Lincoln LORE

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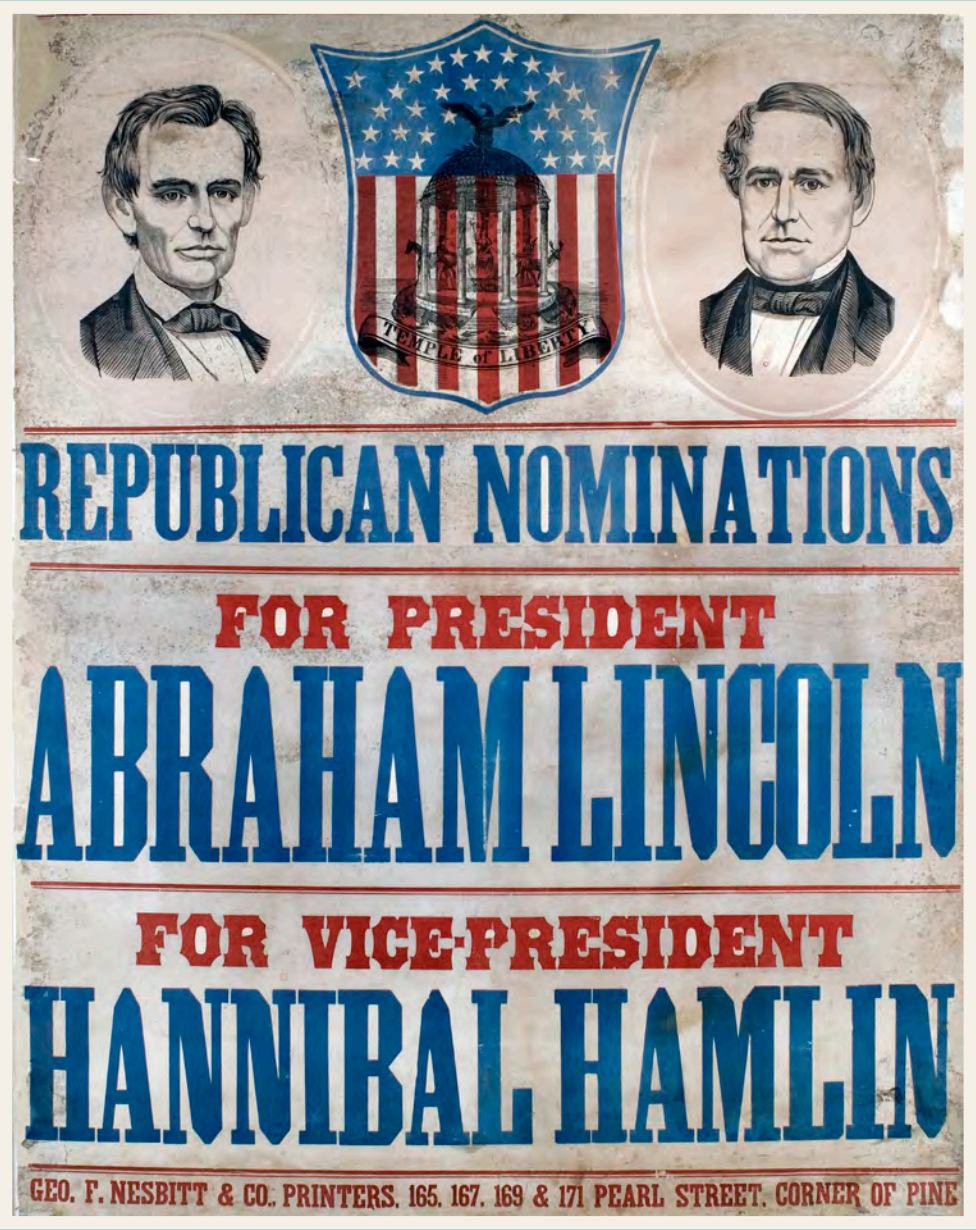

Lincoln LORE

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Editor's Note

In this issue we hear from several historians who have helped shape the way the public thinks about Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War.

Jon Grinspan is one of the leading historians of youth culture in the Civil War Era and Gilded Age. His books on these subjects have presented new ways of thinking about American political culture, and as the Curator of Political History at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History he daily encourages the public to learn more about the past. In a wide-ranging interview, Grinspan offers insight into his work as both a scholar and a public historian.

As a professor at Penn State and the University of Virginia, Gary W. Gallagher mentored a generation of scholars who now lead the field of Civil War history. He is one of the most sought-after battlefield guides and he has worked tirelessly over the years on battlefield preservation. Drawing from his extensive scholarship on military history, he offers us an enlightening analysis of Lincoln's relationship with his generals.

Callie Hawkins is CEO and Executive Director of President Lincoln's Cottage in Washington, D.C., where her vision has helped make the site a place for the public to engage with the past in meaningful ways. In a touching interview, she describes not only the history of the Lincolns' summer home, but also how twenty-first-century Americans have found solace in the place where the Lincoln family sought peace amid the turmoil of war and personal loss.

If you enjoy reading the articles in *Lore*, please share them with your friends and encourage them to join the Friends of the Lincoln Collection of Indiana.

– Jonathan W. White

On the Cover: Large cloth broadside featuring the Republican nominees for president and vice president in 1860, printed by George F. Nesbitt in New York City. (71.2009.081.0360)

Photograph by Kristina Sherk.

An Interview with Jon Grinspan

by Jonathan W. White

Jon Grinspan is Curator of Political History at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. His work explores the history of American democracy, with a focus on ways the formative, forgotten 1800s shaped our political present. His three books and many New York Times *articles have explored nineteenth-century youth politics, frustrations with democracy, and militant antislavery clubs, as well as off-beat subjects like Civil War coffee, Gilded Age saloon life, and the best tricks for stealing an election. At the Smithsonian, he focuses on collecting objects from past and contemporary political events to tell the story of America's struggle for democracy to museumgoers in the future. His latest book,* Wide Awake: The Forgotten Force That Elected Lincoln and Spurred the Civil War *(2024), was a finalist for the Gilder Lehrman Lincoln Prize and won both The Lincoln Forum's Harold Holzer Book Prize and the Society of American Historians' Francis Parkman Prize.*

Jonathan White: Tell us about your day job. What is it like to be Curator of Political History at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History?

Jon Grinspan: The beauty of being a curator is that nobody really knows what we're supposed to be doing. It takes so many forms. I have colleagues at the museum whose days are entirely different from mine. To me, the Smithsonian's original mission ("the increase and diffusion of knowledge") is a kind of thesis and a challenge: in what ways can we increase our knowledge of the past, and how can we diffuse it to the broadest public audience?

I usually target those who might not make it to the museum on the National Mall, and try to bring historical research to contemporary conversations through and books and articles. Those serve as tentpoles for talks, events, programs, and projects. And each can reach multiple populations, so one

day we might meet with senators, and then it's kindergartners the next day.

The museum and its collection serve as an anchor, as an endless source of research, and often as a kind of goad, posing new questions to explore. Giving tours to diverse audiences is vital, because people ask questions we just never think of. And I work to expand our collections. Although my scholarship focuses on the nineteenth century, much of our collecting is contemporary, drawn from recent political events like rallies, protests, campaigns, conventions, and now riots. Some of our best work comes from viewing a 150-year-old object next to one collected last week.

Last but not least, it's a physical job to steward these collections. You have to be ready to climb on top of a tower of steel quarter units or (carefully) dust U.S. Grant's inauguration carriage.

JW: What are some of your favorite artifacts?

JG: I particularly love a Wide Awake torch we recently collected in Milford, New Hampshire. Its owner marked the year "1860" for its first use, and then participated in torchlight presidential campaign rallies over the next half century, marking "1864," "1868" all down the shaft, through "1904." It's like an artifact of democratic engagement over time. Then there is our incredible trove of Lincoln materials: his gold watch (found to contain secret inscriptions by D.C. jewelers), the coffee cup he drank out of the night of his assassination, even the hoods his assassins wore when on trial.

Other objects—like the Woolworth lunch counter where Civil Rights protesters famously held a sit-in in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1960—are powerful because they combine basic, quotidian functions with powerful moments in our history. And some objects I like simply because I'm shocked they survived into the twenty-first century, like a Log Cabin (basically made out of Lincoln Logs) from the 1840 campaign.

Really, there are too many gems to name them all.

JW: Much of your scholarship has focused on young people in the nineteenth century. How did you get interested in that subject?

Wide Awake torch from Milford, New Hampshire. The collections of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. Photograph by Jaclyn Nash.

JG: Originally, I liked youth because it was universal, one of the rare experiences we've all shared across other divisions, and one that had been neglected in the study of politics. On top of that, the sources were just incredible. Nineteenth-century young people poured their hearts, and their many worries, into diaries and letters in a way older people and later generations rarely would. Finally, as I grew interested in exploring the long sweep of nineteenth-century politics, and the high turnouts they enjoyed, young voters emerged as the fuel that sustained that model over time. If you're going to study a system that perpetuated itself across generations, among diverse populations, new immigrants, new states, etc., you have to consider who is feeding into this system.

And it was easy to make readers empathize with the struggles of a 16 year old, to see the humanity and the humor in their stories.

JW: As a slight tangent, what was it like to study the Civil War at the University of Virginia? There's such an incredible community of faculty and students there, I imagine it must be an amazing place to work.

JG: Often, in my life, I've only afterwards realized how lucky I've been to end up in a certain environment. UVA was like that. Getting to study with Gary Gallagher, Michael F. Holt, and Elizabeth Varon, and count among my peers many of the best young scholars in the field, was an incredible privilege. At a time when much of academic history stressed an approach that was theoretical, abstract, or driven by external political projects, UVA emphasized concrete knowledge about how systems in the past actually worked, what lives were like, and often helped keep many of the sillier fads at bay. There were challenges, to be sure, but it was an environment that shepherded young scholars into deep research and direct engagement with the past in a way I continue to benefit from.

JW: Give us a sense of what electoral politics looked like in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. This is a key part of the story you tell in *The Virgin Vote: How Young Americans Made Democracy Social, Politics Personal, and Voting Popular in the Nineteenth Century* (2016).

JG: My work really began with one simple statistic: the turnout rates for eligible voters. I think many people assume America's political past was basically staid and dull before maybe the 1960s or so. I know I used to. So I was fascinated to learn of a vibrant, vital, messy political world in our deep past. From the 1840s through 1900, roughly 80% of eligible voters participated in elections. What was their story? What was happening in the culture that sustained that engagement? What were the human lives that came together to make that statistic? I was fascinated to discover an expansive world of voters and non-voters who made partisan political combat one of the largest, loudest, most ubiquitous elements of our national culture. This was, to be sure, a system rife with racism, sexism, and other exclusions, but even with those limitations, diverse Americans were participating, voting, arguing, and fighting about politics. And they were often doing so in ways that were material, colorful, physical, and spectacular—perfect for the Smithsonian's collections.

I became fascinated by the multiple paradoxes of this: a system that was both deeply bigoted and among the most democratic in world history; a mixed use of the same cultural institutions to disburse government power, settle ideological debates, and also entertain millions with marches, barbeques, fireworks, booze, and brawling. I loved the combination of seriousness and silliness that drove it all.

And young people were the fundamental fuel, both participating in politics for personal reasons, and being recruited by predatory campaigns who coveted their votes. And then, just as fascinating: the era ended with a crash in turnout after 1900, a dramatic quieting of politics, and a falling away of new, young voters. What was that about?

JW: Your next book, *The Age of Acrimony: How Americans Fought to Fix Their Democracy, 1865-1915* (2021), really delves into that question by examining how reformers in the Progressive Era tamed the system to give us what we might think of as "normal" politics. Tell us about that.

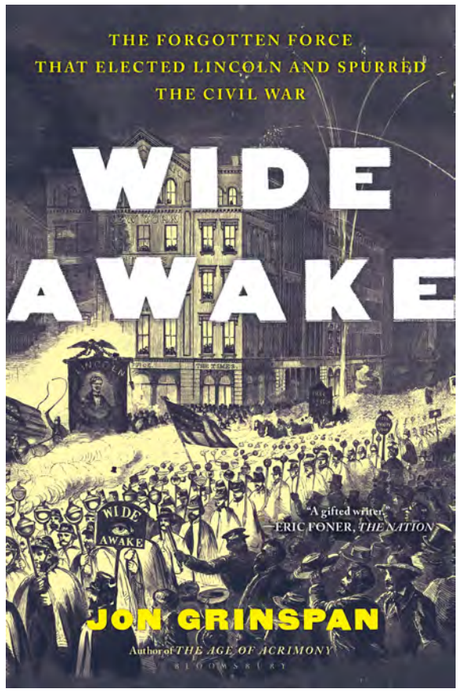
JG: That book was an attempt to get three not-well-known stories into the public conversation. The first was the mix of engagement and enragement that drove politics in the second half of the nineteenth century. After the 2016 election, many contemporary observers kept throwing around words like "unprecedented" when talking about politics, seemingly unaware of how heated American democracy had been during Reconstruction and the Gilded Age. If contemporary observers had any sense of political conflict in our past, it was from the Civil War, but turnout and partisanship actually increased in the generation after the war was over (1876–1896). So there was a lot of great material there, from a colorful age, that people just didn't know. Also, twenty-first-century observers kept wondering where our "normal" politics had gone, missing that many of our norms were constructed in the early twentieth century to reign in that earlier, wilder era. So we had this deep history that was relevant to our contemporary struggles, and few non-historians knew it. Just telling that story felt urgent.

The second element was trying to avoid a simplistic, brittle view of our evolving politics as either good or bad. I think people were throwing around the term "democracy" without considering the hard trade-offs inherent to that system. At least in U.S. history, our periods of greatest mass engagement coincided with our period of greatest ugliness, partisanship, fraud, and violence. And the subsequent crash in popular interest after 1900 led to the flourishing of incredible Progressive era reforms. So, were the laws establishing income taxes, direct elections of senators, women's voting rights, clean food and drug laws, regulations of monopolies and railroads, and a host of voting reforms only possible because a big chunk of voters lost interest and stayed home? What does that say about the relationship between engagement and civility?

Finally, I believe that history is about people. You could make the two previous points from 30,000 feet, using statistics about American Political Development. But where's the fun in that? Who wants to read that book all the way to the end? I was hoping to tell a not-well-known human story. So I hit upon the saga of congressman William "Pig Iron" Kelley and his daughter, the labor activist Florence Kelley. Both were major players in the struggles of their eras, from the 1830s into the 1930s, passing down a legacy across time. For Will Kelley, a mid-nineteenth-century man, that meant public, political efforts, bombastic campaigns, writing the text of the 15th Amendment, and many speeches and rallies. But for his daughter, who was operating as a woman in the early twentieth century, she had to rely on consumer boycotts, labor crusades, social science studies, the administrative state, and private influence and lobbying. Both had to operate in different ways in their different eras, highlighting the changes going on in American politics over this tumultuous, neglected period. Their adventures and campaigns helped chart the changes I was trying to show.

So that was the thinking behind that book. I think it all helped it connect with audiences, but getting those three plates to spin at the same time was not easy.

William D. "Pig Iron" Kelley. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.



JW: After writing about the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, what led you back to the mid-nineteenth century to write a book about the Wide Awakes?

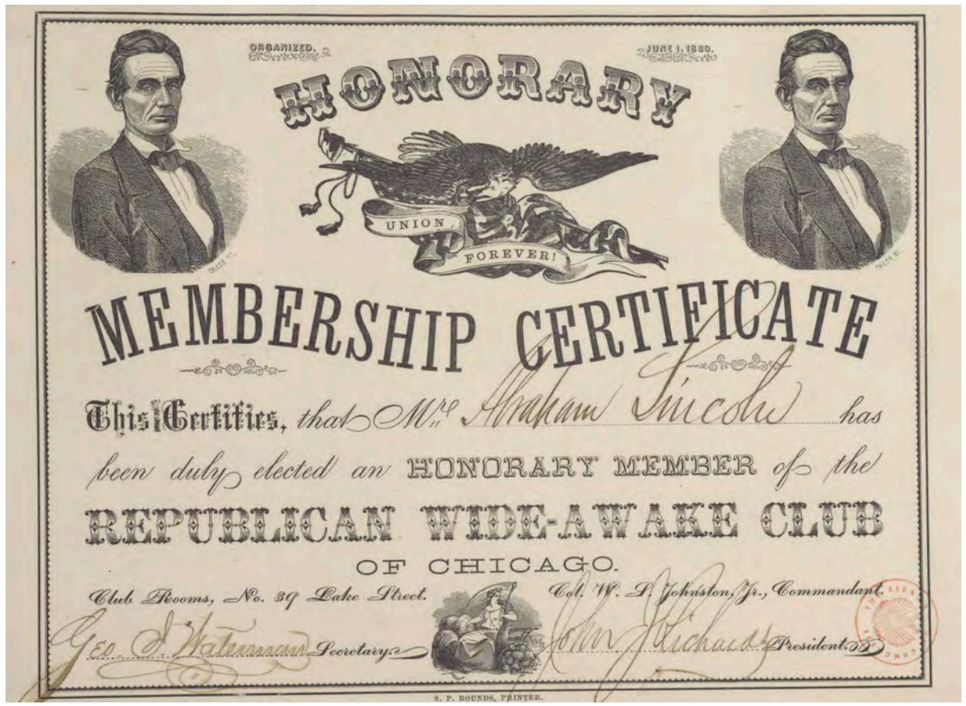
JG: The Wide Awakes had been stuck in my craw for decades. I learned about them in grad school, wrote a little article, and thought I was done. But just as the Wide Awakes used to show up at William Seward's house, or Carl Schurz's hotel, and get them out of bed demanding midnight speeches in the 1860 campaign, they kept coming back to me too. At the Smithsonian, people would contact me with new artifacts they'd found, questions about the movement, or plans to restart a group today. And then, in 2020 and 2021, as America debated public protest in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, the January 6 attacks, etc., the Wide Awakes' blend of public politics and public militarism seemed especially relevant. If writing *The Age of Acrimony* was an intricate balancing act, writing about the Wide Awakes was just a delightful sprint. Their story was rich and well-documented, their movement had a clear narrative arc, and they hadn't been written about before in a book. It was so much fun to go back to them after muddling through the Gilded Age and Progressive era history.

JW: Tell us about the origins of the Wide Awakes. How did they get started? And what caused their movement to spread across the country?

JG: One of the great things about the Wide Awakes is that, although they grew to be among the largest mass movements in American political history, their founders were basically just working class kids. A 19-year-old clerk in Hartford put together a cool uniform, and he and his friends formed a militaristic marching company. At first they were just hoping to sway a gubernatorial election in Connecticut in 1860, but much of the North was primed for a mass movement. Their uniforms, their marching, their public speaking, and their resistance to intimidation made them an incredible vehicle to fight the local and national forces of "the Slave Power" that had been suppressing anti-slavery views. And because of their modular, franchise model, they never all had to agree on the knotty constitutional issues about slavery. As long as they all wore the same uniforms and marched together, they could be an inspiring campaign movement. So these young novices in Connecticut kicked off a movement that would spread across the North, and into the West and even the Upper South. At their peak, they had hundreds of thousands of members. The exact number is hazy, but adjusted to today's population, we're talking about a movement of millions.

JW: I've always found the Wide Awakes' symbolism fascinating. What can you tell us about their dress, the ways they marched, and the symbols they used?

***The Wide Awake Quick Step*. Courtesy of the Lester S. Levy Sheet Music Collection, The Sheridan Libraries, Johns Hopkins University.**



Honorary membership certificate sent to Abraham Lincoln by the Wide-Awake Club of Chicago. Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress.

JG: I agree, they've got to be among the most visually composed and compelling movements in American history. Like them or hate them, everyone was struck by their black, shiny capes, their militaristic caps, their torches on long poles, their use of the open eye as a symbol of awakening, and their coordinated marching. Some people found it inspiring, some people found it menacing, and some thought the whole thing looked awfully silly, but I really found no one who had no comment. And interestingly, they did spend much of their time, in their meeting minutes and in their company constitutions, laying out exactly how they wanted to look, down to the cut of their capes, the color of their lanterns, and the style of their marching. Many of their founders, and spreaders, were in the textile business and had an eye for design (and for sales). And they were connecting to a mid-nineteenth century culture, in the U.S. and Europe, that was passionate about uniforms and militarism. They looked to Garibaldi's black poncho, Italian nationalists' red shirts, and European revolutionaries' use of flags in 1848. Interestingly, very few of the young, northern Wide Awakes had military backgrounds, so they kind of pieced together a pseudo-militaristic movement from scratch.

But it all came together to argue a material thesis: that the Republican Party was united, bold, and orderly at a time when many other parties seemed fractured or chaotic.

JW: What did Lincoln think of the Wide Awakes? Did he have any interactions with them?

JG: Lincoln stands out, among the Republican leadership, as being the least noisily pro-Wide Awake. He rode with them in their very first official march, but he was notably cautious about the movement. Other Republican leaders like William Henry Seward or Carl Schurz sometimes grumbled about the Wide Awakes waking them up or being too enthusiastic, but learned to play to the Wide Awakes, to speak to them and joke with them and to help spread and validate the movement. Some—like Frank Blair Jr., Hannibal Hamlin, John A. Andrew, and Charles Francis Adams Jr.—even joined the Wide Awakes or marched with them.

But Lincoln wrote privately that he found "monster meetings" basically silly, a side-show to the real campaigning of buttonholing individual doubtful voters. As a nominee, he was expected not to campaign, so he was insulated from having to please crowds of Wide Awakes. Once he won the election, he said nice things about the movement, but also basically implied it was done. Through lieutenants like John Hay and William S. Wood (who organized his trip to Washington), word was put out that Lincoln wanted the Wide Awakes to go away. Meanwhile, Seward and Sumner and all the other party leaders were cheering the Wide Awakes. It's an interesting disjuncture.

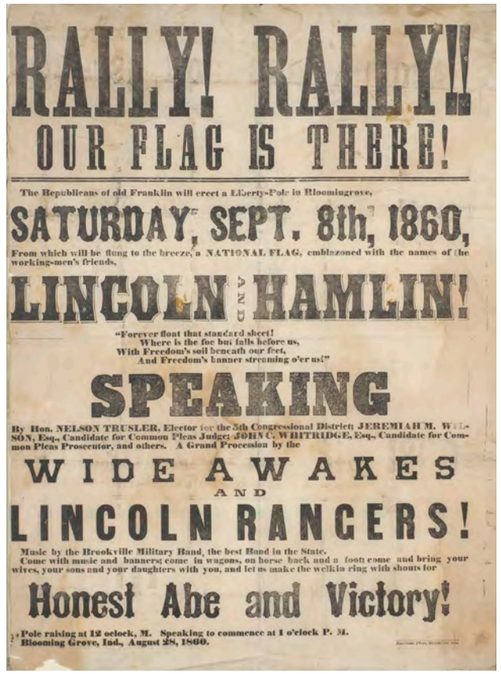
JW: How did the South react to the Wide Awakes?

JG: Just as the Wide Awakes' whole ethos seemed designed to excite young northerners, it was terrifying to many in the South. The movement just confirmed southern talk of northern coercion, northern extremism, and a northern majority using its numerical advantage in menacing new ways. And many southerners noted that the clubs emerged from Connecticut, John Brown's home state, just a few months after his famous raid. To many, they symbolized a national, partisan escalation of what Brown had been plotting. Brown's force had just 22 men, but the Wide Awakes were rallying hundreds of thousands.

Many in the South also lived in a limited news environment, getting only southern papers or extremely biased northern ones (like the *New York Herald*). Many honestly believed that the Wide Awakes were a paramilitary force, preparing to invade the South, spark a race war, and kill white southerners. The existence of some African American Wide Awakes in Boston further agitated them. And, if we're trying to be as empathetic as possible with people in the past (without agreeing with them), how could your average newspaper reader in Huntsville or Shreveport know the truth, that the Wide Awakes were not military but really just interested in campaign spectacle?

The response to the Wide Awakes was proof of how damaged the bonds of Union already had become. And many secessionists made use of this, referencing the Wide Awakes as they campaigned for disunion. Some people (who really could have known better), like ex-governor of Virginia Henry A. Wise, went around telling crowds that the Wide Awakes would soon invade, and that if southern states did not secede, they would be "cut to pieces by the Wide Awakes."

Campaign medal created by the Wide Awake club of Hartford, Connecticut. (71.2009.082.0873)



Campaign broadside announcing a rally for Abraham Lincoln and Hannibal Hamlin in Blooming Grove, Indiana, on September 8, 1860, featuring a grand procession by the Wide Awakes and Lincoln Rangers. (71.2009.081.0562)

While a much larger conflict led to secession, the Wide Awakes became a concrete device to help make disunion happen.

JW: What became of the Wide Awakes after the election of 1860?

JG: This was one of the most fascinating elements of their story, and one of the best things about returning to the Wide Awakes after years away. Previously, I'd assumed that the movement petered out after Lincoln's victory in November 1860. But as I dug back in, I learned that something much more dynamic and dramatic happened. Many clubs disbanded, but others hardened, reorganized as militias, some armed, others wrote to Lincoln offering to fight as his bodyguards or even invade the South.

At a time when southern states were seceding and arming, the Wide Awakes presented Republican leaders with a fascinating dilemma. They had this movement of hundreds of thousands of uniformed, (semi-)trained, excited young men. They could easily be turned into an army, or a kind of guard for Lincoln. In St. Louis, the Wide Awakes were already arming, training, preparing for a fight. But Lincoln and other leaders saw that while the Wide Awakes could provide muscle, they could also alienate much more important elements of the coming fight. Northern Democrats, southern Unionists, Border States still on the fence, none of them would be happy to see the Wide Awakes emerge as a partisan, paramilitary fighting force. So the movement was encouraged to disband. Outside of St. Louis, most did so, although many enlisted in the Union army en masse after Fort Sumter. In St. Louis, many Wide Awakes re-organized as Unionist militias and led the fighting at Camp Jackson in May 1861, fully evolving from a campaign club into a fighting force.

But in between the November election and the start of real fighting in April and May 1861, the Wide Awakes were caught in this tenuous, tentative space, between politics and war.

Finally, after the war was over, many ex-Wide Awakes emerged as key leaders in the Republican Party and in Gilded Age society. Some kept marching, holding reunions and rallies in the early twentieth century, although they really lost their edge over the years. By the twentieth century, they were mostly forgotten or neglected . . . which is what made it so much fun to help bring them back.

JW: Now that you've wrapped up this fascinating book, what are you working on next?

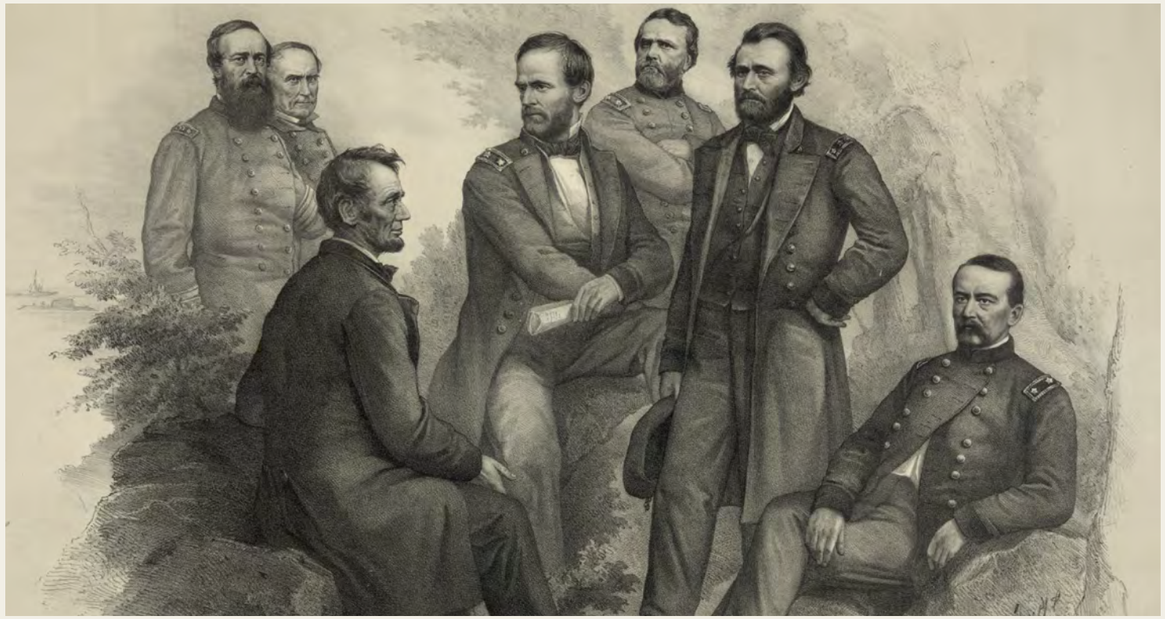
JG: I'm still in the very early phases of a new project. But I'm thinking about doing a book on political bosses across American history. People know the term "boss," and often you'll hear explanations for how things were different "back when the bosses ran things." But to me, that hints at a rich world to explore. And the model of boss politics, in which leaders coordinated votes of anxious, resentful populations into blocs, often in opposition to the courts and rule of law, has relevance today.

Plus, their stories are amazing, from Boss Tweed to Mayor Daley and all the forgotten figures in between. I like to work on topics which have an old, neglected secondary literature to re-animate, and just a bit of public knowledge to try to expand upon. Plus, it'd be fun to move from across time, from the 1860s to the 1960s.

But I don't want to jinx it, so no more on that one for now.

JW: That sounds fascinating! Thank you so much for joining us.

Lunch counter from the Woolworth in Greensboro, North Carolina, where the sit-in movement began in 1960. The collections of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. Photograph Jaclyn Nash.



In this 1865 lithograph, "Lincoln and His Generals," Lincoln talks with his military leaders, from left: Admirals David Dixon Porter and David Farragut, Lincoln, and Generals William T. Sherman, George H. Thomas, Ulysses S. Grant, and Philip H. Sheridan. Published by Jones and Clark of New York and C. A. Asp of Boston. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

LINCOLN AND HIS GENERALS:
Leadership during the Greatest American Crisis

by Gary W. Gallagher

Abraham Lincoln faced greater challenges than any other president in United States history. Managing an immensely complex war effort in a democratic republic posed special challenges. He understood that victory depended on maintaining morale among both Democrats, who composed about 45 percent of the electorate and of Union soldiers, and Republicans. If events on the battlefield or political controversies on the home front—and the two often were inextricably linked—convinced enough loyal citizens that the war had cost too much human and material treasure, the Confederacy could win despite having far fewer soldiers and resources. Under the Constitution, civilian power was supreme, with military leaders always subordinate to Lincoln as commander in chief. Some generals understood this, some did not, and friction in this regard led to difficult times for the president. In the end, Lincoln found the right officers to command the nation's armies.

Lincoln possessed substantial constitutional authority in two key areas. First, he helped shape a national strategic policy designed to suppress the rebellion, reestablish the Union, and, after January 1, 1863, make emancipation a non-negotiable element to any resolution of the war. Second, he decided which generals would serve at the highest level of command. His decisions in naming generals, and the way in which he worked with those chosen, proved decisive in winning a war that as late as the summer of 1864 seemed likely to end in Confederate independence. Lincoln's selection of Ulysses S. Grant to be general-in-chief in March 1864, and the two men's resulting relationship, provided the foundation for eventual victory.

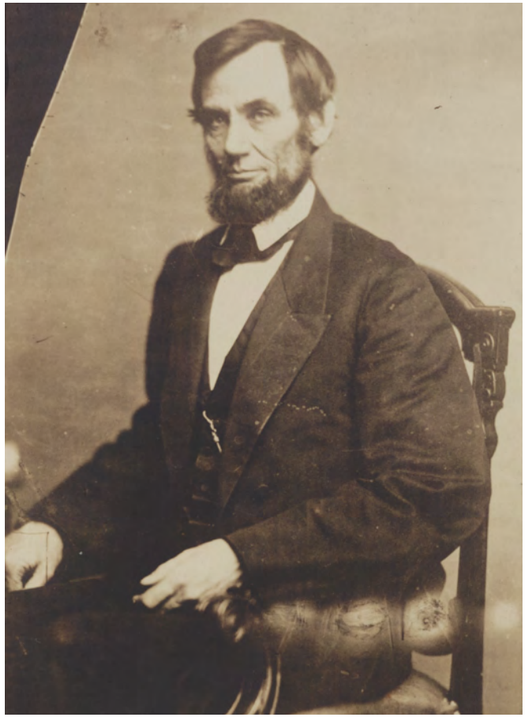
Lincoln brought little military or administrative experience to his new job. He provides a cautionary example for those who fetishize credentialing. Anyone examining the resumés of Lincoln and Jefferson Davis in 1860–1861 would

conclude, without question, that Davis held far more promise as a commander in chief. He graduated from the United States Military Academy and successfully led a regiment of Mississippi Volunteer Infantry during the War with Mexico. Somewhat remarkably, Davis had commanded more troops in combat than anyone who became a general officer during the Civil War except Winfield Scott. He also had been a very innovative secretary of war under President Franklin Pierce and chaired the Senate's Military Affairs Committee.

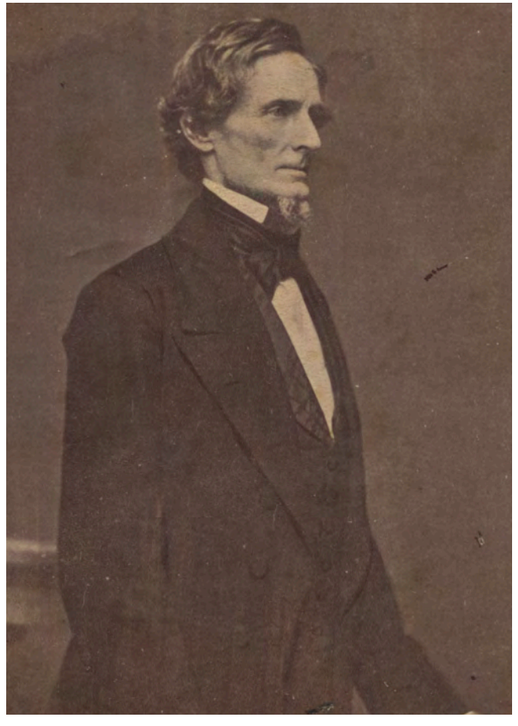
In contrast to Davis, Lincoln had no formal military education, had logged only a few weeks of militia duty during the Black Hawk War of the 1830s, and could boast of no administrative experience beyond running a very small law office. Although somewhat embarrassed by his humble origins and lack of formal education, Lincoln never sought to obscure his roots in Kentucky (his birthplace), southern Indiana, and Illinois. He spoke with an accent that clearly marked him as a western, rural outsider among college-educated easterners and had a predilection for homespun, often earthy, stories that invited dismissive comments from people, including many military officers, of more privileged backgrounds.

As a leader, Lincoln proved willing to put aside his ego, overlook slights, and tolerate prima donnas if they delivered results. He maintained an unwavering focus on the overriding national goal of crushing the Confederate rebellion and restoring the Union. He sometimes pursued unpopular policies to achieve that goal, knowing his actions would alienate various parts of the national electorate. Members of his own party tried to dump him from the Republican ticket in 1864, and some of his top generals openly opposed him, including George B. McClellan, who ran as the Democratic candidate seeking to deny Lincoln a second term.

Lincoln's handling of military affairs revealed a tremendous capacity for growth and a willingness to learn from more knowledgeable subordinates. Early in the war, like most Americans, he believed one big battle would settle the issue. He pressed his generals to force a showdown in northern Virginia, questioning the argument that volunteer soldiers were green and needed more training. General-in-Chief Winfield Scott counseled against precipitate action but eventually supported a campaign against Confederates located near Manassas Junction. After a humiliating Union defeat at First Bull Run



Abraham Lincoln, taken May 16, 1861, at Brady's National Photographic Portrait Galleries in Washington, D.C. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.



Confederate President Jefferson Davis, photograph taken at Brady's National Photographic Portrait Galleries in Washington, D.C. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

in late July 1861, Scott briefly lost his composure in front of the president and members of the cabinet: "I have fought this battle, sir, against my judgment. . . . I deserve removal because I did not stand up, when my army was not in a condition for fighting, and resist it to the last." Lincoln acknowledged that he had been wrong and General Scott correct. Only training and experience, both of which took time, would convert the volunteers into soldiers. The war would take much longer, and require far more men and matériel, than Lincoln initially had imagined.

Lincoln also manifested a willingness to give great latitude to generals who might deliver results, even if they exhibited problematical traits or proved personally antagonistic to him. Here he kept his eye on the ultimate goal of victory and a restored Union. Carping, snubs, and posturing, all of which he endured in full measure in dealing with various generals, never persuaded Lincoln to think first about himself or to engage in efforts to punish the offenders.

As he matured as commander in chief, Lincoln settled on four requisites for military victory. First, efficient logistics would undergird successful military campaigning. He devoted considerable attention to the unglamorous tasks necessary to clothe, feed, and arm huge numbers of soldiers. Second, control of the Mississippi River, as well as other major waterways, would support Union initiatives and undercut Confederate efforts to thwart them. Winfield Scott's influence was apparent regarding the centrality of the Mississippi. Third, U.S. commanders should target Confederate armies rather than cities. If the major Rebel forces were defeated, concluded Lincoln, the places they defended would fall into Union hands. Finally, and perhaps most important, the United States must apply its far greater industrial power and its 2 ½ to 1 edge in manpower in the most sustained, relentless manner to win the war before civilian morale sagged. It should do so even at the risk of high casualties that might prove problematical in the near term but would shorten the war and save lives in the long term.

Lincoln's relationship with top generals centered on his search for leaders who would utilize the nation's superior manpower and resources effectively. His greatest disappointments arose when commanders failed to do so. An examination, in chronological turn, of Lincoln's relationships with four officers in whom he placed trust to achieve the nation's military goals reveal crucial elements of his leadership.

Lincoln's dealings with Winfield Scott, the army's senior officer, showcased his efforts to educate himself about military affairs. Nearly seventy-five years old at the time of Fort Sumter, Scott first gained combat experience in the War of 1812. During the War with Mexico in the 1840s, his strategic and operational planning and execution proved daring and innovative. Such was Scott's skill in Mexico that the Duke of

Lt. Gen. Winfield Scott, published by Brady's National Photographic Portrait Galleries in 1861. (LN-0981)

Wellington pronounced him "the greatest soldier of the age." Although little known to most modern Americans, Scott surely ranks among the five best generals in U.S. history.

After an initial failure to follow Scott's advice, Lincoln wisely sought to learn as much as possible from his venerable general-in-chief. Scott drew on vast experience and a first-rate intellect to propose a strategy the press labeled the "Anaconda Plan" because it sought to squeeze the life out of the Confederacy. Contemplating the problem of how best to crush the rebellion in the spring of 1861, Scott envisioned a naval blockade to deny war-related imports to the Confederacy and a combined army-navy strike down the Mississippi River to split the Rebel republic into two pieces. Should the Confederates continue to resist after the loss of key ports and control of the Mississippi, the United States, in Scott's words, might have to "[c]onquer the seceding States by invading armies." These proposed operations would take several months to organize and, cautioned the aging general, might stretch over two or three years and require hundreds of thousands of recruits to execute.

Well aware of political and popular pressures on Lincoln to strike an immediate blow to end the rebellion, Scott eventually proved successful in convincing the president that precipitate action held scant promise. Lincoln quickly accepted that it took time to train raw troops and collect supplies, basic military realities lost on many newspaper editors and members of Congress. Well before he retired on November 1, 1861, Scott had sketched a strategic blueprint that Lincoln embraced and which, in broad outline, anticipated how the United States waged the war.

George B. McClellan, who succeeded Scott as general-in-chief, provides an example of how much aggravation Lincoln would tolerate from a subordinate he believed might achieve military success. McClellan often behaved as someone who did not respect civilian superiority under the Constitution and who pursued his own plans to prosecute the war even when they deviated from those of Lincoln and other political leaders. Perhaps most tellingly, "Little Mac" never embraced the transition during the summer of 1862 to a harder kind of war that targeted the institution of slavery and war-related civilian property as necessary to defeat the Confederacy. He always hoped to restore the Union as it had been before the secession crisis of 1860–1861.

McClellan was just thirty-four years old in 1861 and had lived a life marked by one success after another. He graduated second in the class of 1846 at West Point and served as a member of Winfield Scott's staff in Mexico. He resigned his commission in the mid-1850s to pursue a lucrative career as a railroad executive. During the Civil War, he demonstrated superb organizational but deeply flawed operational leadership. Undoubtedly charismatic and intensely self-referential, he forged an unmatched bond with his soldiers and never masked his opposition to many of the Lincoln administration's policies.

Gen. George B. McClellan with his wife, Ellen Marcy McClellan, taken by Charles D. Fredricks of New York. (OC-0798)

In the wake of Union disaster at First Bull Run, McClellan converted a dispirited rabble of 35,000 men into a confident and well-trained force of more than 100,000 that he christened the Army of the Potomac. He also instilled in the army's subordinate officer corps a culture of caution that lingered long past his own departure from command. Within that culture, he counselled avoidance of risk; obsessed about logistics and sought never to undertake a movement until everything was perfect; avoided delivering a knock-out blow to the enemy, aiming instead to defeat the Rebels just enough to persuade them to come back into the Union; and always manifested an awareness of possible political repercussions from his military decisions. In the end, McClellan created a powerful military instrument but proved unwilling to risk it in battle. He lacked what mid-nineteenth-century Americans would term the moral courage to take chances in pursuit of decisive results.

Lincoln entrusted McClellan with two jobs from November 1861 through early March 1862. As general-in-chief of all U.S. armies, he orchestrated overall strategic plans; as head of the Army of the Potomac, he led the republic's largest and most important field command in the conflict's most scrutinized theater of operations. John Hay, one of Lincoln's secretaries, recorded how Lincoln warned McClellan that the dual positions of general-in-chief and head of the Army of the Potomac would be taxing: "In addition to your present command, the supreme command of the Army will entail a vast labor upon you." "I can do it all," replied the self-assured McClellan.

Lincoln wanted two things from McClellan: to keep his civilian superiors informed about the army's plans and to carry out an aggressive campaign against the Confederates in Virginia. As time passed in late 1861 and early 1862, Lincoln realized that McClellan held back crucial information. Even more vexing, months elapsed without a major Union offensive while McClellan demanded more men and supplies and grotesquely inflated Confederate numbers to justify his inaction.

The youthful general betrayed contempt for both his military and political superiors in the summer and early autumn of 1861. "I am leaving nothing undone to increase our force," McClellan wrote to his wife at one point, "but the old general [Scott] always comes in the way." Scott finally grew weary of McClellan's behavior and on November 1 retired as general-in-chief. As for Lincoln, McClellan described the president as "nothing more than a well-meaning baboon." McClellan's contempt for Lincoln reached a low point on November 13, 1861, when the president, his private secretary John Hay, and Secretary of State William H. Seward paid a visit to the general's home. Absent when the three men arrived, McClellan later appeared but went upstairs without speaking to Lincoln. After twenty minutes or so elapsed, he instructed

his butler to tell Lincoln—his commander in chief—that he had retired for the evening but would be happy to speak with the president at some other time. Upon leaving McClellan's home, Hay castigated "this unparalleled insolence of epaulettes." Lincoln, however, "seemed not to have noticed it specially, saying it was better at this time not to be making points of etiquette & personal dignity."

McClellan often paraded his anti-administration politics. Failing to capture Richmond during the Seven Days campaign in June–July 1862, he nonetheless lectured Lincoln about policies supporting a hard war and emancipation. He insisted that "Neither confiscation of property, political executions of persons, territorial organization of states or forcible abolition of slavery should be contemplated for a moment." In a letter written two weeks after his withdrawal from the battlefield at Malvern Hill, he sputtered, "I have lost all regard & respect for the majority of the Administration, & doubt the propriety of my brave men's blood being spilled to further the designs of such a set of heartless villains."

Lincoln never could get McClellan to act aggressively. In early March 1862, he removed his balky subordinate as general-in-chief but left him in charge of the Army of the Potomac. When McClellan unnecessarily retreated from Richmond in July 1862 and then, two months later, allowed Robert E. Lee to escape from Maryland unmolested after the battle of Antietam, Lincoln lost his patience. A note to McClellan dated October 25, 1862, conveyed his utter frustration with the general's lethargic actions and unpersuasive excuses. Lee's army had recrossed the Potomac River in one night after the battle of Antietam, but McClellan remained immobile near the battlefield more than five weeks later. He claimed he could not pursue Lee because the Union army's horses "are broken down from fatigue and want of flesh." "Will you pardon me for asking," responded Lincoln with a mixture of sarcasm and anger, "what the horses of your army have done since the battle of Antietam that fatigue anything?"

If McClellan had won victories and pressed Lee, Lincoln probably would have put up with his insubordination, open political opposition, and personal snobbery. But the president would not do so with a man who did not win. The day after the autumn elections in 1862, he sacked McClellan, timing the action to avoid a Democratic backlash at the polls. McClellan never led another army in the field but returned to the national spotlight in 1864 as the Democratic Party's presidential standard-bearer.

A brief consideration of Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker further illustrates Lincoln's patience, and frustration, with problematical officers. Nicknamed "Fighting Joe," the Massachusetts-born officer stood out as an aggressive presence in an army blessed with too little of that commodity. Hooker had worked tirelessly to supplant Ambrose E. Burnside as commander of the Army of the Potomac following the Union fiasco at Fredericksburg in December 1862 and the equally ignominious "Mud March" of mid-January 1863. A shameless self-promoter, he told Republicans in Congress what they wanted to hear, touted his own accomplishments, criticized Burnside, and emerged in late January as the president's choice to lead the Army of the Potomac.

"Battle of Antietam" by Kurz & Allison, ca. 1888. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

Gen. Joseph Hooker (OC-0714)

Lincoln initially looked the other way about Hooker's troubling behaviors. The general talked publicly about how the nation needed a dictator to win the war, implying that he would make a good one. The president reacted in a remarkably perceptive and blunt letter. "I believe you to be a brave and skillful soldier," began Lincoln. "You have confidence in yourself, which is a valuable, if not an indispensable quality. You are ambitious, which, within reasonable bounds, does good rather than harm." But, Lincoln added, "Only those generals who gain successes, can set up dictators. What I now ask of you is military success, and I will risk the dictatorship." Hooker also bragged about what he was going to do to Lee, observing that he hoped God would have mercy on the Rebel chieftain because he, Joe Hooker, would not. Lincoln correctly feared that such bluster masked insecurity, offering one of his barnyard examples to make the point: "The hen is the wisest of all the animal creation because she never cackles until the egg is laid."

Just before the battle of Chancellorsville, which took place on May 1–4, 1863, Lincoln reminded Hooker that "our prime object is the enemies' army in front of us, and is not with, or about, Richmond." To attain this objective, Lincoln urged his general to utilize his superior manpower—130,000 as against Lee's 64,000. (Hooker, it must be noted, knew the relative numbers because he possessed excellent intelligence about the strength of Lee's army.)

"Battle of Chancellorsville" by Kurz & Allison, ca. 1890, showing the wounding of Confederate general Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson by friendly fire on May 2, 1863. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

An abject failure of will and nerve at Chancellorsville brought humiliating defeat for Hooker. Despite Lincoln's strong admonition, Hooker did not employ all of his strength. Indeed, two of the army's seven infantry corps suffered very light casualties at Chancellorsville. Thousands of Union soldiers did not fire a shot. Lincoln spent several critical days at the telegraph office monitoring the action as it unfolded along the Rappahannock River in Virginia. A witness recounted how the president, upon realizing that Hooker had retreated, turned ashen and exclaimed, "My God! My God! What will the country say?" In June, when Lee marched north toward Pennsylvania, Hooker proposed to take the Army of the Potomac southward to capture Richmond instead of confronting the invading Rebel army. Lincoln had had enough, and after a dispute regarding the Union garrison at Harpers Ferry he fired Hooker. He simply would not countenance a general who seemed unable or unwilling to deliver a decisive blow against the Army of Northern Virginia.

Ulysses S. Grant, who apart from Lincoln did more than anyone else to defeat the Confederacy, forged a singular relationship with his commander in chief. He and Lincoln provide an example of how the nation's constitutional system ideally functions during a military crisis. A determined president and a talented soldier who understood and accepted civilian oversight worked effectively toward a common national goal.

Thirty-nine years old when war erupted, Grant had logged both staff and line duty during the 1840s. He left the army in the 1850s, desperate to rejoin his family after difficult postings to the West Coast. Financial failure dogged him and his family for much of the 1850s—a period of adversity that toughened him. He came to prominence in the war's Western Theater, which encompassed a vast expanse defined by the Appalachian Mountains on the east and the Mississippi River on the west. Victories in 1862–1863 at Forts Henry and Donelson, Shiloh, Vicksburg (which opened the Mississippi River to full Union control), and Chattanooga (which severed a crucial rail link between Virginia and the southern and western Confederate states) brought Grant appointment as general-in-chief in early March 1864. He also received promotion to lieutenant general, a permanent rank previously held only by George Washington that Congress reinstated specifically for Grant.

"General Grant Receiving His Commission as Lieutenant-General from President Lincoln," *Harper's Weekly,* March 26, 1864. (71200908408089)

Ulysses S. Grant with his wife, Julia, and son, Jesse, taken at City Point, Virginia, in 1865. Published by E. & H.T. Anthony of New York. (OC-0658)

In a short speech delivered to the general in front of members of the cabinet and a few others on March 9, 1864, Lincoln addressed Grant's promotion to the rank previously held only by Washington. "The nation's appreciation of what you have done, and its reliance upon you for what remains to do, in the existing great struggle," remarked the president, "are now presented with this commission, constituting you Lieutenant General in the Army of the United States. . . . I scarcely need to add that with what I here speak for the nation goes my own hearty personal concurrence."

Grant's subsequent behavior validated the most important personnel decision of Lincoln's presidency. In contrast to McClellan, Grant dutifully carried out all administration policies. Always aggressive, he rewarded subordinates who pushed their men to achieve decisive results. During his year with the Army of the Potomac in 1864–1865 (as general-in-chief he accompanied, but did not officially command, the army), he labored incessantly to root out McClellan's culture of caution. In perhaps the most startling departure from McClellan, Grant made do with available resources rather than constantly asking for more, operating, in large measure, as a sort of anti-McClellan. In his *Personal Memoirs*, Grant offered a tribute to Zachary Taylor that might just as well have been written about himself: "General Taylor was not an officer to trouble the administration much with his demands, but was inclined to do the best he could with the means given him. . . . No soldier could face either danger or responsibility more calmly than he. These are qualities more rarely found than genius or physical courage."

Grant possessed these "rare qualities" in abundance. Imperturbable, willing to take responsibility for his actions, and almost singular in his habit of making do with what the government gave him, he mirrored Lincoln's determination, ability to focus on a goal, and, perhaps most important, refusal to be derailed by initial failure. Never making excuses for his setbacks or laying blame on subordinates or civilian superiors, he simply went back to the drawing board and tried something else. Examples of this attribute can be found at Vicksburg in the spring and summer of 1863, at Chattanooga in November 1863, and in the Overland Campaign against Lee in 1864.

No one saw the large strategic picture more clearly than Grant. As general-in-chief in the spring of 1864, he planned a series of offensives that would strike at both the Confederacy's armies and at its capacity to produce and distribute the materials needed to sustain the war. His experience as a quartermaster during the Mexican-American War taught him the importance of logistics, and he targeted the economic, agricultural, and transportation underpinnings of the Confederacy through what scholars have labeled a "strategy of exhaustion." Destroy the enemy's ability to clothe, feed, and arm its soldiers, he believed, and the United States would not have to kill those soldiers in large and bloody battles.

Grant also understood the political pressures on Lincoln and adapted when necessary. At the time of his elevation to general-in-chief, he knew the northern public thirsted for a direct confrontation between him—the Union's best soldier—and Robert E. Lee. He knew as well that Lincoln had wanted someone in charge in Virginia who would smash the Rebels. He thus incorporated a direct challenge to Lee and his army into his broader strategy of exhaustion. During the resulting Overland Campaign of May–June 1864, he applied ceaseless pressure that brought combat on a scale unknown even in this bloody war. Constant attrition between the first week of May and the middle of June produced more than 65,000 Union casualties in an army that began the campaign with 120,000 men. (To appreciate this scale of loss, imagine how Americans today would respond to news that U.S. military forces had suffered close to a million casualties in a six-week operation.) Later in the war, Grant embraced Lincoln's vision for an easy peace when he offered generous terms to the Confederates who surrendered at Appomattox. Grant likely agreed with Lincoln's views in this respect, but the point is that he did what his civilian superior wanted him to do.

Crowd at the Ulysses S. Grant Memorial at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., in 1922. Photograph by Harris & Ewing. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

In short, this was a model civil-military partnership. Lincoln gave Grant wide latitude, and Grant calmed Lincoln down on occasion, as when he reassured him that the capital was safe in the face of Jubal A. Early's incursion in July 1864. Just before Vicksburg fell to Union forces in July 1863, Lincoln stated: "Grant is my man, and I am his for the rest of the war." That was the case, and the leadership of these two men, more than any other factor, enabled the United States to emerge triumphant from the crucible of a mammoth war.

Anyone who visits the National Mall in Washington should take a moment at each end of that long, green swath. In front of the Capitol sits the imposing equestrian statue of Grant, dedicated in 1922 and bearing a single word: "Grant." At the other end of the Mall, the Lincoln Memorial, also dedicated in 1922, faces eastward toward the Capitol from near the Potomac River. It is entirely appropriate that Lincoln and Grant face each other in the capital of the nation their superior leadership did so much to save.

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The National Mall, from the Lincoln Memorial to the U.S. Capitol, taken on April 30, 2007. Carol M. Highsmith's America, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

Photograph by Brian Rimm.

An Interview with Callie Hawkins

by Jonathan W. White

Callie Hawkins is the CEO and Executive Director of President Lincoln's Cottage in Washington, D.C., where she previously served as Director of Programming. She is responsible for innovative leadership of the national monument and for providing overall direction for all aspects of operations. Additionally, she co-hosts Q&Abe, the site's award-winning podcast, which has reached thousands of people in more than 80 countries. During her tenure, Hawkins has spearheaded projects that won national and international recognition, including awards from the American Association for State and Local History, the American Alliance of Museums, the National Council on Public History, and a presidential medal in 2016 for Students Opposing Slavery, a youth education program for high school students dedicated to raising awareness about modern slavery. She has contributed to numerous publications, including the Journal of Museum Education, The Public Historian, *and* History Matters.

Jonathan White: I've visited Lincoln's Cottage a number of times over the past twenty years and I always find it such a beautiful, peaceful place amid the hustle and bustle of Washington, D.C. Tell us about the history of the Cottage. And what did it mean for the Lincolns?

Callie Hawkins: President Lincoln's Cottage is located on the outskirts of D.C.—about 4 miles uphill from the White House—on the grounds of what is today called the Armed Forces Retirement Home. The Cottage itself was built in the 1840s by a prominent Washingtonian, George Washington Riggs, who sold the property in the early 1850s to the federal government, which was looking to establish a retirement home for veterans. The Old Soldiers' Home—as it was originally called—made a practice of recruiting high-ranking government officials to stay in houses on the property. While president, James Buchanan stayed in a house adjacent to the Cottage, and it's likely that he is the one who made President Lincoln aware of the serene grounds.

"Soldier's Home, Washington, D.C.," ca. 1863, by Charles Magnus. (71.2009.081.1703)

The Cottage and the Soldiers' Home grounds bookend Lincoln's presidency—he visited days after his first inauguration and was seen riding the grounds the day before his assassination. The Lincoln family made plans to come to the Cottage for his first hot season as president, but the outbreak of the Civil War persuaded him to remain at the White House. By the next summer—the summer of 1862—the first family was desperate for a measure of comfort. Their beloved boy Willie had died in February, and the Executive Mansion was a house of pain for the first family. Mary never entered the room where he suffered again. In a May 1862 letter to Julia Ann Sprigg, Mary wrote, "Our home is very beautiful, the grounds around us are enchanting, the world still smiles & pays homage. Yet the charm is dispelled—everything appears a mockery, the idolised one, is not with us, he has fulfilled his mission and we are left desolate." She noted their plans to move "to the 'Soldiers' Home,' a very charming place 2 ½ miles from the city." At the Cottage, the Lincolns found some of the quiet they craved. The quiet of a country cottage called to them in their deep grief. The Lincoln family returned each summer and early fall he was president; in total, Lincoln spent a quarter—or 13 of the 50 months of his presidency—in residence at the Cottage.

JW: What was daily life like for Lincoln and his family during their summers on the outskirts of the city?

CH: Given the seclusion of the Soldiers' Home grounds, it's easy to imagine the Cottage as a retreat. However, the constant call of visitors that President Lincoln experienced at the White House didn't stop just because he'd moved out of the city. As Mary Lincoln described in a letter to friends, each day brought cabinet members, allies, and adversaries who wanted an audience with the president. The family was also surrounded by the veteran residents of the Old Soldiers' Home and the young men from Company K of the 150th Pennsylvania Volunteers, who guarded President Lincoln and his family both at the Cottage and at the White House.

Still, there were precious moments of peace that were difficult to come by at the White House. As Mary described, when the family was "in sorrow, quiet is very necessary to us." The Cottage and the grounds offered a bit of that quiet they craved.

JW: You've been at the Cottage now for more than fifteen years. How has your role at the site evolved over time?

CH: I first started as the Education Coordinator—managing the tour and field trip programs—shortly after the Cottage opened to the public for the first time. As the vision for the Cottage grew, so did my role. After several years, I was promoted

to Director of Programming. I spearheaded many groundbreaking programs, partnerships, and exhibits in order to expand our understanding of both Lincoln and ourselves. In August 2023, I was invited to serve as the CEO and Executive Director. While leading the organization was never really in my plans, the opportunity was hard to resist. We have the most talented, curious and brave staff, and it is a real honor to work alongside them.

JW: Tell us about some of the more moving or poignant moments of Lincoln's presidency that happened at the Cottage.

CH: More than any one story or singular event, the most poignant parts of Lincoln's time at the Cottage—to me—are revealed in all the ways he was human at this place. Here, he grieved; spent sleepless nights; responded to desperate favor-seekers in ways he later regretted; played games; read books and recited poetry; and made nation-changing decisions—he developed the Emancipation Proclamation in an upstairs bedroom—all within these walls. And, by choosing to talk about all the ways Lincoln was so uniquely himself at this place, President Lincoln's Cottage gives visitors today an even more intimate look at a man about which we know so much. I'm constantly heartened by the comments we receive from self-professed Lincoln-lovers who share that they've studied the man their entire lives and feel closer to him after a visit to this place.

With that in mind, Lincoln's most poignant moments at the Cottage to me are the ones that reveal different aspects of his character and humanity. One of those is an account we have from a California woman who wrote about seeing the weary president wandering through the U.S. Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery, which was the precursor to Arlington. She wrote that "in the graveyard near at hand there are numberless graves—some without a spear of grass to hide their newness—that hold the bodies of volunteers. While we stood in the soft evening air, watching the faint trembling of the long tendrils of waving willow, and feeling the dewy coolness that was flung out by the old oaks above us, Mr. Lincoln joined us, and stood silent, too, taking the scene." According to the woman, Lincoln softly recited several lines from the eighteenth-century poet William Collins: "How sleep the brave, who sink to rest / By all their country's wishes blessed." To what extent the site of those fresh graves influenced his wartime policies, writings, or speeches, we will likely never know. What is certain is that, in many ways, living at the Soldiers' Home brought Lincoln closer to the war and its devastating toll.

I also find poignant the quiet moments the first family spent

President Lincoln's Cottage. Photograph by David B. Wiegers.

Stereoview of the cemetery at the Soldiers' Home in Washington, D.C. Photograph by Benjamin West Kilburn, ca. 1880. (New York Public Library)

here with each other, especially Lincoln and his son Tad. By all accounts a somewhat permissive father, I adore the stories where we see glimpses of Lincoln, the doting father. Often mischievous and always full of love, these tales include everything from Lincoln climbing a tree to release one of Tad's peacocks who'd become entangled in branches to playing checkers with his son on the south veranda and worrying over the whereabouts of Tad's beloved goats who had mysteriously disappeared while Mrs. Lincoln and Tad were traveling. While none of these happenings would have made national headlines, they obviously meant something to the people who witnessed these micro-moments and jotted them down or passed them on through family stories of their own.

JW: You recently created an exhibit on grief. As readers of *Lincoln Lore* know, Lincoln was no stranger to grief, having lost his mother, father, sister, an infant brother, his sweetheart, and two sons—not to mention close friends and associates like Edward D. Baker and Elmer Ellsworth, and so many other dead during the Civil War. Tell us about this exhibit. And how did it come about?

CH: The Lincolns' impetus for moving to the Cottage had been part of our tours since opening to the public in 2008. However, our initial approach focused more on Willie's death as a circumstance that led them to this place, rather than a turning point for the family. In truth, Willie's death—and Eddy Lincoln's death several years prior—changed the course and character of both Lincolns' lives forever and it certainly impacted who they were at the Cottage. Early on, we failed to give that lived experience the care and attention it deserved. We also missed the opportunity to connect modern grieving people to this part of the Lincolns' lived experience. For a site that really seeks to bring Lincoln into the present, the recognition that grief is a universal human emotion that every visitor who walks through our doors has or will experience if they love and live long enough, has provided new chances to deeply connect with modern visitors who may also be grieving.

In December 2020, President Lincoln's Cottage opened *Reflections on Grief and Child Loss*—a special exhibit that puts the Lincolns' experience with traumatic grief after the deaths of their children in conversation with nine modern families whose children have died. These families represent a range of perspectives and cultures, and their children have died inexplicably and as a result of illness, violence, and other tragic circumstances. While each experience is unique and individual, these families are connected—to each other and the Lincolns—in their grief and in their love for their children. At the center of the modest exhibit room is a large, structural weeping willow on whose branches hang dozens of removable vellum leaves. On each dangling leaf, visitors are invited to write the name of a child or other loved one who has died and hang the leaf back on the tree. This public memorial has resulted in thousands of messages of love and loss.

Reflections of Grief and Child Loss was also a labor of love for me very personally. On February 12, 2018—which also coincidentally was Abraham Lincoln's 209th birthday—my infant son tragically and unexpectedly died. I now knew exactly what Mary Lincoln meant when she said something I had quoted a million times throughout my tenure at the Cottage, "When we are in sorrow, quiet is very necessary to us." I had never fully appreciated that—*and* her—until then. In fact, in those early days, I remember thinking that if society did to me what it did to Mary Lincoln, then I might not survive the pain of such an enormous loss. For me, integrating my love for my son who died into every part of my life became vital to my own survival. I had a recognition that if I felt this way—isolated in society and deeply connected to the Lincoln story—then other people might find a measure of solace in this story, too.

To create the exhibit, we identified themes related to the Lincolns' own grief from their private correspondence and from the reflections of those who knew them. From the historical record, themes emerged that became the basis for a series of questions on which we asked the participating modern families to reflect. By connecting the Lincolns' experience to the reflections of contemporary families, we found commonalities and meaningful differences, especially related to places of meaning, support networks and social expectations, and rituals.

It's probably no surprise, but one of the aspects of grief that echoed across the eras is the idea that places hold power in death and grieving. According to grief researchers, places crystallize memories of children who have died, create powerful connotations that inform the grieving process, and provide a space to reflect. Sometimes these places hold moments and memories to which we long to return, and others are places we would like to forget. As I noted earlier, the White House held both beautiful memories of Willie's life and agonizing memories of his death. The Cottage offered a measure of quiet and an opportunity to nurture their broken hearts that they perhaps couldn't find at the Executive Mansion. In our grief exhibit, a modern family echoed: "Our home is a place of beautiful memories and terrible pain. [Our daughter's] bedroom has, for the most part, remained the same. We find comfort walking by her door and peering at her things just as we did when she was alive. She loved being outdoors and helping in the garden.

Reflections on Grief and Child Loss exhibit. Photograph by Brian Rimm.

Since her death, we have planted her favorite pink flowers and have garden art placed throughout that bears her name. We take pride in what we have created. It is a quiet space that allows building new memories but also remembering the old." Her mom went on to share, "I personally cannot drive by any elementary school without thinking that if she went to that school, she would be alive. It seems like a cruel world when you have these unannounced reminders that your child died as you go about your life."

In the exhibit, we acknowledge that grief is a universal experience. Yet, our society holds little space for the grieving, who often are left feeling isolated and alone. It is a profoundly personal experience, but is shaped by external factors, including the expectations of society and those closest to the bereaved. The type of support a person receives in the aftermath of their loss is critical to their ability to integrate their grief into their daily lives.

The historical record suggests that the Lincolns' felt the weight of social expectation and longed for support from family and friends, though this manifested itself in different ways for the two of them. They shouldered public opinions, advice, duty, and criticism, even as they grieved. Society urged Mary to focus on her other children. But she went far deeper into mourning than others thought proper. She retreated from society for an entire year. Her grief fueled accusations she was mentally unbalanced. Mary experienced public outbursts and crying fits so intense that Abraham's thoughts turned to the mental institution across the river. Unable to take time off or distance himself, Abraham was expected and required to go back to work. Not long after, he laid the groundwork for the Emancipation Proclamation. He had to face the war alongside his grief and carry the double burden of being the President of the United States and a grieving father, often reflecting in the country's first national cemetery, located just a couple hundred yards from the front door of his Cottage. The Lincolns found support in old friends and family. And they found some perspective in the losses of those around them.

Once again, these sentiments were echoed by modern families who participated in the exhibit. Abby's father reflected, "Talking about Abby is so vital to us in keeping her memory and legacy bright and alive. I think it is a surprise for some people that we still talk about her so freely. I think they are confused as to why we are still talking about her, assuming reflecting on her life, and death, only accentuates the pain. They don't understand that talking about her is the best way of staying in touch with our continued love for her." And Brendan's parents acknowledged that the two of them often have very different needs from one another. His father expressed that, "The action of greeting people and accepting their sympathies helped me through Brendan's funeral. It gave the people a way to express their support for me and our family. It recognized our connections and acknowledged that Brendan and our family had value." By contrast, Brendan's mother added, "So many people wanted to offer kind support, but this loss of my son is so entirely personal that I find little comfort from others. It's in the time in bed before I sleep when I talk—sometimes aloud—to Brendan that I am comforted."

Callie Hawkins reflects on messages of love and loss in President Lincoln's Cottage's exhibit on grief and child loss. Photograph by Brian Rimm.

When a loved one dies, researchers say that ritual "serves to honor the content of our hearts, both the love and pain." Rituals like funerals and memorial services offer what Dr. Joanne Cacciatore—a leading research therapist and herself a bereaved mother—describes as "connection maintenance" by helping us feel closer to the one who has died. When a child dies, these rituals can honor the importance of the child in their parents' lives and can heighten the ability of those close to the grieving—who may also themselves be grieving this loss—to show up for the bereaved parents in meaningful ways that validate rather than diminish their loss.

On February 24, 1862, a storm swept through Washington, D.C., that was so fierce it knocked out windows and toppled church steeples. Inside the Executive Mansion, Abraham, Mary, and Robert Lincoln gathered in the Green Room to bid a private farewell to their beloved boy who had died days earlier. They arranged flowers in Willie's hands and draped the mirrors in black. Neither Mary nor Tad, the Lincolns' youngest son, attended the funeral. Mary was too distraught, and Tad was bedridden with the same illness that killed his brother. Abraham and Robert, the oldest of the Lincolns' four boys and the only one who knew all of his siblings, attended the service and processed with his casket to a Georgetown cemetery where Willie was laid to rest in the Carroll family vault, beside the Carrolls' own departed children.

In the exhibit, one family reflected on the immediate aftermath of their daughter's death and her funeral, saying: "The days immediately following [our daughter's] death were held together by close family and friends. They protected us. They allowed access only to close friends and kept strangers and the media away. We tried to personalize the service by singing our daughter's favorite songs and sharing funny stories, but it did little to alleviate the trauma. Distraught, my husband and I chose to allow other family members to eulogize her. It is one of our biggest regrets."

As we heard over and over again from grieving families, rituals serve to keep parents connected over time to their children who have died, as Jaycee's mom reflected, "I find ways that I can share my Jaycee moments with others. Sharing photos and stories of Jaycee. I still parent my child (young adult) by letting people know his personality. I end my emails from the two of us, and I use the word 'is' instead of 'was.'"

JW: What was the public reaction to *Reflections on Grief and Child Loss*?

CH: Because grief is universal, the exhibit has been meaningful to tens of thousands of our annual visitors. People not directly impacted by child death report that its message is instructive for all types of grief and grievers. We have found our takeaway cards that provide suggestions on how to best support grieving loved ones are especially resonant. One visitor noted, "I loved this exhibit. Thank you so much for working so hard to find solidarity and community for everyone who has suffered the loss of a child and all of us who love them."

We have also connected with a new audience of bereaved people in search of opportunities to share their experiences publicly in a grief-averse society. We've been so moved by the scores of grievers who pilgrimage to the Cottage to leave behind a memorial leaf. One grieving parent shared, "It was so comforting to see affirmation of the grieving we have lived through after losing our son." But perhaps one of the most moving comments from a bereaved visitor was a note that simply said: "I felt less alone."

This exhibit has been important to the parents who so graciously shared their reflections of love and loss. One mother explained the import of participating in this project, saying "When your child dies, you get no more moments where accomplishments are celebrated, or milestones achieved. With [my son] being part of this exhibit, I get to feel proud that he has a chance to make an impact, bring awareness and potentially create change." To our great honor, bereaved parents, many of whom have traveled great distances, have chosen to spend the anniversaries of their child's death or birth at the Cottage, memorializing them on a vellum leaf on the central willow. As the tree fills up, the Cottage team will transcribe the messages from each leaf onto seed paper and ultimately plant a grief garden on the Cottage grounds. An act which will, as reporter Gillian Brockell wrote in a piece for the *Washington Post*, take "all that love and grief and sustain something new and alive."

For many visitors, a Google search of "famous people in history who have lost children"—tapped out on their phones while in the throes of deep grief—led to Brockell's article on the exhibit, which ultimately led them to the Cottage. Desperate for community and connection, they find a measure of that on these grounds.

I wish this exhibit never had to be, yet I am grateful that a shared sense of love and pain have brought me in community with so many other loving people and families who so generously provided their reflections.

JW: What other things can visitors to the Cottage expect to encounter?

CH: Lincoln's Cottage is perhaps the best place in the country to understand Lincoln as both a private man and president. I'm often struck by the deep human connection to Lincoln that visitors come away with. When people visit the Cottage, I hope they glimpse the view of downtown Washington that Lincoln had from his back porch—a view that gave him both the literal and figurative latitude to just think about things differently. I hope they will run their hands along the banister—the same one that provided stability for a war-weary and grief-stricken Lincoln as he made his way to bed each evening. And, I hope they will feel the "Lincoln shiver"—a full-bodied sensation that some people report experiencing when they walk through these rooms and think deeply about Lincoln and what his life and work mean to us today.

Our public programs further demonstrate how what happened here more than 160 years ago continues to ignite courageous new ideas and respectful dialogue. Annual programs like Students Opposing Slavery, the Lincoln Ideas Forum, and Two Faces Comedy—a partnership with the DC Improv—thematically link the history of Lincoln's legacy at this place with modern audiences in unexpected ways. We also host annually Bourbon and Bluegrass as a nod to Lincoln's Kentucky roots and a fundraiser for our preservation activities. Perhaps one of my personal favorite parts of our programming is Q&Abe—a podcast that explores real visitor questions. We always start with the Cottage and Lincoln but end up in some unexpected places. It's a great tool for sharing this special visitor experience with audiences who may never get to visit the Cottage in person.

JW: Thank you so much for sharing your story with us, and for the work you are doing to connect modern families with this very important history.

President Lincoln's Cottage. Photograph by Brian Rimm.

Statue of Lincoln and his horse at President Lincoln's Cottage by sculptors Ivan Schwartz, Stuart Williamson, and Jiwoong Cheh, dedicated February 12, 2009. Photograph by David B. Wiegers.

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