

Delphos, Kansas,
Mar. 1, 1923

Rev. Wm. Barton,
Oak Park, Ill.

Dear Sir:

Yours of recent date is at hand and I take pleasure in complying with your request, and will repeat the story of the correspondence and subsequent meeting with Mr. Lincoln.

I have a very vivid remembrance of those weeks preceding Mr. Lincoln's election, filled with excitement and the turbulent years which followed. My father was an ardent admirer of the great man and the principles for which he stood and, childlike, I followed in his footsteps. I recall my indignation at the unkind comments of my school-mates whose friends were supporting the opposition and, you may be sure that I resented them. I think I did not see his picture until later when my father brot home a poster to us children; it was crude and coarse----Mr. Lincoln and Hamlin occupied the center and their faces were surrounded by a rail fence, by way of frame; the outer edge of the picture was finished with portraits of former presidents. Possibly I was a trifle disappointed with his appearance for I thot to myself that he would look better if he had whiskers and I posted a letter with that advice that very afternoon to Mr. Lincoln. I told him that I had seen his picture and thot that he would be better looking if he wore a beard and told him, that if he would, I would try to coax my two brothers, who were Democrats, to vote for him and, if he had not time to reply, would he have his little girl answer my letter. I must have been fearful that his feelings would be hurt for I told him that I thot the rail fence around his picture looked real pretty. I do not remember anything more that I wrote him.

In a few days came a letter in reply which follows: (I still have this in my possession)

Private

Springfield, Ill.,
Oct. 19, 1860

Miss Grace Bedell

My Dear Little Miss.

Your very agreeable letter
of the 15th is received--

I regret the necessity of saying I have no daughter-- I have three sons--one seventeen, one nine and one seven, years of age. They, with their mother constitute my whole family--

As to the whiskers, having never worn any, don you not think people would call it a piece of silly affectation if I were to begin it now?

Your very sincere well-wisher
A.Lincoln.

It seems to me that his letter shows the kindly, humorous side of his nature and also the public interest shown thru these passing years.

In Februrary 1861, while on his way to Washington to be inaugurated he was accompanied by ex-governor Patterson and others on that memorable trip . President Lincoln asked ex-governor Patterson, who was a former resident of our town, if he knew of a family by the name of Bedell living there and received an affirmative reply. After a short speech delivered by Mr. Lincoln from the platform at the rear end of the car he said, "I have a correspondent in this place and, if she is present, I should like to see her". I was with friends in the crowd but I had neither heard nor seen the great man. The people began tomshout, "Who is it?---Give us her name". He said, "Her name is Grace Bedell and she wrote me that she thot I would be better looking if I wore whiskers.

I was half lead, half carried to the platform, running by the track on which Mr. Lincoln's train stood. He stepped down, took my hand as he said, "You see, I let these whiskers grow for you, Grace". He stooped and kissed me and then resumed his journey, leaving aut much-confused child who had but one thot: to get home to her mother. When I reached home and told my story, I found a little bunch of stems which was all that was left of a bouquet of winter-roses, which I had hoped to give to the President with some others which were to be presented.

Perhaps I might add one thing which has always lived in my memory. The humiliation which was mine when I was asked how I happened to write to him and how I had addressed my letter. I said, "I addressed it 'Hon. Abraham Lincoln, Esq.'" I knew it was right". My mother turned aside her face and smiled and said, "Well, I think the postman had no trouble in delivering to that address".

Very sincerely,

Grace Bedell Billings