. The article shows Blakeslee, despite his advanced age, living his life as he always did. It described him "seated in his easy chair writing an essay on 'My Memories of Lincoln.'" Dr. Blakeslee, who has given hundreds of lectures on Lincoln, no longer is able to give public addresses, but he continues to write his memoirs of the statesman." That night, Blakeslee was honored at a Syracuse University Alumni of Southern California dinner, after which he attended — you guessed it — a lecture on Abraham Lincoln.

#### Jason Emerson is the author of *The Madness of Mary Lincoln and Giant in the Shadows: The Life of Robert Todd Lincoln*.

(Portions of this article were published in the book co-authored with Erica Barnes: "The Bear Tree" and Other Stories from Cazenovia's History.)



In any scholarly biography of Abraham Lincoln, a reader will find countless references to this prairie lawyer's love of poetry. I'm not sure that biographers will ever come up with a definitive explanation for this passion. Lincoln's law partner William Herndon told the story that, once when they were on horseback riding to an event, Lincoln mentioned that he was puzzled about the genesis of his love for learning... given the fact that his parents were illiterate pioneers. His only explanation was that he thought that there was a possibility that his mother, Nancy Hanks, was illegitimate...and that her father was an educated Virginia planter.

We only have Herndon's description of this conversation, and, as far as we know, Lincoln did not mention the subject again...to anyone. I don't know that this family influence could hold true, even if the facts were basically correct. After all, the more direct influence on the future president would have come from his parents and the family and friends with whom he spent his formative years.

We can be certain, however, that something burned deep down inside the young frontiersman. We know about the borrowed books; the attempts to learn to write on wooden objects with charcoal; and the "stump speeches" with which he regaled his friends by repeating word-for-word sermons given by itinerant preachers.

We know from many reliable reports that, when riding the 8th Judicial Circuit in Central Illinois, in the evenings, lawyers would often huddle around a fireplace and listen to this tall, gangly resident of Springfield tell stories and quote poetry. And when you think of lawyers all riding together and staying in the "quaint" country inns of the prairie, you need to know that the phrase I used about huddling around the fireplace was not simply to paint a homey picture. They had to huddle around the fire because the inns were dark, dreary, and drafty.

While the future president is better known for quoting poetry, there are a couple of poems which he wrote.

These two items are from his Copy Book, probably written between 1824 and 1826:

*Abraham Lincoln  
his hand and pen  
he will be good but  
god knows when*

*Abraham Lincoln is my nam(e)  
And with my pen I wrote the same  
I wrote in both haste and speed  
And left it here for fools to read*

# LINCOLN & POETRY

*by Sara Gabbard*

In 1844, Abraham Lincoln journeyed from Illinois back to Southern Indiana. He wrote a lengthy poem about the experience and titled it:  
My Childhood Home I See Again

*My childhood home I see again,  
And gladden with the view;  
And still, as mem'ries crowd my brain,  
There's sadness in it too.*

*O memory! Thou mid-way world  
'Twixt Earth and Paradise,  
Where things decayed, and loved ones lost  
In dreamy shadows rise.*

*Now twenty years have passed away,  
Since here I bid farewell  
To woods, and fields, and scenes of play  
And school mates loved so well.*

*Where many were, how few remain  
Of old familiar things!  
But seeing these to mind again  
The lost and absent brings.*

*The friends I left that parting day—  
How changed, as time has sped!  
Young childhood gown, strong manhood grey,  
And half of all are dead.*

*I hear the lone survivors tell  
How nought from death could save,  
Till every sound appears a knell,  
And every spot a grave.*

*I range the fields with a pensive tread,  
And pace the hollow rooms;  
And feel (companions of the dead)  
I'm living in the tombs.*

*The very spot where grew the bread  
That formed my bones, I see.  
How strange, old field, on thee to tread,  
And feel I'm part of thee.*

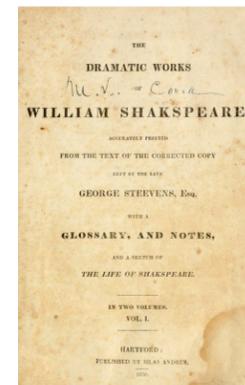
There are many stanzas which describe the awful reality of madness, but the poem ends in a stanza which, while Abraham never wanted to spend his life as a subsistence farmer like his father, shows a certain affection for the land itself.

When asked to contribute material for a campaign biography in 1860, Lincoln said that his life's story was best illustrated by a line from Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" . . . The short and simple Annals of the Poor. The full stanza for that sentence reads:

*Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,  
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;  
Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile  
The short and simple annals of the poor.*

Lincoln read, remembered, quoted, and loved Shakespeare. Both on the judicial circuit and later in Washington, people commented that he frequently quoted from Richard II:

*For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground  
And tell sad stories of the death of kings:  
How some have been depos'd, some slain in war  
Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed  
Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping kill'd  
All murdered.*



The Dramatic Works of  
William Shakspeare  
71.2009.084.00714



Robert Burns  
OC-0464

Charles Sumner reported that on a steamer bound for Washington, on the last Sunday of his life, Lincoln read aloud from Hamlet, in retrospect a passage which appears to be prophetic:

*Duncan is in his grave  
After life's fitful fever he sleeps well;  
Treason has done his worst; nor steel nor poison  
Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing  
Can touch him further*

Lincoln called Shakespeare and Robert Burns "my two favorite authors, and I must manage to see their birthplaces some day if I can contrive to cross the Atlantic." He always carried a collection of Burns' poems, and yet when asked to provide a toast for a celebration of the poet's life at the Burns Club in Washington, Lincoln was unable to attend because of the war effort. He did not even send a noteworthy message. Instead, he replied: I can not frame a toast to Burns. I can say nothing of his generous heart, and transcendent genius.

Abraham Lincoln's favorite poem, which he frequently quoted from memory, was "Mortality" by William Knox. It is not a joyful poem, but it is typical of the era. Lincoln once commented that he would give everything he had if he could have "written as fine a piece as I think this is."

*O why should the spirit of mortal be proud!  
Like a swift flitting meteor, a fast flying cloud,  
A flash of the lightning, a break in the wave—  
He passes from life to his rest in the grave.*

*The leaves of the oak and the willows shall fade,  
Be scattered around, and together be laid;  
And the young and the old, and the low and the high,  
Shall molder to dust, and together shall lie.*

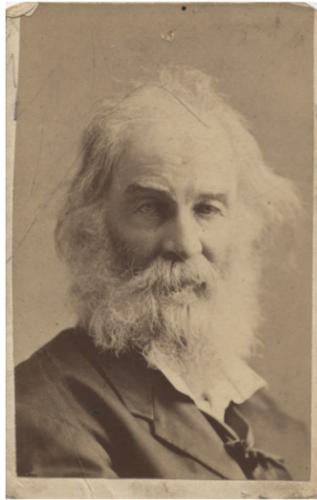


*Truth was to him a Sun which lighted all his soul  
From whence, with Sun-bright clearness all within  
Him saw, that foul idolatry of wrong  
Must cease; yea, that a nation's eye, at once  
Must be pluckt out, and all the reas'ning of  
Past ages must now be struck mute. To pause,  
Or hesitate when Heav'n speaks, is crime;  
Nor time is now for pause, the nation bleeds.  
Truth her own throne must seize;  
Whoever dares her Heav'n-born power, must sink.  
Hence to the height of his great task,  
The mighty LINCOLN rose, and broke the fetters  
Of our modern days...*

He then refers to the Civil War as a volcano which spewed forth “burning bolts of pride, hate, bloody tyr’ny, and death.” The nation was saved by Abraham Lincoln and the guidance of God, whose fame will be forever remembered:

*Immortal LINCOLN! The whole earth at thy  
Great name already thrills, the voice of Heav'n  
In thee is heard, nor dost thou even thy  
Own will perform. A higher will than thine,  
Thy reason rules, yet nought in thee suspends.  
Ages beyond us, shall with joy upon  
Thy font, read with delight  
“The sent of God.”*

Abraham Lincoln will always be with us, and his death simply ensures that posterity will continue to honor him because “by the blood of LINCOLN, Heav’n bids the earth be free! The Master but recall’d his servant to Himself. LINCOLN then lives, his soul commands.”



Walt Whitman  
LN-1371

Perhaps the most memorable of all tributes to the assassinated president is Walt Whitman’s glorious poem, “Oh Captain! My Captain!” The poet refers to the Civil War as a long and dangerous voyage for the ship of state, with Abraham Lincoln serving as captain... and then the awful irony of Lincoln’s death just as the seas calmed and the future seemed so bright. The first stanza of the poem is almost shattering in its impact.

*O Captain! My Captain!  
Our fearful trip is done;  
The ship has weather’d every rack,  
the prize we sought is won;  
The port is near, the bells I hear,  
the people all exalting,  
While follow eyes the steady keel,  
the vessel grim and daring;  
But O Heart! Heart! Heart!  
O the bleeding drops of red,  
Where on the deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.*

There are many aspects of Abraham Lincoln’s life which can be debated: Could the Civil War have been avoided? Did his suspension of the writ of habeas corpus set a questionable precedent? Whereas his selection of Cabinet members was, for the most part, outstanding, why did he continue to choose inept military commanders? Could he have been more sensitive to the obvious psychological problems of his wife? If he had lived, could he have healed the tragic wounds of both North and South during Reconstruction? In spite of those reasonable questions, one thing remains clear and without contradiction, his love for and use of poetry. Even much of his prose rang with the cadence of poetry.

It frequently allowed him to take joy in much loved poems, even during the constant and devastating news from the battlefield. It both strengthened and calmed him, and it is one of the main reasons that his mastery of language continues to place him at the top of our rankings of presidential eloquence.

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*Lincoln* LORE

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