

# LINCARNATIONS

The Newsletter of the ASSOCIATION OF LINCOLN PRESENTERS

VOL. 2, NO. 1

NOW HE BELONGS TO THE STAGES

SPRING, 1993



## A Lincoln Portrait of Benjamin Chapin (1874-1918)

by Dr. Dan Bassuk

Nine years after Lincoln's assassination, a "reincarnation" seemed to appear in the person of Benjamin Chapin. Born in Ohio in 1874, Ben educated himself by studying the Bible, Shakespeare, and especially the writings of Abraham Lincoln. Young Ben was already reciting Lincoln's speeches and performing short Lincoln monologues at the age of nine. He got his chance to perform as Lincoln on the Lyceum circuit stage and achieved prominence as the first famous Lincoln impersonator. In appearance he was a natural - tall, thin, deep set eyes, black hair, resonant voice - he would have easily won a Lincoln look-alike contest.

On the Lyceum stage, Chapin's monologues were taken from dramas that he wrote about Lincoln. Portraying Lincoln became his life work and at the age of 32 his play Lincoln was staged in New York with Chapin playing the lead role (1906). Continuing to write about Lincoln, in 1909 he produced a four act play entitled Lincoln at the White House, which received critical acclaim from such Lincoln luminaries as John Hay, Ida Tarbell, Osborn Oldroyd, and William Stoddard.

Following his Lincoln dramas, Chapin made a number of short films on Lincoln, believing that motion pictures were the way to reach the people about his hero. These silent films were compiled into The Benjamin Chapin  
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## Letters Received by the

### ASSOCIATION OF LINCOLN PRESENTERS

"Congratulations on the burgeoning membership of ALP and the fine quality of LINCARNATIONS. The ABRAHAM LINCOLN PRESENTERS OF YESTERYEAR supplement sent with Vol. 1, #2 of LINCARNATIONS, is an immensely useful history for both strictly academic scholars and activists like myself who wish to thrust Lincoln — and the other Mount Rushmore Presidents — to the forefront as role models for American political-economic leadership in our time and for all time!"

Dr. Wallace H. Best, Founding Director  
International Lincoln Association

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"I received your most welcome update of Lincoln 'imposters' - it is great. It is reassuring to know that others enjoy being a part of America's history.

The list has grown since your last issue. Of the 58 Lincolns listed, I have met and competed with 27 of them. I might add that all were very nice and friendly men.

Impersonating Mr. Lincoln continues to be my very enjoyable hobby. This year I have spoken in Indiana, Kentucky, and Tennessee, for churches, schools, patriotic events, community meetings and many other events. I have a drug program for the young people, using Mr. Lincoln as an example — From log cabin to President of the United States of America without the aid of drugs.

I hope that someday we can all get together for a national convention. I am enclosing a check for this year's dues. Keep up the good work.

Best Regards,  
A. Lincoln  
Jim Sayre  
August, 1992

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## Chapin cont.

Cycle of Lincoln Photoplays comprising ten episodes (1913-1917). In the early episodes, Chapin played Lincoln's father, and in the later films he played Abraham. One of these photoplays, "Son of Democracy" was filmed in Springfield at Lincoln's home. Another episode, "Call to Arms" was filmed at the White House during the presidency of Woodrow Wilson in 1917.

Chapin's plays and films won him fame and fortune. From his Lincoln presentations he earned in excess of \$100,000. While many notables including Mark Twain admired his Lincoln presentation, the 16th President's son, Robert Todd Lincoln, could not be won over, and while Robert never saw Chapin perform, he found the

advertisement of Chapin's film "distasteful".

Many of Chapin's Lincoln photoplays are preserved at the Library of Congress, and this writer had the good fortune to view some of them in 1992, thanks to Clark Evans, former president of the Lincoln Group of DC. The Library's collection of rare books has the copy of the Lincoln monologue that Chapin presented to President Woodrow Wilson.

One wonders how far Chapin might have gone with his Lincoln presentations. At the age of 44, Chapin died of tuberculosis in a sanitarium in Liberty, New York. His death in 1918 left the role of Lincoln open, and those who took up the tall hat in the 1920's were George Billings, Charles Bull, and Frank McGlynn.

## Announcements and Achievements of Lincoln Presenters

1. ASSOCIATION OF LINCOLN PRESENTERS AWARD - The Glenn Schnizlein Memorial Lincoln Award for 1992 has been awarded to James Getty of Gettysburg. An inscribed Lincoln plaque made by ALP member James Hitchcock was awarded to Mr. Getty. The award committee chose Mr. Getty for the more than 700 Lincoln shows he performed in 1992.
2. LOOK-ALIKE CONTEST - In October of 1992 ALP member, Nelson Doyle of Williamstown, Kentucky, won the Lincoln look-alike contest in Hodgenville.
3. ASSOCIATION OF LINCOLN PRESENTERS ON DISPLAY - During President's month in 1993, the Hunterdon County Library of New Jersey held a display to demonstrate that Lincoln is still alive. While one cabinet showed photographs of Lincoln, another cabinet had photos of modern-day Lincolns including Max and Donna Daniels, Phillip Chetwynd, Tad Allen, Dan Bassuk, Dr. McClerren, John Kemple, Jim Sayre, and James Getty.
4. POST CARD COLLECTOR - Orville Mohr is an avid collector of post cards of Lincoln look-alikes. He has about a dozen and is looking for more (pardon the pun). Send your card to him at 1002 W. Front St., Bloomington, IL, 61701.
5. GRIT PEOPLE - The magazine GRIT ran an article on the ASSOCIATION OF LINCOLN PRESENTERS on February 14, 1993, called "Abe Lincoln Returns". Featured were Max and Donna Daniels, James Getty, Dan Bassuk, and Bruce Hanks.
6. LINCOLN-DOUGLAS DEBATES - Reenactment of the first Lincoln-Douglas debate was held on August 22, 1992 at Ottawa, Illinois. Russel Brazzel portrayed Stephen Douglas, while ALP member, Dr. B. F. McClerren took the platform as Lincoln. With the newly published unexpurgated text of THE LINCOLN-DOUGLAS DEBATES by Harold Holzer of the LGNY, cheers, heckles, and laughter will fill their accurate places when these debaters repeat the performance in '93.
7. PRESIDENT LINCOLN MEETS PRESIDENTS GARFIELD AND WASHINGTON - ALP member Ralph Borror, alias Abraham Lincoln, met another assassinated president, Garfield, at Garfield's home in Mentor, Ohio on President's Day '93. Looking on was General George Washington.

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### Question:

**Who was the very first Lincoln Impersonator? This is his picture. Who is he?**

**For the answer, see Page 4.**





## Fellow Presidents and First Ladies Join ALP

The ALP is pleased to welcome into its ranks living fellow Presidents Calvin Coolidge, Teddy Roosevelt, and first lady Eleanor Roosevelt. Calvin Coolidge broke his long silence when Jim Cooke of Boston joined the ALP in 1992. Shortly thereafter, Teddy Roosevelt said "Bully" when Ted Zalewski of Cambridge, Mass. joined our esteemed ranks. Finally, we heard from Eleanor Roosevelt when Elena Dodd of Vermont became a member of our group. The ALP is happy to welcome these and other White House residents in the hope that this association will be mutually productive to living history.

## Myths After Lincoln

In the early 1920's, Carl Sandburg, Lloyd Lewis, Ben Hecht, Sherwood Anderson, and Clarence Darrow were enlivening the city of Chicago. Lewis was a practical joker. It happened that when they were vacationing at a place outside Chicago, Sandburg was doing a lot of research on Lincoln. To get away from the revelry of his comrades, Carl preferred to go into the field and get in a mood to understand Lincoln. Lloyd Lewis got an idea. He persuaded Hecht to don a frock coat, tall silk hat and shawl. At dusk, as Sandburg was sitting on a stump wrapped in thought, in the distance he saw the Lincolnesque figure walk slowly by. Carl came back to the house, visibly shaken. "Anything wrong, Carl?" asked Lewis. Sandburg shook his head and said, "I think I'm getting too wrapped up in this thing, Lloyd."

(Detroit Free Press, Jan. 10, 1955)

## THE ASSOCIATION OF LINCOLN PRESENTERS

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 to the American people. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

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.

## The State of Lincoln Presenters

( April, 1993 )

The Association of Lincoln Presenters lists 89 Abrahams and 15 Marys in 26 states as follows: Illinois (the land of Lincoln ), 23; Kentucky, 13; Florida, 5; New Jersey, 7; New York, 4; California, 4; Michigan, 4; Pennsylvania, 4; Virginia, 3; Maryland, 3; Massachusetts, 3; Indiana, 3; Oklahoma, 3; ; Minnesota, 2; Georgia, 2; Ohio, 2; Missouri, 2 and 1 in these states: Arizona, Connecticut, Maine, Delaware, Iowa, Montana, Wisconsin, West Virginia, Arkansas, and the District of Columbia.

The ASSN. OF LINCOLN PRESENTERS is pleased to recommend its members for various patriotic, historic, and speaking engagements. For a complete membership list with names, addresses, and phone numbers, please write to Dan Bassuk in Neshanic, New Jersey.

## Who was the very first Lincoln Impersonator?

Answer: **DENNIS HANKS (Lincoln's cousin)**  
"It was after the assassination that Dennis set himself up as a Lincoln expert, wearing a stovepipe hat in hopes that strangers would note a family resemblance. He was well-known to Lincoln biographers for his full (if contradictory) account of Abe's early life." (Lincoln Herald, Summer, 1966, p. 92 )