



LINCARNATIONS

The Newsletter of the ASSOCIATION OF LINCOLN PRESENTERS

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NOW HE BELONGS TO THE STAGES

FALL, 1994

President Clinton Honors Lincoln on His Birthday, 1994

This is the third in a series on Lincoln's influence on our Presidents, by associate editor Ted Zalewski, who portrays Teddy Roosevelt.

Radio address to the Nation from the White House, February 12, 1994.

"Abraham Lincoln was born in a log cabin in Kentucky 185 years ago today. He became President just as our country was coming apart, and he lived in the White House during the four most troubled years in American history. He appealed to the best in the American people when they were going through their worst. His hand trembled as he set his pen to the proclamation that declared slaves thenceforth and forever free. In freeing the slaves, Lincoln freed America. A war to preserve the Union became a struggle to redeem the promise of our Declaration of Independence, which holds that all men are created equal.

Lincoln went to Gettysburg, the bloodiest battlefield on our continent, to dedicate a cemetery for the war dead. There he asked America to "resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain — that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom — and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth."

We call Lincoln "The Great Emancipator," but we might also call him "The Great Conciliator" because no person in our history ever did more to bring us together — this vast nation of great diversity.

As the Civil War neared its close, many of the victors approached the vanquished with pride and with vengeance. But Lincoln called for humility and forgiveness. His second inaugural address con-

tained none of the bitterness toward others, none of the petty partisan attacks that had grown so frequent in those days. "With malice toward none, with charity for all," he said, "with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up that nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

At that moment, it was as if Lincoln had stretched out his long arms to gather the people from every corner of the country to make our nation whole, to shepherd it beyond the war and move it forward. Only one month later, he was gone — his life taken on Good Friday, 1865.

Lincoln's legacy has touched us all down through the ages. A son of the frontier family himself, he signed a law to create land grant colleges, which have educated America's sons and daughter ever since. Lincoln's work allowed people from ordinary backgrounds like his own to rise in life and accomplish extraordinary things. Today that work goes on. Our job here is to build up and strengthen the great American middle class, to give opportunity to all, to help our communities rid themselves of crime and drugs, to help families protect themselves due to spiraling health

care costs, to move people away from lifetime welfare toward full-time work, and to allow everyone who works hard to get ahead, compete and win in the new global economy.

Still the question recurs, can we do better? — just as Lincoln asked us when he said, "The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew."

"Fellow-citizens, we cannot escape history," he said. "We will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance or insignificance can spare one or another of us. We — even we here — hold the power, and bear the responsibility. We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best, hope of earth. Other means may succeed; this could not fail. The way is plain, peaceful, generous, just — a way which, if followed, the world will forever applaud, and God must forever bless."

Those words from Abraham Lincoln should guide our path today."

President Clinton

Did you notice the glaring error that President Clinton made about Lincoln in this speech? Write and tell us about it.

Hildene's Taylored Lincolns

by Robert and Janet Taylor

Hildene, Robert Todd Lincoln's 24 room Georgian mansion in Vermont, opened to the public in 1979, after an heroic community effort to preserve this Lincoln family treasure. Hildene is unique as an historic home, having been occupied continuously by Lincoln descendants from its completion in 1905 until 1975. Hildene was enjoyed by President Lincoln's son and his family every summer for 21 years until Robert's death in 1926. His widow continued the seasonal family tradition until her demise in 1937. It then became the possession of her eldest daughter, Mary Lincoln Isham, who died before occupying it.

The last Lincoln to own Hildene was Mary Isham's niece, the only granddaughter of Robert Todd Lincoln, Peggy Beckwith. She occupied Hildene for 36 years until her death in 1975. Peggy's closest living relative was her brother, Bob Beckwith, who survived her by ten years, but when he died on Christmas eve, 1985, Abraham Lincoln's blood-line came to an end.

The year Hildene opened to the public was also the year that we commenced our portrayal of the Lincolns. Prior to this we had not been Lincoln students, nor did we have any teaching or acting experience. Robert was a retired Air Force jet pilot, and Janet, a wife and mother. We simply recognized that a need existed to impress upon school children the importance of remembering our nation's heritage. That heritage included faith in God, as evidenced by our founding fathers, and more emphatically by our 16th President, Abraham Lincoln.

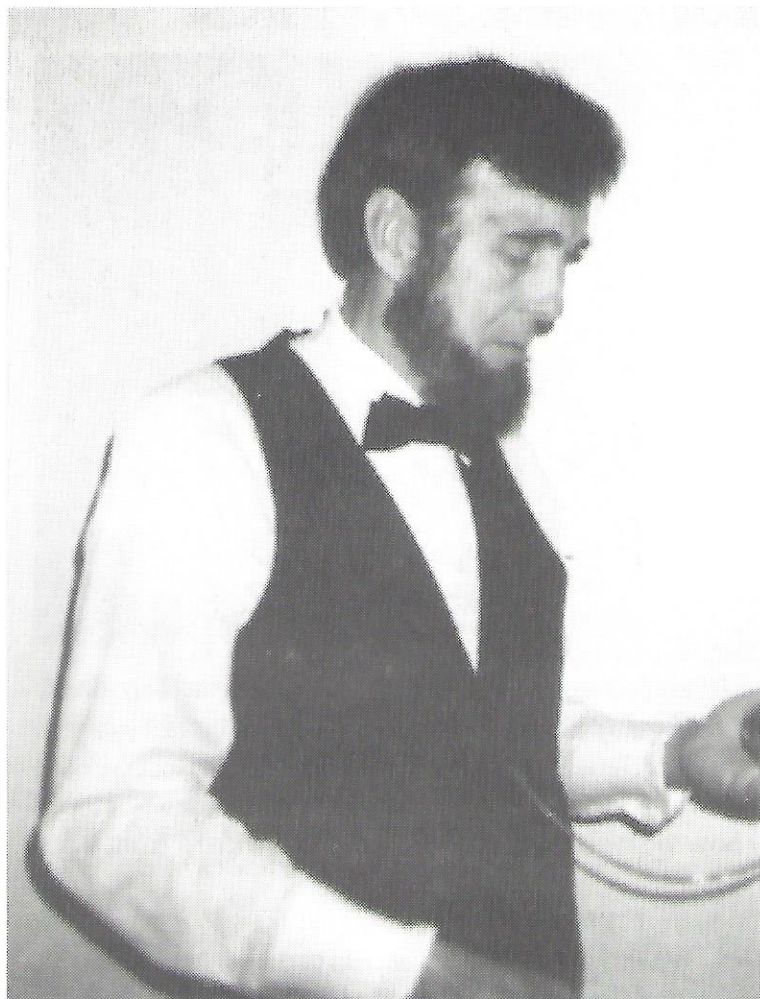
Portraying President and Mrs. Lincoln for two years, and providing what we call "living history lessons" for schools, we were frequently asked, "are there any living descendants of Mr. Lincoln?" At that time we were novices, but Hildene came to our attention, and we planned a visit to learn about Lincoln's descendants. In September of 1981, we appeared in costume to take the guided tour of Hildene. The executive director was quickly alerted of our presence and before our departure extended to us an invitation to greet Hildene's visitors whenever we were in Vermont. Five years elapsed before we accepted that invitation. In the summer of 1986 we attended Hildene's first Lincoln symposium which afforded us the opportunity of meeting the foremost Lincoln scholars and collectors and benefiting from their knowledge and insights. On this occasion, we were granted the privilege of lodging at Hildene in the reserved guest suite. We were awed by priceless Lincoln artifacts, and felt part of history, a realization that truly humbled us.

Greeting Hildene's visitors brought into focus our interest in being part of "the friends of Hildene," as volunteers and by our financial support. We also decided to buy a home near Hildene. Robert Todd Lincoln was 62 when Hildene was ready for his occupancy, and coincidentally, Robert Taylor was also 62 when he acquired a home in Manchester, Vermont.



(continued on page 3)

Abe En-Ables Youth by Jim Sayre



Mr. Sayre has been impersonating Abraham Lincoln for twelve years. In 1988, he helped open the tremendously popular "39 Men" exhibit at the Hoover Presidential Library-Museum.

The program that I developed has received good results and plaudits. I show boys and girls a picture of Lincoln that has many things concealed in it, the American flag, a horse and rider, Union troops, Lincoln's mother, the Capitol, etc. After all children have seen the picture, I ask them what they have seen. Most kids see only Lincoln. Then I point out all the things that are hidden in the picture. I explain that drugs work the same way. They paint a pretty picture, but many things are concealed, such as loss of ability to talk clearly and think clearly. I use the life of Lincoln as an example : progressing from log cabin and poverty to White House and President without the use of any drugs. Lincoln's life shows what can be done.

I receive many letters from kids, and here is one:

"I thank you for wasting your time to share the things that you know about Lincoln. You are a very good impersonator of Mr. Lincoln and I like your stovepipe hat. The picture that showed the effects of drugs was really neat. I learned a lot about drugs and Abraham Lincoln. You would be a really good president if you ran."

Hildene's Lincolns continued

The highlight of our Hildene experience came in 1988, on the 125th anniversary of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. That occasion was commemorated by a Civil War reenactment and an original drama written for the event complete with music. Every effort was made for authenticity. Robert Taylor, as President Lincoln, arrived on horseback, escorted by New Hampshire's Civil War reenactors.

We have been privileged to appear as the Lincolns at Hildene since 1986. From July through October, we spend several days each week at Hildene, finding it enjoyable as well as gratifying to portray President and Mrs. Lincoln in these gracious settings. Our appearance never fails to impress and please, even startle, the visitors. In this way we are not only friends of Hildene, but making friends for Hildene.

Of the many comments we receive, one child's remark is etched in our memory. She was much impressed by Lincoln's stovepipe hat on display, and learned that he had carried notes in it. Then, on meeting "Lincoln" in the garden, she asked to peek inside his hat. Seeing papers there, she remarked, "then you must really be Abraham Lincoln."

Reunited

by Helena G. Eilenberg

What a delight it was on February 2, 1994! An event occurred that I have anticipated for 130 years. I appeared in public with my husband - Abraham Lincoln!

I portray Mary Todd Lincoln for schools, libraries, and adult groups. As Mrs. Lincoln, I talk about my husband, myself, the Civil War, slavery, our four boys, and life in the White House. The interest and excitement of both children and adults about his era is always a source of great pleasure to me. Yet, what a difference on the fateful Wednesday! I looked next to me and saw Abraham Lincoln telling stories to wide eyed, fascinated children. The awe and wonder that his presence inspired was remarkable.

Dan Bassuk and I exhibited separately in April, 1993 at the Nassau County showcase on Long Island. We were surprised and delighted when a PTA representative approached us from an elementary school in Massapequa. She asked if we would consider appearing together the following February as Abraham and Mary Lincoln. After many phone calls and letters, we came up with a program that worked for both of us. Yet, as of that morning, we had never performed together. Though we knew that our portrayals worked separately, we did not know how we would mesh as husband and wife in front of an audience.

It seems that perhaps the spirits of Abraham and Mary Lincoln were with us that day. Our program blended beautifully as we told our stories. We included tales of Lincoln growing his beard, our boys running rampant throughout the White House, and the price of life in the Civil War. The children knew that we were storytellers telling our tales. Yet, despite that knowledge, there was still a question in their eyes and from their lips - "are you REALLY Abraham and Mary Lincoln?"

The unique opportunity to work and interact with each other on stage was a treat for us. To be able to see the audience react to our "partner" was fascinating and informative. It was a learning experience, as our performances always are, but with a different twist. And for me, as Mary Todd Lincoln, to have my "husband" at my side was very special indeed!



***Lincoln Laughter** by Dan Bassuk -- Encountering President Lincoln walking down the hall, the teacher asked her kindergarten students if they knew who President Lincoln was? A little girl raised her hand and said that "Lincoln was the President who freed the pilgrims."*

THE ASSOCIATION OF LINCOLN PRESENTERS is a non-profit association dedicated to the proposition of supporting and encouraging the presenting of Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. Membership in the ALP is \$20. Annual renewal is \$5.00 and \$7.50 for an Abe-Mary team. Life membership is \$100.

Officers in the ALP are Dr. Daniel Bassuk, President; Max and Donna Daniels, Vice-Presidents; Patricia Thomas, Treasurer. Please address inquiries and correspondence to Daniel Bassuk, 1143 River Road, Neshanic, New Jersey 08853 or call (908) 369-7648.

Life Members of ALP

1. Dan Bassuk
2. Phillip Chetwynd
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