



the

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An Inside Peek at Lincoln Treasures

When you think of Abraham Lincoln, you might think of his symbolic stovepipe hat, the Gettysburg Address, or his ever present black tie. Thankfully, these treasures have survived the ages and now give us a glimpse of the man behind the artifacts.

Illinois is lucky -- we own these artifacts, and many more. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum (ALPLM) in Springfield has the "largest and most comprehensive collection of materials about Lincoln that exists anywhere," according to James Cornelius, ALPLM Lincoln Collection curator. (Other Lincoln stovepipe hats and copies of the Gettysburg Address exist, and are owned by different institutions or collectors across the country.)

The ALPLM's Henry Horner Lincoln Collection currently totals about 50,000 items; almost half are written materials, including documents handwritten by one of the Lincolns, like letters and business papers. There are also personal items (Lincoln's hat and shaving mirror, Mary's jewelry and wedding skirt, and Tad's toy cannon, among others), artwork (including paintings and sculptures of Lincoln), as well as photos and even ads using Lincoln's image. Some of the items date back to the 1840s.

The collection stems from former Illinois Gov-

ernor Henry Horner, an avid Lincoln collector, who donated his extensive Lincoln materials to the Museum's predecessor, the Illinois State Historical Library, in 1940, just before he died.

Since then the ALPLM has continued to collect Lincoln artifacts. It got a treasure trove in 1978, when Lincoln's last descendant, great-grandson Robert Lincoln Beckwith, donated family items from his personal homes as well as Hildene -- the Manchester, Vermont home for Robert Lincoln and his descendants. Beckwith's sister, Peggy, lived at Hildene until 1975, when she died. Bob Beckwith inherited the estate,

Cornelius says, and donated many items to the Illinois State Historical Library.

More recently, the ALPLM got what many consider the mother lode of Lincoln collections last May, when it acquired the 1,600-item collection of Lincoln family, John Wilkes Booth family, and Civil War artifacts formerly owned

by California resident Louise Taper. This included the iconic stovepipe hat and even Civil War photographer Matthew Brady's supply box.

As curator of the Lincoln collection, one of Cornelius's jobs is to acquire more artifacts. It's not easy. "It is impossible for me or any one person to keep track of what's on offer out there. There are three of us who sort of semi-regularly try to keep track or hear



The Lincoln Home name plate and key are part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum's extensive Lincoln Collection. All photos in this issue are courtesy of the ALPLM.

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Abraham Lincoln's reading glasses

about things... There are several other people who hear about things and call us," he says.

After the Museum learns about an available artifact, the next challenge is verifying it. "So much of this stuff has apparently got a real story to it and real provenance (a paper trail proving its authenticity) that is mostly documentable, but you just don't know," Cornelius explains. One day historians may be able to authenticate certain artifacts, like hair and blood remains, through DNA testing, he says. The ALPLM isn't currently considering this method. Cur-



James Cornelius, Curator of the ALPLM Lincoln Collection.



Lincoln's stovepipe hat.



Tad Lincoln's toy cannon.

rent testing methods destroy too much of the artifact, but technology is evolving so that one day only a negligible fraction will be destroyed. Even then, historians will have to weigh the ethical implications of DNA testing, Cornelius says, because it could be seen as an invasion of the Lincolns' privacy.

In the meantime, he and other ALPLM experts rely on their broad knowledge of the Lincoln family, Lincoln-era politics, 1800s materials (like paper and ink), and an artifact's documented history to help them separate real from fake. Even after reviewing all that, sometimes they're still not sure. "You go on faith, to some extent," Cornelius says.



The inkwell Lincoln used to write his First Inaugural Address.



Abraham Lincoln's cracked shaving mirror.



Mary Lincoln's jewelry box.

“There’s one item I can’t tell you about, that we learned of about two to three months ago, that I think could well be the real thing and it would be a fabulous real thing to have. We’re not sure that we’ll find out really. It falls into that category of partially documented, like almost everything does,” he says.

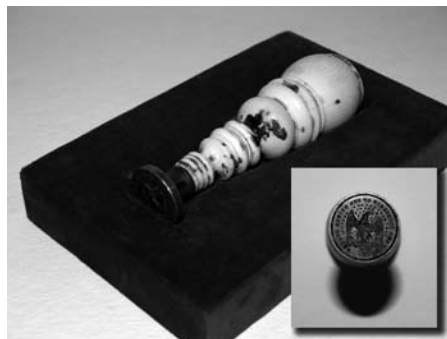
There are two “dream” artifacts that Cornelius wishes the Museum could get. One is the so-called “Bixby Letter,” a letter supposedly written by Lincoln (some historians think his secretary wrote it) to Lydia Bixby in Boston, expressing sympathy for her sons’ deaths in the Civil War. “But it probably was thrown into the fire in the illiterate Mrs. Bixby’s house in Boston after her neighbor read it to her, in Nov. 1864. Many fakes of it exist,” Cornelius says.

His second “dream” artifact is the letter Lincoln wrote in reply to Grace Bedell, the girl who advised him to grow a beard just before his presidential election. It’s owned by a private collector in California.

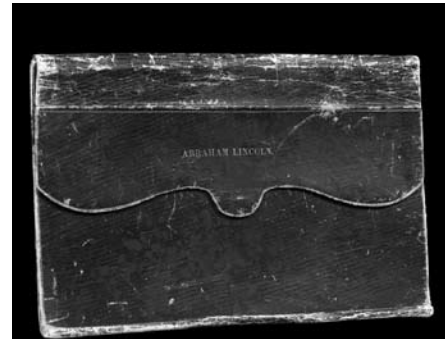
Cornelius says it’s unknown when some items from the Lincoln Collection, such as the recently acquired stovepipe hat, will be displayed for public viewing. However, the Museum is working on two books -- a coffee table book and a souvenir book, that will feature photos of items from its Lincoln Collection. The National Geographic Society will publish the books, which may be available this summer.



Mary's music box.



Lincoln's Presidential seal.



Lincoln's Presidential briefcase.

Lincoln Bicentennial Plans

Next year will be the 200th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth. National, state, and city commissions are coordinating activities around the country to commemorate the event. Some of those activities will take place this year.

The Illinois Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission is helping Illinois groups organize and fund bicentennial activities, and lists many on its Web site: www.lincoln200.net.

Some of the many events planned for Illinois this year are:

- 10th Illinois Volunteer Cavalry Regiment Band Period Ball – February 9, 2008, Springfield. The Band will present an 1860 Presidential Ball in the Governor's Mansion, with period instruments and period dress.
- Abraham Lincoln Association Celebration - February 11 and 12, 2008 - Springfield. The ALA commemorates its centennial with two days of Lincoln presentations by renowned historians, a banquet, and a concert.
- Meet the Lincolns - February 16, 2008, Batavia. Lincoln presenters, Max and Donna Daniels, will tell the story of our Sixteenth President in a presentation at the Batavia Depot Museum.
- Lincoln Douglas Debates - July - October, 2008. This year is the 150th anniversary of

Lincoln's seven famous debates with his political opponent, Stephen Douglas. Between July and October, the cities where these men debated will hold events to mark the occasion; the cities are: Ottawa, Freeport, Jonesboro, Charleston, Galesburg, Quincy, and Alton

- Tour de Lincoln Bicentennial Bike Tour - August 16 - 23, 2008, Illinois, Indiana, and Kentucky. This 360-mile bike tour will visit Lincoln sites in the states where Lincoln was born and lived. (National Park Service archaeologists are currently digging at the site of Lincoln's childhood home in Knob Creek, Kentucky, in the hopes of finding the outline of his family's cabin, as well as artifacts from Lincoln's time there.)
- 11th Annual Civil War Symposium - October 18, 2008, Wheaton. "Abraham Lincoln as War President" will be the topic of this year's symposium, which will feature presentations on Lincoln and the War by renowned Lincoln historians and re-enactors.

On the Illinois Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission Web site you can get more information about these and other Bicentennial activities, and search for activities by date or city.



Transitions

Rep. Jim Watson (R - 97, Jacksonville) is headed for Iraq with the Marine Corps Reserve. His unit will go to the Anbar province where it will help establish local units of government. Rep. Watson expects to return to Illinois this fall. He previously served in Iraq from 1990 to 1991.

On December 28, former **Rep. Gene Hoffman**, died in Colorado. He was 75. Rep. Hoffman had lived in Elmhurst and served from 1966 to 1990 in the General Assembly, where he was nicknamed "Mr. Education" for his extensive knowledge and work in education.

