Upcoming Programs

*Cottage Conversations*

*January 14, 2010*  *(Please note this date has changed since the last newsletter)*

Gerald Prokopowicz

April 15, 2010

Craig Symonds

All Cottage Conversations:
6:00pm - Reception
6:30pm - Lecture
7:30pm - Book signing

General Admission: $10
Yearly Subscription: $25
Cottage Donors $100+: Free

Reservations: alison_mitchell@nthe.org
or (202)829-0436 x31228

Interpreting the Emancipation Proclamation at President Lincoln’s Cottage

By Frank Milligan, Director

A major interpretive goal for us here at President Lincoln’s Cottage is to help our visitors better understand the process that led President Lincoln to enact the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. We want our visitors to gain an appreciation for the countless political and military forces that played upon Lincoln in the months leading up to and following the issuance of his September 1862 Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation’s decree that slaves in rebellious states or parts of states should be “then, thenceforward, and forever free.”

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Paul Conrad is best known for his political cartoons. A three-time winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Editorial Cartooning (1964, ’71, and ’84), Conrad served as chief editorial cartoonist for the Los Angeles Times for 29 years. In addition to being a celebrated cartoonist, Conrad is also an accomplished sculptor. In the late 20th century, Conrad created a series of small scale sculptures, most of them satirical, of political icons, including John F. Kennedy, Richard Nixon, Martin Luther King, Jr., both Presidents Bush, the Clintons, and Abraham Lincoln.

Abraham Lincoln was no stranger to political satire and editorial cartoons—positive and negative. In this bronze sculpture (shown on left), Conrad created a classic caricature of Lincoln, one in which his height and lankiness is exaggerated. The image refers to the Harper’s Weekly political cartoon of Lincoln titled, “Long Abraham Lincoln, a Little Longer” (shown on right) printed a few weeks after Lincoln’s successful run for reelection in 1864. Unlike the cartoon of 1864, a comical celebration of Lincoln’s victory, Conrad’s sculpture is meant to convey the “dramatic, yet fragile attitude of Abraham Lincoln.”

- Erin Mast, Curator

The exhibit “My Abraham Lincoln” is located in the Robert H. Smith Visitor Education Center for President Lincoln’s Cottage. Due to popular demand, the exhibit has been extended through July 31, 2010. You may view highlights of the exhibit on our Facebook page: www.facebook.com
Cottage Receives Lincoln Forum’s Volk Award

On November 18, President Lincoln’s Cottage was awarded the prestigious Volk Award from the Lincoln Forum, which “honors excellence in advancing Lincoln history and preserving his memory.”

Left to Right: Frank Milligan, Director of President Lincoln’s Cottage, Richard Moe, President of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and Frank Williams, President of the Lincoln Forum.

Attention Teachers!

President Lincoln’s Cottage welcomes students of all ages, and from around the country, to participate in its school programs. Education programs include an interactive program component which meet state and national standards of learning and a specialized tour of the Cottage. Programs are offered for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. Experiences for college and graduate students are also available.

Come see where Lincoln lives!

To schedule a school program contact Education Coordinator, Callie Hawkins callie_hawkins@nthp.org / 202.829.0436 x31223

Click here to learn more

LEED Gold Certification

The Robert H. Smith Visitor Education Center at President Lincoln’s Cottage is the first National Trust Historic Site to receive Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Certification from the U.S. Green Building Council. The Visitor Education Center received 44 credits, earning LEED Gold in April 2009.

The Visitor Education Center is an Italianate Renaissance Revival style building designed by architect William Poindexter. The building was constructed in 1905, as the Administrative Building for the Soldiers’ Home. In 2007, the National Trust sustainably rehabilitated the building and adapted it for use as a welcome center, exhibit space, and staff offices for President Lincoln’s Cottage.

Thanks to a $1 million contribution and technical expertise provided by United Technologies Corporation, green practices became an integral part of the rehabilitation of this building.

A special self-guided Eco Tour will be available in the building for visitors in December 2009.

To learn more visit us online at www.lincolncottage.org
Perfect for Holiday Gatherings!

Cottage rooms glow with soft evening light during the fall and winter seasons, lending a magical quality and Victorian ambiance to any celebration. Two historic buildings and landscaped grounds offer many options for large and small gatherings, and formal and casual entertaining. Call now to reserve space for your private or corporate event.

To learn more visit: http://www.lincolncottage.org/events/index.htm

For questions contact Events Manager, Leslie Bouterie leslie_bouterie@nthp.org 202.829.0436 x31232
Interpreting the Emancipation Proclamation at President Lincoln’s Cottage...continued

By Frank Milligan

The issue of slavery, and Lincoln’s views about it, is complex and challenging and needs to be seen through the prism of a mid-nineteenth century America that was not familiar with the ‘Great Emancipator’ as enshrined in the awe-inspiring Lincoln Memorial. Such is not the case with today’s visitors.

From the start, we at the Cottage were committed to helping our visitors understand that interpreting Abraham Lincoln’s personal views on the right to hold persons as slaves needed to be seen within the broader issues of race and to a lesser degree colonization - the voluntary relocation of former slaves to Africa or Central America that would ensure the permanent separation of the two races. How do we actually interpret such a complicated story within the confines of a sixty-minute guided tour in which emancipation itself is but one part of a larger picture?

Our emancipation story begins to unfold in earnest in the Cottage where, according to accounts written by the men who guarded him and the friends who visited him, Lincoln spent a great deal of time reading and contemplating many issues, but in the spring and summer of 1862 probably no issue so dominated his thinking as did emancipation. It was here at his rural sanctuary where the beleaguered President increasingly turned to his Bible “to know the will of Providence” in ending slavery. As historian Matthew Pinsker writes, “the origin of his emancipation decision in July [1862] appears to have been an acutely solitary moment.”

Here, we emphasize Lincoln’s strong personal commitment to the principle of equality as embodied in the Declaration of Independence. In fact the foundation for Lincoln’s eventual success in transforming a war for Union into a war for freedom was his wholehearted belief that freedom was the one natural right of every human being: “There can be no moral right in connection with one man making a slave of another,” he argued in his October 16, 1854, speech in Peoria, Illinois. But according to historian H.W. Brands, Lincoln had no desire early in his presidency to “conduct a revolutionary crusade.” Emancipation would emerge as a military necessity, not as a moral compass.

Clearly slavery was morally incompatible with the spirit of the Declaration. But Lincoln also knew the importance of calming Northern sentiments and so he cleverly maintained in letters and conversations that the maintenance of the Union represented his true war aim, and not the dismantling of slavery. This Lincoln held to even as he wrote his preliminary emancipation decree and then awaited the military victory that allowed him to announce the proclamation from a position of military strength.

To fully understand the nuances relating to the emancipation story, we believe that our visitors should have a basic understanding of Lincoln’s changing personal views on race and the reality that Lincoln’s long-held opposition to slavery did not initially, as Brands puts it, “make him
written the Proclamation. We much prefer to help our visitors appreciate the complexity of the emancipation process, and its necessity as a military measure to stem the rising opposition to the war by northerners who in the summer of 1862 saw only Union military impotence on the eastern and western fronts. Clearly, Lincoln needed a bold political and military measure to turn public opinion in favor of continuing and ending the war. As a result of the Emancipation Proclamation, over 180,000 African-Americans took up arms within Union ranks, and as Lincoln predicted, that valor and bravery helped turn the tide of war for the North. Furthermore, it was that valor that eventually led Lincoln to propose giving these warriors the right to vote – a decision that directly led to his assassination.

But the story does not end on January 1, 1863, with the implementation of the final Proclamation. Rather it, and our tour, ends in the summer of 1864 amidst dire conversations that took place at the Soldiers’ Home retreat regarding Lincoln’s plummeting political fortunes for the 1864 presidential election. To his credit, the President dug in his heels and rejected the advice of political advisors and influential War Democrats to drop his intention to make the end of slavery, enshrined in a constitutional amendment, the centerpiece of his 1864 re-election campaign. It was a courageous decision that cemented both Lincoln’s political legacy and his emancipation policy.

Our increasing Cottage attendance mirrors the growing public and professional museum and scholarly interest with our honest and engaging presentation of the emancipation story. Over the past six months, I have delivered papers on the subject to conferences in Oxford, the District of Columbia, Richmond, Rochester, and Indianapolis. Interpreting emancipation is a challenging and exhilarating process; just as creating and enacting it was for Abraham Lincoln.

2 For the full text of this remarkable speech see Lewis Lehrman’s excellent new book: Lincoln at Peoria: The Turning Point (Stackpole Books, 2008), 289-328
4 Ibid.
7 Oakes, “Natural Rights,” 115, 127-128
8 Historians differ on this but I remind our staff that regardless of where the document was finally drafted, Lincoln most certainly thought through his options and, as was his practice: jotted notes on the subject while staying at the Cottage during the spring and summer of 1862.