



# LINCARNATIONS

“Would I might rouse the Lincoln in you all”

Association of Lincoln Presenters



Dan Bassuk,  
ALP Founder

## Mark Your Calendars:

### Looking Ahead to Kansas in 2021!

We have all missed the opportunity to learn about Lincoln and visit with each other since we were not able to gather at Springfield this year. I hope you are planning to go to Kansas in 2021. The plan is to spend a day in Leavenworth, where we will view the Lincoln collection – including an original of the 13th Amendment -- at the University of St. Mary. There are plans for several speakers, mentioning not only Lincoln's visit there in December 1859, but also many of the activities and incidents of the Bleeding Kansas. We will also spend a day visiting Constitution Hall where the Lecompton Constitution was drafted, and will see a presentation from a group of reenactors to tell us more of the conflict in Kansas of that era. We will then go on to Lawrence, where we will hear from John Brown.

As you make plans to travel to and/or from Leavenworth, there are several worthwhile places of historical interest. If you are coming from the west, you may want to stop at Abilene, Kan., to visit the Eisenhower Center, the boyhood home, Presidential Library and Museum. If coming up from the south, you may like to stop at Ft. Scott, a restored 1840s-era fort that was intended to help maintain peace between the Indian tribes and white settlers. Coming from the east, you may want to stop in Independence, Mo., at the Truman home and Presidential Library. There is also the Military Museum on the grounds of Fort Leavenworth, and the Arabia Museum in Kansas City, Mo., as well as a museum dedicated to WWI that is across the street from the Arabia. The Arabia Museum is a fascinating display of the steamship Arabia and its cargo that was salvaged from a ship that sunk in the Missouri River in 1856.

As the time of the conference draws nearer, details will be provided. I hope you are looking forward to joining us and have April 15-18 marked on your 2021 calendar.

Murray Cox (Conference Host)

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## **ASSOCIATION OF LINCOLN PRESENTERS**

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July 2020

Good morning, Members!

This note is written after the cancellation of our planned conference in Springfield, Ill., to have been hosted by Randy and Joy Duncan. To those 50-plus people who registered, your ALP Board regrets the need to postpone our conference. The ALP conferences have come to be a highlight in the ALP year, allowing us to learn more about Lincoln, the Civil War period, and providing opportunities to greet friends and make new acquaintances. Your attendance plays a big part in annually bolstering other members' spirits and in spurring enthusiasm for our next meeting.

We express gratitude to Randy and Joy for their efforts in preparing for our arrival in Springfield. Hosting a conference is a major undertaking. After spending two years in preparation, postponing the event is a major disappointment. We are grateful that they have agreed to again prepare for our ALP Conference in 2022. I hope all of you who had planned to be with us this year will be able to join us then.

We are pleased to report that ALP Treasurer Murray Cox is well on his way with preparations for our Lawrence, Leavenworth and Lecompton (Kan.) conference next year. The dates are April 15-18, 2021. Please block those days on your calendar, and join us for the festivities. This conference will provide us unique learning experiences about 1859 Kansas and Lincoln's short visit there. Please see Murray's 2021 ALP Conference update in this newsletter.

See you in Kansas!

Stan

## Meet Your Fellow Lincoln *Eric Richardson*

*Submitted by John Cooper, Ohio*

Eric Richardson from Bel Air, Md., became a life member of the ALP in 2015. He is the sole performer and proprietor of a performance company called the Summit Tribute Group. In addition to Lincoln, he presents a number of characters, beginning as one of the country's best Dean Martin tribute artists. He also does Gregory Peck (as Atticus Finch), Gen. Douglas MacArthur, Geoffrey Rush as Capt. Hector Barbossa, Harrison Ford as Han Solo, and Kurt Russell as Santa Claus. In addition to Lincoln, he presents four other U.S. presidents: Washington, Jefferson, FDR and Reagan. He does about 50 performances per year across all characters, with Dean Martin accounting for the largest number of performances. He does Lincoln about a dozen times each year.

His journey as Abraham Lincoln began when, seven years ago, a fellow cast member in a play remarked how much he resembled the great actor, Gregory Peck, who portrayed Lincoln in *The Blue and the Gray*, so he decided to tackle Lincoln. He soon found out that his Lincoln was his most popular president with conventioners visiting Washington, D.C. His proximity to the nation's capital led to frequent bookings there. He has recently teamed up with a superb presenter of Frederick Douglass, giving audiences a little known insight to their unusual friendship.

Richardson spent a number of years in theater, including a two-and-a-half-year run with the touring company of the Broadway hit, *Annie*.

He was an understudy covering multiple ensemble members in their roles, going on often when one was sick, injured or on vacation. The biggest understudy role was Rooster Hannigan who was portrayed by Tony Award-winner Gary Beach. Unfortunately, family responsibilities forced him out of the theater into a multitude of sales jobs, including real estate, automobiles, insurance and investments. But the lure of the theater about 10 years ago caused him to form his Summit Tribute Group and embark on an independent performance career.

He received his critical theatre training in New York City's The American Musical & Dramatic Academy. He has always considered himself an entertainer/singer (crooner) who performs solo as Dean Martin, as well as with Rat Pack combos (Sinatra, Sammy Davis), and others such as Marilyn Monroe, Jerry Lewis and Bobby Darin. He was particularly honored to sing the National Anthem at Baltimore Orioles Camden Yard as Francis Scott Key in 2014. That was particularly gratifying because he is an avid Orioles (and Ravens) fan.

He has been happily married to one beautiful lady, Patty, for more than 40 years, with a son and a daughter, but no grandchildren... yet! Although Patty would make a wonderful "Mary," she simply declines his invitation... *adamantly!!!*

Though he has little time for outside interests, Richardson can feed his passion for history through his work. He is currently pursuing his ancestral roots, hoping to discover the resting place of his great-great-grandfather, who was hanged as a Confederate spy by an overly zealous Union



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### “Our Members Take the Floor...”

*Our members were asked, “What has been your most fulfilling experience while presenting your character and why? Also, what experience came closest to causing you to consider hanging up your stove pipe hat (or hoop skirt, as the case might be) and why? How did you ultimately handle this unpleasant experience?”*



**Don Ancell of California** reports that his most fulfilling experience was a chance meeting with a parent of a young student who had attended a performance. “I was getting out of my car at a shopping center after another presentation (still dressed as Lincoln) when this lady from some distance away (began) waving and calling me over to where she was. As I approached her, she said, ‘I want to thank you for what you did at our school.’ ‘What was that?’ I replied. ‘My son would not pick up a book to read, so I had much trouble getting him to do his school work, but after your presentation, (where I pushed the importance of reading), he went to the library and checked out several books on Lincoln and the Civil War and has been reading ever since.’ I wish I could meet this now a grown man.

“The worst time I had at a presentation -- and actually quit and hung up the suit -- was when I first started 22 years ago. I was asked to do a presentation at a fifth grade classroom. I mistakenly thought I was knowledgeable enough to do the job. Just looking like Lincoln is not enough. I learned the hard way... It was a very embarrassing experience because the students knew more than I did, and one boy made fun of me, and the teacher just sat there. After a year of study and research, I started up again, and for the most part, it was great time spent. I am now 82 and only play Lincoln for friends and at an assisted care facility where my wife is now residing.”




**John Cooper of Ohio** wrote that for years he has gone to schools, told Lincoln stories, and returned home without ever knowing if anyone even paid attention. “But several years ago, I was hired for a town festival, (and) asked if I would come early and visit their elementary school the day before. The next day at the festival, I began to run into third and fourth graders with their parents. One mother told me that her third grade daughter came home the previous day more excited than she had ever seen her. The mother said, ‘My daughter said Abraham Lincoln came to my class today. Then she proceeded to tell story after story about Lincoln for almost an hour. Two hours later, my husband came home and my daughter started all over.’ That just warmed my heart and finally assured me that I was making an impact on the lives and education of children.

“I have had no incidents that caused me to consider quitting, but I will share a response that was somewhat negative. I did a presentation to a group of military wives in Ohio and talked about Ohio generals' contributions to the war. Afterward, a lady came up to me and complimented my program, but then said she was from Alabama and I should have mentioned some southern generals. I replied, 'Ma'am, I did mention a lot of southern generals. I told how General Grant whipped General Lee through Virginia and forced his surrender at Appomattox; how General Sherman whipped General Johnston and then General Hood all the way across Georgia; how General Sheridan whipped General Jubal Early all across the Shenandoah and met General Stuart's cavalry at Yellow Tavern

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resulting in Stuart's death. I think I talked a lot about southern generals. But I didn't mention Stonewall Jackson because, after all, your own boys shot him.' She wasn't too happy about my response, but I thought it was appropriately humorous."

 **Whit McMahan of Tennessee** recalls that "by far, my most fulfilling and memorable experience in presenting Mr. Lincoln (was) at a Baptist Day Care Center in Murfreesboro, Tenn., that I visit each February during President's Week. It took a few attempts to relate my character well with children ages 2-6. Finally, I discovered that story telling from picture books was the answer. In my most recent visits, I began to see that meeting Mr. Lincoln is making a difference in the children's lives. One autistic child talked about my upcoming visit for weeks before I arrived. Another returned to his former daycare location after meeting me in one of my visits. This child had gotten so carried away with meeting Mr. Lincoln that he told me his goal is to become a history teacher! Through these children, I am now in the business of creating memories! I found that young children of today are starving for living history. Many will carry the memories of their visit with Mr. Lincoln all the way to their senior years.

"In retrospect, I have just a few outstanding memories of my own childhood that made a lasting impression into adulthood. One was a visit from Mr. Lincoln at my elementary school when I was in the first or second grade. I have no idea who might have played the part of President Lincoln in my hometown of Clarksville, Tenn., back in 1968. It really doesn't matter, but that visit became a fixated memory that I will never forget. Ultimately, it is the smile on these children's faces that make presenting Mr. Lincoln so worthwhile."

As far as negative experiences go, McMahan wrote, "My interest in portraying Mr. Lincoln is deeply rooted and personal. Several times during my childhood, I asked my parents to stop by Hodgenville, Ky., so I could visit Lincoln's birthplace whenever we were traveling in that area. I had no idea why I was drawn to the serene place, but the visits happened time and again. It took until adulthood before the answer was revealed. Indeed, my interest in portraying Mr. Lincoln has waxed and waned over the years, but I have never actually considered giving up presenting altogether. I credit God for helping me to win the genetic lottery in acquiring Mr. Lincoln's physical characteristics. I feel that any divine gift so undeserving requires, in my mind, that I respond to God by becoming the best Mr. Lincoln I can be. I hope to continue presenting as long I am able. Perhaps, in the afterlife, I hope to hear the blessed spoken words written in Matthew 25, verse 23: 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'"

 From **Rick Otey of Illinois** we read, "I am in my fourth year presenting President Lincoln. My most enjoyable event to present him is at all of The Greater Peoria Honor Flight Homecomings in Peoria, Ill. I go to the airport an hour-and-a-

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half before the flight lands and visit with the hundreds of people there to welcome the veterans home. Being a Navy vet myself, I am honored to be the first person to welcome each veteran as they enter into the terminal. I was invited to go to (Washington) D.C. to present Lincoln on the May flight; however, with the flight being canceled because of COVID19, I will have to wait until next year.

“I have no memories that would make me want to hang my stovepipe hat up.”



**JoAnn F. Peterson of West Virginia** wrote that the “most fulfilling experience I’ve had portraying Mary is introducing her to young people. I was doing a performance at a library in Moundsville, WV, with two little boys (first and second graders) on the front row. I had their rapt attention throughout my program. When I broke character and (was) looking at the little boys, I said, ‘I hate to disappoint you, but I’m not really Mary Lincoln.’ They both went, ‘Ooooh!’ with a saddened look on their faces. That made my heart swell.

“Another fulfilling time was when I did a portrayal for West Virginia’s Sesquicentennial Celebration in Charleston, WV, where I performed in the House Chambers in the capital building. My dressing room was the one used the night before by actor David Selby. My second portrayal that day was outside in the sweltering heat on the Capital grounds. Two little girls walked up to me and said, ‘We like your umbrella.’ ‘Why, thank you! It’s called a parasol,’ I replied. ‘We like your umbrella,’ they repeated. That put a smile on my face.

“I’ve not considered hanging up my hoop skirt yet, but some of the circumstances where I’ve had to do portrayals (outside in the aforementioned sweltering heat with no shade and nary a breeze) or places where they want me to change into my costume (in a low-ceilinged room where I couldn’t stand erect and there was no mirror and standing water on the floor, in a filthy utility closet, or on the top floor of a historic building where there was no A/C in the sweltering heat) have been challenging.

“I handled the unpleasant experiences (by drinking) a lot of water, try to find shade, use my fan, dress as fast as possible and use my cell phone camera to check my hair. Always keep a smile on your face as yourself and stay in character once on stage, even when circumstances aren’t the most ideal.

“I love portraying Mary, introducing her to young people or correcting mistaken beliefs about her, showing her as a loving mother who suffered greatly over her lifetime. People are more sympathetic to her once they understand her better. (For) an actress, Mary is a wonderful character to play, with her mercurial personality, sharp tongue and quick wit, from her highs to her lows. I’ll continue portraying Mary (and the other historical women I portray) as long as my memory stays good, I’m physically able to, I’m enjoying it, and people still want to hire me!”



**Garry Rissman of New York** recalls that his most rewarding experiences

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“by far were being paid by two different TV shows to be a Lincoln background character at the New York Hall of Science Center in Queens, N.Y. They needed various characters for what is referred to as ‘comic con’ or fantasy costumed characters. One of the TV shows was *Elementary*, involving a Steam Punk Science Fiction convention. The other TV show was *Younger* by TV Land. They wanted characters that were not copyrighted by the large producers of film such as Disney, Fox, Sony, Amazon, etc.

“Secondly, I also loved giving lectures about the Civil War and Lincoln's early to late life during three President's Day (commemorations) at the Saint Paul's Church National Historic Site located in Mount Vernon, N.Y. It was used as a military hospital after the American Revolutionary War Battle of Pell's Point in 1776.

“The experience of being cast as Lincoln in three different plays at the Mount Pisgah Baptist Church in Brooklyn was equivalent to an acting degree due to the intensity. The first play was set in 1862 when Lincoln was losing the war and thinking about signing the Emancipation Proclamation. Frederick Douglass enters and explains why black soldiers are needed to win the war. The timeline of the play ends on New Year's Eve 1863 when Lincoln goes out on the balcony to make the announcement that he had just signed the Emancipation Proclamation. The actual play also ends on New Year's Eve, making it feel more real and up to date than any Civil War play I have ever seen or heard of.


“I used my acting experience to invite audience participants at Saint Paul's. One of the scenes involved Lincoln scolding his two most successful generals, Grant and Sherman, as to why there was such a dramatic loss of life of the African-American 54th regiment during their July 18, 1863, attack on Fort Wagner, S.C. I realized quickly that although participants were reluctant at first to volunteer, once they did it, I could feel what an uplifting presentation it was for them and for me. A traditional lecture where there is no audience participation is sometimes a bit boring.

“As far as experiences causing me to want to hang up my Lincoln hat, there have been a few.

“The most dramatic was in Union Square, New York City, when I walked over to Lincoln's statue. A young man saw me and started chasing me. I ran away as quickly as I could. He never said why, but I understood. Some people feel it is a form of blasphemy to dress up like Lincoln. Of course, you will all say, ‘Why didn't you explain it to him?’ When someone is chasing you, there is no indication of how mentally unbalanced that person is or if that person has a weapon other than his fists. The former Mayor Bloomberg pointed out during a speech that I attended that New York City's extensive benefits for the homeless does attract countless individuals to leave their city for the Big Apple. Many of those individuals are homeless due to mental health issues, which is another reason not to have discussed or tried to reason with that person.”


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 **Danny Russel of Indiana** related that in recent years, he was invited by the Oklahoma Cowboy Museum to share his portrayal for school children. “As a professional actor for more than 30 years, there's no finer approbation than delivering Mr. Lincoln's hilarity, heartbreak, humanity, Civil War tragedy and triumph, freedom for slaves and brilliant speeches in front of 700 people! Imagine the cascades of laughter and applause heightening my energy, nurturing my spirit and dictating precious timing!

“After a full hour onstage detailing our hero's journey from log cabin to White House, I was equally blessed to appear in the galleries answering questions and fulfilling photo requests. Curious kids savored additional time with Abe. What's more gratifying than sparking imagination and leaving an audience wanting more?

“It's been an astonishing trajectory since I was initially awarded funding, courtesy of the Indiana Arts Commission, for scholarly research into Lincoln's life more than a decade ago. With tours all across the country and thousands of performances under my belt, Lincoln isn't merely a role but the apogee of my career. You won't find a more revered American -- my perpetual goal is to limn those personality traits with dramatic integrity and historical veracity -- and since actors never retire, our 16th president will follow me well into old age!”

 Most recently, **John Voehl of Colorado** had the fulfilling experience of successfully transitioning from live in-person Lincoln presentations, to doing live video conference presentations via Zoom. “I've put together several PowerPoint packages (one for each distinct Lincoln presentation), using all of the show-and-tell items (that) I normally employ in an in-person presentation. Throughout the presentation, I share and then un-share the PowerPoint pages, as I would in-person. The customer host is kept busy muting and unmuting the audience for group interaction and individual Q-and-A. (Voehl's logistics sheet that he provides to customers who host the Zoom video conference may be requested via [John@AbeLincolnAlive.com](mailto:John@AbeLincolnAlive.com).)”

As for hanging up the hat... “I've always thought of my Lincoln work as Christian ministry, as the only acting I ever did before was for gospel plays. My initial Lincoln DBA was Abraham Lincoln Ministries, but I soon changed it to Abraham Lincoln Presentations as the former was confusing to most folks. I never intended to use the Lincoln character for evangelism, but I considered it a ministry to present his godly character. I was very discouraged after reading the Lincoln biography by Gore Vidal and seriously considered ending my Lincoln work, which I already loved so much, if Lincoln really wasn't a godly man.


“I came to understand that Vidal was an atheist and had chosen to portray Lincoln's non-Christian views of his New Salem days as a life-long mindset. I went

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to a local Christian bookstore and asked them if they had any book on Lincoln as a Christian. They did and that was the start of my digging deeper into that facet of his character and finding evidence sufficient to satisfy my continuance and expansion of studying and presenting Abraham Lincoln.”

 And from **Stan Wernz of Ohio**: “My most fulfilling experience was 15 years in the making. One day a lady came to me and asked if I had presented the Gettysburg Address for a certain group in the late 1980s. The answer was yes. She then told me one of those hearing the presentation decided to study American history as a result of the presentation, and was currently employed at the National Underground Freedom Center.

“Regarding hanging up my stovepipe hat, I regularly evaluate my presentations. When I find that memory isn’t as sharp as it needs to be, I think, ‘Is now the time to stop presenting?’ One such time was when my presentation was live-streamed, and call-in questions were accepted. One caller asked two questions that stumped me, but the content was familiar to me. The forgetfulness so aggravated me that I couldn’t wait to get home and research the items. Research showed both items came from the same page of *The Abraham Lincoln Encyclopedia* by Mark E. Neely Jr.”

**Editor’s Note:** *I offer an enthusiastic “Thank You!” to all those members who weighed in on this issue’s “Our Members Take the Floor...” feature. I am especially pleased that the submissions represent individuals from throughout the United States. Ideas for future questions should be sent to Vicki Shaw Woodard at [vwoodard@eiu.edu](mailto:vwoodard@eiu.edu).*

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*(Eric Richardson)*

general. He would also like to understand what caused his ancestors to leave their family farm just north of Baltimore and commit to serve in the Confederate Army. Because of this connection, Richardson may be one of the few Lincolns who is a member of the Sons of Confederate Veterans.

His favorite Lincoln story is about Edwin Booth saving Robert Todd Lincoln's life at the train station. A memorable question was provided by a Cub Scout who asked him, "So, how many vampires have you actually killed?" During a D.C. convention meet-and-greet, he was asked for a photo taken with a Hassidic Jewish family. He discretely set up the photo so that he didn't touch the female members, which put a big smile on the father who realized that Richardson understood the propriety of the situation.

As a relative newcomer to the Lincoln world, he is still reading up when his schedule permits. He has enjoyed several books on the relationship between Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. He is currently engrossed in a dual biography of Lincoln and Jefferson Davis, which lends itself to a new presentation that he looks forward to developing soon.

Eric has yet to attend an ALP conference, but hopes to attend in the future to network with other presenters.

## Following the ALP Via Facebook

*Submitted by Sharon Wood, New Hampshire*

Facebook! Some of our members are active users of this popular social networking site. Others choose not to use it. Here's a bit of history about the ALP Facebook page.

In 2010, Dean Dorrell sent an email to his fellow ALP board members indicating his interest in setting up a Facebook page for the ALP. He wrote that the page would be much more interactive than our Web site and would provide a place for our members to post pictures, make comments and hold discussions, amongst ourselves and with the public. He thought a group page would be a good way to publicize our organization.

Dean administered the ALP page for a few years on his own. When he was unable to continue, Sharon Wood offered to assist, joined later by Laura Keyes. Susan Miller contributed posts about our 2017 conference in Lexington. Kevin Wood agreed to join the admin team in May of 2020.

Unfortunately, the original goal to create an interactive page for the ALP was not fully realized. When Dean first created the page, various choices had to be made to establish the page's features. Facebook users realize that group pages have different parameters than personal pages or business pages. In addition, Facebook itself is constantly changing page features. Parameters for setting up pages at that time were not the same as those that exist today.

The reason we say this is that the ALP page that was created in 2010 does not behave the way 2020 group pages do. For example, even though these settings say that visitors can post to the page, and we have repeatedly gone in to those settings to make sure that option is "checked," when someone types a post or uploads a photo, it appears on the News Feed for that day only. After that, the post was transferred to a section of the page titled "Posts by Others" and is not kept in the News Feed. We used to be able to see that section off to the side on the main page, but can't even find it when we look for it now.

We speculate that this is because of a setting that was established when the page was created. It may have been the only option available at the time, or the best option available for this type of page. This was 10 years ago. Please understand that no details of that page's original parameters remain with us today.

Administrators have tried our best to re-post those hidden posts by downloading the photos to our own computer, copying the text of the post, and reposting it all as the page administrator, so that the post remains in the News Feed. We have done this repeatedly over the years, being sure to post credit to the original poster.

Another way for a non-administrator to have their posts remain on the page is for them to comment on a post made by the ALP. Comments will remain on the News Feed with the post. We have regularly encouraged members to make posts of their own by commenting on an official page post so that it will remain in the News Feed.

We would welcome anyone who is able to troubleshoot this particular feature and tell us if it possible to change it. As the page was set up, only the page administrators can post to the page and have the post remain in the News Feed. Anyone else's post is moved to the "Posts by Others" location. We think that the only way to correct the problem might be to create a new page with different parameters that allow public posting, but worry that this would confuse followers and lose many of them.

As for the content that goes up on the ALP page, we have tried to include historical information about the Lincolns, the time periods through which they lived, other historical figures they would have known, etc. Posts made by the Lincoln historic sites are often shared. We also post information about ALP members (i.e., links to news items or video clips about their work presenting as Abraham or Mary, publicity about upcoming public programs, etc.)

We can only post information about our members if we administrators know about them. We are not all connected to each other's Facebook pages or Web sites. We must rely on what happens to come across our own personal News Feeds from our fellow ALP members or what is sent to one of us.

If you would like to contribute information for posting, please send a private message to the ALP Facebook page so that an admin can post it. Members may certainly post photos and links themselves, while being aware of the page limitations as described above.

The ALP adopted a Social Media Policy at the 2019 conference. Guidelines for the ALP Facebook page were: 1. When posting a photo of oneself on the ALP Facebook page, all members should strive for historical accuracy in costume and persona. 2. Online etiquette portrays the Lincolns/other characters only in a positive manner. 3. ALP social media posts give notice of members' efforts to carry out the mission of the ALP. 4. Educational posts by ALP members inform the public and the membership of interesting Lincoln family information. 5. Posts discussing topics where emotions run high (such as current politics and religion) should not be made. 6. The association's Facebook administrators have the authorization to delete any posting by a member or non-member on the association's page that is deemed unworthy.

**Association of Lincoln Presenters**

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### **Limited Number of Mary Polo Shirts Still Available**

Mary's love of flowers inspired Susan Miller to create a logo for Mary members of the Association of Lincoln Presenters.

A beautiful red rose is named for Mary Lincoln. Members ordered t-shirts and polo shirts this past winter. Three large polo shirts are left over in colors of pink, light blue and off white. They are \$30 each and postage is \$8. Please contact Susan Miller at [susanviolamiller@gmail.com](mailto:susanviolamiller@gmail.com).

