



THE LINCOLN FORUM

BULLETIN

TO ENHANCE THE UNDERSTANDING AND PRESERVE THE MEMORY OF
ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND THE CIVIL WAR

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Don E. Fehrenbacher, 1920-1997
Ralph G. Newman, 1911-1998

FIFTH ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM TO EXPLORE "LINCOLN 2000: NEW INSIGHTS FOR THE NEW CENTURY," WITH UNPRECEDENTED ROSTER OF LEADING SCHOLARS

Two of America's most popular and acclaimed historians — both of whom are currently writing their initial books on Abraham Lincoln — will join the most popular Civil War novelist of the day on the roster of scholars making their first-ever Lincoln Forum appearances at the fifth annual symposium at Gettysburg, November 16-18, 2000. The theme for Lincoln Forum V will be "Lincoln 2000: New Insights for the New Century."

Doris Kearns Goodwin, who is currently researching a book on the inner workings of the Lincoln administration, and Michael Beschloss, who is writing a major book on public reaction to the Lincoln assassination, are the first-time visitors to the Lincoln Forum. Joining them — again for the first time — will be the leading novelist of the Civil War, Jeff Shaara, author of the best-selling books, *Gods and Generals* and *The Last Full Measure*.

Mark E. Neely, Jr. of Pennsylvania State University, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties*, and considered by many the leading Lincoln scholar of our generation, will also be making his first appearance at the Lincoln Forum. Neely is also the author of *The Abraham Lincoln Encyclopedia* and *Abraham Lincoln and the Last Best Hope of Earth*, and co-author of *The Lincoln Image*, *The Confederate Image*, and *The Union Image*.

Appearing as well for the first time will be Hans L. Trefousse, Reconstruction scholar and author of biographies of Carl Schurz, Andrew Johnson, and Thaddeus Stevens, who is now at work on a study of Lincoln's reputation during the Civil War; Iver Bernstein of St. Louis University, the leading authority on the 1863 New York City Draft Riots, and author of the definitive 1989 book on that subject; and J. Tracy Power, author of *Lee's Miserables: Life in the Army of Northern Virginia*, which the Washington Post called "a glimpse into the American soul."

"Each year we are emboldened to declare that we will be presenting the best Lincoln Forum ever," said Chairman Frank J. Williams in announcing the roster at the first Forum symposium of the 21st century. "But I have never felt more confident in making such a statement. We wanted to launch the new millennium of Lincoln scholarship and Lincoln Forum activities by inviting exceptional historians who are working on important new projects — and can provide a fresh look at Lincoln studies. Let me repeat a familiar, but I think in this case a truly justifiable, prediction: Lincoln Forum V will be the best symposium ever."

Returning speakers in 2000 will be the prolific Civil War scholar Gary Gallagher of the University of Virginia, and Frank J. Williams and Harold Holzer, who will speak on the Lincoln assassination in the graphic arts, based on their 1999 monograph, *The Lincoln Deathbed in Art and Memory: The Rubber Room Phenomenon*. Williams, Holzer, and Forum Advisor Edna Greene Medford are currently at work on a book about the Emancipation Proclamation in law, society, and memory.

A special panel on the Lincoln Family will feature S. L. Carson, editor of the *Manuscript Society News* and authority on the life of Robert Todd Lincoln; Louise Taper, preeminent Lincoln collector and Mary Lincoln authority; Frank Williams and Albert Jernan, curator of Robert Todd

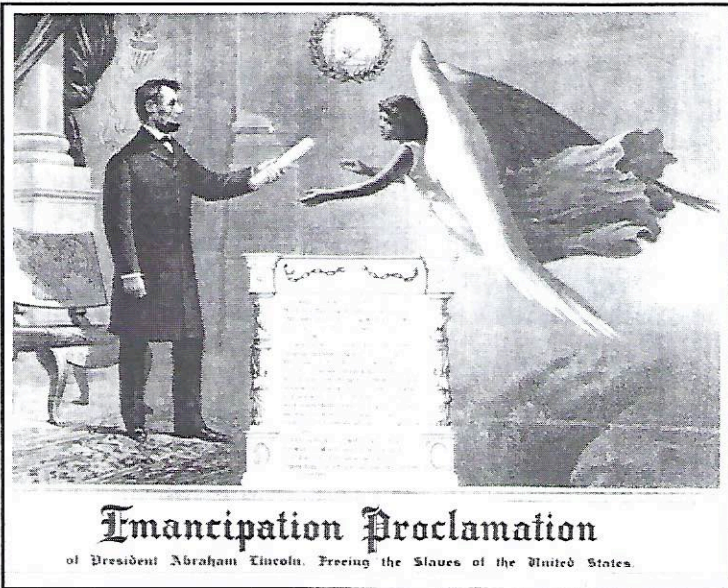
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WELL WORTH REMEMBERING

Lincoln himself did not coin the phrase, but as a lover of Shakespeare he likely quoted it often: "all's well that ends well."

Just before last year's Symposium, the Forum learned that for the first time in more than a century, the organizers of the annual District of Columbia Emancipation Day would be unable to place the traditional wreath at Thomas Ball's *Freedom* statue in 1999. The reason? Lack of funds.

April 16, as some Lincoln students know, was the day the 16th President signed the District of Columbia Emancipation Act, ending slavery in the nation's capital, and compensating loyal owners up to \$300 for each slave set free (as well as payments of up to \$100 to any liberated slave opting for colonization). Lincoln's largely forgotten act actually preceded his famous general Emancipation Proclamation by more than five months. And for years thereafter, African-American citizens of Washington had celebrated April 16 as their day of jubilee. Until funds ran out.



(Above) Remembering the Day of Jubilee. This fanciful 1896 print shows that by the turn of the 20th century, Lincoln's greatest act had assumed mythic proportions, and holy endorsement.

(Photo: Library of Congress)

At last November's annual Board of Advisors' meeting, we voted unanimously to send \$100 to Washington civic leader Loretta Lynn Carter to fund the 2000 wreath-laying. I am proud to report that the ceremony was re-instituted as a result.

And now the City Council of the District of Columbia has moved one step further toward making permanent this celebration by recommending just a few weeks ago that April 16 become an official holiday in Washington, re-enforcing the city's claim "of being the first jurisdiction to have had its slaves freed."

We hope the District moves forward with this effort to honor Lincoln and the nation's first "day of jubilee." As always, the Forum stands ready to assist in ensuring that this solemn but joyous occasion goes forward.



It is with great sadness that I report the passing of one of the Forum's first – and most beloved – members, Rev. William B. Holberton, who succumbed to cancer on March 6 at age 78.

"Father Bill," as he was affectionately known to all of us, traditionally delivered the opening-night prayer of grace at our Forum symposia. Last year, illness kept him from our gathering. While we hoped for his recovery and return in 2000, it was not to be. As this gentle, spiritual man would have said, sometimes even our most sincere prayers are unanswered. We will never forget the sight of him at our Gettysburg meetings – wearing his priest's garb for the opening evening; then returning the next morning in mufti – corduroys and a sweater – but always a devoted admirer of Lincoln, a good friend, and a lovely man. We shall miss him.

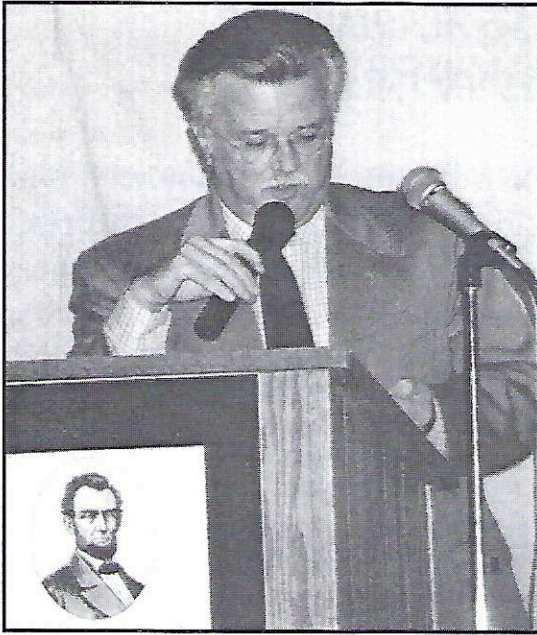
And on behalf of the entire Forum, we extend our deepest condolences to Senator Paul Simon, 1999 winner of the Richard Nelson Current Lincoln Forum Award of Achievement, on the passing of his wife, Jeanne, on February 20. A respected lawyer and lobbyist for literacy, Jeanne Simon was Chairwoman of the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science. Together with her husband, she wrote a book on surviving a Catholic-Protestant marriage. They were certainly experts: their own union lasted some 40 years.



Finally, plans for Forum V are complete. An extraordinary roster of scholars is booked, advance mailers are out, and I'm pleased to report that reservations were received as early as March. Do not miss our first symposium of the century: it promises to be unforgettable. As the results of your evaluations of Forum IV show – see the article in this edition of the Bulletin – we have a tough act to follow. But our goal is to get better every year. So far, your response suggests we're doing exactly that. I hope to see you all in Gettysburg in November.

Frank Weimer





**William C. Davis speaks on *Lincoln's Men*.
(Photo: Budge Weidman)**

**1999 SYMPOSIUM ATTENDEES
RANK WILLIAM C. DAVIS
FORUM'S FAVORITE,
ANNUAL SURVEY SHOWS**

William C. "Jack" Davis, author of the prize-winning *Lincoln's Men*, was voted by Symposium attendees as the highest-ranked Forum speaker of 1999 in the annual survey of participants.

Davis received a 9.23 ranking (out of a maximum vote of 10), edging out the highest-ranked speaker of 1998, Craig L. Symonds of the U. S. Naval Academy, who earned a 9.17 — less than a tenth of a point behind Mr. Davis. Both Frank J. Williams and Harold Holzer were close behind at 9.15.

The survey also showed overwhelming, continuing satisfaction with the headquarters hotel, the Holiday Inn Gettysburg Battlefield, with 79% favoring future return visits.

Battlefield guide Gary Kross (rated 9.5) continued to achieve high rankings, as did Lincoln interpreter James Getty's 1999 performance as the 16th President (9.6).

The survey found that the average 1999 Forum symposium participant attends 2.1 Lincoln-related conferences each year, and traveled 628 miles to reach Gettysburg for the annual Forum gathering (the farthest from 3,000 miles away on the West Coast, the closest from four blocks away in Gettysburg). More than 90% said they find Lincoln Forum registration costs to be fair and reasonable, and a growing number of attendees is participating in Gettysburg Address anniversary events at the National Cemetery and at Gettysburg College.

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Fifth Annual Symposium

Lincoln's Hildene in Manchester, Vermont. Harold Holzer will chair the session.

Once again the Richard Nelson Current Lincoln Forum Award of Achievement will be presented at the annual banquet (Saturday, November 18)— to an honoree to be named — and once again battlefield guide Gary Kross will lead a tour of the hallowed ground at Gettysburg. Following the traditional pre-tour lunch at the Dobbin House, Kross will lead a visit to the Wheatfield, Peach Orchard, and Devil's Den.

Jared Peatman of Gettysburg College will deliver the third Lincoln Forum student lecture. Jared, who served as a volunteer at Forum IV, will speak on *Dan Sickles, Abraham Lincoln and the Gettysburg Aftermath*. And Virginia Williams will offer her second annual slide show of Lincoln Forum memories. Gabor Boritt, Director of the Civil War Institute at Gettysburg College, once again will offer the traditional welcome to the scene of the greatest battle — and most eloquent speech — of the Civil War.

Mark Neely, whose latest book is *Southern Rights*, will also serve as the speaker at the annual Lincoln Fellowship of Pennsylvania luncheon on Sunday, November 19, and once again Forum attendees who are members of the Fellowship will be invited to attend.

This year's Gettysburg anniversary ceremonies will take place in the afternoon (the Sunday custom). The cemetery speaker that afternoon and the Fortenbaugh lecture choice for Sunday evening will be announced at a later date.

Lincoln Forum symposium attendees will also enjoy the traditional book displays and sale, and for the first time be in town for the Remembrance Day parade on Saturday, November 18.

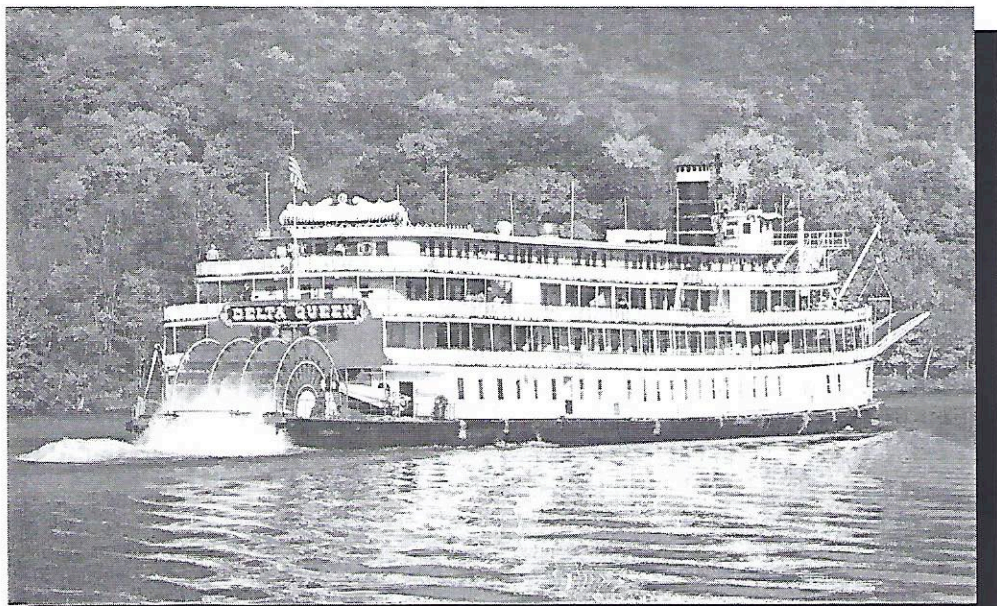
Early registration is invited, once again at a cost of \$235 per person. Address reservations to Charles D. Platt, 14 Blue Heron Drive, Greenwood Village, CO 80121. Hotel reservations must be made separately at the Holiday Inn Gettysburg Battlefield (717-334-6211), or the Holiday Inn Express (717-337-1400), at each of which a block of rooms has been set aside for Forum registrants on a first-come, first-served basis. Please do not use the 800 toll free number, and when calling be sure to identify yourself as a Lincoln Forum participant.

For further information, contact Forum administrator Annette Westerby at 303-721-6681, by fax at 303-721-6682, or via e-mail at anetwest@uswest.net

DELTA QUEEN CRUISE HEADING FOR LINCOLN'S ILLINOIS IN FALL 2001

HistoryAmerica Tours and The Lincoln Forum have announced plans for the first-ever Lincoln Forum cruise to Lincoln Country – the 16th President's Illinois homeland – aboard the legendary river steamer, Delta Queen.

The cruise, scheduled for October 6-12, 2001, will feature Forum chairman Frank J. Williams and vice chairman Harold Holzer as the on-board historian/lecturers. After departing from St. Louis, the paddle-wheel steamboat will head up the Illinois River to visit Grafton, Beardstown, Havana, Peoria, Henry, Peru, and Ottawa, re-tracing Lincoln's extraordinary legal and political careers in the river towns of his home state from the 1840s through the 1850s.



The oldest operating overnight paddlewheeler, the Delta Queen, an American classic, will welcome a Fall 2001 Lincoln Forum cruise sponsored by HistoryAmerica Tours.

A day-long shore tour will bring participants to New Salem, where Lincoln came of age as an adult, ran for his first public office, experienced his only military service, learned surveying, launched a grocery store business, began studying law, and met and lost Ann Rutledge.

Finally, visitors will head for an afternoon visit to the state capital of Springfield, where they will enjoy a special, intimate look at Lincoln's meticulously restored home, his law office, the magnificent Old State Capitol, and the solemn Lincoln Tomb in Oak Ridge Cemetery – the sites where he lived, worked, and enjoyed great professional and political triumphs as well as agonizing personal tragedies.

Optional shore trips will be offered to explore courtrooms where

Lincoln won some of his most famous cases, visit the site of his momentous first 1858 senate debate with Stephen A. Douglas, and see the magical legislative chamber where he delivered his immortal "House Divided" speech and, just seven years later, lay in state.

The unforgettable voyage will offer the usual fine food and beverages that have made Delta Queen cruises famous, as well as the expert commentary that Lincoln Forum members have come to expect from their symposiums and publications.

For more information – rates and early reservations – contact Pete Brown at HistoryAmerica Tours, 800-628-8542. You will be hearing more about this opportunity in the next Bulletin, but this early alert provides an advance chance to enroll now for a first-time offering that the organizers expect to sell out early.

Symposium surveys indicate that attendees want additional Lincoln Forum opportunities in other regions – especially Illinois. Here is the chance to participate in such an event in 2001.

If you have news to share — on your Lincoln or Civil War organization, activities, or studies — send it for inclusion in the next Bulletin to:

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Or contact co-editor David Long
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ANDERSON COTTAGE RESTORATION SET TO BEGIN

February 24, 2000, was a banner day for The Lincoln Forum. On that day a group of historians, preservationists, museum directors, army generals, architects, collectors, and employees of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and National Park Service, gathered for a meeting in the room where Abraham Lincoln changed the course of American history. Adding to the diversity of the group, there was even a clergyman (speaking on behalf of the residents of the Old Soldiers' Home) and a White House representative of First Lady Hillary Clinton's Save America's Treasures initiative. The meeting officially launched the effort to restore Anderson Cottage, the residence of Abraham Lincoln and his family during the summer and fall months of 1862, 1863, and 1864.

It is known that Lincoln and his family lived in this building for at least twelve and perhaps as many as eighteen months of his term in office. It is also known that he composed the second draft of the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, in the same room where the meeting took place on February 24th. He composed that document on September 20, 1862, shortly after receiving word from western Maryland that during the nighttime of September 18, having been fought to a standstill by the Army of the Potomac a day earlier, Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia had re-crossed the Potomac River and returned to Virginia.

The Lincoln Forum has played an essential part in bringing about this meeting. At the first meeting of the Board of Directors of The Lincoln Forum in November 1996, Chairman Frank Williams had appointed a special committee to inquire into the feasibility of restoring this building. The efforts of that committee, and specifically Board member Chuck Platt, led to a meeting at the offices of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in Washington. Following that gathering, NTHP President Richard Moe committed his organization to the restoration effort and specifically began to search for a funding source to underwrite the preparation of a historic structure report. That report would include the preliminary information necessary before any decision to proceed could be made. It would include estimates of costs involved in such an undertaking, and would document information as to the history of the structure, its present and past ownership, the physical changes in the structure since the period when Lincoln and his family resided there, and other relevant information that would be useful for short-term and long-range planning regarding the restoration.

This past fall a funding source was found, a source very closely aligned with The Lincoln Forum. Two members of the Lincoln Forum, Vice-Chairman Harold Holzer, and Board of Advisers member David Long, were present at the meeting on February 24th, and Chairman Frank Williams would have been there as well but for a previous commitment that required him to be in Kansas. Dick Moe has indicated his belief that The Lincoln Forum should play a central role not only in the restoration process, but in the eventual management and oversight of the facility that will result from this restoration. He mentioned the possibility of The Lincoln Forum establishing its national headquarters within the Center for the Study of the Presidency of Abraham Lincoln, a vision Moe has for a future that would include an institute where scholars could come to do serious research and writing in the subject area of mid-nineteenth century American history.

This is an exciting prospect, and an initiative that would not have come about but for the key roles that The Lincoln Forum and its members have played. Stay tuned for what may very well become the most exciting and important historic preservation effort of the twenty-first century.

—David E. Long, Co-editor of *The Lincoln Forum Bulletin*



*Lincoln relaxing at the Soldiers' Home, ca. 1864, from a sketch by French artist-merchant Pierre Morand.
(Missouri State Historical Society)*

Lincoln Forum IV:



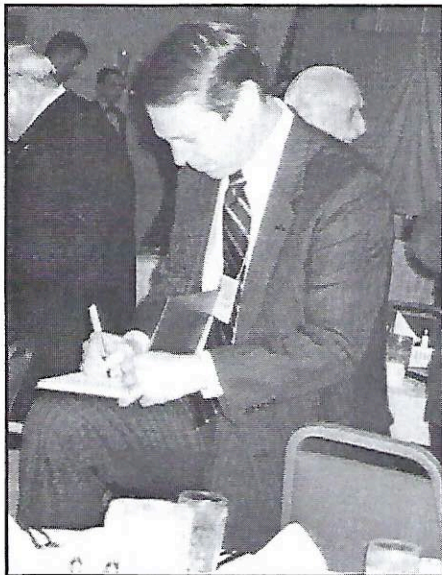
The welcome mat is out at the headquarters hotel.
(Photo: Harold Holzer)



The Platt Family signs us in: staffing the registration desk are, left to right, Chuck Platt, Annette Westerby and Linda Platt.
(Photo: Edith Holzer)



In character: Lincoln interpreter supreme James Getty recreates the Great Emancipator — a highlight of Lincoln Forum IV.
(Photo: Virginia Williams)



Speakers Craig Symonds (above) and Bill Pederson (below) pause between sessions to autograph their recent books. (Photo: Budge Weidman)



Monte Buck, Professor Arnold Taylor, and Bill Gladstone pause for a chat.
(Photo: Budge Weidman)

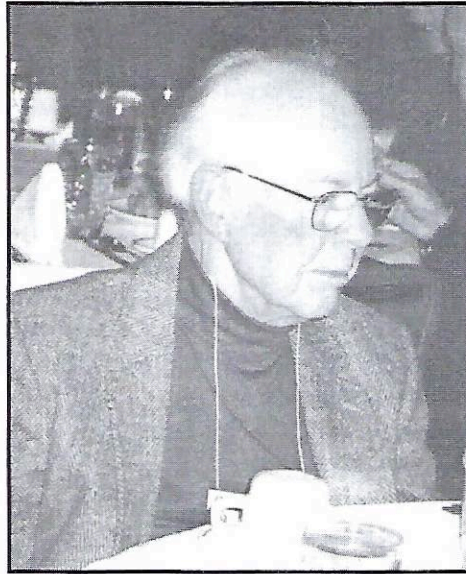


How many Lincolns does it take to...? From left to right, our Lincolnesque regulars reunite: Charles L. Brame of Alta Loma, CA, Bill Ciampa of Gettysburg, B. F. McClerren of Charleston, IL, Fred Priebe of Belleville, MI and George Buss of Freeport, IL. (Photo: Edith Holzer)

You had to be there....



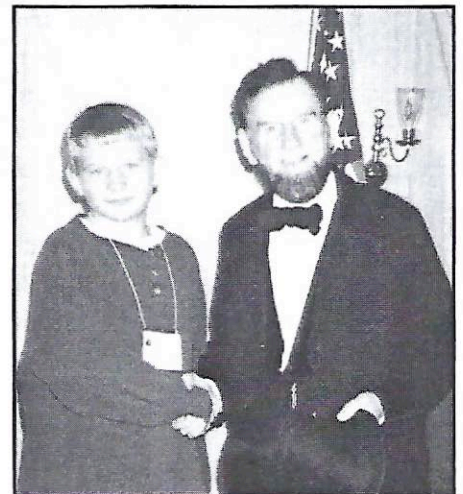
Striking the pose: Sculptor John McClarey, whose creation, Freedom River, has become the official award of achievement, strikes a Lincolnian posture behind his display table at the Holiday Inn. (Photo: Harold Holzer)



Return of a hero: Dean of Lincoln scholars Richard Nelson Current returns to the Forum to watch the award named in his honor presented to Paul Simon. (Photo: Budge Weidman)



The 1999 honoree: former U.S. Senator Paul Simon receives the 1999 Richard N. Current Award of Achievement on November 18. Presenting the award are Forum vice chairman Harold Holzer (left) and chairman Frank J. Williams. (Photo: Edith Holzer)



Jordan Buss, himself the son of Lincoln interpreter George Buss, meets Jim Getty at the 1999 symposium. (Photo: George Buss)



(Above) Howard University scholarship attendees join their host, Professor Edna Greene Medford (first row, right), and longtime member William Redd (top left) for a dinner meeting. (Photo: Edith Holzer)

(Right) On site: Guide Gary Kross (center) gives tour participants a brief break during the annual visit to the Gettysburg battlefield. (Photo: David Walker)





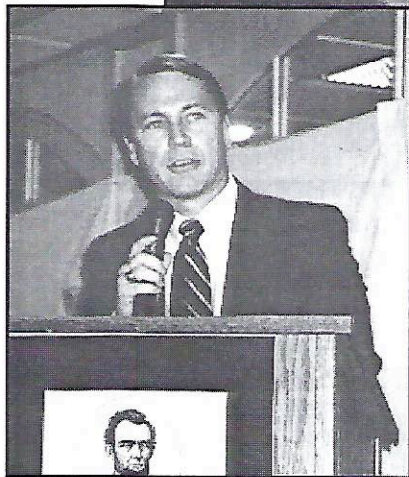
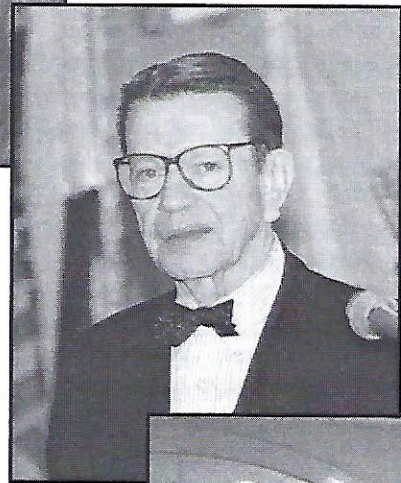
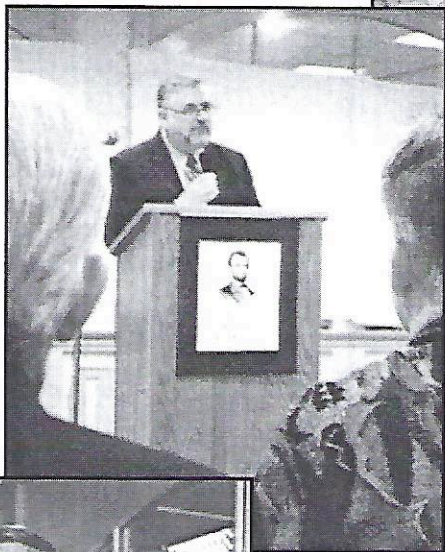
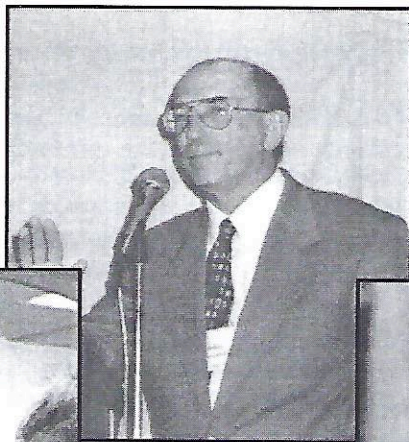
YOUR VOICE COUNTS: COMMENTS ABOUT THE 1999 FORUM

“We truly value the recommendations and reactions of our Forum attendees,” Chairman Frank J. Williams commented on the 1999 evaluations. “More and more participants are filling out their evaluation forms, and the leadership is taking their votes — and their comments — most seriously in creating future programming.”

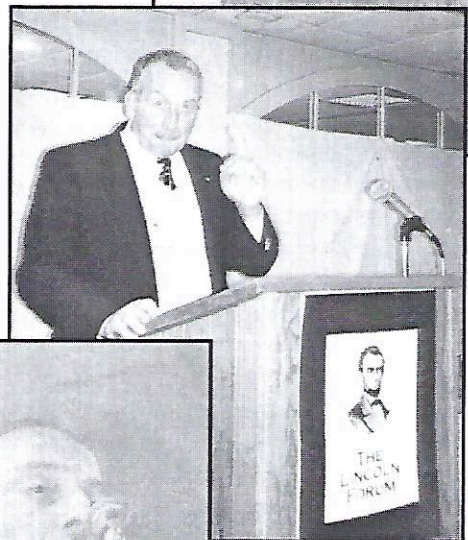
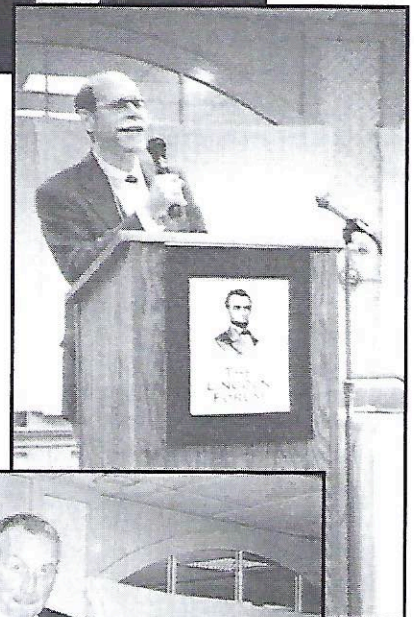
Following are some highlights from the 1999 survey -- from that section of the evaluation in which participants are invited to offer additional comments, laudatory and critical alike:

(Right) The Lincoln Forum 1999 Banquet was the largest yet — nearly 200 attendees. (Photo: Harold Holzer)

- “I am flattered to be a part of the Lincoln Forum. You do an excellent job.”
- “Let’s guard against too hagiographic a view of Lincoln. Some informed criticism would seem in order, too.”
- “Well run and operated on time. Excellent! If you were quartermasters in the Union Army, the war would have ended in ‘64.”
- “A real family atmosphere. We are made to feel welcome.”
- “I hate to be read to. Some of the presenters could have been better speakers. William Davis is a consummate speaker who is at ease with an audience.”
- “Lecture sessions should be recorded and sold to attendees to give a permanent record of the events.”
- “I have some experience in managing events. This was very well run, and gave a wonderful opportunity for interested people to expand their knowledge. I would suggest exploring new forms of audio-visual support.”
- “There are two reasons to come to the Forum: first the scholarship is the best; second, the fellowship is very important. The good nature starts at the top and includes all members, including amateurs from Canada!”
- “From our first session this was terrific — well done, well-handled.”
- “You are to be commended for doing a great job.”
- “As far as I know, the democracy of this Forum — where the attendees have a voice in matters — is unique.”
- “Give us more stand-up breaks between lectures!”
- “This is my first Lincoln conference and I have enjoyed it very much. I have made some friends here and have been made to feel very welcome by all.”
- “I look forward to reading the sessions.”
- “Well done. This is my third — and the best.”
- “Great presentation of Lincolniana and a true learning experience.”
- “The discounts on books were great; I bought seven. Excellent speakers, good fellowship. I enjoyed my first Forum very much indeed. The meeting room was too hot, however.”
- “There were not enough books. We need a greater selection, more author’s books, and more old titles as well.”
- “I would like more time for question-and-answer periods.”
- “I could not get a non-smoking room until 11:45 the first night. Intolerable!”
- “The Forum continues to be impressive and enjoyable. A certain tone is established by Frank and Harold and carries throughout. Congratulations.”
- “Exceeded my expectations. Very appreciative of friendly, helpful conferees. Just feel blessed that I heard about the Forum and could attend.”
- “The hotel has poor amplification. Remember that you have many senior citizens who have hearing problems.”
- “I enjoy the people we meet and the friends we make.”
- “Frank Williams is an excellent emcee. His energy and enthusiasm, as well as his excellent sense of humor, help make this an exceptional experience.”
- “Keep up the great work.”



SPEAKERS GALLERY, 1999
*(Photos by Budge Weidman, Jean Hoefer,
David Walker, Virginia Williams)*



At the rostrum, clockwise from top:
John Marszalek, Paul Simon,
Harold Holzer, Frank Williams,
Gabor Boritt, John Y. Simon,
Craig L. Symonds, David Long,

THE 1999 CHUCK AND LINDA PLATT STUDENT ESSAY CONTEST WINNER: VICKEY KALAMBAKAL

The winner of the first annual Chuck and Linda Platt Lincoln Forum essay contest for college students is Vickey Kalambakal of UCLA, a history major then in her junior year. The essay contest was open to undergraduates at all accredited American colleges and universities. Vickey won the \$1,000 first prize. Second prize (\$500) went to Gina Sandvick of Otterbein College, and the \$250 third prize was awarded to Adam Tompkins of Arizona State University.

Don McCue, curator of the Lincoln Shrine in Redlands, California, chaired the committee that organized and judged the entrants. His fellow judges were: George M. Craig, president emeritus of the Lincoln Group of New York and the Civil War Round Table of New York and chief judge of the annual Baroness/Lincoln Award, and Thomas R. Turner, editor of the quarterly journal *Lincoln Herald*, professor of history at Bridgewater State College, and a leading authority on the Lincoln Assassination.

To solicit entries, Mr. McCue sent out notices to 145 colleges and universities in 1999, and received several dozen e-mail inquiries during the competition.

Chairman Williams announced at the 1999 symposium that the award was being named in honor of Forum Treasurer Chuck Platt and his wife, Linda, who have generously agreed to fund the awards. "This is yet another example of Chuck and Linda's truly extraordinary generosity, as well as their commitment to Lincoln, to the Forum, and to the idea of teaching Civil War history to young Americans. It is an honor for us to express our thanks to them by renaming the award in their honor."

The Forum's congratulations go to Vickey, whose award-winning essay is printed in full below.

COMPETITION OPENS FOR THE 2000 ESSAY CONTEST

The next Chuck and Linda Lincoln Forum Essay contest competition is underway — with the winners to be announced at the 2000 symposium in Gettysburg.

The subject for the 1500 word essay is: *Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties: Constitutional Stalwart or Tyrant?*

The contest is open to anyone who is enrolled as a full-time undergraduate student at an American college or university, with entrants to be judged by the essay committee of the Forum. Deadline is June 30, and the winners will be publicly announced at the 5th annual Lincoln Forum in Gettysburg in November.

Essay contest entries should be mailed to: Don McCue, Lincoln Memorial Shrine, 125 West Vine Street, Redlands, CA 92373. For more information, phone Mr. McCue at 909-798-7632, or e-mail at archives@aksmiley.org

Lincoln the Man versus Lincoln the Myth by Vickey Kalambakal

Abraham Lincoln was a real person, but beyond that simple statement little can be said of him that does not resound with the mythical connotations that have clung to his name for 150 years. From the time he was a young man, Lincoln was refashioning himself—shedding his old persona for one that better fit the man he wished to be. The Lincoln that has come down to us is an amalgamation of 150 years of image-making, public relations, and hero worship, mixed with the blood and romance of the Civil War. What we have of him that is real are the archives of his presidency: his public actions, witnessed by many, and his own writings. Everything else is misted by the fond memories of his friends and admirers. The irony is that in the last generation, the actions of the President have become overshadowed by the search for the "real" man.

If we use the dictionary definition of real as "existing as or in fact", then seeking the real Lincoln is to compare images backed by varying degrees of documentation. And there is no lack of documentation! In 1969, Victor Searcher wrote a book about books about Lincoln, in which he stated there were over 5000 volumes on the subject (15). The Internet reveals that as of June 1999, Amazon.com sells no less than 506 books on Lincoln, and the Library of Congress catalog lists 3,683 entries under "Lincoln, Abraham".

Lincoln himself was "the most shut-mouthed man" ever, in the words of his law partner, William Herndon (Neely, vii). While not denying his humble beginnings, Lincoln said very little about his earlier years. He defined the concept of the self-made man by his own choices and actions; the past he left behind seems seldom to have troubled him.

A recent book, *Honor's Voice*, by D. L. Wilson, discusses in depth how Lincoln transformed himself in the 1830's and 1840's. One of Wilson's most interesting speculations is how the many changes Lincoln went through affected his own sense of identity and self-definition. What emerges, after this period of transition from farmboy to politician, is a man of character, humor, and ambition.

Later biographers have searched the formative years of Lincoln's life for clues to his greatness and for the inspiration such insight might provide to others. The sparse details, such as the log cabin he was born in, and the borrowed books he studied, have become icons of a long-vanished American past. In them we see a romantic frontier, in which goodness triumphs over adversity, and in which poverty and hard work result in success and wisdom.

When Lincoln became a national figure in the presidential campaign of 1860, biographies about him began to appear. These booklets established the legend of Lincoln the Rail Splitter, and "Honest Abe". One author, Scripps, based his biography on information furnished by Lincoln himself. Lincoln did not glamorize his background, but the writers realized that his early poverty and seeming lack of opportunity could be used to showcase the man's virtues and trumpet his accomplishments.

Stories about Lincoln preceded, and were passed independently of, official biographies. Lincoln's speeches, especially his words on slavery, were interpreted and sometimes misconstrued, and rumors about memberships in secret societies, his religious and patriotic feelings (or lack of them) were unofficially spread (Donald, 253).

The years from 1861 to 1865 are well-documented, as these are the years of Lincoln's presidency. His words were recorded, often verbatim, by journalists and secretaries. His appointments and meetings were tracked, and most of his actions became a part of history. Everything—scraps of paper, spoken anecdotes, and idle musings, were collected by admirers and saved. While Lincoln probably enjoyed more privacy than today's public figures, the Civil War did not allow him much respite from the business of, or the many visitors to, the White House.

Almost immediately after his death, everyone who knew Lincoln began to record their memories. His secretary during his first administration, Nicolay, with his assistant Hay; Noah Brooks, a Washington correspondent; his partner in his law practice, William Herndon; the artist who painted his portrait, F. B. Carpenter; and Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, were among the many who contributed to the Lincoln myth by publishing volumes about their deceased president.

This tradition of committing every iota of Lincoln-related information to print continued into the 20th Century. Carl Sandburg, in the Preface of the first volume of his series of books on Lincoln, recalls a childhood spent in the company of "men and women who had eaten with Lincoln, ...heard his jokes and lingo, remembered his silences and mobile face" (vii). Sandburg approaches Lincoln's life as an artist, rather than as a historian; he includes everything in his books—snippets of popular songs and poems, descriptions of local flora and fauna, political news, and the minutiae of everyday life that may or may not have influenced Lincoln.

These reminiscences are the product of a romantic age, and are written by people who were emotionally connected to their subject. Before taking them to heart, we should ask ourselves why we are reading about Lincoln. If it is to vicariously live Lincoln's life, as if he were the subject of a novel, then these books might help. If, rather, it is to discover what makes a man great, or to learn about the accomplishments of our greatest president, we might be misled by these types of books. At the very least we should be conscious of the often unabashed adoration that colors the authors' words. Opinions are not facts. Knowing that Lincoln was loved and admired does not really help us understand how he preserved the Union, or found the courage to commit the lives of thousands of young men to that cause.

Here we get to the heart of the matter: what Lincoln actually did. The stories of how he rose in the world, of how he courted, or of the depressions he suffered interest us only because of what he did as President. Apart from those actions, the man would have been a footnote, if that, in the records of Illinois politics. There would have been no myth.

The results of his actions shaped our country, and the raw courage behind them explain why we re-examine the man again and again. To uphold the United States that he believed in, Lincoln was willing to sacrifice the lives of hundreds of thousands of men. He was able to stand against some of the most brilliant and passionate leaders of his day "with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right".

Lincoln claimed that he was controlled by events, rather than the other way round. This was not false modesty; it was the way Lincoln often chose to operate. Others might wish to take control of situations, but Lincoln waited for the right moment to respond to circumstances in a way that brought about his desired resolution. Donald refers to this as the "essential passivity of his nature", and considers it part of Lincoln's basic character (14).

The most reliable documents we have about Lincoln are those he wrote himself. The inaugural speeches, the Emancipation Proclamation, the Gettysburg Address, and his other writings show us why he is considered our greatest president. Besides the actions he took to end slavery, and to bring the warring halves of the country back together, Lincoln's words reveal a clear vision of our own potential as a people, and hints at what we might accomplish together.

The impact of such profound moral leadership in the midst of the country's greatest crisis cannot even be imagined today. We look at today's presidency through disenchanted eyes, knowing of past lies, scandals, and trickery. It is difficult to imagine that someone in the Oval Office could provide such inspired leadership and remain true to his objectives and to his constituents.

Lincoln had many enemies, of course, and in his lifetime the stories of Honest Abe were countered by political cartoons of the ape who posed as president, or stories and editorials about his abuses of power and his ignorance (Donald, 382-3; Kunhardt, 306-7). Since his death (and since the healing of the gap between the North and South, caused by the Civil War), the consensus has been to praise him as one of our best presidents, and these barbs and criticisms have been largely forgotten.

In examining his greatness, however, a new trend has emerged. Rather than attack him with insults, as his contemporary critics did, some authors and commentators attack Lincoln with analysis. Recent articles and books focus on his relationship with his wife, lost loves, and possible diseases, rather than any of the accomplishments that made him a fit topic of biography to begin with. Rumors of homosexuality, based on the reading of old letters by gay activist Larry Kramer, are reported on the evening news in 30-second bites. The public, half-listening, is fed a new myth.

What is troubling about these recent stories is that they are being reported upon in the news media—not confined to book review sections, but as news in and of themselves. A child will hear of Lincoln's name on TV, not as "The Great Emancipator", but as a possible closeted homosexual. This cheats all of us of a much-needed hero and role-model, and offers us instead a revised history of our leaders as flawed celebrities, whose accomplishments are incidental to their supposed secrets.

There is a reason that Lincoln's name has been remembered, and it has nothing to do with secrets or sexuality. The conflict between Lincoln the man versus Lincoln the myth is secondary to Lincoln the President. It is in this role that Abraham Lincoln achieved greatness, by defining and uniting our country. We need no myths here; we do not even need to know much about the man himself. In his role as 16th President of the United States, the facts about Lincoln are unambiguous and stand up to scrutiny.

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Website Update

www.thelincolnforum.org

The Lincoln Forum is pleased to announce the addition of Amazon to our website. As a participant of the Associates Program of Internet book seller Amazon.com, The Lincoln Forum benefits from a small commission from each purchase made from its website.

Books may be purchased by visiting The Lincoln Forum website and following the Amazon link.



Above: The 1999 panel discussion considers the history — and eternal appeal — of Lincoln collecting. From left to right, Frank Williams, whose private library and collection is one of the country's largest; S. L. Carson, editor of the *Manuscript Society News* and an expert on 19th century documents; Stuart Schneider, author of the book *Collecting Lincoln*; Bill Gladstone, who has amassed a renowned collection of images and artifacts of the African-American experience in the Civil War; and Daniel Weinberg, proprietor of the great Chicago collectors' mecca, The Abraham Lincoln Book Shop. Photo: Edith Holzer.

Below: Forum attendees pack the Holiday Inn conference room for the opening session of Lincoln Forum IV. This year's record turnout thronged the daylong sessions and packed luncheon and dinner meetings. Attendees came from as far away as California, as nearby as the antique shop down the block in Gettysburg. Photo: Budge Weidman.



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