

LINCARNATIONS

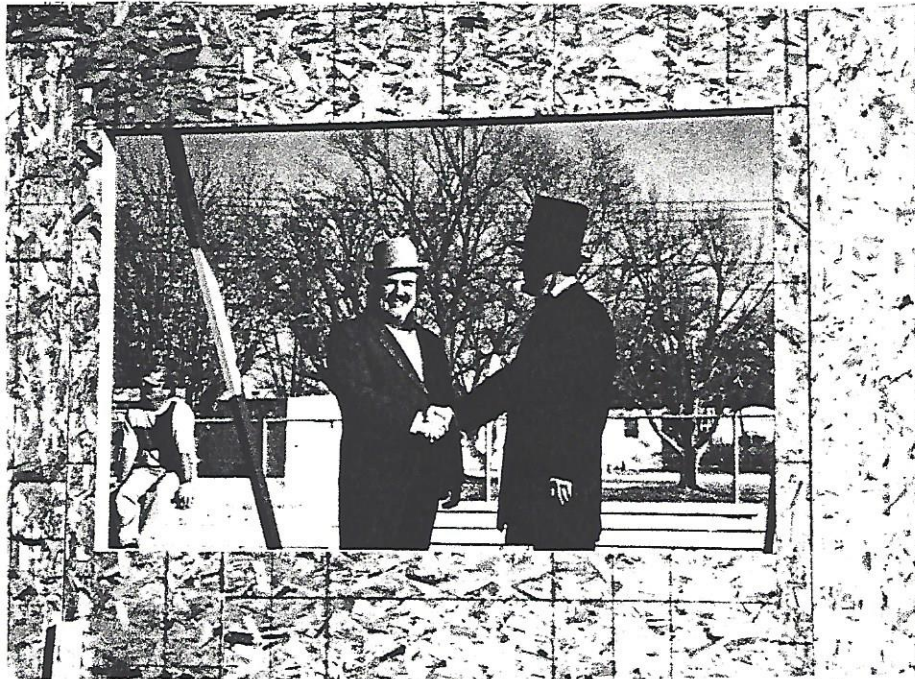
The Newsletter of the ASSOCIATION OF LINCOLN PRESENTERS

Number 17

Would I might rouse the Lincoln in you all February 2000

IN HIS STEPS

Dr. B.F. McClerren has good reason to sign his letters "In his steps." Standing precisely where Abraham Lincoln stood 141 years earlier when he delivered the "House Divided" speech, McClerren delivered much of the same speech in the Old State Capitol Building in Springfield, Illinois on October 9, 1999. An audience of 200 heart surgeons and their families were awestruck, and "it brought down the house!" Dr. McClerren's wife, Dorothy, presented Mary Todd Lincoln and had several of the audience in tears at her conclusion.



Stephen Douglas and Abraham Lincoln inspect the new wall for the museum that will be built at the Coles County Fairgrounds commemorating the historic Lincoln-Douglas debates.

LINCOLN DEBATE MUSEUM

"Mac" and Dorothy McClerren hail from Charleston, Illinois, where the ALP held its 4th convention. Now the city of Charleston has begun to construct the Lincoln-Douglas Debate Historic Museum on the site where that famous debate took place. The structure of 2,600 square feet will be completed in July, 2000, and will feature items from all seven Lincoln-Douglas debates. On November 13, 1999, Dr. McClerren as Abraham Lincoln debated Dr. Oseguera as Stephen A. Douglas, after which the first wall of the museum was erected at the Coles County Fairgrounds. Lincoln (McClarren) repeated his famous theme of "a house divided" and said slavery should not be allowed in new states that enter the union so its "ultimate extinction" would take place where it already existed.



A TIP OF THE HAT By Ted Zalewski

A few months ago on July 21st, I had the good fortune to perform as Teddy Roosevelt at the Ernest Hemingway centennial birthday party in Oak Park, Illinois. The connection? Teddy Roosevelt was Hemingway's boyhood hero. After this event, my daughter, Katie, and I headed back to Boston via the New York thruway. Needless to say the toll road can be boring. So we took the nearest exit in order to drive the slower but far more scenic route. It was a good choice, for we saw wonderful vineyards, picturesque farms and rolling fields. Then we approached Westfield, a little town in the northeast corner of New York State. Suddenly, at the edge of the town, a few feet from the country road, stood Abraham Lincoln. Serendipity! What a magnificent sight.

Abe Lincoln was standing in the middle of a circular bed of gray stones. He looked quite presidential in his long coat. Slightly stooped forward, he was holding his up-side-down top hat at his waist. His smiling face wore whiskers. Apparently, he had just tipped his hat to the little girl several feet away. The little girl, made from the same metal as old Abe, seemed to glow with a metallic sheen. She was wearing a traditional dress that flared out and a large circular hat. She stood half the height of the tall man from the prairie. Her face beamed with joy as she gazed upon the President. Of course the girl was Grace Bedell, the little girl from Westfield who wrote a letter to the future President recommending that he would look so much better with a beard. Abe took her advice. As he was passing through on his way to the White House, he wanted to see her. If the statues could have moved on that day in July, Abe and Grace would have been embracing.

After we enjoyed lunch, Katie and I walked to the statues. Abe's open stovepipe hat was full of pennies. Of course it is hard to estimate how many pennies there are in the proverbial jar, or in a Lincoln hat. But I estimated that three to four hundred pennies covered the hat's inside. I couldn't help but think that each time a person passed by the hat and didn't take the pennies, the spirit of Honest Abe was still inspiring.

Photos courtesy of David Kreutz

The Gettysburg Address, a newly available video documentary by Richard Katula is a godsend for Lincoln presenters. In a brief fifty minutes, Mr. Katula provides the historical background, scholarly analysis, and anecdotal evidence that is vital to an engaging Lincoln presentation.

Noted ALP member James Getty of Gettysburg, PA delivers the famous address as one part of the video. His presentation and the analysis of the address offers an excellent springboard to discuss what may best insure success in liberating the latent Lincoln in ourselves and in our audiences.

To share something of the soul as well as the substance of Lincoln requires considerable time, thought, research and rehearsal. Your audience will not only be entertained, they will be educated, they will be enlightened, they will be inspired. They will be blessed with new and honest insights dispelling the myths that encumber Lincoln today.

Ask yourself, "What is my purpose in presenting Lincoln?" "What do I hope to accomplish?" Having personal goals and objectives in preserving and presenting Lincoln lore is vital to any long-term success as a presenter. Scholarly knowledge of the President and of his times are a starting point.

Without serious consideration given to the numerous first-hand accounts of Lincoln's speech pattern, his manner, his reasoning, his motives, his circumstances, his character, the well-meaning Lincoln presentation falls short of its potential. The degree and depth of authenticity is a matter of personal taste and commitment. But in presenting Lincoln you are performing Lincoln. To properly perform Lincoln demands skills including focus, pacing, projection, and passion, for without passion you are not giving the audience a chance to share your vision of the great man.

Recent candidates running for the office of President of the United States have named one particular quality as necessary to a successful campaign: a fire in the belly. Do we have this same internal fire that drives us to present Lincoln? What is this fire? How is it created? Is it really necessary?

What is this fire?

We know that Lincoln believed that the Almighty had a purpose for him and the country. He believed that he was controlled by events. But this did not stop him from taking the steps necessary to dealing with daily demands on his time. He felt things very deeply. Do you want to share something of the passion that drove Lincoln to take the steps, write the words, and propose the plans that he did?

How is this fire created?

We must take a look at each passage of our presentations. The passionate fire is kindled by analyzing what Lincoln is saying, the manner he says it, what circumstances precipitated those words, and who is the intended audience. One must develop the ability to speak the words intelligibly, honestly, and with the correct inflection to communicate Lincoln's meaning. Blocking and gestures are assisted by a study of the first-hand accounts of how Lincoln moved using educated guesses to fill in the gaps. When in doubt, don't, don't, allow the gestures, the set, the props to overshadow the message.

It is important to make the message fit the moment. Lincoln made an Address in Gettysburg. It was not a fireside chat or a lecture to a faceless sea of strangers. It was an Address to a large crowd on a momentous occasion with a monumental message. It was a moving pronouncement about freedom. The words alone are moving. But without a sense of place and purpose, the Address becomes something altogether different.

Our thoughts, as performers, must take us to where Lincoln was at that moment. We must mentally visualize the moment, the masses, the purpose, the place. As presenters we should be focused on the words AND visualize the environment. Those who have actually walked the battlefields of Gettysburg have wonderful mental pictures of the place. These mental images, added to the power and conviction of the words, gives our audience a sense of the message and the soul of the man. This is what separates a lecture from a performance.

Ask someone to objectively critique your presentation. Successful presenters realize that learning never stops and that seeking new ideas frequently rouses us to greater achievement. Is there a fire in your belly to share a moment with Lincoln?

Is this fire really necessary?

In Lincoln's day, the spoken word, and speeches in particular, were the prime source for current events, news, gossip, recreation, and entertainment. There have been millions of people, in all times and places, who have sensed in Lincoln's words the expression of their own strivings and dreams. In presenting, we must strive to frame Lincoln's own words in a manner that best promotes and perpetuates his meaning. With a humble and passionate approach as presenters, our audiences will take Lincoln's message to heart. He will truly belong to the ages!

These ideas are intended to encourage the newcomer, and challenge the veteran, to visit the video, so as to reinvigorate one's public presentations by improving their quality and integrity. Recommended: The Gettysburg Address: A Speech for the Ages. A Documentary by Richard A. Katula. e-mail Rkatula@AOL.com (video tape available for \$40.00)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. Sixth annual CONVENTION of the ALP will be held at Lincoln's birthplace, Hodgenville, Kentucky on April 14 -16, 2000. Please make your reservation by April 1 so that those preparing food know how many are coming. Convention schedule enclosed.

2. www.lincolnpresenters.org More than 700 people have viewed the ALP website since December, 1999. Your ideas about this website are welcome. Bring ideas to Hodgenville, or email honestlyabe@worldnet.att.net

3. STAN WERNZ (ALP Abe # 100) has just retired after 33 years in education.

He has decided to run for the Ohio House of Representatives.

His slogan is "Honestly serving the common good."

4. BILL PECK (San Diego Abe) turned 3 score and ten on the last day of 1999.

5. ROBERT A. HALL, new ALP patron, is composing an opera on Abraham Lincoln for the bicentennial of his birth. If anyone can assist him with funding grants or connections with an opera company, he can be reached at rahcomp@ihot.com

6. TRADING POST: Donna Bowen has 4 books on Mary Todd Lincoln for sale.

If interested call her at (812) 256-2370

7. Dan Bassuk is writing an article on "Lincoln Presenters on Post Cards."

He has post cards of Jim Getty, Homer Sewell, Bill Hey, and Joe Woodard.

If there are other Lincolns on post cards, please let Dan know.

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