

OUR LINCOLN: BICENTENNIAL ICONS FROM THE BARTON COLLECTION OF LINCOLNIANA

This year the nation commemorates the bicentennial of the birth of Abraham Lincoln. Born in Kentucky on February 12, 1809, raised in Indiana, and brought to national attention by his political career in Illinois, Lincoln was indelibly shaped by the traditions and values of the West. In the decades following the trauma of the Civil War and the President's assassination, veneration of Lincoln became widespread in politics, popular culture, and intellectual life. Nowhere was this impact more strongly felt than in Illinois, the state that Lincoln had called home.

Among the most devoted students of Lincoln was the Rev. William Eleazar Barton (1861-1930). Born in Illinois in the same year Lincoln assumed the presidency, Barton grew up in an environment heavily influenced by reverence for Lincoln. After graduating from Oberlin Theological Seminary in 1890, Barton served several parishes before becoming the pastor of the First Congregational Church of Oak Park, Illinois. Barton devoted the last decade of his life to Abraham Lincoln, publishing books and articles, delivering lectures, and collecting books, manuscripts, prints, ephemera, and artifacts. Barton traveled widely in Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois to visit Lincoln sites and acquaintances, and he also purchased historical materials amassed by other Lincoln collectors such as John E. Burton and Osborn H. Oldroyd.

In 1932, at the urging of Professor William E. Dodd and other faculty members in the Department of History, the University of Chicago Library acquired the William E. Barton Collection of Lincolniana. The collection included thousands of historical books and documents associated with Lincoln and Lincoln studies; a signed broadside copy of the Emancipation Proclamation; letters of Lincoln and other figures of the Civil War era; Lincoln portraits, photographs, and paintings; and a large amount of ephemeral and artifactual material related to Lincoln, his parentage, Lincoln sites, and the Civil War.

In the summer of 1934, portions of the Barton collection were exhibited in the Illinois Host House at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago. Later that year, the Barton collection was installed in the Lincoln Room, a dedicated museum space in Harper Memorial Library, where it remained on public display for the next decade. In 1953, the Barton collection became part of the newly established Department of Special Collections (now the Special Collections Research Center). The books, documents, and artifacts in the Barton collection remain an important source of original research materials on the Civil War era and a vivid testimony to the continuing resonance of Abraham Lincoln in American national memory.

Alcove Case 4

1.

**Lincoln Room, Harper Memorial Library, University of Chicago, photograph, 1934
Archival Photographic Files**

2.

**Lincoln Room, Harper Memorial Library, University of Chicago, photograph, 1934
Archival Photographic Files**

3.

**Leonard W. Volk
Abraham Lincoln life mask and hands, metal casts from originals of 1860
Lincoln Collection. Artifacts**

During a visit to Chicago in March 1860, Lincoln agreed to have plaster casts of his face and hands made by sculptor Leonard W. Volk. Lincoln later said that sitting quietly while the wet plaster slowly set on his face, all the while breathing through tubes in his nose, was “anything but agreeable.” But from the historian’s perspective the results were more than worth the discomfort. The casts of Lincoln’s angular face and massive hands preserve an indelible portrait of the prairie politician only a few weeks before his nomination in May 1860 as the Republican Party’s candidate for President.

4.

**Abraham Lincoln
Leaf from Sum Book, 1824-1826
Lincoln Miscellaneous Manuscripts Collection**

The earliest surviving sample of Lincoln’s handwriting is found in a boyhood “sum book” that he kept while he was intermittently attending local frontier schools in Perry County, Indiana. In 1866, Lincoln’s step-mother gave the sum book to his former law partner, William H. Herndon, and the volume was subsequently broken apart. Ten leaves from the sum book are known to survive in different institutions, including this example from the William E. Barton collection.

5. -6. -7. -8.

**Thomas Lincoln
Small metal claw hammer with wooden handle
Lincoln Collection. Artifacts**

**Thomas Lincoln
Metal woodworking tools
Lincoln Collection. Artifacts**

**Thomas Lincoln
Metal axe head**

Lincoln Collection. Artifacts

Thomas Lincoln

Metal scythe blade

Lincoln Collection. Artifacts

William E. Barton considered artifacts from Lincoln's life to be an important part of his collection. These tools were once owned by Thomas Lincoln, Lincoln's father, who was a lifelong farmer as well as a carpenter and furniture maker. Barton purchased the tools from Nancy A. Hall, great-granddaughter of Thomas Lincoln's second wife, Sara Bush Lincoln. Nancy Hall testified to Barton that the tools "have been in our home all my life and . . . were the property of Thomas Lincoln, who died in our home in 1851, his widow dying in the same cabin in 1869."

Alcove Case 3

1.

Abraham Lincoln, Washington, D.C., to Mary Todd Lincoln, Shelbyville, Kentucky, letter, July 2, 1848

Lincoln Collection. Miscellaneous Manuscripts.

Mary Todd Lincoln deliberately destroyed nearly all of the correspondence with her husband. Fewer than twenty letters or notes from Lincoln to his wife are known to survive, among them this letter. Written while Lincoln was serving his first and only term in the U.S. House of Representatives, it closes with jocular comments about a Congressional colleague and affectionate mentions of the couple's two young boys, Robert Todd Lincoln (born 1843) and Edward Baker Lincoln (born 1846, died 1850).

2.

William Wallace Lincoln, Chicago, Illinois, to Henry Remanns, [Springfield, Illinois], letter, June 1859

Lincoln Collection. Miscellaneous Manuscripts.

When he was only eight years old, Willie Lincoln accompanied his father on a business trip to Chicago in the spring of 1859. Writing home to Henry Remanns, his friend in Springfield, Willie mentions the entertainment in Chicago and describes the pitchers, towels, and beds in their room. Less than three years later, Willie Lincoln died in the White House, devastating his parents and plunging his mother into a deep depression from which she never fully recovered.

3.

Abraham Lincoln

Olive green fringed wool shawl

Lincoln Collection. Artifacts.

4.

Abraham Lincoln

Walking stick with brass head

Lincoln Collection. Artifacts.

5.

Lincoln-Herndon Law Office, Springfield, Illinois

Gavel made from the floor-beams of Lincoln's office in Springfield

Lincoln Collection. Artifacts.

Like many other Lincoln collectors, William E. Barton was drawn to objects that Lincoln once owned or that were associated with his life and career. The walking stick bears Lincoln's initials on its brass head, although there is no way to confirm that he ever used it. The gavel carved from the floor of his office represents a type of historical memento very popular in 19th-century America. The wool shawl, also attributed to Lincoln, was found by William E. Barton's descendants in his New England summer house and presented to the Library for addition to the Lincoln collection.

6.

Currier & Ives

"Honest Abe Taking Them on the Half-Shell," lithograph, [1860]

Lincoln Collection. Currier & Ives Lithographs.

Cartoons and caricatures were an effective way to convey personalities and issues to the 19th-century voting public. This famous Currier & Ives image shows Lincoln contemplating two of his opponents in the 1860 presidential election, Senator Stephen A. Douglas of the Northern Democratic party and Senator John C. Breckinridge of the Southern Democratic party. Not pictured is the fourth presidential contender in that year's election, John Bell of the Constitutional Union party.

7.

Lincoln House, Springfield, Illinois

Wood taken from the floor of Lincoln's bedroom

Lincoln Collection. Artifacts.

The handwritten label attached to this object from the William E. Barton collection reads: "This wood was taken from the floor of Mr. Lincoln's Bed Room by William Helmle wood carver who was a personal Friend of Mr. Lincoln's. The House was Erected in 1839 and repaired by the State in 1899. Alvah Carup, Son-in-Law of Mr. Helmle."

1.

Abraham Lincoln

Emancipation Proclamation, January 1, 1863

**“Authorized Edition” signed in 1864 by Abraham Lincoln as President, William Seward as Secretary of State, and John Nicolay as Private Secretary to the President
Lincoln Rare Book Collection**

The Leland-Boker printed edition of the Emancipation Proclamation was created by two staunch Union supporters, magazine editor Charles Godfrey Leland and philanthropist George Henry Boker. Copies were printed and signed for sale at the Great Central Sanitary Fair held in Philadelphia in June 1864, one of many Northern efforts to raise funds for sick and wounded Union soldiers. Lincoln created a public sensation by attending the Philadelphia event and delivering a moving speech praising the work of the Sanitary Commission. While it is not known how many copies of the Leland-Boker edition of forty-eight were actually signed by Lincoln, twenty-five copies are known to survive.

2.

Union Congressional Committee.

“What the Administration Has Done”

New York: Printed by John A. Gray & Green, 1864

Lincoln Collection. Broadsides.

Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, granted freedom to all slaves held in areas of the Confederacy that had not yet been brought under the Federal government’s military control. For the remainder of the war, every Union victory on the battlefield would hold an added moral dimension. Maps such as this one showed the steadily enlarging area reclaimed by Union forces as armies pressed further into the Southern states.

3.

Ford’s Theater, Washington, D.C.

Blood-stained curtain fragment, 1864

Lincoln Collection. Miscellaneous Manuscripts.

This blood-stained piece of curtain is said to be from the private box at Ford’s Theater where Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth on April 14, 1865. As with many relics of Lincoln, its authenticity has never been firmly established. A note indicates it was presented to Lincoln Post No. 3 of the Grand Army of the Republic of the Potomac by E. L. Townsend on January 15, 1880.

4.

George M. Pullman Company

Lincoln Funeral Car (“Pioneer”), decorative panel, 1864

Lincoln Collection. Artifacts.

In 1864, Chicago entrepreneur George M. Pullman built the first version of what was to become the “Pioneer,” the celebrated Pullman railroad car. A foot wider and two feet higher than the conventional cars of the day, Pullman’s coach set a new standard for railroad passenger convenience and elegance. When Lincoln’s casket reached Chicago on its long rail passage from Washington to Springfield in April 1865, Pullman’s new coach was added to the funeral train, it was said, so that Mary Todd Lincoln could ride the last leg of the journey in comfort.

This painted panel was removed from the interior of the Lincoln funeral car when it was broken up, and after being acquired by William G. Pinkerton it was eventually given to William E. Barton in 1923.

5.

Sangamo Insurance Company, Springfield, Illinois.

**“The House & Tomb of President Lincoln, Presented by the Sangamo Ins. Co.,”
lithograph, 1865**

Lincoln Collection. Broadsides.

Lincoln’s burial in Oak Ridge Cemetery in Springfield, Illinois, brought the state’s most famous son home at last. As the city in which Lincoln had spent the longest period of his adult life, Springfield soon became a pilgrimage site devoted to the life of the Great Emancipator.

Former Alcove 1 Wall Cases

1.

George Frederick Wright

Abraham Lincoln, 1864

Lincoln Collection

Painted from life in Washington, D.C., in the closing months of the Civil War, this portrait of Lincoln was commissioned by Horatio G. Wright, a Union Army engineer and general. It was the second time Lincoln had posed for artist George Frederick Wright (no relation to the general). Four years earlier, another portrait sitting in Springfield, Illinois, resulted in Wright’s notable image of a newly elected, unbearded Lincoln. That painting, also part of the William E. Barton collection, hangs on the wall above the credenza just inside the door to your left.

2.

“Lincoln/Ruin / M’Clellan/Peace”

Democratic Party broadside, 1864

Lincoln Collection. Broadsides.

To oppose Lincoln’s re-election in 1864, the Democratic Party nominated General George B. McClellan, who had been dismissed from his command of the Army of the Potomac by

President Lincoln. Taking advantage of war weariness and resentment over emancipation, McClellan and the Democrats campaigned for a prompt end to hostilities and negotiations that might allow slave-holding Southern states to rejoin the Union.

3.

“Tho’ Dead He Liveth”

**Philadelphia: H. G. Leisenring’s Steam-Power Printing House, lithograph, 1864
Lincoln Collection. Broadsides.**

From its plant on Dock Street in Philadelphia, Henry Leisenring’s firm generated a steady stream of printed matter of all types, including certificates, posters, handbills, tickets, vouchers, and ledger books. This broadside was one of a series that Leisenring printed after Lincoln’s assassination, each version of the lithograph bearing the same portrait of Lincoln and a different title such as “We Mourn Our Nation’s Loss” or “Fallen but Enshrined.”