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# COOK-WITTER REPORT

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## Museum Gets Major Lincoln Collection

**I**t was a dream come true. This spring the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum (ALPM) in Springfield acquired the bulk of the most renowned private collection of Lincoln-related memorabilia in the world.

The collection of about 1,500 items was owned by Louise Taper, a California Lincoln buff and author who's been acquiring Lincoln-related items for more than 30 years. Included are documents, artifacts, photographs, campaign buttons and ribbons, and even sheet music produced to commemorate Lincoln's election.

Perhaps no other item is more closely associated with Lincoln than his stovepipe hat. There are only three still existing. Now, one of his hats is home. The ALPM acquired one through the Taper collection. (The other two are at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. and Robert Todd Lincoln's home, Hildene, in Vermont.) The Museum's hat has worn finger marks where

Lincoln grasped it and its band is stretched from Lincoln shoving too many business papers inside.

Other highlights of the collection are the blood-stained gloves Lincoln wore to Ford's Theater the night he was assassinated and a handwritten page from the math book Lincoln used when he was young.

Taper donated part of the collection; the Museum's Foundation bought the rest and will give it to the Museum. No tax money was used. While Taper kept some items, she will eventually also send them to the ALPM. Certain items from her collection are already on display at the Museum.

We recently questioned Lincoln scholar and ALPM State Historian Tom Schwartz about the collection and its importance for the Museum. Schwartz has seen numerous private Lincoln collections and is in a unique position to evaluate this acquisition.

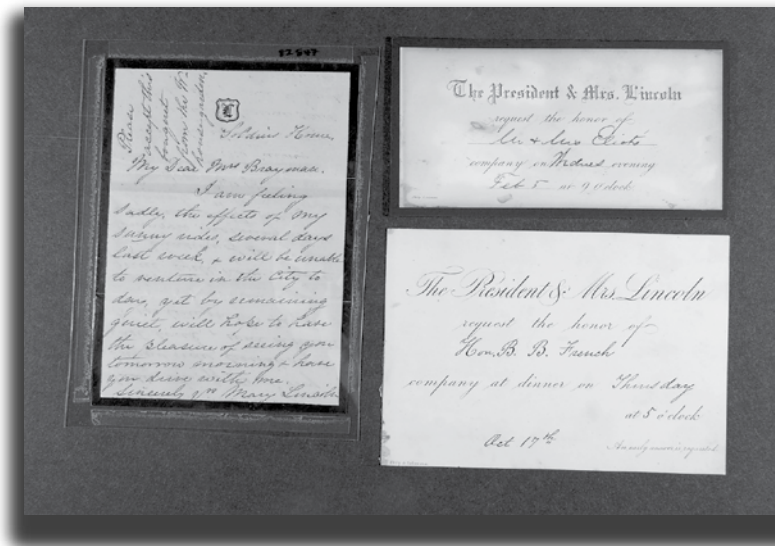
***Describe how this acquisition affects the Museum and what it can offer visitors.***

The purchase allows the Museum more significant original pieces with which to tell the Lincoln story. Some are iconic such as Lincoln's stovepipe hat, while others are personal and rather ordinary, such as his wallet. People respond best to authentic and original pieces because it is a way to connect them to past lives. If you look at the Taper materials as potential entry points into the Lincoln story, its acquisition provides a rich treasure trove of possibilities in the way the story is presented and interpreted. Will it increase atten-

dance? Probably, since people are naturally curious about anything that is new and different.

***How many of the items will go on permanent display?***

Nothing goes on permanent display. It is anticipated that once everything is properly cataloged, many items will be used in a variety of exhibits, especially those planned for the bicentennial (of Lincoln's birthday -- in 2009).



*White House Invitations and Mary Todd Lincoln Stationery - Courtesy of Terry Farmer Photography Inc.*

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### Museum Gets Major Collection...

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*Mary Todd Lincoln's black mourning jewelry is part of the Taper Collection. Courtesy of Terry Farmer Photography Inc.*

***Will the Museum have a special exhibition of all or many of the Taper items?***

It's too soon to predict or announce an exhibition timetable.

***How did some of the items remain intact this long? Tell us about their history.***

Every item in the collection has its own story about how it passed from Lincoln to various individuals until it eventually arrived here. Benjamin Richardson, an eccentric New York collector and millionaire, solicited Mrs. Lincoln for items owned by her late husband for Richardson's growing collection of Lincoln memorabilia. She eventually sent him the blood-stained gloves and handkerchief from Ford's Theatre. He, in turn, framed them and proudly displayed them on his dining room wall. Mary gave away many of Lincoln's things, especially those related to the night at Ford's Theatre, which was something she did not want to remember. One wonders what went through the minds of Richardson's guests when they saw the framed items as they ate rare roast beef in his dining room!

The sum book page, and the entire sum book, was kept by Sarah Bush Johnston Lincoln, Abraham's step-mother. When Lincoln's last law partner, William Herndon, interviewed her for his book about Lincoln, she showed him the sum book. Herndon recounted this visit in a letter which Louise Taper also acquired and provided with the sum book page. Herndon acquired Lincoln's sum book later, from Thomas Johnston, the son of Lincoln's step-brother John D. Johnston.

Herndon broke the book up into individual leaves and either sold or gave them away. Justin Turner, the great Lincoln collector from Los Angeles, acquired this particular page. He was a friend and mentor of Mrs. Taper.

***State officials have been negotiating with Mrs. Taper for a few years about getting this collection. How did it feel when those items arrived by truck and were finally here?***

I felt relief and deep satisfaction. Of all the private collections that I have examined, none can compare to the Taper collection. It contains significant materials that are wonderful in their scope and depth of research potential. It took someone with a keen eye and intelligent grasp of the Lincoln story to assemble such a magnificent collection. We are very fortunate to have it intact.

***The collection also includes John Wilkes Booth artifacts. Can you describe them?***

The collection has a very important component of assassination materials, including correspondence of John Wilkes Booth. The love letters he wrote to Boston socialite Isabel Sumner are part of the acquisition, along with the ring and scarf he gave her. This was 1864 -- the same time he was plotting to kidnap Lincoln.

Photographs of Booth, including some signed images, are part of the collection. There are also play bills from productions that featured him and his brothers. The theatre was an important outlet for escape and leisure for the Lincolns and many other Americans, especially at a time of such great tragedy. The display of these items, like any other item is for a fixed, limited period.



*White House China - Courtesy of Terry Farmer Photography Inc.*

## ALPM Showcases Mary Lincoln's Many Sides

Mary Todd Lincoln got stuck in controversies like gum gets stuck in hair. She got stuck a lot, too, considering her overspending, insanity trial, fits of anger, estrangement from her oldest son, and experiments with spiritualism. But there are aspects of those "crazy" Mary stories that are far less known, and may cause people to reconsider their ideas about her.

Through October 28, the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum (ALPM) in Springfield is holding an exclusive, one-time exhibit looking at Mary's imbroglios. It's the first major retrospective of Lincoln's wife.

The show, "Mary Todd Lincoln: First Lady of Controversy... continues the Museum's commitment to telling the full Lincoln story, warts and all," says Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum Executive Director Rick Beard.

It includes little-known information and several relatively new artifacts, some never before seen in public. One may even change minds about Mary's so-called "insanity."

The Museum organized the exhibition because "we thought it was important to do more in fleshing out the significance of her role in the entire Lincoln story," says ALPM Illinois State Historian Tom Schwartz. "The Museum has Mary coming in and out of the story, but it's actually focused on Lincoln. We thought this would give us a good opportunity to redress the balance. It also provides us with a wonderful opportunity to reveal for the first time, some new acquisitions."

While Mary had "many, many faults," the exhibit will show "that Mary was a person of incredible taste, who was intellectually curious, and someone who loved people, and loved being part of a larger community and yet, ironically, kept finding herself being marginalized and disparaged," Schwartz says.

"Our understanding (of her) is kind of a surface one. So typically, we tend to repeat the stories we're told. I think that has much to do with Mary's reputation still being someone who is kind of an embarrassment to Lincoln and the less said, the better."

Artifacts on display for the first time include the diary of Abraham Lincoln's friend, Illinois Senator Orville Hickman Browning, which reveals misdeeds and unflattering information about Mary. Recently discovered letters written by Mary during and immediately after her stay at the sanitarium illustrate her sense of betrayal toward her oldest son Robert, who initiated her insanity trial.

A few documents deal with Mary's infamous money problems. Newly discovered, unpublished telegrams show she used a fake name to communi-

cate secretly with creditors in Washington. Letters from Mary to the U.S. Treasurer show she fought the government to get Lincoln's remaining salary the year he was shot and used a portion to pay debts with merchants.

Mary got into financial trouble partly because she redecorated the White House. But Lincoln did something similar.

"When she becomes First Lady, she inherits an Executive Mansion that looks like a worn-out boarding house," Schwartz says. "Mary saw the need to turn it into a showplace for the American Republic, a symbol of union" to show visiting dignitaries that "this country was the equal of any foreign monarchy or empire."

When Lincoln was inaugurated, he spent a "great deal of money" during the Civil War to finish the Capitol's dome, against the advice of some, because Lincoln believed a grand Capitol symbolized the union's strength.

Defining Mary's character is like defining art. "Depending on whose eyes you use to see her, you get these vastly different pictures of the same person," Schwartz says. "Lincoln's private secretaries, John Nicolay and John Hay, had nothing good to say about her... On the other hand, another private secretary (of Lincoln's), William O. Stoddard, couldn't explain why people went out of their way to bash her and mistreat her when she'd done absolutely nothing to warrant that."

Stoddard thought Mary just needed to manage her public relations better.

She visited soldiers in the hospital and wrote letters for them, gave them flowers and food, ministered to them, and did the same in contraband camps. Stoddard believed Mary's image would have been better "if she had only brought newspaper reporters along" during her good deeds, Schwartz says. "But she didn't want any of that, and I think that is something people see for the first time in this show."

Something else they'll see for the first time is a letter challenging the idea of her insanity.

Mary wrote the letter to her physician, Dr. Willis Danforth. She asks for more "white powder," or chloral hydrate -- a powerful sleeping medication, and indicates she consumed five doses of it the day before. She also complains about "excessive wakefulness."

"Chloral hydrate, when taken in large doses, instead of inducing sleep, has the opposite effect and can actually cause insomnia and hallucinations," Schwartz says. "Chloral hydrate addiction is not

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**ALPM...**

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uncommon at that period or even into the twentieth century.”

This letter, “written right before the period of her insanity trial, indicates that (Mary’s) hallucinations, which people credit to a broken or insane mind, may, in fact, have a chemical dependency explanation.”

Maybe Mary wasn’t insane, just drugged.

“I don’t think she was insane,” Schwartz says. “She may have been depressed, she may have had compulsions... But I don’t think it was a personality disorder that today we would diagnose as insanity, I think it would be something that could be controlled by different kinds of medications...”

“The interesting thing is that those who claim Mary was insane have a hard time explaining that when she was released, none of the behavior was ever in evidence again.”

The ALPM show also features Mary’s clothing, accessories, jewelry, and photos. About half of the materials belong to the ALPM; the remainder come from private collectors Louise and Barry Taper, the Mary Todd Lincoln Home in Lexington, Kentucky; the Chicago History Museum, and the Batavia Historical Society, which is loaning Mary’s bed from her confinement at the sanitarium there.

“It’s doubtful that these materials will ever be assembled this way again,” Schwartz says. “It’s really a very unique event.”

For more information about the Museum or the Mary Lincoln exhibition, visit: [www.alplm.org](http://www.alplm.org) or call the Museum at: (800)610-2094 or (217)782-5764.



**Happy Birthday Abe!**

The 200th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln’s birthday is in 2009. To commemorate the occasion, the country and individual states are planning events for that year

The Illinois Lincoln Bicentennial Commission is in charge of our state’s 2009 celebration and is comprised of gubernatorially appointed members from academia, business, the arts, community development, civil rights and historic preservation communities. It meets regularly to discuss plans.

Recently, it awarded more than \$440,000 to groups planning commemorative events. The fourteen grant recipients are:

- the Lincoln-Douglas Debate Site, Alton
- “Lincoln Road Scholars,” Illinois Humanities Council
- Black Metropolis Convention & Tourism Council, Chicago
- Vermilion County Museum Society, Danville
- Lincoln Log Courthouse, Decatur
- Land of Lincoln Statewide Read Program
- Lincoln-Douglas Debate Site, Freeport
- Ravinia Music Festival, Highland Park
- Lincoln-Douglas Debate Site, Jonesboro
- Early American Museum, Mahomet
- Menard County Tourism Council
- Lincoln-Douglas Debate Site, Quincy
- “Prairie Fire” program, WILL-TV
- Evans Public Library District, Vandalia

The Commission is working with local communities, as well as many academic and historical organizations, to develop plans for the bicentennial. For more information about the recent grants or the Commission, see [www.lincoln200.net](http://www.lincoln200.net).

**Transitions**

**Rep. Paul D. Froehlich** of Schaumburg, formerly a Republican, changed party affiliation in June and is now a Democrat. **Speaker Michael Madigan** has named him Chairperson of the new House Disparities in Educational Achievement Committee.

Former state representative **Marcel “Bob” Dejaegher**, of Silvis, died June 13. He was a Democrat in the House for 12 years.

