

LINCARNATIONS

“Would I might rouse the Lincoln in you all”

Association of Lincoln Presenters



Dan Bassuk,
ALP Founder



Stan Wernz,
President
Emeritus

ASSOCIATION OF LINCOLN PRESENTERS

11781 Julie Dr.,
Baltimore, Ohio 43105

February 2023

President's Message

With this issue of LINCARNATIONS, we begin the countdown to our next conference. We will gather in Springfield, IL from April 13-16 to visit some of the most iconic sites of Lincoln's life. Walk the same streets that Abraham and Mary Lincoln walked. Visit the only home they ever owned. Visit New Salem, where he first lived as an adult. Spend a little time at the family tomb in Oak Ridge Cemetery. If you regularly attend our conferences, come to renew your old friendships. If you rarely or never attended, this would be an ideal time to come to see these sites and become a part of the ALP fellowship. Details and registration information are included in this issue.

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The board will be proposing a by-law revision for membership vote at the conference business meeting. The by-law amendment is to de-link the position of treasurer from an annual membership vote and no longer requiring the treasurer to be an elected board member first. Instead, the treasurer will be selected by the board members and serve at the board's discretion. The treasurer will become a board member by virtue of his/her position but will not be required to stand for election by the membership to the board. Because of the unique skill set required to be treasurer, this will assure that the position always has a duly qualified person and maintain continuity in the position. This will also free up another board position for general election by the membership. As a side note, if anyone is wondering, Murray Cox is not considering retiring from the treasurer position and this proposal has nothing to do with Murray's status and he approves the proposal.

Finally, we still request each of you remain on the look-out for potential new members for ALP. Our membership is rapidly dwindling. If you run into other Mary or Abraham Lincolns or other re-enactors of historical characters during your own travels, please talk to them about ALP and encourage them to apply for membership. Obtain contact information and refer that information to me so that Larry Elliott (our marketing manager) and I can talk with them also about joining ALP. Only with all our member's assistance can we hope to maintain a viable organization.

John Cooper, 740-862-6373, 12-13-2

The Association of Lincoln Presenters
2023 Conference Information
13-16 April 2023
Springfield, IL



Conference Hosts: Laura Keyes, 815-494-4313, LFKeyes@gmail.com
Randy Duncan, 217-416-3871, no_malice03@yahoo.com

Informational Video: [Here](https://youtu.be/SesDygBRaB4) (https://youtu.be/SesDygBRaB4)

Hotel Accommodations: The State House Inn, 101 E. Adams St. Springfield, IL. 217-528-5100. Hotel reservations can be made starting now **up until March 13th**. Identify yourself with the Association of Lincoln Presenters (ALP) to receive the group rate of \$129/night plus taxes. After the deadline The State House Inn will release unreserved rooms for general sale. The price includes a hot breakfast buffet each day.

Registration Costs: \$165 for ALP Members, \$175 for Non-Members. Optional: attend Friday or Saturday evening Dinner & Speaker (without attending the rest of the conference) - \$50 each night.

After completing the Registration Form, please mail check (made out to ALP) to: Laura Keyes, ALP Conference Hostess, 12120 N. Tall Trees Dr. Dunlap, IL 61525. Alternately, you may pay with your Credit/Debit Card - phone Murry Cox, ALP Treasurer (260-571-2870) to arrange payment. Service charges may apply.

Registration Form: Registration is now online! The form is [HERE](https://forms.gle/rhMdVWUJ7w4QPy2B6) (https://forms.gle/rhMdVWUJ7w4QPy2B6) and on the ALP Website and Facebook page. In order to save postage costs and expedite the registration process, a smaller conference packet is being sent this year, and you are encouraged to register online. If you are unable to register online, you must phone Laura Keyes at 815-494-4313. **Registration closes on March 6th**.

Dressing for the Event: No 19th-Century clothing will be worn during the day on Friday. You are encouraged to wear your ALP Polo Shirts with nice jeans/trousers, or another button-down shirt. Everyone is welcome to wear 19th-Century clothing during Friday evening, Saturday during the day, Saturday evening, and Sunday morning. We will have a group photo taken at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum on Saturday.

Carpooling: In order to save costs, the ALP has not hired a bus/van to transport the attendees to and from the locations we will visit. Therefore, we are asking attendees to carpool. More information will be gathered on the Registration Form.

Meals: Thursday dinner will be on your own, and a list of recommended restaurants will be included in your welcome packet. Lunch on Friday and Saturday will be simple; final menus are not set at this time. You will be contacted for more information, once menus are available. Dinner on Friday and Saturday will be a buffet; menus are listed below. If you have dietary

requirements (allergies, vegetarian, etc.) please list them on the registration form. If you do not inform us of dietary needs at this time, there is no guarantee our caterers will be able to accommodate you.

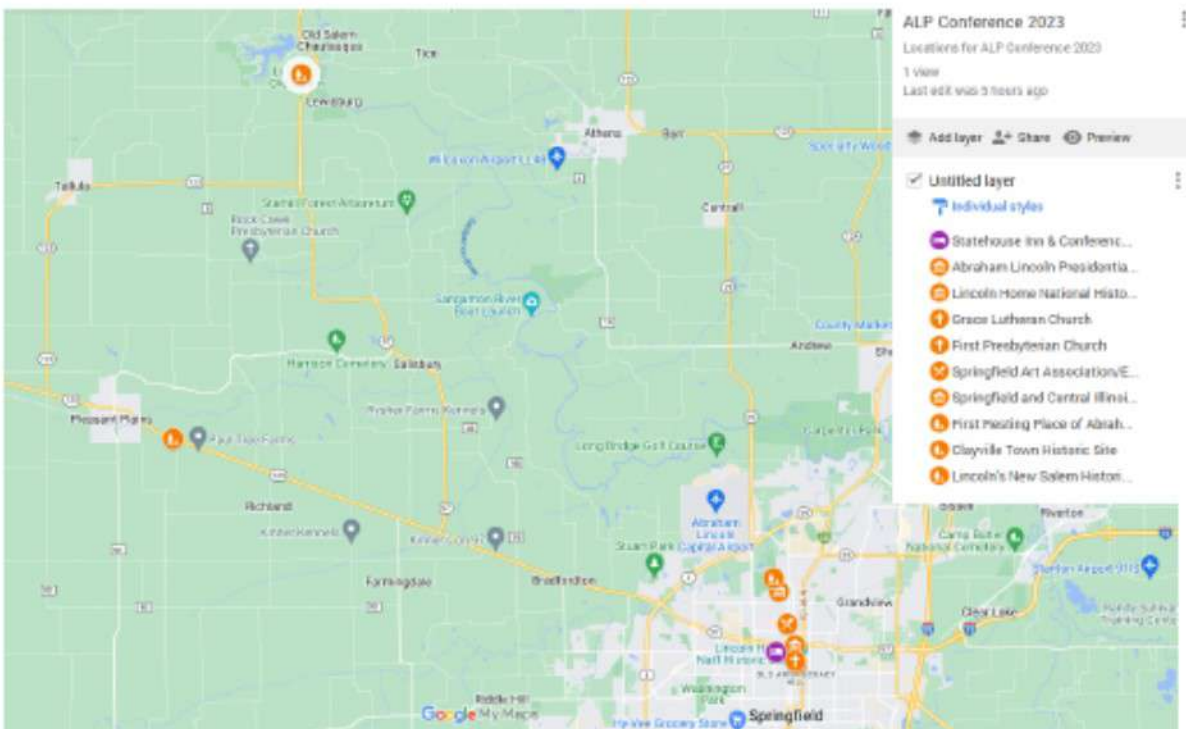
Friday Dinner: Marinated Grilled Chicken Breasts, Cheesy Baked Scalloped Potatoes, Green Beans Almandine, Greek Salad, Cheesecake Variety

Saturday Dinner: Italian Beef Served w/French Rolls, Vegetarian Pasta w/ Red Sauce, Parmesan Sweet Corn, Caesar Salad w/Croutons, Cream Pie Variety

Emergencies while traveling: If you are detained while traveling, please contact either Laura Keyes (815-494-4313) or Randy Duncan (217-416-3871).

Welcome/Pick Up Registration Materials: Welcome Table will be in the lobby of the State House Inn on Thursday afternoon/early evening, also early Friday morning before the tours begin. If you plan to arrive in town outside of these times, please contact Laura Keyes beforehand and she will make special arrangements.

Map: A larger map will be included in the welcome packet. If you have specific questions about locations of events, please contact Laura Keyes directly.



Photographer: A local photographer, Sarah Frey, will be our designated Conference Photographer. She will be with us all day on Friday and Saturday, and provide conference attendees with a form by which they can purchase a digital copy of the photographs that she takes. Look for that form in your Welcome Packet.

Weather: April in Central Illinois is extremely changeable, so be sure to bring layers as well as umbrellas. Wear sturdy shoes on Friday, for there will be a good deal of walking around outside, including Lincoln's Tomb, Lincoln's New Salem State Park, Claysville Historic Site, and Lincoln's Home.

Silent Auction: The form has been included in the Conference packet for your convenience. Please make copies to accompany the silent auction items you are donating. Bring the items to either Friday or Saturday evening's dinner. Silent Auction will be Saturday evening, with the possibility of Friday evening, depending on the facilities available.

Confirmation: All registered participants will receive an email confirmation at the time of registration and any other updates or developments about the conference after the registration deadline. You are expected to check your email for these updates.

Membership Meeting: This will take place on Saturday evening. More information, including reports and agendas, will be available in your Welcome Packet.

Cash on Hand: You are encouraged to bring cash for some specific transactions: (a) monetary donation the Lincoln Home (\$5 *per person* is recommended), (b) many of the guest speakers are published authors, and will have their books available for purchase, (c) silent auction purchases may be made via cash or check.

Patch: Susan Miller is arranging for embroidered patches to be made for interested ALP Members and Conference Attendees. Cost is \$4. Please indicate on the Registration Form your interest.

Virtual Option: ALP Members will be able to virtually connect (via Zoom) to the Membership Meeting (Saturday evening), and hopefully the guest speakers on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evenings following dinner. Final plans have not yet been made, and additional announcements will be on the ALP website and Facebook page.

DRAFT of Schedule

Thursday, 13 April

ALP Members start to arrive in town.

3:00pm – ALP Board Meeting at State House Inn Conference Room

6:30pm – Dinner on own

7:30pm – Speaker Erika Holst at State House Inn Conference Room, "Lincoln's Springfield Family"

Friday, 14 April – Attendees WILL NOT wear 19th-Century Clothing

7:00am-8:15am Breakfast at hotel (Buffet)

8:55am – arrive at Lincoln Home

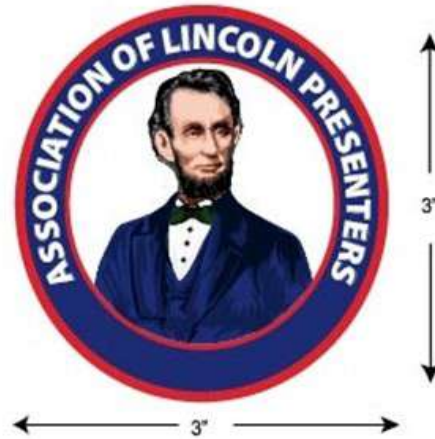
9:10am-10:30am – Tour of Lincoln Home

11:40am-12:25 – Tour of Lincoln Tomb

Conference 2023

By Susan Miller

A uniform is worn by members of an organization while participating in that organization's activity. Uniform also means to be the same, and without any difference. We, the members of the Association of Lincoln Presenters have a very recognizable "uniform." During our 3-day ALP conferences we wear "our" uniforms.



If the dress of the members of an organization remains the same, then emerges a sense on commonality and a look of professionalism that we will bring to our organization. Uniforms also depict solidarity.

Two sites in Springfield do not want us to wear our "uniform." Keeping this in mind, the 2023 Conference hosts ask ALP members to have a common dress on Friday, April 14, 2023. Many members have the polo shirts that were sold in 2017. Those that do not have the polo shirts are asked to purchase the new Association of Lincoln Presenters patch to place on a polo shirt of their choice.

Wearing a uniform these days is common for organizations like the police, Armed Forces and safety personnel. Uniforms help them stand out of the crowd to be easily recognizable and distinguish them for their service. These uniforms not only make them feel proud but also have an imposing effect on others as the presence of a person in uniform can change the mood and demeanor of people around them. Though we will not dress like Abe and Mary that day, a uniform will look professional and identifiable with the public.

The patches will be available in January for preorders.

Survey Results

Submitted by Vicki Woodard

In the July 2022 issue of *Lincarnations*, the Association of Lincoln Presenters featured a three-page comprehensive survey designed to determine our members' thoughts regarding the annual conferences the organization holds each April. I want to thank those individuals who took the time and effort to give thoughtful feedback to the questions we posed.

I must admit, however, that I was disappointed. The turnout of respondents was low (16); the composition of that small pool was homogeneous. I was happy to be reminded, though, of the active and loyal members who attended one conference and became hooked for life (health, budget and work schedules allowing, of course).

We also wanted to hear from those who have never attended a conference or, maybe, attended one year but did not find the event to their liking. More responses can provide a greater view of what we need to modify. The survey's purpose is to know why so that we can evaluate our practices and enhance the conference experience for everyone. We cannot know what changes to make unless you tell us.

As I wrote in July, ALP founder Dan Bassuk and other organizers of the first ALP conference held in Lexington, Ky., recognized that the experience taught them that members were eager to learn from one another and form or renew friendships. Thus, the annual conference became a central component of the ALP's success.

If you didn't complete the survey in July, it's not too late; we'd still appreciate your feedback. At your convenience, simply return to the July 2022 issue of *Lincarnations* (<https://www.lincolnpresenters.com/wp-content/uploads/Lincarnations/Lincarnations-7-22-compressed.pdf>), print and fill out pages 4, 5 and 6, and send them to Vicki Woodard, 602 N. Pine Street, Hazel Dell, IL. 62428. (Please do not use online version of survey.)

Questions? Don't hesitate to contact me at jvwoodard@proton.me.

I thank you in advance for your participation.

The following is a sampling of information derived from the July 2022 conference survey:

Interestingly, under Lodging, more respondents (narrowly) emphasized their desire for on-site conference rooms (11) than the importance of the cost their room (10).

Under Programming/Activities, talks/lectures/seminars were the number one vote-getters (15). (This applied equally to Lincoln/Civil War-related events and those related to general history of conference site.) Travel to Lincoln/Civil War-related sites was also important (13), but not so much as travel to general points of interest of conference site (9).

Respondents indicated their desire to see more presentations/demonstrations by their fellow ALP members (13), and not just those of Abraham and Mary Lincoln presenters. They were eager to learn more about other historical characters, as well.

Small group round-table discussions ranked rather high in votes, too (10), as did the respondents' desires for additional social time (14) and unscheduled time/rest time (12).

Activities receiving the least number of votes were dances/balls (2) and volunteer visits to local schools, libraries, etc. (3).

The most desired Presentation Topics were, in order of votes, the Lincoln family (immediate and extended) (13); Civil War characters and battles (12), etiquette of the mid-19th century (10), and contemporaries of the Lincoln family and politics of the mid-19th century (9 votes each).

With a vote of 15 to 1, respondents indicated they would be willing to car-pool (when practical) to conference events to save money on group buses. (Note: Organizers of the April 2023 conference in Springfield, Ill., plan to have attendees car-pool at that event.)

Meet Dennis Boggs



Dennis Boggs is a lifetime member of ALP beginning in 1995. He lives in Nashville, TN with his wife of 26 years, Molly Flatt. They have no children but enjoy their cats. He has presented Abraham Lincoln full time since around 2000. But his first performance was a play he did in 1990, at the TPAC Theater in Nashville, entitled *Abraham Lincoln and the Songs He Loved*. He then repeated that play in 1996, at Fisk University with Fisk Jubilee Singers and went on to perform it to a few schools.

Pre-COVID Dennis averaged around two hundred programs a year to school groups (pre-school to College and University level), churches, retirement homes, libraries, Civil War reenactments, living history groups, Civil War Roundtables and conventions. (Editor's note: Hopefully he is returning to those numbers now post-COVID).

Before becoming Lincoln, Dennis was in the retail grocery business, from 1965 until 1999. First in Huntsville, Alabama, then Nashville, Tennessee, for the last 20 years. He notes that his education was a lot like Lincoln's, defective. He dropped out of school when he was fifteen years old to help his mother pay the bills and did not receive a high school diploma until he was thirty-eight years old. Also, like Lincoln, what little knowledge he has acquired is self-developed, sometime by necessity.

Dennis and his wife attended their first conference in 2003 in Santa Claus, Indiana and his last conference was in 2011 in Greenville TN. He always enjoyed each one that he attended but felt too much time was spent as tourist and not enough time fellowshiping with each other.

Regarding music, Dennis states, "I still love all those oldies from the 1950's and 1960's." Though he wishes he could play a musical instrument of some kind, he confesses his attempts to learn any have been to no avail. But he loves listening to those oldies. (I reckon he can play the radio adequately).

He believes, though, that he is the only Lincoln Presenter to perform at the world famous Grand Old Opry. This is not because of musical ability but rather because of his contacts. His wife, Molly, worked as a professional hair and makeup artist for the Nashville Network, so it was through her contacts, that he was given the honor of delivering the Gettysburg Address, to a sold-out crowd on a Memorial Day weekend.

Dennis was also one of the featured Lincolns in the TV documentary about ALP that was filmed in 2005 and 2006, at our Lincoln conferences, titled *Being Lincoln: Men in Hats*.

For hobbies, Dennis enjoys reading anything about Lincoln's life, and the Civil War. He also col-

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Book Review

The Case of Abraham Lincoln

Julie M. Fenster

2007 Palgrave Macmillan

255 pages, outline map of Illinois, illustrations

paperback \$14.95 list price (available at a discount from Edward R. Hamilton.)

The book concentrates in 1856 and Lincoln's involvement with and crucial role in the establishment of the Republican Party in Illinois. This account also describes the most-publicized murder case to occur in Springfield, Illinois for many decades - one in which Lincoln would eventually be involved as a lawyer.

I consider myself well informed about Lincoln and about Illinois in his lifetime but learned some new things about the man and his state from this book. The author repeats the familiar story about the bad behavior of Lincoln's sons when he would bring them to the law office, and how, to Herndon's disgust, they went uncorrected. But the author relates an incident about Lincoln punishing his boys (with a barrel stave!) after he caught them mistreating a dog, thus showing how his tolerance for his son's misbehavior had its limits.

The author also relates multiple incidents of both sides in a case seeking to enlist Lincoln and the advocate necessarily disappointing one side because the other got to him first. He turned down work assisting the District Attorney for Sangamon County in a prosecution and then later joined the defense team in the same case. The George Anderson murder case is interesting, shedding light on investigation and prosecution in its place and time, as well as revealing much about Lincoln's place in the legal profession in his time and place. He prosecuted a single criminal case in his entire career and the author says he was averse to sending criminals to prison or the gallows.

Another new fact to me, this time in politics, was that Lincoln may have been the inventor of personalized junk mail. The "Letter to Fillmore Men of 8 Sept. 1856" as it is titled in the *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* had printed by lithography as a facsimile of his handwriting and then filled in different names with his own hand on many copies and mailed to multiple individuals.

The book is well footnoted from primary sources, and yet is a quick and easy read.

Joe Woodard

THE LINCOLN QUESTION and ANSWERS

"Describe your opinion of Lincoln's religious beliefs (in one or two paragraphs)."



A lot of historical books about Abraham Lincoln really do not dwell on his religion. Yes, we know he and Mary had a pew at the church in Springfield, IL. Lincoln did not seem like a church-going person, but accounts say he read his Bible, that he was a kind man, and he himself quoted scripture often and used it in his speeches.

When it came to humanity crises, Lincoln lent himself to being the gracious, forgiving, and loving character to pardon honest mistakes, and tried to encourage those in distress. He felt that God would be the deciding factor when all was said and done, and he knew how to pray.

Janet Myer

The Tragic Mrs. Lincoln



I understand that Lincoln was agnostic in his early adult (New Salem) years. I think that God dealt with him through the deaths of his loved ones (Mother Nancy Hanks Lincoln in 1818, son Edward Baker Lincoln in 1950, William Wallace Lincoln in 1862), and the pressure to do God's will during his civil war presidency.

One of the better pieces of evidence of Lincoln becoming a born-again Christian during the CW is the conversation that Lincoln had with Gen. Dan Sickles, his aide Lt. Col. James F. Rusling and Tad on July 5, 1863. Rusling was amazed at being in a casual conversation with Lincoln and within a couple hours wrote to his father, a big fan of Lincoln, detailing this conversation. Decades later, that 7/5/63 letter came back into Rusling's hands when he wrote his memoir in 1899, *Men and Things I Saw in the Civil War Days*. Rusling details Lincoln's vow to God before and during the Gettysburg battle as follows. Here is the nugget from Rusling:

"Lincoln: 'No, Gen Sickles I had no fears of Gettysburg, and if you really want to know I will tell you why. Of course, I don't want you and Lt. Rusling to say anything about this – at least not now. People may laugh if it got out, you know. But the fact is, in the very pinch of the campaign there, I went to my room one day and got down on **my knees and prayed Almighty God** for victory at Gettysburg. I told him that this was his country and the war was His war, but that we really couldn't stand another Fredericksburg or Chancellorsville. And then and there I **made a solemn vow with my Maker, that if he would stand by you boys at Gettysburg, I would stand by Him.** And after wrestling thus with the Almighty in prayer, I don't know how it was, and it is not for me to explain, but, somehow or other, **a sweet comfort crept into my soul, that God Almighty had taken the whole business there into his own hands**, and we were bound to win at Gettysburg! And He did stand by you boys at Gettysburg and **now I will stand by Him.** No Gen Sickles, I had no fears of Gettysburg, and that is the why.' This conversation made a deep impression on me and seems worthy to be recorded here. Clearly it settles the *questio vexata* of his religious faith forever."

Thanks,

John Voehl

cell 303 909 5587



Baptists can hear the Hard Shell Baptist from the church he worked for and attended in Indiana. Presbyterians can hear the man in the pew in Springfield. Even atheists can hear the doubt and trouble of the melancholic young man in New Salem. All can see him as someone like them. This is a great asset to a lawyer and politician.

His private and public writings and speeches, particularly later in life suggest a strong faith in a Christian God. He was at time criticized for his religious references. The War and the [Second] Great Awakening solidified his commitment to try to remain firm "in the right as God gives us to see the right."

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Sincerely,

John Walther

Johnw1854@aol.com



I spent one entire year - basically from 9 to 4 daily researching Lincoln's faith. I am not sure how many hours that is, but a whole lot. Reading of archived news articles was a meticulous job, but I did a lot of it. This included Nicolay's and Hay's diaries, their personal writings beyond the book they co-authored, as well as writings of people who knew him on a personal level, including Elizabeth Keckley, as well as letters written about him from people who knew him and heard him talk of his faith and belief in the power of God and a larger plan than ours. Simply reading his personal writings is easy - of which there are many and of which I have read quite a lot - to see his faith reflected in his words, both verbally as well as in letters and political writings. Dr. Vinton of Trinity Church played role in his conversion as well. He met Dr. Vinton when Lincoln was in New York City - delivering what is now known as the Cooper Union Speech. A diary entry attests to Vinton's visit to the Executive Mansion in 1864. Somewhere in my research I found a letter in which a friend wrote of Lincoln's actual conversion on the ride from the town of Gettysburg to the cemetery on November 19, 1863.

In the final analysis whether you are a Christian in your heart or not - is known only to you and God. Lincoln's faith walk was gradual, but as you read from his earlier days to his last it is very clear. I cannot prove I am a Christian other than to say so and live as one. Lincoln clearly did the latter. I do not doubt in my heart but that he was Christian, and that it evolved over time, as the same has been for me. Billy Graham is assumed to be one because he said so, preached on it and lived it. Lincoln did the same, though he did not preach as a Pastor or Minister.

Dick Freeman

Alpharetta, GA



I do not think that what Gerald Prokopowicz wrote on the subject in *Did Abraham Lincoln Own Slaves?* can be improved. I have not found any convincing evidence that Lincoln ever joined any organized religious group. I know that several groups have tried to claim him as one of their own, but I do not find any of those claims meeting a high standard of proof. I am persuaded from the many references to deity in Lincoln's speeches and writings that he believed in a deity the same as the Christian God.

Joe Woodard



Lincoln spoke of his Mother's teachings having a profound effect on his life. The religious atmosphere of home continued with his Stepmother Sarah. Lincoln openly expressed having belief in a Providential God. His faith was nurtured and challenged after he left home.

In 1850, Lincoln's second-born son died. The following appeared in the newspaper and is believed to have been submitted by Lincoln:

Little Eddie.

The Angel of death was hovering nigh,

And the lovely boy was called to die.

Bright is the home to him now given,

for "of such is the kingdom of heaven."

On February 20, 1862, Lincoln's third-born son Willie died. Ward Lehman stated, "the misery that drips from the arms of Lincoln is caused by the lack of any personal faith." Lincoln set aside every Thursday to grieve. "My poor boy, he was too good for this earth. God has called him home. I know that he is better off in Heaven, but we loved him so. It is hard, hard to have him die."

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At Gettysburg, Lincoln walked the battlefield before the dedication program, where he said, "I was put in touch with Gethsemane and Calvary; there I recognized the need for redeeming and preserving grace." Subsequently, he was given a gift of *The Bible* and said in part: "In regard to this Great Book, I have only to say that it is the best gift God has given to man. All the good from the Savior of the world is communicated to us through this Book. But for this Book we could not know right from wrong."

Additionally, I consider the Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address and the request to address the congregation assembled on Easter Sunday, 1865, at the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church. Couple that with his comments in the Thanksgiving Proclamations, and I conclude Lincoln's Faith developed over time, but at the end he had a saving faith.

Stanley Wernz



I believe that Lincoln was a Christian, believing in Jesus Christ as well as the Bible. Though he seldom mentioned Jesus, the following stories indicate to me his belief in Christ. One verse he frequently quoted was from I Corinthians 15:22, "As in Adam all died, even so in Christ shall all be made alive," expressing his belief in the atonement through the sacrifice on the Cross.

When given a Bible from a group of Black Americans, he replied, "In regard to this great book, I have but to say it is the best gift God has given to man. All the good that the Savior gave to the world was communicated through this book."

Lincoln attended a dying woman to help her make a will. After he was done, she asked if he would read to her from the Bible. He responded by stating, "Your faith in Christ is wise and strong. Your hope of a future life is blessed." He then recited from memory the 23rd Psalm, emphasizing, "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." He concluded by reciting John 14:2-4, quoting Jesus Christ, "Ye believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions...I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

John Cooper



(Editor's note: Redacted from Kevin Wood's blog, "Thanksgiving: Celebrate It or Cancel It?", 26-Nov-2022; read the full version at <https://www.mrlincoln.com/blog/?p=965>)

Thanksgiving has become a controversial topic with articles such as "The True, Dark History Behind Thanksgiving", coming in large part from the idea that the holiday came about to commemorate the so-called first Thanksgiving in 1621 at Plymouth, when the pilgrims and native Americans held a shared feast. As the relationship between native Americans and European colonists would later become less friendly and eventually result in tragic consequences, especially for the Native Americans, several are now suggesting that we need to "re-brand" Thanksgiving, if not cancel it altogether.

But what if the people primarily responsible for the creation of the American Thanksgiving tradition – most notably Sarah Josepha Hale (editress of *Godey's Lady's Book*) and Abraham Lincoln – were thinking of something entirely different? Should we blindly accept bold claims such as: "Crucially, Hale's campaign for the Thanksgiving holiday was explicitly linked to the story of Plymouth" (*Time*, Dec. 2-9, 2019) or "Lincoln blended the sentimental myth of Pilgrims and Indians sharing a harvest feast with the public need for a celebration of national unity" (*The Boston Globe*, Nov. 18, 2007)?

Really? I have read all of Sarah Hale's editorials and writings about Thanksgiving which I can find, her letter to Lincoln, and Lincoln's Thanksgiving proclamations. In not a single instance have I found a reference to the "first Thanksgiving" in 1621. They were not commemorating that long-ago event, but instead giving thanks to God for the blessings he had bestowed on them in their own times, blessings which they themselves had experienced. Lincoln's 1863 proclamation begins with the words: "*The year that is drawing towards its close*, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies" (*emphasis added*), and continues by enumerating various "extraordinary" bounties which the people had experienced: peace with other nations, Union advances in the war, an expanding economy, population growth, etc. His 1864 proclamation is more of the same.

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In Memoriam Gene Griessman

By
Dick Freeman

I lost a dear friend of over 3 decades last month, by the name of Gene Griessman. What follows is what I wrote to his daughters. It is not often that such a man comes along like Gene Griessman.

Still, none will come from the heart with more sincerity than mine. I loved your Dad. We became very good friends over a span of more than 3 decades. I first met him when he performed for the Atlanta Roundtable on Peach Tree Street near white columns. Now understand that the members for the most part were what I call “unreconstructed Confederates” – not a friendly audience to President Lincoln. Gene did his Lincoln presentation and received a standing ovation. He then said that we – the audience – had made history. For this was the first time that Abraham Lincoln ever got a standing ovation in the City of Atlanta! And I would add that it may still be the only time.

I saw him perform several times in the Atlanta area. Many years ago, he performed his play at my daughter Carey’s school near Athens. He initially agreed to perform for her first-grade class. But that very quickly grew into the whole school and the performance ended up being in the gymnasium. When the performance was over, the kids ran to stand with Abraham Lincoln and have their photos taken. Gene made Lincoln come alive for those kids that day. My daughter has spoken of it often & even now she will run into one of those students - as an adult & parent - and they will comment on how Gene made history come alive for them.

Your Dad and I often met for dinner or lunch, over the years. We exchanged many emails and text messages as well. In those exchanges he provided a perspective to me that was fresh, honest, and intellectual. He changed my mind on several things because of his unique ability to present an old argument in a fresh light.

He became a significant mentor to this 84-year-old man. A treasure beyond words. I miss him terribly already. As a Christian, I am comforted by knowing that in due course, I will see and talk with Gene again down the road.

Some years ago, I was convinced to write and perform a one man, one act play on Lincoln’s faith. I did that for many years, as a solo. The same as Gene. Over the years we talked casually about finding a way to do a joint gig, but nothing really materialized. Then one day on a visit to Gene’s home for lunch some weeks before he went to Hawaii, he suggested that we do a joint gig at my church as a fund raiser. I was stunned. He never did such a thing. Plans were well underway & then he flew to Hawaii. He had a massive heart attack as we all know and never fully recovered.

Gene changed me in many ways. He - in fact - changed the trajectory of my life. I think of him every day. I will carry him in my heart until we meet again.

(To conclude, here are some words that Gene wrote as his interpretation of some of Lincoln's thoughts that he used as a Lincoln soliloquy for a training film *Lincoln on Communication*, and subsequently incorporated it into his one-man play *The Wit and Wisdom of Abraham Lincoln*. It is included in Chapter 19 of *Lincoln Speaks to Leaders* by Gene Griessman). This is Gene, speaking as Abraham Lincoln.

“Words have been used to encourage and praise me. Words have been used to mock,

attack, and wound me. But I have never lost faith in their power or their durability.

“Words can reveal thoughts, conceal pain, paint dreams, correct errors, and pass along dearly bought lessons to the latest generation.

“Words can transport knowledge from the past, interpret the present, and speak to the future. Words can erect walls between people or build bridges.

“Words can inflame passions or cool them, stir up the worst or find the best, pull down or build up, tarnish or cleanse, wound or heal.

“The ability to use words can endear you to your fellows, win them to your side, and help you to rise to heights you may now only dream of. That happened to my father’s son.

“Pursuing the mastery of words is worth the time, the money, and all the energy you can muster. What you invest will be repaid with interest compounded.

“Build up your knowledge so that your words will be true. Nurture your spirit so that your words will be true, kind, and wise.

“The world may little note nor long remember what you say here. And yet it may. For words, once released, take on a life of their own, and find lodging in places and hearts you may never know. And after many days, those words may return to haunt you, or to bless you.

“Think carefully before you let them go.”

– Gene Griessman

(Editor’s note: Gene Griessman was also featured in a biography in our February 2021 edition of LINCARNATIONS, available on the ALP website).

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Thus, we see that our annual, national observance of Thanksgiving was not motivated by commemorating some distant (and controversial) event, but instead by a desire to give thanks to God for the blessings the people themselves had experienced in their own times. If the latter is also our desire, we have no reason to “cancel” Thanksgiving.

Respectfully submitted by **Kevin Wood**



It can be difficult to tackle what Abraham Lincoln’s religious views were. He knew the Bible better than most and could quote scripture from memory, yet he never joined any church. He attended Protestant services with his family, but he did not adhere to any one denomination. Whenever referring to “God,” or the “Almighty” on occasion, he did so in reference to a higher power who had unknowable reasons for why events unfold as they do. In this sense his religious beliefs might be better described as having been more of a moral philosophy.

As Lincoln himself said, on many occasions, to many people over the years, “I am and have always been a fatalist.” His wife Mary and long-time law partner William Herndon both corroborate his fatalism, citing a quote Lincoln often said: “what is to be, will be, and no cares of our own can arrest the decree.” Lincoln believed in predestination and the Doctrine of Necessity, both of which strip mankind of free will. In this view, people are all governed by conditions over which we have no control. Our actions and choices then are dominated by motives, and at the bottom of these motives is self.

During his presidency, Lincoln saw himself as an “instrument of God” for a country that was undergoing a Civil War to purge itself of a great national sin. He did not believe in Hell, and for him, hell was suffering which could be educational and medicinal- not punitive. This was demonstrated in his expressed wish not to punish the South after the war. He did say that if people in the North were in the position that the South was in, they would have done all the same things. Though Lincoln never called himself this, he was without a doubt, an egalitarian. Perhaps the argument could be made then that his religious beliefs or moral philosophy was that of an egalitarian fatalist.

Submitted by:

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lects and watches classic movies and classic television shows. Like many other Lincolns, he also collects books about Lincoln and currently owns about 200. He enjoys spending time with his wife and their new cat, Spanky. Other activities include going to historic homes and parks and occasionally loafing.

Dennis says that one very special moment occurred while doing a program for the Tennessee School for the Blind. He told a story about someone saying how ugly Lincoln was. As the students were leaving, one young girl asked if she could touch his face. Of course, he said it was ok. Dennis states "After she took my face in her hands she said, 'Mr. Lincoln I don't think you are ugly; I think that you are beautiful.' " Dennis concludes: "It brought me to tears. I knew right then and there, just how blessed and lucky all of us as Lincoln Presenters are."

One of his funniest moments was while he was doing a program for a group of third graders. Right in the middle of delivering the Gettysburg Address, his cell phone went off and a little boy in the front row, yelled out, "I bet that is Mrs. Lincoln calling to tell you to bring home a loaf of bread," proving that there is always one in every crowd!

Dennis concludes that what he likes best about being Abraham Lincoln is "absolutely everything!"

*Respectfully submitted by **John Cooper***

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