

THE LINCOLN MUSEUM



1990 ANNUAL REPORT

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The year 1990 proved to be gratifying for institutions devoted to the study of Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War. It began with the Inaugural Lecture of the Presidential Lecture Series on the Presidency, the subject of which was President George Bush's favorite president, Lincoln. Professor David Donald of Harvard University delivered the Lincoln lecture in the White House on January 7, and this event seemed to set the tone for the year.

Autumn was marked by the phenomenon of some fourteen million people viewing eleven hours of documentary television on the American Civil War. Though there had been in recent years many signs of increasing popular interest in the great conflict, from the growing membership of Civil War Round Tables to the excellent sales statistics for serious Civil War books, no one could have predicted the popular reaction to Public Television's Civil War series. That a straightforward historical documentary, relying heavily on the words of the war's participants and almost entirely on period photographs and paintings for visual effects, could not only attract such an audience but increase it over five days of programming astounded the press and television critics.

FIFTEEN TYPICAL DAYS IN A BANNER YEAR

Naturally, The Lincoln Museum enjoyed a year of increased attendance and nearly frenzied activity. Out of curiosity, three staff members, Mark Neely, Director, Ruth E. Cook, Assistant to the Director, and Marilyn Tolbert, Project Specialist, logged their calls and correspondence for the period March 30-April 13, and found that they answered 59 letters, 33 telephone requests, and 26 visitors' inquiries. In the same period a researcher worked in the library on a paper about Lincoln and Shakespeare.



*The Staff of The Lincoln Museum (from left to right):
Yvonne White, Marilyn Tolbert, Mark Neely, and Ruth Cook.*

At the same time attendance at the museum's exhibits numbered 733 persons (in what amounted to ten working days altogether). Two personal tours were conducted by the staff, one of them for a group of visiting Rotarians from Great Britain. On Sunday, April 8, the director of The Lincoln Museum spoke at the 50th anniversary meeting of the Lincoln Fellowship of Wisconsin on the subject of "Lincoln and the Idea of Total War." In the same period the museum secured the services of an intern from Indiana University-Purdue University at Fort Wayne, Margaret Kennedy, a history major who, in two short semesters of diligent and tightly-focused work, subsequently catalogued hundreds of our photographs and produced a special exhibit on Civil War photography.

There was nothing special about the period March 30-April 13 to skew these statistics. The month of April stood only third in total attendance for the year. Of the director's forty-five public appearances for lectures and speeches in 1990, only three occurred in April. March 30-April 13 simply marked two event-filled weeks in a year filled with Lincoln and Civil War events.

ACQUISITIONS

The popularity of Lincoln and the Civil War is reflected not only in museum attendance figures and television-viewer ratings but also in the prices realized for manuscripts, rare books, and other artifacts associated with the sixteenth president and the war he guided. Like world oil reserves, the supply of historical materials on the market is always dwindling, and increased demand only makes natural price increases unnaturally steep.

The environment for museum and library acquisitions has been hostile for years. Manuscripts have attained unprecedented values, and other categories have followed them—photographs perhaps almost as rapidly, prints a bit more sluggishly, and books more slowly yet.

Thanks to the renewal of a generous five-year program for funding acquisitions on the part of the Lincoln National Life Foundation, this institution has been able to cope very well, and 1990's acquisitions surely prove the point. January saw the acquisition of Abraham Lincoln's legal wallet, a worn leather pouch with alphabetized accordion-pleated paper compartments. Inside was a pocket-knife with a silver blade and mother-of-pearl handle. "A. Lincoln" is engraved in a small silver panel on the handle. The items last sold at the famous auction of Oliver R. Barrett's Lincoln collection in 1952. The purchaser discovered the knife, not catalogued for the sale, in the "K" compartment of the wallet—a buyer's dream and a seller's nightmare.

Photographs have figured largely in The Lincoln Museum's acquisitions in the last six years. In 1990 a dealer from Ohio brought in the year's best acquisition in this category: an imperial-sized ambrotype of Horace Greeley in an old wooden frame with a gleaming brass mat. Lincoln photograph authority Lloyd Ostendorf pronounced it "the largest specimen of its kind" that he had seen in over fifty years of collecting and studying photographs of the period. He further characterized it as "indeed a real find, a once-in-a-lifetime item." The hey-day of ambrotypes, early photographs produced on glass plates, was 1855–1860, and this portrait therefore likely shows the famous editor of the New York *Tribune* around the time that Abraham Lincoln was troubled by Greeley's support for Stephen A. Douglas' re-election to the United States Senate. Lincoln wrote feelingly about the Greeley problem on June 1, 1858:

I have believed—do believe now—that Greeley [*sic*]...would be rather pleased to see Douglas re-elected over me or any other republican; and yet I do not believe it is so, because of any secret arrangement with Douglas. It is because he thinks Douglas' superior position, reputation, experience, and *ability*; if you please, would more than compensate for his lack of a pure republican position, and therefore, his re-election do the general cause of republicanism, more good, than would the election of any one of our better undistinguished pure republicans. I do not know how *you* estimate Greeley [*sic*], but *I* consider him incapable of corruption, or falsehood. He denies that he directly is taking part in favor of Douglas, and I believe him. Still his *feeling* constantly manifests itself in his paper, which, being so extensively read in Illinois, is, and will continue to be, a drag upon us.



Abraham Lincoln's legal wallet and pocket knife.



Ambrotype of Horace Greeley, whom Lincoln thought "incapable of corruption, or falsehood."

The rarest book acquired in 1990 was Robert Todd Lincoln's copy of *In Memoriam. Abraham Lincoln, Sixteenth President of the United States*, a compilation of the general orders about Lincoln's assassination issued to the army. The volume, consisting of 46 pages printed in black mourning borders with a steel-engraved frontispiece portrait of Abraham Lincoln from the Bureau of Engraving, was put together in 1882 for Abraham Lincoln's grandchildren by order of the Adjutant General of the United States Army. Only four copies were printed, one each for Mamie, Jessie, and Jack, and one for Robert, who was their father. Robert was also the Secretary of War in 1882, when the book was published, and the volume may well be characterized as a handsome gift to the boss and his kids from the Adjutant General, paid for by the taxpayers of the United States! If Robert ordered the book's publication, which seems quite unlikely, then the volume represented a selfish conflict of interest on his part. Either way, the book tells a sorry story, and all too familiar-sounding today.

The year's manuscript acquisitions included eighteen letters written by two soldiers in the 100th Indiana Volunteer Infantry, Solomon Barnes and John Sutton, along with a photograph of this sturdy pair in uniform. As an Indiana institution, The Lincoln Museum naturally takes a special interest in Indiana's role in the Civil War. Our nearby patrons expect to find research materials on Indiana in the Civil War here, and a program has been under way for several years to acquire Indiana soldiers' letters and diaries as well as printed regimental histories of Indiana units.

A particularly charming manuscript acquisition was a copy of James Whitcomb Riley's poem, *Lincoln*, written in the Hoosier poet's hand.

Art works added to the collection this year included an oil portrait of Lincoln's private secretary and biographer, John G. Nicolay, painted by his daughter. A related acquisition was a handsome photograph of Nicolay sitting with his daughter in an artist's studio in the 1880s.

NEW NAME, NEW LOOK

Although the times have been good in terms of public interest in our subject, an institution, even one devoted to study of a historical figure, must take care to keep up with the times. This year we became "The Lincoln Museum," a familiar name by which most people have called the place through the sixty-one years during which it labored under different official names: the Lincoln Historical Research Foundation, the Lincoln National Life Foundation, the Lincoln Library and Museum, or the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum.



Tintype of Solomon Barnes and John Sutton, Civil War soldiers from Indiana.



John G. Nicolay in an oil portrait by his daughter Helen.

LINCOLN

A PEACEFUL LIFE — just toil and rest
 All his desire, —
 To read the books he liked the best
 Beside the cabin fire —
 God's word and man's; — to peer sometimes
 Above the page, in smouldering gleams,
 And catch the faint heroic rhymes
 That came to him in dreams.

A peaceful life; — to hear the low
 Of pastured herds,
 Or woodman's ax that, blow on blow,
 Fell sweet as rhythmic words.
 And yet there stirred within his breast
 A faithful pulse that, like a roll
 Of drums, made high above his rest
 A tumult in his soul.

A peaceful life!... They hailed him even
 As One was hailed
 Whose open palms were nailed toward Heaven
 When prayers nor aught availed:
 And, lo, he paid this selfsame price
 To bid a nation's awful strife
 And will us, through the sacrifice
 Of self, his peaceful life.

— James Whitcomb Riley

James Whitcomb Riley's poem "Lincoln," written on the back of a piece of the poet's stationery.

To mark the change the institution also adopted its first official logo: a black top hat in a gold frame. Readers can view it on the back cover of this report—and soon also on our letterhead and on our other publications.

The museum still feels strongly its indebtedness to the first director, Louis A. Warren. The research library is now called The Louis A. Warren Library of Lincolniana. Warren served as director from 1928 to 1956, purchased the original library collection back in 1929, and wrote important books himself. This seems an especially appropriate area in which to honor his contributions to the Lincoln field.

AWARD

The Corporate Communications department of Lincoln National Corporation provided indispensable aid in developing the new logo and in other related museum programs. That work typifies the high level of support given the museum over the years by Lincoln National Corporation. It provides the operating budget, the physical home, and through its Foundation, the acquisitions funds for The Lincoln Museum. In September the American Association for State and Local History recognized this contribution by giving Lincoln National Corporation its Award of Merit “for lasting commitment to the support and development of The Lincoln Museum.”

R. GERALD McMURTRY LECTURE

On May 24th John T. Hubbell, Professor of History at Kent State University, Director of the Kent State University Press, and Editor of *Civil War History*, delivered the thirteenth annual R. Gerald McMurtry Lecture. The subject was “War and Freedom and Abraham Lincoln.” For the third year in a row attendance exceeded 140 (and the seating capacity of the lecture room). The 1989 lecture, Robert W. Johannsen’s *Lincoln and the South in 1860*, is now available in printed form. Six other lectures are still available as pamphlets: Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Minor Affair: An Adventure in Forgery and Detection* (1979); Harold M. Hyman, *Lincoln’s Reconstruction: Neither Failure of Vision nor Vision of Failure* (1980); Robert V. Bruce, *Lincoln and the Riddle of Death* (1981); Ralph Geoffrey Newman, *Preserving Lincoln for the Ages: Collectors, Collections, and Our Sixteenth President* (1983); Frank E. Vandiver, *The Long Loom of Lincoln* (1986); and John Y. Simon, *House Divided: Lincoln and His Father* (1987).

These lectures honor the work of Louis Warren’s successor, R. Gerald McMurtry, who directed the museum’s operations from 1956 to 1972 and who died on October 29, 1988.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

This report goes to press three weeks before the end of the year, but museum attendance reached 13,891 by that time. Attendance has climbed gradually since the disastrous oil embargo of the 1970s greatly diminished the use of school buses for “field trips.”

Special exhibits have helped to rebuild visitation. Each year The Lincoln Museum provides small exhibits and special publications for the December holiday season, for Black History Month, and for three Fort Wayne festivals: Germanfest, Three Rivers Festival, and the Johnny Appleseed Festival. Each event offers a special challenge for a Lincoln institution whose greatest strength lies in its holdings in books, manuscripts, photographs, and prints. Such materials do not lend themselves readily to parades, street fairs, or crafts demonstrations. The Christmas season presents an extra problem. Abraham Lincoln often worked on Christmas Day, a holiday that did not have the significance in the nineteenth century that it has today. To provide a holiday exhibit without distorting the historical record (or seeming Scrooge-like to the modern public) requires ingenuity. In 1990 the museum featured highlights from a decade of collecting, 1890–1990, putting the emphasis more on the New Year than on the Christmas holiday.

It is no secret that the power of Lincoln’s image in America’s black communities decreased considerably in the late 1960s. Just at the time some people in the civil rights movement were saying that Lincoln did not go far enough fast enough on race issues, the tragic murder of Martin Luther King, Jr., accelerated Dr. King’s rise to symbolic leadership. Lincoln was nevertheless vitally involved in black history, and The Lincoln Museum carefully notes that involvement each year with an exhibit featuring photographs and prints showing Lincoln’s complex relationship to black history in the United States.

Germanfest does not offer the problems it might appear to at first blush, because Lincoln is an international figure—and because the largest foreign-speaking segment of the American electorate in the middle of the nineteenth century spoke German. Therefore, a substantial number of Lincoln items were printed in German. In the Three Rivers Festival, the museum provided a parade entry, and for the Johnny Appleseed Festival it provided sets of Lincoln’s works to be given away by lottery.



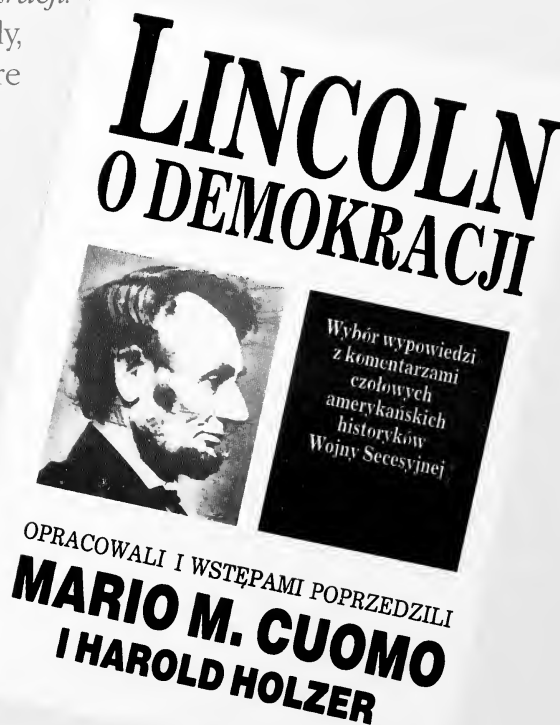
“Welcome Home,” a Chicago print that formed part of the special exhibit for Black History Month.

SCHOLARSHIP

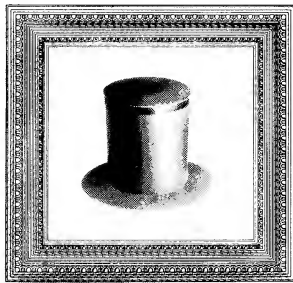
The Lincoln Museum continues its emphasis on Lincoln scholarship. Researchers this year worked on Lincoln's image in the American mind; on Anson Henry, Lincoln's physician and political associate; on the trial of Lincoln's assassins; on women abolitionists in Indiana; on Abraham Lincoln's legal practice; on Lincoln bibliography; and on ethnic images in engravings, lithographs, and cartoons—to mention a few.

The library provides inspiration for visiting researchers and staff members alike. The monthly bulletin, *Lincoln Lore*, featured the writing of Sarah McNair Vosmeier before she left to work on the *Journal of American History* and to finish her Ph.D. in history. Matthew Noah Vosmeier, like his wife Sarah also a graduate student in history at Indiana University, now writes most of the issues of the bulletin. Its circulation stands at 5,789.

The museum's director, Mark Neely, has seen several projects reach publication this year. Oxford University Press published his book *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties* in November. In the previous month Doubleday brought out *The Lincoln Family Album*, based on photographs in The Lincoln Museum's collections, with commentary by Neely and coauthor Harold Holzer. Holzer, with whom Neely frequently collaborates, aided Governor Mario M. Cuomo in producing *Lincoln on Democracy*, also published in the autumn, by Harper Collins. One of the book's essays introducing selections from Lincoln's works was written by Neely. Fulfilling a promise made by Governor Cuomo to Solidarity Movement teachers visiting from Poland, the work was simultaneously published in Poland as *Lincoln o Demokracji*. The world appears to be changing rapidly, but Abraham Lincoln still remains a figure of international political importance.



Book: "Lincoln O Demokracji."



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