

# NEWS FROM PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S COTTAGE

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## *From the Director's Desk....*

Earlier this year Betty (See) Kessler, a resident of Wichita, Kansas, brought to the attention of Matthew Pinsker, Dickinson History Professor and author of *Lincoln's Sanctuary: Abraham Lincoln and the Soldiers' Home*, a diary written by her great grand-father Albert Nelson See (1840-1924). See was a member of Company K, 150th PV (Pennsylvania Volunteers), more commonly known as the "Bucktails" who guarded the Lincolns at the White House and Soldiers Home. Mrs. Kessler and Joseph Northrop, a descendant of Albert's brother in law, transcribed the diary which Mrs. Kessler then sent to Pinsker after reading *Lincoln's Sanctuary*. Fortunately for us Professor Pinsker remains a great friend of the Cottage, and he brought the diary to our attention and with his blessing, and Betty Kessler's gracious encouragement, I am excited to include in this newsletter summarized portions of the Albert See diary.

See "Albert See and the Pennsylvania Bucktails," Page 4

## *Lincoln and Emancipation Teacher Kits Available*

In collaboration with the Gilder Lehrman Institute for American History and the National Endowment for the Humanities, President Lincoln's Cottage has developed a teacher kit for grades 5-12 which explores Lincoln's evolving views on emancipation. Using primary source documents, teachers and students will gain insights into the complexities of issuing the Emancipation Proclamation. Materials included in the kit address specific standards of learning and curriculum requirements and are free of charge to educators.

To receive a kit please contact Scott Ackerman at [scott\\_ackerman@nthp.org](mailto:scott_ackerman@nthp.org). Please include your name, school affiliation, grade taught and contact information.



View of South Façade of President Lincoln's Cottage. Photo by Robert Szabo

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## Lincoln Goblet Returns to the Soldiers' Home

President Lincoln's Cottage recently acquired a glass in the Lincoln White House crystal pattern purportedly used by Lincoln on his last visit to the Soldiers' Home. Lincoln's last recorded visit to the Soldiers' Home was on April 13, 1865, one day before his assassination. It is unclear whether the reference to Lincoln's last visit is in relation to his last ride out to the Home or if it is a reference to his last season in residence at the Home. The crystal glass is a direct match to the Lincolns' White House crystal service and was found in the attic of a famous author's home along with papers relating to Richard Henry Dana, who was a U.S. Attorney during the Civil War and met with Lincoln in D.C. on at least two occasions. The goblet represents a tangible link to the Lincolns' life at Soldiers' Home. It will be displayed in the Robert H. Smith Visitor Education Center at President Lincoln's Cottage.

This acquisition was made possible through the generosity of Ruff and Susan Fant.



## HOST YOUR NEXT EVENT AT PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S COTTAGE

*In 2009, the nation will celebrate the Bicentennial of Lincoln's birth. Where better to celebrate than at his summer home.*

To find out more about events  
please visit our website

[www.lincolncottage.org](http://www.lincolncottage.org)  
or contact Leslie Bouterie

(202) 829-0436 x31232 or [leslie\\_bouterie@nthp.org](mailto:leslie_bouterie@nthp.org)

## Inaugural Premium Tours

*Special private tours will be offered in January in response to the tremendous interest in Abraham Lincoln on the eve of the Obama inauguration and the bicentennial of Lincoln's birth in 2009. The theme of the Obama inauguration, "A New Birth of Freedom," is taken from Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, and will be woven throughout the inaugural ceremonies.*

Premium Tours include:

- ~ Greeting and introduction from Director, Frank Milligan
- ~ One hour private cottage tour
- ~ Private discussion with Curator, Erin Carlson Mast

The Cost: \$300 for up to 10 people (\$30 for each additional person)

To reserve a Premium Tour contact Alison Mitchell  
(202) 829-0436 x31228 or [alison\\_mitchell@nthp.org](mailto:alison_mitchell@nthp.org)

## Cottage Receives Mayor's Award

The National Trust for Historic Preservation received an Excellence in Design Award for Restoration and Renovation for President Lincoln's Cottage and the Robert H. Smith Visitor Education Center from the mayor of Washington, D.C.

The Robert H. Smith Visitor Education Center is also on target to receive LEED (Leadership in Environmental and Energy Design) Gold Certification. The renovated building has been hailed as an example for future sustainability projects and is being considered as a pilot project for LEED 2009's new Alternate Compliance Path for Life Cycle Assessment of Building Assemblies. The Visitor Education Center has also been named Restoration Project of the Year from Mid Atlantic Construction Magazine.



## Lincoln Statue Installed at President Lincoln's Cottage

On November 10, 2008 a new statue of Abraham Lincoln and his horse was installed at President Lincoln's Cottage. The life-sized statue conveys Lincoln either returning from or about to embark on his commute to the White House. Months of research went into the historical accuracy and visual aesthetics of this portrayal of Lincoln and his horse.

There are no known photographs of Lincoln at his Soldiers' Home retreat, so it was thought that a typical moment in his everyday life at the Cottage would best depict the intimacy and comfort he felt while living here. In this statue the observer can almost see and feel the full weight of the war bearing down on the President's shoulders. Yet one also senses calm and solace in his resolute expression, coming as it did from the peace he felt while living here, as he did for over a quarter of his presidency.

The statue was made possible through the generosity of Robert H. Smith and designed and produced by StudioEIS of Brooklyn, NY.



## Albert See and the *Pennsylvannia* Bucktails

More than anything else, except perhaps serving his savior Jesus Christ, Albert See wanted a college education. But in the spring of 1862 ill health and dwindling funds forced the young Pennsylvanian to leave Meadville College before the end of his academic year. See lost no time investing in a Pennsylvania oil well “to make money for the sole purpose of educating myself.” (He later sold his well making a tidy profit). However, as it did with hundreds of thousands of Americans, the Civil War intervened with See’s plans and by the end of September 1862 he was mustered into service with the 136th PA Volunteers.

While the 136th saw considerable action in the December 1862 Fredericksburg campaign and the harrowing “Mud March” that followed, the only action that Albert See experienced was lying inside a hospital ward suffering from a worsening bronchial ailment. Continuing ill health prevented his joining the 136th until just before the May 2-5, 1863, Battle of Chancellorsville, and while See was “not engaged in the battle,” he was “shelled quite severely and marched very hard... [and] returned to Camp was well nigh used up.”

See was discharged when the 136th was mustered out of service on May 29, 1863, and he returned to Meadville where he worked for a time as an enrolling officer. That job took him through to fall haying when he started back to College, fell in love and got married, finding “more real happiness in married life than I ever dreamed of.” See was a diligent student, “but soon the call to arms was so strong that I could no longer resist.... I am a soldier.” Early in 1864 See enlisted

in the 150th Pennsylvania Volunteers and jumped at the opportunity to join its Company K - known as “the body guard to President Lincoln.” And that is where Albert See’s story becomes our story, for as a member of the 150th “Bucktails” See’s January 1 to December 31, 1864, diary records abundant and fascinating new



Detail of mural by William Woodward in Robert H. Smith Visitor Education Center at President Lincoln’s Cottage

information pertaining to President Lincoln’s daily routine and the inner workings of his presidential guard.

On March 4, 1864, the 24 year-old volunteer made out his will and a week later was in camp, instantly “transformed” as he described it, “from a man to a soldier.” On April 5 See commenced his sentry duty at “the Executive Mansion” though he never stopped learning, often reading Greek, the Bible and other subjects in his guard tent while on duty or

back in his camp tent amid the ongoing cacophony of card and dice games, brawls and colleagues recovering from drinking bouts.

One particularly descriptive portion of the diary involves See’s entries during Confederate General Jubal Early’s July 1864, assault on Washington’s outer defenses. The point of attack was Fort Stevens, one of a number of forts guarding Washington’s northern perimeter, and located only a mile north of the Lincoln’s somewhat isolated Soldiers’ Home compound: “The Rebs have appeared in front of the fortifications of Washington,” See wrote on July 10, “and the President Sent a request that the guard should be doubled and sleep near the house.” See himself was on duty the night that an armed messenger, dispatched by Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, thundered into the Soldiers’ Home compound late at night with an urgent appeal for the Lincoln family to evacuate to the White House:

“I stood in front of the house straight and about 11 1/2 O. an Orderly rode up revolver in hand and handed me a dispatch requesting that it be handed to the President as soon as possible... soon the Coachman came out and said he had to go to the City and the Escort was ordered and the President and family soon came out and he said that he did not anticipate any danger, yet the Sec. or War felt uneasy about him and thought he better come to the City and he yielded to his wishes else if something should happen he should be charged of rashness. So when the coach came up they stepped in and soon drove off soon as they thought the Cavalry would be ready to go... The house servants were all up and I guess did not sleep much during the rest of the night. They were badly frightened yet I was not for I had no idea that there was danger.”



Detail of mural by William Woodward in Robert H. Smith Visitor Education Center at President Lincoln's Cottage

Early the following morning Lincoln visited Fort Stevens and Mary Lincoln returned in her buggy to the Cottage to gather belongings and calm her terrified household staff. Within minutes of her arrival Lincoln's cavalry escort arrived to bring Mrs. Lincoln back to the White House. The Cavalry officer also announced to the assembled infantry that *"the Rebs are in force at the head of 7th St. in front of Ft. Stephens so close that they can fire into the ft. with their rifles and that two balls struck just behind the Presidents carriage as they were leaving."* This report prompted a fearful Mary Lincoln to demand that the 150th infantry guard move with her to the White House: without us, See wrote, *"she would not feel safe at all .... she wanted a guard sent tonight."* Eventually the President over-ruled his wife and agreed with the 150th's Lieutenant that his guard could be of more assistance at the Fort than sitting at the White House, four miles from the action. Undeterred, Mary returned to the Soldiers' Home later that day and *"begged that we would not go [to the Fort] and told the capt. that if we stayed it would probably save a great many of our lives*

*and possibly theirs."*

The following day seventy-seven men and officers of Company K each packed "70 rounds of cartridges making in all 100 rounds each and took up our line for

*Ft. Reno, all except those that were unable to come as some were troubled with a disease of the heart called faint heartedness."* On its way west to Fort Reno

Company K marched close enough to Fort Stevens *"that some balls passed over us."* See's account continues through the following days as he settled into rifle pits and encountered Confederate skirmishers fire: *"I feel a little the worse for wear," See acknowledged two evenings later, adding that he did not have "much of an appetite and cannot eat hard tack...and we have nothing to eat with it, no meat and could not eat it if we had."*

By the following day, July 14, word had spread of President Lincoln's visits to Fort Stevens during the multi-day engagement:

*President L. was at the Ft yesterday and day before and has been every day since the enemy came near so that there was a danger he was standing on the wall of Ft Stephen when a man was killed beside him by a Sharp Shooter and several balls struck near him, but he never flinches....*

The 150th's sentry work lightened considerably immediately following Jubal Early's removal from Washington but the threat of assassination lurked about the Home:

*There has been great number of threats made of assassinating "Uncle Abe" and we cannot well allow that we think to much of him for that and if they do so they will find a hard time of it we are ready and willing to fight until there is not a man left to fight before a hair of his head shall be hurt. We have 8 guards in the day and 11 at night and all sleep out near the President's House. We all lay with our accoutrements all on and ready at a moments warning to meet any force that may come.*

Exciting as the Early raid was for the men of Company K, the vast majority of their time – and subsequently the vast majority of Albert See's diary – describes the daily drudgery of sentry duty and camp life:

*"Arose at the beating of the drum and in time to wash before roll call which is calculated to be at 5 1/2 O every morning. Wiped out my gun so as to have it clean and go to inspection. About 8 1/2 [AM] the President passed received a salute by every one of the guards, then we went down and fired our guns at the target."*

The See diary covers it all: camp life with a heavy dose of national politics as the autumn 1864 presidential election neared when "Old Abe" faced Democratic nominee George McClellan: *"Most of McC's friends are now turned against him,"* See wrote in mid September. *"Some because or nearly all because he accepted the nomination on that [peace] Platform and the friends of the Platform are down on him for not coming out more decided for Peace....He has not now scare a friend at all except in the Reb. States and there only because he will be a tool in their hands."* Not surprisingly Lincoln swept the Company K vote and Albert See proudly recorded the results: *"65 Votes Cast all Lincoln."*

Frank Milligan, Ph.D, Director  
President Lincoln's Cottage