



**Abraham Lincoln and Freemasonry
Why Did We Lose a Perfect Mason?**

by Paul M. Bessel

**Presented at the
Connecticut Lodge of Research
on May 24, 2006**

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Introduction

The bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth in 1809 is less than three years away. Congress established a Bicentennial Commission and it is preparing and sponsoring thousands of events.¹ Even though thousands of books have already been written about Lincoln, they continue to pour out and will undoubtedly increase in the next three years even though many would think nothing more could be found to write about him.

There are books, many very recent, about Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson², Franklin D. Roosevelt³, John F. Kennedy⁴; the Sioux Indians⁵, Mormons⁶, Generals⁷, friends⁸, cabinet

¹ The fifteen members of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission were appointed by the President, the Senate and the House of Representatives following the passage of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission Act in 2000 (Public Law No: 106-173). This diverse and accomplished group was chosen based on their knowledge and study of President Lincoln and their dedication to educating others about Lincoln and that time in our history. In addition, two of the Commissioners are U.S. Senators and two are from the U.S. House of Representatives who represent states where Lincoln lived, practiced law and served in the legislature. The Commissioners are focused on informing the public about the impact Abraham Lincoln had on the development of our nation, and finding the best possible ways to honor his accomplishments.

² Wilenz, Sean, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln*, 2005, W.W. Norton, ISBN 0393058204

³ Pederson, William D., and Frank J. Williams, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln: Competing Perspectives on Two Great Presidents*, 2002, M.E. Sharpe, ISBN 0765610345

⁴ Hunt, J. Vance, *Origin of Lincoln-Kennedy Parallels: JFK Knew of Them*, ASIN: B0007JP8D8; and Russell, G. Darrell, *Lincoln and Kennedy: Looked at Kindly Together*, 1973, Carlton Press

⁵ Cox, Hank H., *Lincoln And The Sioux Uprising Of 1862* (Paperback) , 2005, Cumberland House Publishing, ISBN: 1581824572

⁶ Emery, Richard L., *Abraham Lincoln and the Latter-Day Saints*, 2005, Authorhouse, ISBN 1420850806

⁷ Williams, T. Harry, *Lincoln and His Generals*, 1952, Alfred A. Knopf, New York

⁸ Donald, David Herbert, *We Are Lincoln Men: Abraham Lincoln and His Friends*, 2003, Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-7432-5468-6

officers⁹, Frederick Douglass¹⁰, Chief Justice Taney¹¹, Stephen A. Douglas¹², There are many books about places associated with Lincoln¹³: New Salem¹⁴, Springfield¹⁵, Washington DC¹⁶, his summer home;¹⁷ We also have books about Abraham Lincoln's attitudes and actions as a public man: Commander in Chief¹⁸, his social and political thoughts¹⁹, faith²⁰, ideals, values²¹, virtues²², leadership²³, the American dream²⁴, the

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- ⁹ Goodwin, Doris Kearns, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, 2005, Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0684824906
- ¹⁰ Oakes, James, *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery*, 2007, W. W. Norton, ISBN 0393061949
- ¹¹ Simon, James F., *Lincoln and Chief Justice Taney: Slavery, Secession, and the President's War Powers*, 2006, Simon & Schuster, ISBN 074325032X
- ¹² Zarefsky, David, *Lincoln, Douglas, and Slavery in the Crucible of Public Debate* (paperback), 1990, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 0-226-97867-1
- ¹³ Davenport, Don, *In Lincoln's Footsteps: A Historical Guide to the Lincoln Sites in Illinois, Indiana & Kentucky* (paperback), 1991, Prairie Oak Press, Madison WI, ISBN 1-879-485-00-0
- ¹⁴ Miller, Richard L., *Lincoln and His World: The Early Years - Birth to First Election*, 2006, Stackpole Books, ISBN 0811701875; and Wilson, Douglas L., *Honor's Voice: the Transformation of Abraham Lincoln*, 1998, Knopf, ISBN 0-679-40788-X
- ¹⁵ Angle, Paul M., *"Here I Have Lived": A History of Lincoln's Springfield, 1821-1865*, 1950, Rutgers University Press (1950), ASIN: B0006ASB5A
- ¹⁶ Lee, Richard M., *Mr. Lincoln's City: An Illustrated Guide to the Civil War Sites of Washington* (paperback), 1981, EPM Publications, New York, ISBN 0-914440-48-9
- ¹⁷ Brownstein, Elizabeth, *Lincoln's Other White House: the Untold Story of the Man and His Presidency*, 2005, John Wiley & Sons, ISBN 0471485853; and Pinsker, Matthew, *Lincoln's Sanctuary: Abraham Lincoln and the Soldier's Home*, 2003, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, ISBN 0195162064
- ¹⁸ Perret, Geoffrey, *Lincoln's War: The Untold Story of America's Greatest President as Commander in Chief*, 2004, Random House, New York, ISBN 0-375-50738-8
- ¹⁹ Rucker, R.D., *Abraham Lincoln's Social and Political Thought*, 1999, Vantage Press, ISBN 0533095794
- ²⁰ Forniери, Joseph R., *Abraham Lincoln's Political Faith*, 2003, Northern Illinois University Press, ISBN 0875803156
- ²¹ Lind, Michael, *What Lincoln Believed: The Values and Convictions of America's Greatest President*, 2006, Anchor, 1400030730
- ²² Miller, William Lee, *Lincoln's Virtues: An Ethical Biography* (paperback), 2002, Knopf, ISBN 037540158X
- ²³ Phillips, Donald T., *Lincoln on Leadership: Executive Strategies for Tough Times* (paperback), 1992, Warner Books, New York, ISBN 9-446-39459-9
- ²⁴ Deutsch, Kenneth L., *Lincoln's American Dream: Clashing Political Perspectives*, 2005, Potomac Books, ISBN 157488588X

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Constitution²⁵, democracy²⁶, freedom²⁷, civil liberties²⁸, race²⁹, emancipation³⁰, statesmanship³¹, intellect³², political genius³³, law practice³⁴, the Whig party³⁵, the Republican party³⁶, and key elections³⁷. And this list does not even begin to touch his personal life: books about Lincoln's wife³⁸, family³⁹, personality⁴⁰, his depression⁴¹, humor⁴²,

²⁵ Farber, Daniel, *Lincoln's Constitution*, 2003, University Of Chicago Press, ISBN 0226237931

²⁶ Cuomo, Mario M., and Harold Holzer, *Lincoln on Democracy: His Own Words, with Essays by America's Foremost Civil War Historians*, 1990, A Cornelia & Michael Bessie Book, ISBN 0-06-039126-X

²⁷ Jaffa, Harry V., *A New Birth of Freedom: Abraham Lincoln and the Coming of the Civil War*, 2000, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, ISBN 0-8476-9952-8

²⁸ Neely, Mark E., Jr., *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties*, 1991, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, ISBN 0-19-506496-8; and Hasian, Marouf, Jr., *In the Name of Necessity: Military Tribunals and the Loss of American Civil Liberties*, 2005, University Alabama Press, ISBN 081731475X

²⁹ Bennett, Lerone, *Forced Into Glory: Abraham Lincoln's White Dream*, 2000, Johnson Publishing Company, Illinois, ISBN 0874850851

³⁰ Foner, Eric, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction*, 2005, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, ISBN 0-375-40259-4; and Vorenberg, Michael, *Final Freedom: The Civil War, the Abolition of Slavery, and the Thirteenth Amendment, 2001*, Cambridge University Press, ISBN 0-521-65267-7

³¹ Krannawitter, Thomas L., *Lincoln and His Critics: Vindicating the Statesmanship of Abraham Lincoln* (paperback), 2006, ProQuest/UMI, ISBN 0496115618

³² Guelzo, Allen C., *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President*, 1999, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, ISBN 0802838723

³³ Striner, Richard, *Father Abraham: Lincoln's Relentless Struggle to End Slavery*, 2006, Oxford University Press, ISBN 0195183061

³⁴ Steiner, Mark E., *An Honest Calling: The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln*, 2006, Northern Illinois University Press, ISBN 087580358X

³⁵ Holt, Michael F., *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War*, 1999, Oxford University Press, ISBN 0-19-505544-6

³⁶ Green, Michael, *Freedom, Union and Power: Lincoln and His Party During the Civil War*, 2004, Fordham University Press, ISBN 0823222756

³⁷ Long, David E., *Jewel of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln's Reelection and the End of Slavery*, 1994, Stackpole, ISBN 0811702170

³⁸ Colver, Anne, *Mr. Lincoln's Wife*, 1943, Farrar and Rinehart, New York, Toronto

³⁹ Packard, Jerrold M., *The Lincolns in the White House: Four Years that Shattered a Family*, 2005, St. Martin's Press, New York, ISBN 0-312-31302-0

⁴⁰ Nicolay, Helen, *Personal Traits of Abraham Lincoln: From the Notes of John Nicolay, Lincoln's Private Secretary* (Paperback), 2006, Stackpole Books, ISBN 0811733475; and Tripp, C.A., *The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln*, 2005, Free Press, ISBN 0743266390

⁴¹ Wolf, Joshua, *Lincoln's Melancholy: How Depression Challenged a President and Fueled His Greatness*, 2005, Houghton Mifflin, ISBN 0618551166

⁴² Thomas, Benjamin P., and Michael Burlingame (editors), *Lincoln's Humor and Other Essays*, 2002, University of Illinois Press, ISBN 0252027086 ; and McClure, Alexander K., *Abraham Lincoln's Humorous Stories* (paperback) , 2006, El Paso Norte Press, ISBN 0977340090

morality⁴³, eloquence⁴⁴, speeches⁴⁵, Cooper Union⁴⁶, Gettysburg address⁴⁷, second inaugural address⁴⁸, debates⁴⁹, Emancipation Proclamation⁵⁰, his legacy⁵¹, his place in American memory⁵². And then there are books about the mind of Abraham Lincoln⁵³, his religious beliefs⁵⁴, views about God⁵⁵, his spirituality and soul⁵⁶. There are hundreds, possibly thousands of books just on the subject of Lincoln's assassination⁵⁷. There are even books about Lincoln's whiskers⁵⁸ and his hat⁵⁹.

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- ⁴³ Carwardine, Richard, *Lincoln: A Life of Purpose and Power*, 2006, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, ISBN 1-4000-4456-1
- ⁴⁴ White, Ronald C., Jr., *The Eloquent President: A Portrait of Lincoln through His Words*, 2005, Random House, ISBN 1400061199
- ⁴⁵ Briggs, John Channing, *Lincoln's Speeches Reconsidered*, 2005, The Johns Hopkins University Press, ISBN 0801881064
- ⁴⁶ Holzer, Harold, *Lincoln at Cooper Union: The Speech that Made Abraham Lincoln President*, 2004, Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-7432-2466-3
- ⁴⁷ Kunhardt, Philip B., Jr., *A New Birth of Freedom: Lincoln at Gettysburg*, 1983, Little, Brown & Company, Boston, Toronto, ISBN 0-316-50600-1; and Wills, Garry, *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words that Remade America*, 1992, Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-671-76956-1
- ⁴⁸ White, Ronald C., Jr., *Lincoln's Greatest Speech: The Second Inaugural*, 2002, Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0743212983
- ⁴⁹ Holzer, Harold, *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates: The First Complete Unexpurgated Text* (paperback), 2004, Fordham University Press, ISBN 0823223426
- ⁵⁰ Holzer, Harold, Edna Greene Medford, Frank J. Williams, *The Emancipation Proclamation: Three Views*, 2006, Baton Rouge, ISBN 080713144X; and Guelzo, Allen C., *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America*, 2004, Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0743221826
- ⁵¹ Oldham, Pamela, and Meredith Bean-McMath, *Complete Idiot's Guide to the Legacy of Lincoln* (paperback), 2005, Alpha, ISBN 159257405X
- ⁵² Peterson, Merrill D., *Lincoln in American Memory*, 1994, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, ISBN 0-10-506570-0
- ⁵³ Burlingame, Michael, *The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln*, 1994, University of Illinois Press, ISBN 0252020863
- ⁵⁴ Leidner, Gordon, *Lincoln on God and Country*, 2000, White Mane Publishing Company, ISBN 1572492074
- ⁵⁵ Hill, John Wesley, *Abraham Lincoln: Man of God* (paperback), 2003, Kessinger Publishing, ISBN 0766161102
- ⁵⁶ Barton, William E., and Michael Nelson, *The Soul of Abraham Lincoln*, 2005, University of Illinois Press, ISBN 0253030494
- ⁵⁷ Some of the best recent books on this subject are: Steers, Edward, *Blood on the Moon: The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*, 2001, University Press of Kentucky, ISBN 0813122171; Kaufman, Michael W., *American Brutus: John Wilkes Booth and the Lincoln Conspiracies*, 2004, Random House Publishing Group, ISBN 037550785X; Swanson, James L., *Manhunt: The 12 Day Chase for Lincoln's Killer*, 2006, Harper-Collins Publishers, ISBN 0060518499
- ⁵⁸ Winnick, Karen B., *Mr. Lincoln's Whiskers*, 2003, Boyd Mills Press, ISBN 1563974851
- ⁵⁹ Brenner, Martha, *Abe Lincoln's Hat*, 1994, Random House Books for Young Readers, ISBN 0679949771

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There are thousands of books about everything relating to Abraham Lincoln, and Lincoln's possible contacts or thoughts about everyone and everything. But there isn't a single book about Abraham Lincoln and freemasonry, not even a thin one. And in all the books about Abraham Lincoln that I have read I have not been able to find "freemasonry" or "masonic" listed even once in the index.

Some might think this is because Abraham Lincoln never knew anything about masonry, but that would be wrong. Some might think it is because Lincoln didn't know many masons but that would be very wrong. Some might think it is because Lincoln was not interested in the things masonry offers but that would also be wrong.

So why wasn't Abraham Lincoln a Freemason? I have wondered about this, and researched it for a long time, and now I would like to share my findings on this subject with you. In the process, I hope we can all learn more about what freemasonry is and what it should be. I will attempt to list all the things that have been cited as reasons why men join the Craft and examine whether any of those things would have attracted or repelled Abraham Lincoln.

Aspects of freemasonry

Socializing with Men

Some men are involved in masonry primarily for social reasons. They like to get together with other men to enjoy each other's company, share stories, possibly exchange jokes, have a good time together. friends - make new friends or meet existing ones.

Abraham Lincoln was well known to be at ease in social situations with other men. He liked to tell stories and jokes and to hear what was on others' minds. Everyone who came into

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contact with him commented on his penchant for telling stories to make a point on any subject. His reputation as a storyteller was legendary.⁶⁰

Lincoln enjoyed the company of other men. He should have welcomed the opportunity to be with men who are such close friends as to consider themselves masonic brothers. He would have had the opportunity to share humorous stories, discuss philosophical issues, and exchange information about their experiences.

Getting away from wives

Some see involvement in lodge meetings as a way to get away from home for a while, or to be more specific, to get away from one's wife.

If any man ever needed some time away from his wife it was Abraham Lincoln. Mary Todd Lincoln was clearly a difficult women to be around.

Food and drink

It is sometimes said that masonry is mainly about eating and drinking. While this is said as a joke there is no denying that someone viewing the actions of masons would think this definitely is one of the main purposes of masonry.

The only social aspect of freemasonry that would not have appealed to him was the practice, then prevalent, of masons drinking together because he was a strict teetotaler. Lincoln ate little and didn't drink at all,⁶¹ while masons are known for enjoying eating a great

⁶⁰ Wilson, Douglas L., *Honor's Voice: The Transformation of Abraham Lincoln*, 1998, Alfred A. Knopf, pages 67-69, 140.

⁶¹ Miller, William Lee, *Lincoln's Virtues: An Ethical Biography*, pages 32-33.

deal, and at least in the past combining this with intoxicating liquor. Still, he never minded being around men drinking liquor and to some extent this probably helped them laugh louder at his jokes and stories.

Social status

Especially in the past, membership in the masons was viewed as giving one a higher social status. For George Washington, becoming a mason meant joining the most honored and respected gentlemen of society.⁶²

The striving for social acceptable was equally important to Abraham Lincoln. In his earliest political statement, his address to the citizens of Sangamo County, Illinois, when he was running — unsuccessful as it turned out, for the state legislature, he said:

Every man is said to have his peculiar ambition. Whether it be true or not, I can say for one that I have no other so great as that of being truly esteemed of my fellow men, by rendering myself worthy of their esteem.⁶³

In 1832 Lincoln was elected to be captain of his unit in the Black Hawk war, winning over a wealthy man who owned the local sawmill. Lincoln relished this and many years later, he said he still felt that this gave him more pleasure than anything else that had happened to him.⁶⁴

⁶² Tabbert, Mark A., *American Freemasons: The Centuries of Building Communities*, 2005, New York University Press, ISBN 0-8147-8292-2, page 36.

⁶³ Basler, Roy P., editor, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, volume 1, page 8.

⁶⁴ Donald, Herbert David, *"We Are Lincoln Men": Abraham Lincoln and His Friends*, 2003, Simon & Schuster, pages 15-16.

Contacts for business and politics

To some extent there are some masons who joined and participate mainly because it is a place where they can make new contacts that can be helpful in business or politics.

Lincoln wanted to progress in his law practice and in politics, so making new friends and contacts was a lifelong occupation. Freemasonry and other fraternal organizations are typical places for politicians to become well known. Lincoln was one of the most ambitious politicians of his day, and he could have benefitted from this connection. Lincoln also had an active law practice, and if he had been a mason more people might have come to know and appreciate his legal abilities.

Admiration for individual masons

One of the most popular reasons a man joins freemasonry is because of his admiration for those who are or were members. Those personal associations can be the most important thing for freemasonry.

Lincoln's personal associations should also have led him to seek to join the masons. Bowling Green was a close friend of Lincoln and one of the most prominent men in New Salem, Illinois, Lincoln's first home town. Bowling Green was one of Lincoln's best friends in New Salem, Illinois. Green spent hours teaching Lincoln about the law, loaned Lincoln a number of his books to further Lincoln's self-education, permitted Lincoln to try cases in Green's court (Green was a Justice of the Peace) even before Lincoln was a lawyer, and Green and his wife took Lincoln into their home and nursed him back to health when

Lincoln was ill. Green also encouraged Lincoln to run for political office.⁶⁵ Green was also master of his lodge and a member of the original grand lodge of Illinois. Mrs. Green and Green's masonic brethren requested that Lincoln speak at Judge Green's funeral,⁶⁶ which included masonic services, in February 1842, and Springfield Lodge #4 invited Lincoln to give a speech at a memorial service for Green in September.⁶⁷ As described by Carl Sandburg:

"...one day there came news that hurt Lincoln. Bowling Green was dead....

He [Lincoln] rode out to the Green home; he stayed till the day of the funeral. Though he was not a Freemason, word came to him that the masons, who were to conduct the funeral, wished him to make some remarks on the character and life of Bowling Green.

On the day of the burial the masons in white aprons gathered in the Green cabin, the chaplain carrying the open Bible, the tyler his drawn sword and other regalia of the masonic brotherhood. The master of ceremonies finally called Lincoln to the head of the coffin."⁶⁸

Besides Bowling Green, many of the important men of New Salem, Springfield, and nearby areas with whom Lincoln was in contact were masons, including Stephen A. Douglas, who was an active member of the masonic lodge in Springfield and also the most successful

⁶⁵ Stein, Elmer, and Fred Schwengel, "Lincoln and Freemasonry", *The Scottish Rite Journal*, February 1990, at pages 21-22, and Sandburg's biography of Lincoln, volume 1, pages 175 and 288-289.

⁶⁶ Bowling Green's grave in Oakland Cemetery in Petersburg, Illinois, is marked by a headstone that to this day clearly shows the masonic square and compasses, as witnessed by the author of this article on a visit there in the early 1990s.

⁶⁷ See, Havlik, R.V., "Is This Of Your Own Free Will And Accord?", *The Lincoln Herald*, at page 69; and Stein, Elmer, and Fred Schwengel, "Lincoln and Freemasonry", *The Scottish Rite Journal*, February 1990, page 22.

⁶⁸ Sandburg, Carl, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years*, volume 1, pages 288-289.

and prominent politician in early Illinois.⁶⁹ Lincoln commented in the early 1850s that while Douglas' name was known everywhere, Lincoln would never be remembered. Stephen A. Douglas was an active member of his Springfield masonic lodge, attending 19 meetings during the first 7 months of his membership and being elected Junior Warden. After he moved to Quincy, Illinois, when he was elected a Congressman from that area, it appears that he no longer was a dues-paying or meeting-attending member of a lodge, but both he and his original lodge considered him to be a member until his death in 1861. Douglas took higher degrees in masonry (York Rite) in 1847, and a reported 1,800 masons conducted a masonic service at Douglas' funeral.

Other men who were prominent in the social and political life around Lincoln and who were also masons, were Ninian Edwards and James Shields. The best man at Lincoln's wedding to Mary Todd was James Matheny, a member of the Springfield lodge and a past master of the grand lodge of Illinois. Lincoln's closest neighbor, James Gourley, was also a mason, as were other friends and business associates.⁷⁰ Even the fiancè of Ann Rutledge, she who was reported to be Abraham Lincoln's first true love, was Junior Warden of a local masonic lodge.⁷¹

Lincoln's idol in politics was Henry Clay, a U.S. Senator and Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, candidate for President several times, and one of the most influential Americans of the first half of the 1800's. Henry Clay was the grand master of masons in Kentucky in 1820-1821. It should be noted, though, that in 1830 and 1831, during the

⁶⁹ Temple, Wayne C., *Stephen A. Douglas: Freemason*, 1982, The Masonic Book Club, The Illinois Lodge of Research, Bloomington, Illinois

⁷⁰ "Chicago 1860: A Mason's Wigwam?," by Olivier Fraysse, in *Lincoln Herald*, Fall 1985, at pages 71-72, citing *Proceedings of the Grand lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted masons of the State of Illinois ...*, Chicago, 1857; *10,000 Famous Freemasons* by W.R. Denslow; *Lincoln's Manager: David Davis*, by W.L. King, and *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, volume IV, at page 336.

⁷¹ Stein, Elmer, and Fred Schwengel, "Lincoln and Freemasonry", *The Scottish Rite Journal*, February 1990, at page 23.

height of the influence of the Anti-masonic Party in American politics, Clay said he had been inactive for many years. Clay was then seeking the Presidency. He might have helped his chances by specifically denouncing masonry, but he refused to do that.⁷² Since Henry Clay was Lincoln's role model in politics, it would be reasonable to expect that Lincoln would have been influenced by Clay's masonic involvement -- rising to the level of grand master of Kentucky, and Clay's refusal to denounce masonry even when that action could have helped him politically -- to join the masons and seek a leadership position, if only to help himself politically.

Lincoln's veneration of George Washington is not known well enough. He read all he could about our first President, saying "Washington is the mightiest name [on] earth" and intimating that "Washington never [did] a wrong thing in his life."⁷³ It was well known to all in Lincoln's time that George Washington had been a Freemason, so we can deduce that Lincoln felt Washington's membership in the Craft was the right thing to do.

Except for Lincoln, all the candidates for President in 1860 were masons: Stephen A. Douglas, John C. Breckenridge, and John Bell. The President then, James Buchanan, and other prominent political leaders, were also masons. The list of prominent people connected with the Civil War and politics in that era who were masons is very long, including Winfield Scott, George B. McClellan, Robert Anderson, Winfield Scott Hancock, Benjamin F. Butler, Simon Cameron, Lewis Cass, John J. Crittenden, Andrew G. Curtin, David G. Farragut, Nathaniel P. Banks, John A. McClernand, Thomas H. Benton, John A. Logan, Sam Houston, Stephen A. Hurlbut, Andrew Johnson, Edwin M. Stanton, who was

⁷² Vaughn, William Preston, *The Antimasonic Party in the United States 1826-1843* at page 56; 1983, University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky, ISBN: 0813114748

⁷³ Basler, Roy P., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, volume 1 pages 279 and 133.

an avid and enthusiastic Freemason.⁷⁴ Gideon Welles, Albert Sidney Johnston, P.G.T. Beauregard, Howell Cobb, John B. Floyd, Albert Pike, Sterling Price, Robert Toombs, Godfrey Weitzel, Henry A. Wise.⁷⁵ The list of prominent people connected with the Civil War and politics in that era who were masons is very long, including Winfield Scott, George B. McClellan, Robert Anderson, Winfield Scott Hancock, Benjamin F. Butler, Simon Cameron, Lewis Cass, John J. Crittenden, Andrew G. Curtin, David G. Farragut, Nathaniel P. Banks, John A. McClernand, Thomas H. Benton, John A. Logan, Sam Houston, Stephen A. Hurlbut, Andrew Johnson, Edwin M. Stanton, Gideon Welles, Albert Sidney Johnston, P.G.T. Beauregard, Howell Cobb, John B. Floyd, Albert Pike, Sterling Price, Robert Toombs, Godfrey Weitzel, Henry A. Wise.⁷⁶

It has even been said that John Wilkes Booth, the man who assassinated Lincoln in 1865 was a mason, but I have not been able to confirm or reject this claim.

If further evidence is needed of Lincoln's knowing and being attached to freemasons, there is his tremendous interest in Robert Burns, the Scottish poet who was well known as the poet laureate of masonry and an active mason.⁷⁷ Everyone in New Salem seems to have noticed that Burns was Lincoln's favorite poet. He "[k]new all of Burns by heart,"⁷⁸ including Burns' poems "Farewell to the Brethren of St. James lodge" and "The Freemasons' Apron."⁷⁹ Even more significantly, the story of Burns' life was widely known at exactly the

⁷⁴ Beauregard, Erving E., "Edwin M. Stanton and freemasonry," in *The Lincoln Herald*, Winter 1993. See especially page 125, citing "Reminiscences," letters from Edwin M. Stanton to Chauncey, Washington City, letter dated August 27, 1864.

⁷⁵ *House Undivided: The Story of freemasonry and the Civil War*, by Allen E. Roberts, at pages 333-344.

⁷⁶ Roberts, Allen E., *House Undivided: The Story of freemasonry and the Civil War*, pages 333-344.

⁷⁷ Denslow, William R., *10,000 Famous Freemasons*, 1957, Missouri lodge of Research, volume 1, page 159.

⁷⁸ Wilson, Douglas L., *Honor's Voice: The Transformation of Abraham Lincoln*, 1998, at page 73

⁷⁹ Denslow, William R., *10,000 Famous Freemasons*, 1957, Missouri lodge of Research, volume 1, page 159.

time when Lincoln was reading his poetry so avidly.⁸⁰

So it is clear that Abraham Lincoln was familiar with many masons and it strains belief to think that none of them would have ever spoken about their membership and suggested the benefits to Lincoln of joining. He saw masonry in action, and participated, during the masonic funeral of his good friend Bowling Green. So it cannot be said that Lincoln did not seek to become a mason because he was not familiar with masons or freemasonry.

Mutual help among masons

Masonry teaches that masons should help each other, and after a mason dies it is the obligation of his brethren to help his widow and orphans. This is an aspect of brotherly love. Membership in lodges provides economic security. Promised to help members' families if anything happened to that member. Homes for orphans or elderly.⁸¹

Lincoln in his second inaugural address, carefully inserted the need after the Civil War "to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan."⁸² Mutual assistance among men was something of importance to him.

Place for travelers

One of the things masons often refer to as a benefit of being a member is that they can travel almost anywhere in the world and find a masonic lodge where they will be welcomed as if they were long-time friends. It is a good feeling to know you have friends you haven't met but who will be friends the moment you meet them. This relieves the loneliness of

⁸⁰ Wilson, Douglas L., *Honor's Voice: The Transformation of Abraham Lincoln*, 1998, at page 190

⁸¹ Davis, Robert G., *Understanding Manhood in America*, 2005, Anchor Communications, page 31

⁸² Basler, Roy P., editor, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, volume 8, page 333.

being on the road.

Lincoln for many years was away from home for months at a time. He “rode the circuit” of traveling lawyers and judges who traveled as a group from town to town in Illinois, and when they arrived in a town they handled all the accumulated legal business of that town. Still, this kept Lincoln away from his young family while he stayed in lonely inns . This was all the more reason for him to have joined masonry so he could attend lodges in different towns and have a place where he could visit and rest, tell stories, and make contacts.

Charity, community service

Some see freemasonry as primarily an organization for charity, community work, a place where men come together to make decisions about how they will help others and aid the unfortunate. For example, the Shrine operates many free hospitals for children. Other masonic groups have other charities.

Roscoe Pound and others in the early 1900's talked about a modern approach of freemasonry, with its goal being to preserve, develop, and transmit to posterity the civilization passed on to us, by insisting on the universality of mankind and the transmission of an immemorial tradition of human solidarity.⁸³ William E. Hammond talked of moral discipline, where masonry produces the finest type of character and culture through fellowship and mutual helpfulness.⁸⁴ Joseph Fort Newton said freemasonry is a form of public service and public mindedness. We have a social duty to help our neighbors by work in our communities, to promote the freedoms of the mind unhampered by dictation by anyone, with education for all to maintain democracy, and to unite people in common

⁸³ Basler , Roy P., editor, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, volume 8, page 333.

⁸⁴ Hammond, William E., *What Masonry Means*, Macoy Publishing and masonic Supply Company, New York, 1939, page 23.

service for mankind.⁸⁵

Lincoln was well known as a charitable man, looking for ways to help others if not financially in other ways. Secretary of State Seward described Lincoln's magnanimity as being "almost superhuman."⁸⁶

It is well known that Lincoln demonstrated magnanimity even toward his enemies, asking in his second Inaugural address for "malice toward none and charity for all" and desiring an easy peace and for the leaders of the Confederate government to be allowed to escape rather than being arrested and condemned,⁸⁷ and his visits and friendly comments to Confederate wounded. Lincoln searched for reasons to reverse the decisions of court-martials calling for executions. freemasonry also played a role in alleviating the harshness of the Civil War, and this probably came to Lincoln's attention and may have affected his own attitudes to some extent. Masons from both sides got together to exchange information, assist wounded from the other side, and arrange for masonic burial services for fallen enemies.⁸⁸ Some soldiers even escaped death because of their masonic affiliation. For example, John Singleton Mosby, the famous Confederate ranger, ordered 7 Union prisoners hanged in retaliation for the Union's shooting and hanging of 7 of his men. Captain R.P. Montjoy, serving under Mosby, recognized two Union prisoners selected for hanging as fellow masons and substituted two other prisoners for them.

⁸⁵ Newton, Joseph Fort, *The Builders*, Supreme Council 33°, Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite of freemasonry, Northern masonic Jurisdiction, 1973 paperback edition (originally published in 1914), page 275.

⁸⁶ Goodwin, Doris Kearns, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, 2005, Simon & Schuster, page 364

⁸⁷ Catton, Bruce, *Never Call Retreat: Volume III of The Centennial History of the Civil War*, at pages 440-41; Nevins, Allan, *The War For the Union: Volume IV... The Organized War to Victory 1864-1865*, at pages 290-91; *The Civil War: A Narrative, Volume 3: Red River to Appomattox*, by Shelby Foote, at pages 855-56.

⁸⁸ Roberts, Allen E., *House Undivided*,. Also see Shields, Richard Eugene, Jr., *Befriend and Relieve Every Brother: Freemasonry During Wartime*; Munn, Sheldon A. *Freemasons at Gettysburg*, and Robertson, William D., "My Enemy, My Brother: An Incident at Gettysburg," in *The Philalethes*, June 1993, at page 61.

Mosby shouted, "Remember, Captain, in the future that this command is not a masonic lodge." Still, the two masons were saved and their substitutes were hanged instead.⁸⁹

Democracy, learning and practicing

Some see freemasonry as the organization that first helped men learn how to govern themselves, masonry being a "great quest for light and knowledge" that deals with the "intellectual, moral, and spiritual values of life." To attempt to achieve these goals, "freedom of thought, speech, and action belongs to every man."⁹⁰

Professor Margaret Jacob has written several very scholarly books developing her thesis that the major gift of masonry has been its way of training men in how to practice democracy in a time, the 1700s, when that was a revolutionary concept.⁹¹ Masonic lodges were one of the earliest modern experiments in people governing themselves, and this ideal was spread during the American and French revolutions and since, until today this is the accepted method of government throughout most of the world.⁹² Stewart W. Miner, a past grand master of Virginia, has said, "I have the impression that masons in another day ... did not hesitate to promote the well-being of mankind, even to the point of putting themselves at the cutting edge of movements organized to achieve social and political

⁸⁹ Siepel, Kevin H., *Rebel: The Life and Times of John Singleton Mosby*, at page 129.

⁹⁰ Brown, William Moseley, PGM, *Taking the First Step: Words of Counsel to the Petitioner Prior to Initiation, Committee on masonic Education*, Grand lodge A.F. & A.M. of Virginia, 1987, pages 6-7 and 21. The quotation to the right of this paragraph is from, Brown, William Moseley, PGM, *The Degree of Entered Apprentice: information for Those Who Have Been Initiated Into the First Degree of masonry*, Committee on masonic Education, Grand lodge A.F. & A.M. of Virginia, revised 1969, pages 7-8.

⁹¹ Jacob, Margaret C., *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (paperback), 1991, Oxford University Press, ISBN 0-19-507051-8; Jacob, Margaret C., *The Origins of Freemasonry: Facts & Fictions*, 2006, University of Pennsylvania Press, ISBN 0812239016 ; Jacob, Margaret C., *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (revised second edition), 2003, Temple Publishers, ISBN 0-9724445-7-2

⁹² Jacob, Margaret C., *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry & Politics in 18th-Century Europe*, 1991; and *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans*, 1981.

change.”⁹³

This continued into the 1800s and 1900s, when masonry was a way in which immigrants could be welcomed into masonry. “In lodge, the new countryman could learn democratic processes . . .”⁹⁴

The great teachings of freemasonry are equality, which is synonymous with masonry, meaning the equal right of all people to use our own minds and abilities; liberty, meaning the unhindered full exercise of our nature and mind; and the right of people to govern themselves, even if they sometimes make mistakes. He was optimistic about the human ability to improve through education, to enrich human life with the human family living happily together.⁹⁵

Lincoln, who talked of America as being the beacon of hope for mankind and who said the goal of the Civil War was to insure that free government would survive in the world, would have been interested in this masonic tradition.⁹⁶ His most famous expression of this was to set the United States on a completely new philosophical basis, where government would be of all men, by all men, and for all people.⁹⁷

Lincoln, who talked of America as being the beacon of hope for mankind and who said the goal of the Civil War was to insure that free government would survive in the world, would

⁹³ Miner, Stewart W., *Let Your Work Become Your Mark*, Anchor Communications, Highland Springs, Virginia, 1986, page 56.

⁹⁴ Davis, Robert, *Understanding Manhood in America: Freemasonry's Enduring Path to the Masonic Masculine* (paperback), 2005, Anchor Communications LLC, Lancaster VA, ISBN 0-935633-37-5

⁹⁵ Haywood, H.L., *The Great Teachings of Masonry*, Southern Publishers, Inc., Kingsport, Tennessee, 1923, pages 42-44 and 72-73.

⁹⁶ Oates, Stephen B., *With Malice Toward None*, at pages 31, 76-77, and Oates, Stephen B., *Abraham Lincoln: The Man Behind the Myths*, at pages 57-60, 91.

⁹⁷ Wills, Garry, *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words that Remade America*, 1992, Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-671-76956-1

have been interested in this masonic tradition.⁹⁸

Equality of all humanity

Masonry teaches human solidarity, the brotherhood of men under the fatherhood of God. "Whenever you are an enemy of bigotry or intolerance ... you live the teachings" of freemasonry," and, "We owe goodwill, charity, tolerance, and truthfulness equally to all."⁹⁹

"All men are created equal" was the foundation of all of Lincoln's political thoughts.¹⁰⁰

Freemasonry was especially strong in the 1700's, and its philosophy and goals had a strong influence on the founding fathers of the United States, many of whom, such as George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, were active, enthusiastic, and prominent masons who applied their masonic ideals in their work.¹⁰¹ The Declaration of Independence in 1776 stated a fundamental position that was developed in masonry earlier in the 1700's:

We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

⁹⁸ See, *With Malice Toward None*, by Stephen B. Oates, at pages 31, 76-77; *Abraham Lincoln: The Man Behind the Myths*, by Oates, at pages 57-60, 91.

⁹⁹ Brown, William Moseley, PGM, *The Degree of Fellow Craft: A Booklet of Information for Those Who Have Been Passed to the Second Degree of masonry*, Committee on masonic Education, grand lodge A.F.& A.M. of Virginia, revised 1969, pages 15 and 18.

¹⁰⁰ Jaffa, Harry V., *A New Birth of Freedom: Abraham Lincoln and the Coming of the Civil War*, 2000, Rowen and Littlefield, page 79.

¹⁰¹ Baigent, Michael, and Richard Leigh, *The Temple and the lodge*, pages 238-39, 252-60. Also see, "Conflicts and Developments in Eighteenth Century Freemasonry: The American Context," by William H. Stemper, Jr., in *The Philalethes*, October 1991, at page 18.

Lincoln in 1861 said:

"I have never had a feeling politically that did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration of Independence....I have often inquired of myself what great principle or idea it was that kept this Confederacy so long together. It was ... that sentiment in the Declaration of Independence which gave liberty, not alone to the people of this country, but hope to the world for all future time. It was that which gave promise that in due time the weights should be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that *all* should have an equal chance."¹⁰²

At a time when it was not common for a white man to have friends among minority groups or even to treat them as equals. Abraham Lincoln did so. Frederick Douglass said Lincoln was the first white person to treat him as a man, not a different man because of his color.¹⁰³ In 1863 Douglass, probably the most famous black man in the country then, described a meeting he had with President Lincoln:

[P]erhaps you may like to know how the President of the United States received a black man at the White House. I will tell you how he received me — just as you have seen one gentleman receive another; with a hand and a voice well-balanced between a kind cordiality and a respectful reserve. I will tell you I felt big there!¹⁰⁴

Many have written about how Lincoln appeared to put himself on the same level as

¹⁰² *Collected Works of Lincoln*, volume IV, at page 240, "Speech in Independence Hall, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, February 22, 1861.

¹⁰³ Peterson, Merrill D., *Lincoln in American Memory*, 1994, Oxford University Press, ppage 59.

¹⁰⁴ Foner, Philip S., *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, 1999, Lawrence Hill books, page 551

common soldiers, but in most of those instances they are talking about public events where that might have been a show. However, even when he was at ease in his summer cottage, forgetting the problems of his unrelenting and awful responsibilities, the soldiers who were guarding him or who were just in the vicinity were impressed by Lincoln's down-to-earth manner. He spoke with privates in a way that demonstrated that he really cared about them and what they had to say to him. There was no patronizing or condescension; he truly acted on the level with these men.¹⁰⁵

Tolerance of others

Some see the main purpose of freemasonry as learning tolerance and moderation. Compasses - keep passions within due bounds. "Whenever you are an enemy of bigotry or intolerance ... you live the teachings" of freemasonry," and, "We owe goodwill, charity, tolerance, and truthfulness equally to all."¹⁰⁶

Lincoln's tolerance is shown by the attributed and comments already described, his empathy for others, his magnanimity, his sincere belief and practice of human equality.

Self improvement, education

Some see freemasonry as an organization that teaches self-improvement — "making good men better." William Preston said freemasonry's role was spreading knowledge. masons should study and learn more about all subjects. Allen E. Roberts and Albert Mackey said masonry is a system of ethics and brotherhood, making men better not just to themselves

¹⁰⁵ Pinsker, Matthew, *Lincoln's Sanctuary: Abraham Lincoln and the Soldiers' Home*, 2003, Oxford University Press, pages 152-153.

¹⁰⁶ Brown, William Moseley, PGM, *The Degree of Fellow Craft: A Booklet of Information for Those Who Have Been Passed to the Second Degree of Masonry*, Committee on masonic Education, grand lodge A.F.& A.M. of Virginia, revised 1969, pages 15 and 18.

but to each other. It teaches the meaning of life and death, with the search for the lost word, meaning the attempt to find God's truth in our lives. We should act towards others as we want them to act towards us, with faith in the social, eternal, and intellectual progress of mankind.¹⁰⁷ One of the fundamental tenets of masonry is that it seeks "to make good men better."

This belief would have appealed to Abraham Lincoln, who desired to see the best in people and to see that each individual could advance in life as much as possible.

Although he had very little education — "the aggregate of his schooling did not amount to one year"¹⁰⁸ — from his earliest age, at least his teenage years, Lincoln pursued his own program of self-improvement, including reading and studying, all in a quest for upward mobility in society.¹⁰⁹ His law partner and biographer, William H. Herndon and an intimate of Abraham Lincoln's said Lincoln's ambition "was a little engine that knew no rest."¹¹⁰ He even married a woman whose ambitions for him matched his own,¹¹¹ one who was quoted as a child as saying "I will be the wife of the President someday."¹¹²

He enthusiastically joined the debating society in New Salem, Illinois,¹¹³ and even as

¹⁰⁷ Roberts, Allen E., *The Mystic Tie*, Macoy Publishing & masonic Supply Co., Inc., Richmond, Virginia, 1991, pages 53-68; "Definition of freemasonry," Mackey, Albert G., *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, revised and enlarged by Robert I. Clegg, Macoy Publishing and masonic Supply Co., Inc., New York, 1946, volume 1, page 269.

¹⁰⁸ Hasler, Roy P., editor, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, volume 2, page 459, volume 4, page 61, and volume 3, page 511.

¹⁰⁹ "Mary Todd Lincoln "On the Wing of Expectation": Wife, Mother and Political Partner, in *The Lincoln Herald*, Winter 2000 edition, page 168.

¹¹⁰ Herndon, William H., and Jesse W. Weik, *Herndon's Life of Lincoln*, original publication date 1889, reprinted in 1942 by World Publishing Company, New York.

¹¹¹ Ackerman, Monroe, "The Love Life of Abraham Lincoln," in *The Lincoln Herald*, Spring 2002 edition, pages 10, 21

¹¹² Keckley, Elizabeth, *Behind the Scenes or Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House*, 1868, pages 228-229.

¹¹³ Wilson, Douglas L., *Honor's Voice: The Transformation of Abraham Lincoln*, 1998, Alfred A. Knopf, pages 69-71.

president, Lincoln showed remarkable growth in his abilities.¹¹⁴

Moderation, control passions

Another important attribute of freemasonry is its teaching that men should learn to “keep their passions within due bounds.”

Lincoln’s temperament was characterized as one of “restraint and control.”¹¹⁵ He urged men to restrain their passions, to rely on “reason, cold, calculating, unimpassioned reason.” Thus, to quote Lincoln, would “all passions [be] subdued.”¹¹⁶ When he used the word “passion” he tied it with rage, anarchy, and violence.¹¹⁷ Passion was something for Lincoln to control and subdue.

Leadership training

Another useful aspect of freemasonry is that it helps teach men how to be effective leaders. Worshipful Masters can only be effective if they inspire their members to want to attend meetings and participate in lodge activities.

Lincoln also trained himself to be expert in the concept of “transactional leadership,” the way in which leaders motivate followers by a simple give and take between them, a practice that is familiar to every Worshipful master and which Lincoln could have learned and honed had he chosen to join a masonic lodge.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Garrison, Webb, *The Lincoln No One Knows*, 1993, Rutledge Hill Press, pages 231-238.

¹¹⁵ Paludan, Phillip Shaw, *The Presidency of Abraham Lincoln*, 1994, University Press of Kansas, page 16.

¹¹⁶ Donald, David Herbert, *Lincoln*, 1995, Jonathan Cape, pages 82-83.

¹¹⁷ Basler, Roy P., *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 1953, volume 2, page 401, and volume 3, page 357.

¹¹⁸ Leidner, Gordon, “Lincoln as a Transformational Leader,” in *The Lincoln Herald*, Fall 2002 edition, page 111.

Lincoln enjoyed politics in all its senses, and he would have likely risen to a prominent office within freemasonry. That would have satisfied his ambition in some way, as well as helping him achieve prominence in the community. It would have shown, as Lincoln did in other ways, that one born without any likely prospects for success in life could achieve much that even those who were more high born did not.

Language - beauty of language - ritual

Some see one of the main benefits of being involved with freemasonry as helping to learn and use the beauty of language, based on masonic ritual.

It has been said of Lincoln's love of language:

We have not had another president — except perhaps Franklin D. Roosevelt — expressed himself in such a clear, forceful, logical manner as Lincoln.... Their pre-eminent quality as leaders was an ability to communicate . . . in an intelligible, inspiring manner that helped energize and mobilize their people¹¹⁹.... And at times Lincoln's words became poetic.¹²⁰

Teaching Morality

William E. Hammond talked of moral discipline, where masonry produces the finest type

¹¹⁹ McPherson, James M., *Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution*, 1990, Oxford University Press, page 93.

¹²⁰ McPherson, James M., *Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution*, 1990, Oxford University Press, page 109.

of character and culture through fellowship and mutual helpfulness.¹²¹

Lincoln's reputation for honesty was great, and this was something he cared about greatly.¹²²

Adherence to oaths

Some see freemasonry as an organization that teaches the importance of adhering to solemn obligations, and that this is the most important lesson in the most important degree — the Hiram Abif story.

Lincoln cared deeply about the obligation to comply with oaths. In his first inaugural address, the speech with which he hoped to avoid civil war, he described his view of oaths: "You have no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to ``preserve, protect, and defend" it."¹²³

God

Some see the main purpose of freemasonry as teaching its members to examine and learn about the relationship of men to God, the role of God in men's affairs. H.L. Haywood said freemasonry is a system of ethics, showing each man the way toward a new birth of his nature as symbolized in the Hiram Abif drama, bringing divine power to bear on each individual.¹²⁴ George Oliver felt freemasonry is best understood in relation to the philosophy

¹²¹ Hammond, William E., *What Masonry Means*, Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Company, New York, 1939, page 23.

¹²² Carwardine, Richard, *Lincoln: A Life of Purpose and Power*, 2003, pages 51,

¹²³ Basler, Roy P., editor, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, volume 4, page 261.

¹²⁴ Haywood, H.L., *The Great Teachings of Masonry*, Southern Publishers, Inc., Kingsport, Tennessee, 1923, pages 42-44.

of religion, as a means for us to know God and his works, by handing down tradition.¹²⁵

Allen E. Roberts and Albert Mackey said masonry is a system of ethics and brotherhood, making men better not just to themselves but to each other. It teaches the meaning of life and death, with the search for the lost word, meaning the attempt to find God's truth in our lives. We should act towards others as we want them to act towards us, with faith in the social, eternal, and intellectual progress of mankind.¹²⁶

Arthur E. Waite and W.L. Wilmshurst wrote about masonry as essentially a spiritual activity. Waite described it as the mysticism of a first-hand experience with God, with symbols for those who are not yet capable of understanding. Wilmshurst talked of spiritual life as the meaning of the masonic ritual and symbols, all leading toward a path of life higher than we normally tread, an inner world where the ancient mysteries of our being are to be learned.¹²⁷

J.S.M. Ward described freemasonry as combining ideals -- political, social, ritualistic, archeological (historical) and mystical into the "great" idea.¹²⁸

A qualification to become a mason is a belief in a Supreme Being, while leaving it to each one to decide exactly what religious beliefs to hold, and masonic ritual includes many

¹²⁵ Pound, Roscoe, *Masonic Addresses and Writings*, Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Company, New York, 1953, Chapter 1.

¹²⁶ Roberts, Allen E., *The Mystic Tie*, Macoy Publishing & masonic Supply Co., Inc., Richmond, Virginia, 1991, pages 53-68; "Definition of freemasonry," Mackey, Albert G., *Encyclopedia of freemasonry*, revised and enlarged by Robert I. Clegg, Macoy Publishing and masonic Supply Co., Inc., New York, 1946, volume 1, page 269.

¹²⁷ Wilmshurst, W.L., *The Meaning of Masonry*, William Rider & Son, London, 1923.

¹²⁸ Ward, J.S.M., *freemasonry: Its Aims & Ideals*, William Rider & Son, London, 1923. This work includes a sympathetic discussion of French masonry's attitude toward religious requirements, at page 177.

references to the Bible and the concept of spiritual rebirth.¹²⁹

Lincoln, too, had a fervent belief in God.¹³⁰ He was an avid student of the Bible, and included Biblical references in many of his writings and speeches, the most famous being his second Inaugural address, and he regarded the entire subject of religion as a matter of individual conscience.¹³¹ Lincoln could have been expected to have been attracted to freemasonry's attitude of support for religion combined with strong support of freedom of religion and conscience for all people. Spiritual rebirth was one of the special concepts alluded to in Lincoln's Gettysburg address.¹³²

When he left Springfield, Illinois, to travel to Washington DC to become president, he appears to have sincerely invoked God's blessing while comparing the task ahead of him with that of George Washington, "Without the assistance of that Divine Being, who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail."¹³³

The Emancipation Proclamation was stated to be the direct result of God's will. Lincoln said that he had decided not to issue that document unless God gave the Union army a victory in its next battle. When the battle of Antietam concluded on September 17, 1862, with General Lee and his army retreating, Lincoln told his cabinet that this showed what God wanted done concerning the slaves and he therefore issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, saying that unless the Confederate states ceased their rebellion by the end

¹²⁹ See, for example, Robinson, John J., *Born in Blood: The Lost Secrets of Freemasonry*, at pages 201-223, particularly pages 205 and 218-221; Robinson, John J., *A Pilgrim's Path: One Man's Road to the Masonic Temple*; Roberts, Allan E., *The Craft and Its Symbols: Opening the Door to Masonic Symbolism*. Also see Kessinger, Roger A., "Hiram Had to Die -- And So Must You, in *The Philalethes*, December 1993, at page 3; and Crabbe, Norman Williams, "The Dawning of 'Spiritual' Masonry," in *The Philalethes*, April 1994, at page 48.

¹³⁰ Sandburg, Carl, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years*, volume 2, page 254 and 372.

¹³¹ *Abraham Lincoln: The Man Behind the Myths*, by Stephen B. Oates, at page 53.

¹³² *Lincoln at Gettysburg*, by Garry Wills, at pages 77-78, 88

¹³³ Basler, Roy P., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, volume 4, page 190.

of 1863 all the slaves in those states and areas still in rebellion would be freed “then, thenceforth and forever.”¹³⁴

The emancipation proclamation could have been simply stated to be a military action. Instead Lincoln inserted, “And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.”¹³⁵

In Lincoln’s Gettysburg address, his first and second drafts said “that the nation, shall have a new birth of freedom” but in his final speech he inserted “that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom.”¹³⁶

He also wrote about the Civil War:

The will of God prevails.... In the present civil war it is quite possible that God’s purpose is something different from the purpose of either party [North or South].... By his mere quiet power, on the minds of the now testestant, He could have either saved or destroyed the Union without a human contest. Yet the contest began. And having begun He could give the final victory to either side any day. Yet the contest proceeds.¹³⁷

In a letter to Quakers who had visited him, letter on September 4. 1864

In all, it has been your purpose to strengthen my reliance on God. I am much

¹³⁴ Hasler, Roy B., editor, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*

¹³⁵ Hasler, Roy B., editor, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, volume 6, page 30

¹³⁶ Hasler, Roy B., editor, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, vol 7, pages 17-23.

¹³⁷ Hasler, Roy P., editor, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, volume 5, pages 403-404.

indebted to the good christian people of the country for their constant prayers and consolations; and to no one of them, more than to yourself. The purposes of the Almighty are perfect, and must prevail, though we erring mortals may fail to accurately perceive them in advance. We hoped for a happy termination of this terrible war long before this; but God knows best, and has ruled otherwise. We shall yet acknowledge His wisdom and our own error therein. Meanwhile we must work earnestly in the best light He gives us, trusting that so working still conduces to the great ends He ordains. Surely He intends some great good to follow this mighty convulsion, which no mortal could make, and no mortal could stay.¹³⁸

Lincoln's views about the role of God in human affairs reached it highest level in what has been described as "his greatest speech," his second inaugural address delivered on March 4, 1865, after his reelection as president and only about five weeks before his assassination¹³⁹:

Fondly to we hope — fervently do we pray — that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. But if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Basler, Roy P., editor, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, volume 7, page 535.

¹³⁹ White, Ronald C., Jr., *Lincoln's Greatest Speech: The Second Inaugural*, 2002, Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0743212983

¹⁴⁰ Hasler, Roy P., editor, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*

Notice how remarkable a statement this is for a president who has guided our nation through its worst bloodletting ever and who now senses total victory that could be celebrated in this, his last inaugural address. Rather than cheering for our army, celebrating the perpetual continuation of the Union, or even saying that God has led us to victory, Abraham Lincoln says that God may will to continue the slaughter further in order to expiate America from the sin of slavery. God may want to destroy everything that has been built by slaves, and bring about the deaths and injury of white men to equal the number of blacks who were killed or wounded during the period of slavery. And Lincoln then says that if this is the will of God, "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." It is almost impossible to imagine any other American president making such a statement at such a time and place. There is no doubt that Abraham Lincoln believed deeply in God and his role in human affairs, a lesson that is taught continuously in masonic lodges.

While there is controversy about exactly what religious feelings Lincoln had, and at what periods in his life, it has been pointed out that almost every historian of Lincoln has attributed religious connections to his actions as president.¹⁴¹ One writer has said Lincoln felt religious meaning in political events more than any other American of his generation.¹⁴²

Meaning of life and death

Masonry is also described as a philosophy teaching about the meaning of life and death. These concepts are explored in our ritual, particularly in the Master Mason degree.

¹⁴¹ Von Bothmer, Bernard, "Devout Believer or Skeptic Politician"?: An Overview of Historians' Analyses of Abraham Lincoln's Religion: 1959-2001," in *The Lincoln Herald*, Winter 2005 edition, page 154

¹⁴² Parrillo, Nicholas, "Lincoln's Calvinist Transformation: Emancipation and War," in *Civil War History*, September 2000 edition, page 227.

Lincoln thought a lot about death.¹⁴³ His favorite poem, of which he said, ““I would give all I am worth, and go into debt, to be able to write so fine a piece as I think that is”¹⁴⁴ was about the meaning of death. It was titled “Mortality” or “Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?” The author was a Scotsman named William Knox (1789-1825). Lincoln was first introduced to it Dr. Jason Duncan when they were in New Salem. Lincoln thought so much of it that he memorized the entire poem and recited it so often that some mistakenly thought he was the author.

Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?
Like a swift-fleeting meteor, a fast-flying cloud,
A flash of the lightning, a break of the wave,
He passes from life to his rest in the grave.

The leaves of the oak and the willow shall fade,
Be scattered around, and together be laid;
And the young and the old, the low and the high,
Shall molder to dust, and together shall lie.

The infant a mother attended and loved;
The mother that infant's affection who proved;
The husband, that mother and infant who blessed;
Each, all, are away to their dwelling of rest.

The maid on whose cheek, on whose brow, in whose eye,
Shone beauty and pleasure - her triumphs are by;
And the memory of those who loved her and praised,
Are alike from the minds of the living erased.

The hand of the king that the sceptre hath borne,
The brow of the priest that the mitre hath worn,
The eye of the sage, and the heart of the brave,
Are hidden and lost in the depths of the grave.

The peasant, whose lot was to sow and to reap,

¹⁴³ Goodwin, Doris Kearns, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, page 561.

¹⁴⁴ Basler, Roy P., editor, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, volume 1, page 378.

The herdsman, who climbed with his goats up the steep,
The beggar, who wandered in search of his bread,
Have faded away like the grass that we tread.

The saint, who enjoyed the communion of Heaven,
The sinner, who dared to remain unforgiven,
The wise and the foolish, the guilty and just,
Have quietly mingled their bones in the dust.

So the multitude goes - like the flower or the weed
That withers away to let others succeed;
So the multitude comes - even those we behold,
To repeat every tale that has often been told.

For we are the same that our fathers have been;
We see the same sights that our fathers have seen;
We drink the same stream, we feel the same sun,
And run the same course that our fathers have run.

The thoughts we are thinking, our fathers would think;
From the death we are shrinking, our fathers would shrink;
To the life we are clinging, they also would cling -
But it speeds from us all like a bird on the wing.

They loved - but the story we cannot unfold;
They scorned - but the heart of the haughty is cold;
They grieved - but no wail from their slumber will come;
They joyed - but the tongue of their gladness is dumb.

They died - aye, they died - we things that are now,
That walk on the turf that lies over their brow,
And make in their dwellings a transient abode,
Meet the things that they met on their pilgrimage road.

Yea, hope and despondency, pleasure and pain,
Are mingled together in sunshine and rain;
And the smile and the tear, the song and the dirge,
Still follow each other, like surge upon surge.

'Tis the wink of an eye - 'tis the draught of a breath -
From the blossom of health to the paleness of death,
From the gilded saloon to the bier and the shroud
Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?

For many reasons, then, one would think that Lincoln should have wanted to become a mason, and that he would have been welcomed if he applied. He would have been interested in male bonding and story-telling, getting away for a time from a difficult wife, having the benefit of a perceived higher social status through masonry, making contacts that would be helpful in business and politics, mutual assistance of masons, having lodges to visit during travels away from home, charity and community service, learning about democracy, promoting equality and the idea that all men are part of the same human family, tolerance, self improvement, moderation and control of passions, leadership training, learning more about the beauty of language, teaching morality, adherence to sacred oaths, the role of God in men's lives, and the purpose of life and the meaning of death. He was surrounded by many masons who were his idols in life and politics. And becoming a mason was, in Lincoln's time, a normal action for community leaders with political ambitions, especially those who thought about the deeper meaning of life.

What did Lincoln say about freemasonry?

It has been reported that the grand lodge of Illinois recessed their meeting being held during the 1860 Presidential campaign to call on Abraham Lincoln, a candidate in that election, and he is reported to have said, "Gentlemen, I have always entertained a profound respect for the masonic fraternity and have long cherished a desire to become a member..."¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Havlik, R.V., "Is This of Your Own Free Will and Accord?" , *The Lincoln Herald*, Fall 1985, page 66, citing "Abraham Lincoln was not a Freemason," in *Lincoln Lore*, Number 1595, January 1971.

When a mason told Lincoln in a conversation during that campaign that all his opponents were freemasons, especially noting that Stephen A. Douglas was an early member of the masonic lodge in Springfield, Illinois, and he was not, Lincoln replied, "I am not a Freemason, Dr. Morris, though I have great respect for the institution."¹⁴⁶

After Lincoln's death, the grand master of the District of Columbia, Benjamin B. French, who had been a friend of Lincoln's, wrote to the editor of *The Masonic Trowel*, who was also the grand secretary of the grand lodge of Illinois, "He [Lincoln] once told me how highly he respected our Order and that he at one time had fully made up his mind to apply for admission into it..."¹⁴⁷

Benjamin B. French also wrote to the deputy grand master of the grand lodge of New York, in response to a similar inquiry, "President Lincoln ... once told me, in the presence of M.:W.: Brother J.W. Simons, that he had at one time made up his mind to apply for admission to our Fraternity but he feared he was too lazy to attend to his duty as a mason, as he should like to do, and that he had not carried out his intentions...."¹⁴⁸

Carl Sandburg said, in a chapter about Lincoln's political activities in his biography of Lincoln, "Though not a Mason, he [Lincoln] had at hand a personal copy of the bound 'Proceedings of the Grand Royal Arch Chapter of the State of Illinois,' being reports of conventions of the masonic order for the years 1851-1857."¹⁴⁹

Still, all of these comments are hearsay. Lincoln never wrote a single word about

¹⁴⁶ Havlik, R.V., "Is This of Your Own Free Will and Accord?" , *The Lincoln Herald*, Fall 1985, page 67

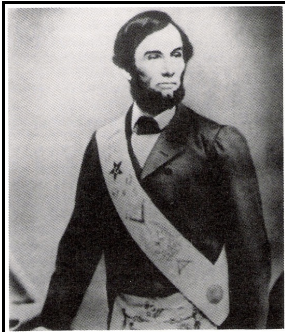
¹⁴⁷ Same as above, and also citing "Lincoln and the masons," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, Summer 1955, at pages 191-198.

¹⁴⁸ Stein, Elmer, and Fred Schwengel, "Lincoln and Freemasonry", *The Scottish Rite Journal*, February 1990, at pages 23-24.

¹⁴⁹ *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years*, by Carl Sandburg, volume 2, page 98.

freemasonry of his feelings about it. He might have some of these things or they may just be things others wished he had said.

Why didn't Lincoln join the Freemasons?



This is a spurious picture of Abraham Lincoln wearing a masonic apron and regalia, ad printed in the Lincoln Herald, Fall 1985, p. 70, citing the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library & Museum as the source of the photo.

After cataloging the reasons why Lincoln and freemasonry would have been a perfect match, and taking into account statements made about Lincoln's intentions concerning freemasonry, we come to the question at the heart of this paper: Why didn't Abraham Lincoln join the masons?

Lincoln is reported to have told the members of the grand lodge of Illinois during the 1860 campaign for U.S. President that:

"I have never petitioned because I have felt my own unworthiness to do so. I might be overcoming my hesitance and be petitioning at the present time but I am a candidate for political office, and by some such action would be misconstrued. For this reason, because my motives would be misconstrued, I must for the present time refrain."¹⁵⁰

However, this does not answer the more important question of why Lincoln didn't petition to join when he was younger, striving for social acceptance and success, when masonry would have been so helpful for him, just as it was for Stephen A. Douglas and others.

¹⁵⁰ Havlik, R.V. , "Is This of Your Own Free Will and Accord?" , *The Lincoln Herald*, Fall 1985, at page 66.

After Lincoln's death, a friend of his who was a prominent Mason said Lincoln had once told him the reason he did not seek membership in freemasonry was that, "I (Lincoln) feared I was too lazy to do all my duty as I should wish to were I a member, and I have kept postponing my application." When the friend said it was not too late, he said Lincoln laughingly replied, "Well, perhaps some day I may ask you to let me in." ¹⁵¹

Mary Todd Lincoln replied, in October 1860, to a letter from a minister who was a member of an anti-masonic faction in the Ohio Republican party who said he would not support Lincoln unless he could be convinced that Lincoln had never belonged to a secret society. She said, "Mr. Lincoln has never been a Mason or belonged to any secret order, since he has been a man, he has had no time to devote to any thing out of the line of his business, even if he had been so disposed." ¹⁵²

Once again the known facts make this suspect as a reason. Lincoln spent a great deal of time doing things other than his business. For example, Lincoln found time to attend the theater frequently, not just the night of his assassination. In fact one of his favorite actors was said to be John Wilkes Booth. ¹⁵³

Edwin M. Stanton, Lincoln's Secretary of War, was an avid Freemason. He wrote that he once elicited Lincoln's views of masonry and Lincoln was noncommittal¹⁵⁴ Perhaps Lincoln did not have strong feelings either way about joining the masons.

Lincoln might have avoided masonry because of unfortunate, but interesting, incidents with

¹⁵¹ Havlik, R.V. , "Is This of Your Own Free Will and Accord?" , *The Lincoln Herald*, Fall 1985, at page 67.

¹⁵² Turner, Justin G., and Linda Levitt Turner, *Mary Todd Lincoln, Her Life and Letters*, at page 67.

¹⁵³ Stout, Harry S., *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War*, 2006, Viking, at pages 116-117

¹⁵⁴ Beauregard, Erving E., "Edwin M. Stanton and freemasonry," *The Lincoln Herald*, Winter 1993. See especially page 125, citing "Reminiscences," letters from Edwin M. Stanton to Chauncey, Washington City, letter dated August 27, 1864.

a couple of masons.

James Adams incident

In May 1837, Lincoln took on one of his first law cases, representing the widow and son of Joseph Anderson in their effort to take possession of and sell ten acres of land presumed to have been owned by him at the time of his death. However, James Adams, Anderson's former attorney and an officer of the Springfield masonic lodge, was found to be in possession of the land, basing his claim on a deed executed to him by Anderson. Lincoln felt the conveyance of this land was spurious.

At the time of this lawsuit, Adams was running as a Democrat for probate justice of the peace of Sangamon County against a Whig friend of Lincoln's. During the campaign, six letters were printed in the local newspaper, written by Lincoln and insinuating fraud by Adams, and a few days before the election Lincoln wrote and distributed handbills in Springfield which stated explicitly that Adams obtained the Anderson land by fraud. Adams responded to these charges, and Lincoln in turn published replies. The affair was bitter and public.

Lincoln said Adams spread rumors that Lincoln was a deist, rumors that caused Lincoln political harm. In the meantime, Adams won the election, and the contested land was still in Adams' estate when he died six years later.

James Adams was a master of Springfield Lodge #4 in 1839 and was elected Deputy Grand Master of Illinois in 1840. Lincoln might not have wanted to join a lodge in which Adams was a prominent member, and Lincoln might not have received unanimous approval to be accepted into the Springfield lodge after his 1837 run-ins with the prominent

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Mason James Adams.¹⁵⁵

James Shields incident



James Shields, 1810-1879
Became a Freemason, 1841
grand Orator of the grand lodge of Illinois,
1841
Illinois Auditor, 1842
Almost dueled with Lincoln, 1842
Illinois Supreme Court Judge, 1843
Charter master of National lodge #12 in
Washington DC, 1846
General in Mexican War, 1847
U.S. Senator for Illinois, 1849-1855
Governor of Oregon Territory
U.S. Senator for Minnesota, 1858
Personally appointed by Abraham Lincoln
to be a Brigadier General in the Civil War,
1861-1863
U.S. Senator for Missouri, 1879
The only person to serve as a United States
Senator from three different states

A short time later Lincoln had problems with another Mason, James Shields. He was an Irish immigrant who settled in Illinois and became an active Mason. In January 1841 he was a warden in Springfield lodge #4 and also the Grand Orator of the Grand Lodge of Illinois.¹⁵⁶ Shields was a Democrat who became

state auditor that same year. Lincoln and the Whig party protested his policies, and several satirical letters appeared in the Springfield newspaper questioning Shields' honesty and mocking his physical courage. Shields was told that Lincoln had written these letters, and he challenged Lincoln to a duel. Lincoln was involved in the writing of these letters, but he was not the sole author. He knew that Mary Todd (later to be his wife) and a female friend of hers had written them, with some advice from Lincoln.¹⁵⁷ Interestingly, the Shields fiasco may have helped bring about Lincoln's marriage to Mary Todd. They had met in

¹⁵⁵ Havlik, R.V. , "Is This of Your Own Free Will and Accord?" , *The Lincoln Herald*, Fall 1985, at pages 67-68; and Temple, Wayne C., "An Aftermath of 'Sampson's Ghost:' A New Lincoln Document," in *The Lincoln Herald*, Summer 1989, at pages 42-47.

¹⁵⁶ Denslow, William R., *10,000 Famous Freemasons*, 1957, Missouri Lodge of Research, volume 4, page 132.

¹⁵⁷ Jewett, Thomas O., "Lincoln's 'Duel'", *The Lincoln Herald*, Winter 1987, page:142; and Basler, Roy P., editor, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, volume 1, at page 292.

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December 1839, and became close and apparently engaged during 1840, but the engagement was ended in January 1841 because of fierce opposition by Mary's family who felt Lincoln was beneath Mary socially and that he would not amount to much. Lincoln then went through a terrible depression. They started seeing each other again in the summer of 1842, and the Shields incident in September apparently brought them closer despite the continuing hostility from Mary's family. Lincoln and Mary were engaged in October and married on November 4, 1842.

All of Springfield read Shields' published challenge, and there was great excitement about the upcoming duel.¹⁵⁸ Lincoln attempted to end the dispute with a partial explanation, but said if a duel was insisted on then he, as the person challenged, would demand that both combatants be in an eight foot circle holding the largest possible cavalry broadswords with neither allowed to pass over a line in the center. These conditions were intended to mock the idea of this duel, especially since Lincoln was so much taller than Shields, but Shields persisted. A witness at the site where the duel was to take place watched Lincoln pick up one of the cavalry broadswords. "He raised himself to his full height, stretched out his long arms and clipped off a twig from above his head with the sword. There wasn't another man of us who could have reached anywhere near that twig, and the absurdity of that long-reaching fellow fighting with cavalry sabers with Shields, who could walk under his arm, came pretty near making me howl with laughter¹⁵⁹

On September 22, 1842, Lincoln, Shields, their seconds and others boated across the Mississippi River to fight the duel on Missouri soil, where, unlike in Illinois, dueling was still legal. Fortunately, friends intervened to get Shields to accept Lincoln's explanation and

¹⁵⁸ Jewett, Thomas O., "Lincoln's 'Duel'", *The Lincoln Herald*, Winter 1987, page:142.

¹⁵⁹ Jewett, Thomas O., "Lincoln's 'Duel'", *The Lincoln Herald*, Winter 1987, at page 143. Also see, Myers, James E., *The Astonishing Saber Duel of Abraham Lincoln*, 1968, Lincoln-Herndon Building Publishers, Springfield IL, ISBN 9998931843 , at pages 15-18.

the duel was called off, but Lincoln was mortified by the episode. Mary Todd Lincoln wrote about a social event at the White House during the Lincoln presidency, when a General, "in the course of conversation, said, playfully, to my husband 'Mr. President, is it true, as I have heard, that you, once went out, to fight a duel & all for the sake of the lady by your side.' Mr. Lincoln, with a flushed face, replied, 'I do not deny it, but if you desire my friendship, you will never mention it again.'"¹⁶⁰

Shields' and Lincoln's letters and all the details were publicized and the "duelling business" and spirit raged in Springfield afterwards.¹⁶¹ We can rightly suppose that Shields' masonic brothers knew all about this affair and possibly assisted him.¹⁶²

It is worth noting that one of the letters which so angered Shields was published in the Springfield newspaper on September 2, 1842, and the very next day Lincoln delivered a speech at the masonic memorial service for his late friend Bowling Green, at the invitation, probably made in July before the anti-Shields letters were published, of the Springfield lodge. Then, a letter that was even more insulting to Shields was printed in the newspaper on September 9, and the parties met and almost fought their duel on September 22.¹⁶³ It is likely that there was a good deal of tension between Lincoln and Shields' lodge brothers during this time. Lincoln had been in a highly public feud with one of the leading members

¹⁶⁰ Basler, Roy P., editor, *The Collected Works of Lincoln*, volume I, at pages 291-297 and 299-302; Havlik, R.V. , "Is This of Your Own Free Will and Accord?" , *The Lincoln Herald*, Fall 1985, at page 69; Neely, Mark E., Jr., *Abraham Lincoln Encyclopedia*, at page 277; Oates, Stephen B. , *With Malice Toward None*, at pages 66-68. Also see, Randall, Ruth Painter, *Mary Lincoln: Biography of a Marriage*, 1953, Little, Brown & Company, Boston, at page 60.

¹⁶¹ Basler, Roy P., editor, *The Collected Works of Lincoln*, volume I, at pages 302-303, where Lincoln wrote to his friend Joshua F. Speed about October duel incidents involving Shields and Lincoln as seconds to others. In Lincoln's words, "...the town is in a ferment and a street fight somewhat anticipated."

¹⁶² The Lincoln-Shields duel incident is described in detail, with some new information and conclusions, in Wilson, Douglas L., *Honor's Voice: The Transformation of Abraham Lincoln*, 1998, Alfred A. Knopf, pages 265 through 291,

¹⁶³ Havlik, R.V. , "Is This of Your Own Free Will and Accord?" , *The Lincoln Herald*, Fall 1985, at page 69. Also see, *Lincoln Day by Day*, entries for September 1842.

of the lodge. This might have made him reluctant to join the masonic lodge to which Shields and his friends belonged, and they might have rejected him if he had petitioned. This episode, plus the one involving James Adams, might have left Lincoln with negative feelings about masons in general.

We will probably never know for sure why Abraham Lincoln did not become a mason. Certainly freemasonry lost the opportunity to include among its members someone who would have fit very well into the masonic philosophy and who could have assisted freemasonry if he had so chosen. Perhaps Lincoln also lost something by not becoming a member of the Freemasons, the opportunity to join with others in an organization seeking many of the same basic goals that motivated Abraham Lincoln throughout his life.

Conclusion

I have attempted to list everything that is mentioned as a reason for someone to join masonry, and to show that Abraham Lincoln more than anyone else would have benefitted from all of them. He also would have contributed greatly to the success of his lodge and masonry in general.

The reasons that have been mentioned in the past for his not joining do not stand up under analysis. So we are left with the question why he did not join.

It is not because he didn't know masons. It is not because he didn't know what masonry stood for. He knew and admired it. It is not because of possible political disadvantage because so many successful men and politicians in Illinois joined and were still successful, Stephen A. Douglas being the most obvious example.

I have concluded that the reason Lincoln did not want to join masonry as a young man is

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because he saw hypocrisy in masonic leaders and being the moral man he was, he could not belong to group that had such leaders. In Lincoln's view, one master of the local lodge fraudulently stole land from a widow and orphan and another had resorted to dueling to deal with a problem — certainly not an instance of keeping your passions within due bounds.

I have heard it said that the only problem with masonry is some of those who are masons. That seems to be a true statement. Grand lodge proceedings are filled with instances of masons disciplined for acting immorally and illegally. And as I have personally come to know, some of the leaders of masonry resort to lies and backstabbing to gain advantage over other masons. Many of the members, rather than objecting to this, as would be expected from those who take obligations to help and assist their brethren, seem all too eager to encourage character assassination and gossip.

If freemasonry is to have any chance of surviving in the future masons will have to live by their obligations, not simply say the words about masons having a higher sense of morality than others and then forgetting those words and acting in harmful, nasty ways. Otherwise perhaps Abraham Lincoln was right in his decision not to join. And perhaps there are many men now who do not join, or having joined drop out or become inactive, because of the way in which some masons show they do not deserve to be called men of morality.

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Appendix - Legislation creating the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission

Enabling Legislation

AT THE SECOND SESSION

Begun and held at the City of Washington on Monday, the twenty-fourth day of January, Two Thousand.

AN ACT

To establish the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SEC. 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission Act".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress makes the following findings:

Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President, was one of the Nation's most prominent leaders, demonstrating true courage during the Civil War, one of the greatest crises in the Nation's history.

Born of humble roots in Hardin County, Kentucky, on February 12, 1809, Abraham Lincoln rose to the Presidency through a legacy of honesty, integrity, intelligence, and commitment to the United States.

With the belief that all men were created equal, Abraham Lincoln led the effort to free all slaves in the United States.

Abraham Lincoln had a generous heart, with malice toward none and with charity for all.

Abraham Lincoln gave the ultimate sacrifice for the country Lincoln loved, dying from an assassin's bullet on April 15, 1865.

All Americans could benefit from studying the life of Abraham Lincoln, for Lincoln's life is a model for accomplishing the "American Dream" through honesty, integrity, loyalty, and

(continued on next page)

a lifetime of education.

The year 2009 will be the bicentennial anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln, and a commission should be established to study and recommend to Congress activities that are fitting and proper to celebrate that anniversary in a manner that appropriately honors Abraham Lincoln.

SEC. 3. ESTABLISHMENT.

There is established a commission to be known as the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission (referred to in this Act as the "Commission").

SEC. 4. DUTIES.

The Commission shall have the following duties:

To study activities that may be carried out by the Federal Government to determine whether the activities are fitting and proper to honor Abraham Lincoln on the occasion of the bicentennial anniversary of Lincoln's birth, including--

- (A) the minting of an Abraham Lincoln bicentennial penny;
- (B) the issuance of an Abraham Lincoln bicentennial postage stamp;
- (C) the convening of a joint meeting or joint session of Congress for ceremonies and activities relating to Abraham Lincoln;
- (D) a redesignation of the Lincoln Memorial, or other activity with respect to the Memorial; and
- (E) the acquisition and preservation of artifacts associated with Abraham Lincoln.

To recommend to Congress the activities that the Commission considers most fitting and proper to honor Abraham Lincoln on such occasion, and the entity or entities in the Federal Government that the Commission considers most appropriate to carry out such activities.

SEC. 5. MEMBERSHIP.

(a) Number and Appointment.--The Commission shall be composed of 15 members appointed as follows:

Two members, each of whom shall be a qualified citizen described in subsection (b), appointed by the President.

(continued on next page)

One member, who shall be a qualified citizen described in subsection (b), appointed by the President on the recommendation of the Governor of Illinois.

One member, who shall be a qualified citizen described in subsection (b), appointed by the President on the recommendation of the Governor of Indiana.

One member, who shall be a qualified citizen described in subsection (b), appointed by the President on the recommendation of the Governor of Kentucky.

Three members, at least one of whom shall be a Member of the House of Representatives, appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Three members, at least one of whom shall be a Senator, appointed by the majority leader of the Senate.

Two members, at least one of whom shall be a Member of the House of Representatives, appointed by the minority leader of the House of Representatives.

Two members, at least one of whom shall be a Senator, appointed by the minority leader of the Senate.

(b) Qualified Citizen.--A qualified citizen described in this subsection is a private citizen of the United States with--

a demonstrated dedication to educating others about the importance of historical figures and events; and

substantial knowledge and appreciation of Abraham Lincoln.

(c) Time of Appointment.--Each initial appointment of a member of the Commission shall be made before the expiration of the 120-day period beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act.

(d) Continuation of Membership.—If a member of the Commission was appointed to the Commission as a Member of Congress, and ceases to be a Member of Congress, that member may continue to serve on the Commission for not longer than the 30-day period beginning on the date that member ceases to be a Member of Congress.

(e) Terms.—Each member shall be appointed for the life of the Commission.

(f) Vacancies.—A vacancy in the Commission shall not affect the powers of the Commission but shall be filled in the manner in which the original appointment was made.

(g) Basic Pay.

Members shall serve on the Commission without pay.

(h) Travel Expenses.—Each member shall receive travel expenses, including per diem in lieu of subsistence, in accordance with sections 5702 and 5703 of title 5, United States Code.

(i) Quorum.—Five members of the Commission shall constitute a quorum but a lesser number may hold hearings.

(j) Chair.—The Commission shall select a Chair from among the members of the Commission.

(k) Meetings.—The Commission shall meet at the call of the Chair. Periodically, the Commission shall hold a meeting in Springfield, Illinois.

SEC. 6. DIRECTOR AND STAFF.

(a) Director.—The Commission may appoint and fix the pay of a Director and such additional personnel as the Commission considers to be appropriate.

(b) Applicability of Certain Civil Service Laws.—

Director.—The Director of the Commission may be appointed without regard to the provisions of title 5, United States Code, governing appointments in the competitive service, and may be paid without regard to the provisions of chapter 51 and subchapter III of chapter 53 of that title relating to classification and General Schedule pay rates.

Staff.—The staff of the Commission shall be appointed subject to the provisions of title 5, United States Code, governing appointments in the competitive service, and shall be paid in accordance with the provisions of chapter 51 and subchapter III of chapter 53 of that title relating to classification and General Schedule pay rates.

SEC. 7. POWERS.

(a) Hearings and Sessions.—The Commission may, for the purpose of carrying out this Act, hold such hearings, sit and act at such times and places, take such testimony, and receive such evidence as the Commission considers to be appropriate.

(b) Powers of Members and Agents.—Any member or agent of the Commission may, if authorized by the Commission, take any action that the Commission is authorized to take by this Act.

(c) Obtaining Official Data.—The Commission may secure directly from any department or agency of the United States information necessary to enable the Commission to carry out this Act. Upon request of the Chair of the Commission, the head of that department or agency shall furnish that information to the Commission.

(d) Mails.—The Commission may use the United States mails in the same manner and under the same conditions as other departments and agencies of the United States.

(e) Administrative Support Services.—Upon the request of the Commission, the Administrator of General Services shall provide to the Commission, on a reimbursable basis, the administrative support services necessary for the Commission to carry out its responsibilities under this Act.

SEC. 8. REPORTS.

(a) Interim Reports.—The Commission may submit to Congress such interim reports as the Commission considers to be appropriate.

(b) Final Report.—The Commission shall submit a final report to Congress not later than the expiration of the 4-year period beginning on the date of the formation of the Commission. The final report shall contain—

a detailed statement of the findings and conclusions of the Commission;

the recommendations of the Commission; and

any other information that the Commission considers to be appropriate.

SEC. 9. BUDGET ACT COMPLIANCE.

Any spending authority provided under this Act shall be effective only to such extent and in such amounts as are provided in appropriation Acts.

SEC. 10. TERMINATION.

The Commission shall terminate 120 days after submitting the final report of the Commission pursuant to section 8.

SEC. 11. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

There are authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be necessary to carry out this Act.

Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Vice President of the United States and President of the Senate.

SEC. 12. LEGISLATIVE HISTORY.

Approved February 25, 2000.

This law originated as: H.R. 1451.

108th CONGRESS

1st Session

S. 858

Passed the Senate May 23, 2003.