The Surratt Courier

Published Bimonthly by the Surratt Society

November/December 2025 | Louise Oertly, Editor | Volume XLXX No. 6

Editor's Message

It wouldn't be the November/December issue without one holiday related article. The following article is reprinted from the December 2015 issue of *The Surratt Courier.* It was provided by Laurie Verge, who was editor at the time, but no mention is made of where the information was found. However, her introduction explains the reason for the article.

The Surratt Society wishes everyone a happy and safe holiday season and New Year.

*****

And Yet We Survived

After nearly 40 years of producing this newsletter and 40 years of trying to teach a bit of American history related to the various holidays—especially Christmas—what is left to say? For a brief moment, the thought struck to go cold turkey (pun intended) this year and not to mention anything about this treasured holiday! However, our Christmas spirit got the best of us, and we began to search for ideas.

What about Christmas letters? These have become quite popular in recent times; but our ancestors enjoyed writing also, and it was a method of holding on to families and friends who could not visit during the season. Today's letters are usually filled with reports on vacations taken, achievements of the children, job promotions, and similar tidings of great joy that make you wonder if your correspondents ever have any bad luck.

Christmas letters of 150 plus years ago were often more somber as our country dealt with a destructive Civil War. However, as you read some of the excerpts that we have chosen, you will see that little rays of warmth and hope could shine through.

Many of us are concerned today about directions in which our country (and others) seem to be late heading. We wonder where our leadership will come from and if it will give strong, intelligent, and effectual guidance. Perhaps the thoughts of the 1860s printed below will provide us with hope for the future. Listen to the words and the soft whisperings that assure us that our ancestors would tell us, "And yet, we survived…"

Laurie Verge, Editor

*****

This newsletter is the Surratt Society's bimonthly publication. The Surratt Society's website is surrattmuseum.org . Contact us at surratt.society@gmail.com or by mail at: Surratt Society, 9201 Edgeworth Drive #3853, Capitol Heights, MD 20791-3853.

The Surratt House Museum, a historic property of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. The Surratt House Museum's phone number is (301) 868-1121 and email is surratthouse@pgparks.com .

In Georgia, Julia Johnson Fisher wrote of the Christmas of 1864:

On Christmas Day, we fared sumptuously. Mrs. Lynn dined with us and furnished the turkey. We had some chickens and a piece of fresh pork. Gussie had been off 10 miles and brought oysters—so We had an oyster stew and chicken salad, minus the greens, potatoes and rice. The Turkey was dressed with cornbread. Our dessert is a cornmeal pudding...how we did relish it! We are always hungry—hungry the year round, but do not grow fat.

***

In South Carolina, Emma Holmes described her holiday dinner as consisting of a ham—a gift from a friend—a turkey she had raised and bread pudding sweetened with sorghum, a delicious meal for the times. But she could not enjoy it for worrying about her family members in the army, who probably had little or nothing to eat. As the Civil War dragged on, deprivation replaced the well-set table, and familiar faces were missing from the dinner table.

***

In Winchester, Virginia, Cornelia McDonald had worked tirelessly preparing rusks (light, sweetened biscuits) and cakes for her children for the holiday, when Union soldiers suddenly filled her yard. When a soldier tried to run off with the Christmas turkey, she ran into the yard and retrieved the turkey, but soon discovered that her kitchen was full of soldiers who were eating all her baked goods.

***

For children, Christmas was altered during the war. There were fewer presents, especially in the devastated South. By 1863, the Union blockade of the Southern coasts had made it nearly impossible for Santa Claus to visit the homes of the South. Quite a few mothers explained to their children that there would be no presents because Santa Claus would not be able to run the blockade, or that the Yankees had shot him.

***

Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas of Atlanta, Georgia, wrote:

I have written so much... and yet I have said nothing of Turner's and Mary Bell's party which we gave them last week in lieu of the Santa Claus presents. Mary Bell has been told that Santa Claus has not been able to run the blockade and has gone to war—yet at this late hour, when I went upstairs Thursday night of the party, I found that in the trusting faith of childhood, they had hung their little socks and stockings in case Santa Claus did come.

***

For Southern slaves, the Christmas season had always meant a break from their duties for a day or two, and they celebrated with singing, dancing, and probably a brief reunion with separated family members from other plantations. Before the war, they had received gifts from their masters and their semi-annual clothing allotment. Near Atlanta, Dolly Lunt Burge a widow living on a plantation with her daughter and her slaves, wrote on December 24, 1864:

This has usually been a very busy day with me, preparing for Christmas not only for my own table, but for gifts for my servants. Now how changed! No confectionery, cakes, or pies can I have. We are all sad, no loud joyous laughter from our boys [her slaves] is heard. Christmas Eve, which has ever been gaily celebrated here, which has witnessed the popping of firecrackers [a Southern Christmas custom] and the hanging up of stockings, is an occasion now of sadness and gloom.

I have nothing even to put in Sadai's [her daughter] stocking, which hangs so invitingly for Santa Claus. How disappointed she will be in the morning, though I have explained to her why he cannot come. Poor children! Why must the innocent suffer with the guilty?

Sadai jumped out of bed very early this morning [Christmas Day] to feel in her stocking. She could not believe but that there would be something in it. Finding nothing, she crept back into bed, pulled the cover over her face, and I soon heard her sobbing. The little Negroes all came in. "Christmas gift, mist'ess! Christmas gift, mist'ess! I pulled the cover over my face and was soon mingling my tears with Sadai's.

***

In Richmond, Judith McGuire wrote in her diary that her family had received a box sent to them by a young officer who had captured it from the Yankees. The McGuires had been forced to flee from their home in Alexandria early in the war, and Judith insisted on sharing the contents of the box with friends who were also refugees.

***

In Virginia, Lucy Buck wrote in her diary on December 25, 1861:

I cannot but feel a little sad this morning for my thoughts continually revert to those dear absent brothers who were wont to share our Christmas cheer and gladden the hours of this festive season for us. Poor boys! I wonder if they think of the blazing hearthstone at old Bel Air [the family home] and wish for a place in the home circle. I think of it all and sicken when I think.

***

On Christmas Day 1862, Tally Simpson wrote to her sister:

This is Christmas Day. The sun shines feeble through a thin cloud, the air is mild and pleasant, a gentle breeze is making music through the leaves of the lofty pines that stand near our bivouac. All is quiet and that very stillness recalls some sad and painful thoughts. This day, one year ago, how many thousand families, gay and joyous, celebrating merry Christmas, drinking health to absent members of their families and sending upon the wings of love and affection long, deep, and sincere wishes for their safe return to the loving ones at home, But today are clad in the deepest mourning in memory to some lost and loved members of their circle...When will this war end? Will another Christmas roll around and find us all

wintering in camp? Oh! That peace may soon be restored to our young but dearly beloved country and that we may all meet again in happiness.

****

Osborn H. Oldroyd

By Joan Chaconas
From her speech at the 2007 Surratt Society Conference

You have probably all heard of the big five Lincoln collectors: William H. Lambert, Judge Daniel Fish, Judd Stewart, Charles McClellan, and J.E. Oakleaf. But you seldom hear the name Osborn Oldroyd on the list. The big five collected top dollar items, while Oldroyd collected anything having to do with Lincoln. However, the one thing that separates Oldroyd from these other men is that he was the first Lincoln collector. He began his collection while Abraham Lincoln was still living.

Born in 1842 in Mount Vernon, Ohio, Osborn H. Ingram Olroyd [his initials were intentionally O-H-I-O] began collecting Lincoln items in 1860. He was a great admirer of Abraham Lincoln, although he never met or even saw the object of his admiration. This did not stop him from collecting everything that had to do with Lincoln's life and death. His collecting began with a small booklet entitled *Life Speeches and Public Services of Abraham Lincoln along with a Sketch of the Life of Hannibal Hamlin.* This is known as the Wigwam edition and cost him 25 cents.

Oldroyd served throughout the Civil War in the Union Army, Company E 20th Ohio Volunteers Infantry. After his discharge, he returned to Ohio. He died in 1930 at the age of 88 and is buried at Rock Creek Cemetery in Washington, D.C. During his lifetime, he amassed a collection of almost 5,000 objects relative to President Lincoln's life and death. Among this collection were the cook stove and many pieces of furniture that had been in the Lincoln home in Springfield; some of Lincoln's law books; photographs of Lincoln's family; rail split by Lincoln; the Lincoln family Bible; swatches of pieces of clothing, curtains, bedspreads, and wallpaper; campaign badges; documents relating to the Wide Awake Club of Springfield, of which Lincoln was a member; many photos and engravings relative to the assassination of Lincoln and the attempt made on Secretary of State William Seward; photos of Lincoln's funeral; photos and sketches relative to Booth and his escape from the city; one intriguing piece listed by Oldroyd is a "sketch of plans made by Booth of boring a hole in the door of the private box and removing the lock with a plan of fastening the entrance to the box so assistance could not reach President after assassination" [this item cannot be found—it would be interesting to see where it came from]; many mourning badges and medallions; parts of Lincoln's coffin; the eagle from the catafalque while Lincoln lay in state in Springfield, Illinois; pieces of the ropes that were used to hang the conspirators; large oil paintings of Lincoln and numerous busts and statues of Lincoln; postage stamps; Union envelopes and letter paper; fractional currency; three pieces of Maine Spruce Chewing Gum, popular during the Civil War, with pictures of Lincoln on the wrapper; sheet music; newspaper and magazines—tributes; personal reminiscence of Lincoln from Grant, Garfield, Charles Francis Adams, Oliver Wendell Holmes, John Greenleaf Whittier, Joshua Speed, Joseph Bradley, plus many more. And that's just a sample of the items in his collections that were on

display first in the Springfield home where Lincoln lived and then the Petersen House, the house where Lincoln died. Some of the items mentioned are currently on display at Ford's Theatre Museum.

The collection was in Lincoln's Springfield home in 1883 and remained there until 1893. Rent at the Springfield home was $20 a month. During those 10 years, Robert Todd Lincoln had inherited the house and turned it over to the state of Illinois. Oldroyd remained in the Lincoln house with his collection until 1893, when he was invited by the Memorial Association of the District of Columbia to come to Washington with his collection. Oldroyd and his family then moved to Washington and rented the vacant Petersen House from the current owners, the Schade family, for $100 per month that was paid by the Memorial Association. After Oldroyd and his collection moved into the house, it was open to the public for 25 cents admission.

Back in 1878, after Mr. and Mrs. Petersen were no longer living, their heirs had sold the house to the Schades. Nothing had been the same at the Petersen House after the assassination and the Schades were finding the same problems that the Petersens had. People kept knocking at the door asking to come in and see the room where Lincoln died. Many of them helped themselves to little mementos. In 1896, after much prodding, the government purchased the house where Lincoln died from the Schades for $30,000.

In 1883, while the Schades still owned the Petersen House, a marble tablet had been placed on the outside, telling of its tragic history. In 1924, a bronze plaque replaced the marble tablet. Also at the same time, a bronze plaque was placed on the Ford's Theatre building as well.

In 1926, Congressman Henry Rathbone, the son of Major Henry Rathbone who had been in the box with the Lincolns the night of the assassination, introduced a bill to purchase the Oldroyd collection. On August 30 of that year, the government paid Oldroyd $50,000 for his collection. Two years later, in 1928, Rathbone introduced a bill "to alter and repair the old theater building to house the Oldroyd collection," but this bill did not pass. So by September 1, 1926, the government owned the Oldroyd collection. Oldroyd remained as curator of the collection until 1927, when Lewis Reynolds took his place. Reynolds also had a connection to Lincoln. As a young boy of five, he sat on Lincoln's lap while his father and Lincoln talked at the White House.

In 1930, Congress took another look at Rathbone's proposal for Ford's Theatre (Congressman Rathbone died in 1928). A strong supporter of this bill was Lieutenant Colonel Ulysses S. Grant III, grandson of President Grant. He was now the caretaker of the Oldroyd collection, and he pointed out that the collection needed more room. He felt moving it to the Ford's Theatre building was a logical move.

Eventually, the government appropriated $100,000 to fix up the old Ford's Theatre building, for the purpose of housing Oldroyd collection and by February 12, 1932, the Lincoln Museum in the Ford's Theatre building opened for visitors. Here they could view the many thousands of pieces of Lincoln memorabilia that had been collected by Oldroyd. They were housed in numerous showcases placed about on the first floor of the building. Many more items were hung on the walls. The charge to view these items was 10 cents, plus a 2-cent federal tax.

The displays showed Lincoln's life in Springfield; Lincoln as a surveyor; Lincoln as a lawyer; the Lincoln/Douglas debates; Lincoln as a congressman; Lincoln as president; Lincoln at Fort Stevens; the assassination of Lincoln; and the trial and execution of the conspirators.

Also on display were the pieces of furniture that Oldroyd had acquired from Lincoln's Springfield home and the Lincoln family Bible from which Lincoln's mother, Nancy Hanks, read to Lincoln. Inside the cover, the name "Abraham Lincoln" appears in a youthful hand. In 1893, the Bible was sold by the Johnstons, stepchildren of Thomas Lincoln, for exhibition at the Chicago

World's Fair. Later it was acquired for the Oldroyd collection. The Bible has been returned to the Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic site in Hodgenville, Kentucky.

According to a write-up in the *Kansas City Star* of February 12, 1950, people over the years had been very disappointed upon entering the museum. Their first question was, "Where is the box where Lincoln was shot?" In August of 1865, the theater had been gutted and converted into an office building. The Medical Museum and then the Pension Bureau used the building. However, in 1893, due to faulty construction, the third floor of the building collapsed into the basement, killing 21 workers. The building was repaired and then used only for storage until 1932, when the Lincoln Museum was installed on the first floor. The second floor continued to be used for storage and the third floor was not used at all.

One of the main things on view in the old Lincoln Museum was a large diorama of the stage as it was in 1865. This has since been destroyed. It was placed in the center of the area that marked where the stage had been located. The Treasury Guard flag, which Booth supposedly caught his spur on as he leaped from the box, was one of many items hanging on the walls. In the back of the museum room, where the stage would have been, black lines on the floor indicated its outline and the placement of the President's box. The door to the box, that had a small hole in it, was placed upright where it would have been used to enter the box. The door was donated in 1940 by the grandson of John Ford. Booth's path, as he escaped across the stage, was shown in black footprints made by a pattern from his actual boot. On display also were the sofa that had been occupied by Major Rathbone and the engraving of George Washington that had been hung outside the box. These were presented to Ford's in 1959 by a great grandson of John Ford.

For a short time, the Lincoln rocker was on display. Earlier, it had been turned over from the War Department to the Smithsonian's basement storage area and the Smithsonian loaned the rocker for display. They also loaned Lincoln's beaver hat that he wore that night to Ford's. In 1921, the widow of Harry Ford asked for the rocker to be returned. Finally, in 1929 it was given to her. She then put it up for auction and an agent for the Henry T. Ford Foundation bought it for $2,400 and it was displayed in the courthouse in Dearborn, Michigan. It is now in the Henry Ford Museum (no relation to Fords of Ford's Theatre).

In 1968, when Ford's was fully restored as a theater, an attempt was made to get the rocker back, but no deal could be made with the Henry Ford Museum. The rocker you see today is a replica. [Editor's note: See article on page 9] When you finished viewing the items in the old museum, you could go across the street to the "House Where Lincoln Died" and, for another admission fee, you could view the room in which Lincoln died. One newspaper reporter describing the experience wrote: "The room is 18 feet by 2 inches by 9 feet by 11 inches. The ceiling is low. One stands by the bed and reads from a card on the wall that it was here Mr. Lincoln suffered through the night before his death early the next morning. '*He was too long for the bed and had to be placed diagonally.*' One feels almost tightly shut up with a great tragedy of death as he stands in a silent room."

For a number of years, when you visited the Petersen House, you were looking at the many pieces of furniture that Oldroyd had acquired from the Lincoln house in Springfield. The original furnishings that were in the Petersen House in 1865 had been auctioned off by the Petersen heirs in 1878.

The Oldroyd Collection remained on exhibit in the old Ford's Theatre building until July of 1964, when the building was slated for restoration. At this time the collection went into storage.

After much debating about restoring Ford's to its original look of April 14, 1865, it finally was accomplished by 1968. A fully restored Ford's Theatre opened to the public and a Lincoln

Museum was located in the newly created basement. The original Ford's Theatre had a basement only under the stage area. Most of the items on display dealt with Lincoln's life as Ford's museum was not created to perpetuate a tragedy and become a monument to his murder. Thus, it had only a small area containing items dealing with his death. A good many pieces of Oldroyd's collection were not put back on display and were stored away in various areas of the Petersen House and Ford's.

In 1976, when the National Park Service needed more space for storage, these Oldroyd items and others were moved to the "vault" in the then defunct Union Station building, which had been converted into the ill-fated visitor center. At the time these items were stored, the vault was a climate-controlled area. For a while, the National Park Service had offices here, but was forced to move out when the Union Station building was condemned. However, the Oldroyd collection remained in the old building. It was in the early 1980s that I discovered this treasure trove of artifacts. I was able to view the Oldroyd collection close up, photographing some of the items.

These items were not being cared for in the best way, but it was the best the National Park Service could do at the time. The book collection, which (according to Oldroyd) had numbered 4,800, was about half that size when I saw it. It was lined up on shelves covered with a plastic tarp, as were most of the statues and busts of Lincoln. Oil paintings were just stacked against a wall. There were flat file drawers filled with rather haphazardly with artifacts—such as a piece of Lincoln's coffin, fringe from a flag, tassels from the catafalque, and various manuscripts and photographs. In one large file drawer I found a beautiful silk quilt, signed in ink by Lincoln in one square and by many other luminaries in other squares. The quilt was not in any kind of protective cover at all.

The National Park Service had accession cards on these objects, which contained the history of the piece, where it came from and from whom. Finding the card was easy—finding the piece a little more difficult. It remains that way today. [Editor's note: This was written in 2007, so we are not sure of the collection's current status or condition.] Some items can't be located. Are they misfiled or missing? After searching the Internet, my feeling is that many of the so-called missing pieces are safely tucked away in a university library or museum. It seems there is a little bit of Oldroyd everywhere.

I was not the only one to view these objects. Richard Sloan, Art Loux, Ed Steers, John Brennan, Michael Kauffman, Laurie Verge, and Louise Oerty were also visitors at one time or another to the "vault." In 1986, as a result of our visits and our general chagrin regarding this collection, we wrote letters to the National Park Service personnel and also to several senators bringing to their attention this neglected collection of Lincoln artifacts. Soon after our letter writing, the National Park Service revamped the museum at Ford's Theatre, making it more assassination oriented and some, but certainly not all, of the Oldroyd articles went back on display. Again, a sizable amount of the collection stays in storage. In the late 1980s, the remaining articles of the collection were moved to a facility in Greenbelt, Maryland. Finally, the collection went through another move in the late 1990s and now reposes in a facility in Landover, Maryland. This facility houses all the National Park Service artifacts from all their properties on the East Coast.

But we are only interested in the Lincoln artifacts and the Oldroyd collection, so let's get back to that. When Oldroyd was in the Springfield house with his collection, he was able to acquire, as I said earlier, several pieces of Lincoln's furniture. Lincoln had sold or given away most of his furniture when he left Springfield. Oldroyd had the Lincolns' cradle, in which all the Lincoln children had been rocked, a wooden settee, a mahogany rocking chair, two sofas, two dining chairs, and a mahogany stand. He also had a chair Lincoln used in his law office and a desk

he used at home. You will be happy to know that the National Park Service gave the original Lincoln furniture back to the home in Springfield in 1989 with the help of former Illinois Congressman Paul Findley. Up to this point some of the Lincoln furniture had been displayed in the Petersen House and some were in storage and pretty much forgotten. Unfortunately, even though the Lincoln furniture was returned to the Springfield house, not all original pieces are on display. Some are back in storage and brought out on occasion. The Lincoln stove was returned in 1950.

From 1926, when the government acquired the Oldroyd collection until the present time, many pieces of it have been lost or misplaced. Probably due to its being moved about so much. Also, Oldroyd was not required to provide a complete inventory, and his handwritten list of the collection is not precise. When Oldroyd died in 1930, his widow and his brother got permission to look things over. They removed Oldroyd's personal belongings and five truckloads of rubbish. It is likely that among the rubbish a good bit of Oldroyd's correspondence was removed too. He had received letters from Jenny Gourlay and Louis Weichmann, as well as many tribute letters found in his books, *Album Immortelles*. The University Library of Chicago has close to 1,000 Oldroyd letters purchased in 1932 from Oldroyd's widow. So, it seems a lot of this so-called rubbish was sold off in this manner.

On my early visit to the vault, I had Oldroyd's handwritten list of items and I tried to find certain ones. Just to mention a few, I could not find the Jewell oil painting of Lincoln; the original dispatches that hung outside General Van Cleve's headquarters in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, announcing the assassination of Lincoln [These had been acquired by Oldroyd. He had been stationed there in 1865, and this is where he heard of Lincoln's assassination.]; the knife used at Petersen House to probe Lincoln's wound; the candle and mustard plaster used at Petersen House. [I have since found out that the descendants of Willie Clark have the candle and mustard plaster. They had given them to Oldroyd and they were on display in the early Ford's Theatre Museum, but they were returned to the Clark family members.] I was unable to find the bedspread from the bed in Petersen's House. The Petersen heirs had it and just recently sold it to someone in the Midwest. It had been proven to be of the period, but is it the one used that night to cover Lincoln? There seems to be some question about that.

And speaking of the Petersens, there is a book out called *Lincoln's Last Battleground*, written by the great-great-grandson of William Petersen. It is a collection of family recollections of the night of April 14, 1865. According to the author, Mr. Petersen, one of his daughters, and a son were at home when Lincoln was brought in and they played minor roles that night. The daughter tried to console Mrs. Lincoln, and Mrs. Lincoln gave her a pin for her kindness. The son rubbed Lincoln's feet as he lay dying. But according to the 1967 furnishing report by George Olszewski, no member of the Petersen family was in close contact with the Lincolns that night. Getting back to the Lincoln artifacts, I could not find the blood-stained boards from the Garrett house.

On our early Booth tours, we would meet a lady named Maude Motley. She used to tell us the Garrett boys would chase the girls with the blood-stained boards from the Garrett house. Could these be the boards Oldroyd collected? At the turn of the century, when Oldroyd was writing his book, *The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*, he walked the Booth escape route, visiting all the sites. He certainly went to Garrett's and maybe found out about the boards.

I could not find the lock of Booth's hair, but there were locks of Lincoln's and Mrs. Lincoln's hair. These are presently on display at Ford's.

On April 14, when Lincoln left the White House to go to Ford's, he was stopped by a steward. He explained that two gents had been waiting at the White House for some time to see the President in order to obtain pass from him for them to pass through Union lines and on to Petersburg, Virginia. Lincoln obligingly wrote a hasty note "no pass is necessary now to authorize anyone to go and return from Petersburg and Richmond. People go and return just as they did before the war." The steward kept the note written by Lincoln and verbally passed on the message to the two men. Later after Lincoln's death, the steward convinced the doctor to let him have a lock of Lincoln's hair. The note and the hair were framed together and displayed by Oldroyd in the Petersen House and are on display in Ford's today.

Many of the funeral wreaths, crosses, flowers, etcetera, were saved and some are on display at Ford's today but a good many fell away to dust.

There are 1,500 magazines and newspapers in the collection and when I saw them, they had dwindled down to very few and most were in bad condition. Only several dozen copies of the original 350 sermons delivered at Lincoln's death collected by Oldroyd remained.

There are some intriguing entries in Oldroyd's handwritten list, such as: journalist "Manton Marble's famous letter to Abraham Lincoln;" A volume of *Old Guard*, the vilest opposer of Lincoln's administration that was ever published in the Northern states, and which was forcibly suppressed; a pamphlet entitled *The Lincoln Catechism*. Other intriguing pieces of Oldroyd's collection are a small wooden cross, tipped in gold and said to be made from a rail split Lincoln split and a wooden desk with a black marble top. The desk was inscribed "Let Man Be Free! The mighty word he spoke was not his own, The Spirit of the highest stirred, His mortal lips alone." In 1875, Oldroyd went to New Salem and purchased the Caleb Carmen house for $10. This is where Lincoln lived when he was postmaster here. Oldroyd was planning on moving the cabin to Springfield, but before he could it was destroyed in a windstorm and the wood removed by the people to use as firewood. All that remained was the sill of the door. Undaunted, Oldroyd used the sill as legs for his desk, and he got John Greenleaf Whittier to write the verse. Are these still around? If they are, it may take some hunting to find them. They can't be located now.

Without Mr. Oldroyd, there might not have been a Lincoln Museum at Ford's Theatre. It was due to his perseverance and persuading the government to own his collection that the museum was created. Ultimately, the 1968 restoration of Ford's was done because people in Congress had begun to realize the collections' importance. Not to mention the fact, the museum drew a lot of interested visitors.

We can certainly appreciate the Lincoln manuscripts that the big five Lincoln collectors acquired, but we have to thank Mr. Oldroyd for collecting the objects that Lincoln used personally. These everyday items such as his furniture, clothing, the inkwell he used at the White House, the rails he split, and the books he read give us a glimpse into the personal life of Lincoln, the man as well as the President.

****

The Lincoln Rocker

By Joan Chaconas
Reprinted from *The Surratt Courier*, July 1987

"Yes, that was the real rocker in the box Lincoln sat in that night, with blood stains on the back of it," and "they carried his body across the street to that house," whereupon a finger was pointed in the direction of the restaurant across the street. This is the conversation I overheard once while standing in front of Ford's Theatre. It's started me wondering—how many visitors to Ford's realize that the Lincoln rocker, and almost everything else that meets the eye, are reproductions!? This fact is pointed out by the National Park Service guides during their most informative talks, but if one misses the talk, there is no way to tell the real from that which is recreated.

The "real" rocker referred to is currently on view in the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan, and has never been displayed in Ford's Theatre. The darkish stains, which some people mistake for blood, are there most likely as a result of not using an "antimacassar." [Editor's Note: Some people call them doilies.] Lincoln was, of course, taken across the street to the Petersen House, which is next door to restaurant. Again, do visitors know that Corporal James Tanner once roomed in the building that now houses the restaurant? Tanner was trained in phonography, the forerunner of shorthand, and offered to take down the statements given to Stanton by the various witnesses of the activity at Ford's Theatre on the night of April 14, 1865.

After Lincoln's death, Ford's Theatre was closed to further theatrical performances. The building was purchased by the government and, by December of 1865, had been gutted, rebuilt, and was being used as the Army Medical Museum. The contents of Lincoln's box (boxes 7 & 8) were turned over to the War Department to be held and used as material evidence. After about a year with the War Department, the items were then relegated to a dusty storage area in the basement of the Smithsonian. They remained there until 1921, when Mrs. Blanche Chapman Ford, widow of Harry Clay Ford, sought the return of her husband's property, namely the Lincoln rocker. Harry Clay, John T. Ford's brother, had removed the rocker from his room over at the over the Star Saloon and had placed it in the box for Lincoln's comfort.

By 1929, after much correspondence, the government, acting under the precedent that the property of Jeff Davis had been returned to his heirs, returned the rocker to Mrs. Ford. She in turn offered the chair up for auction at the American Art Association, Anderson Galleries in New York City. The rocker was purchased $2,400 by Israel Sack, a Boston antiques dealer who worked as an agent for Henry T. Ford (no relation to the Fords of Ford's Theatre). The chair went into the Henry T. Ford Foundation and was displayed for a while at the courthouse in Dearborn, Michigan. Today, as previously stated, it is on display in the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn and approximately 950,000 visitors view it annually, along with the rest of Ford's vast collection of Americana.

During the 1960s, Ford's Theatre underwent a $2,000,000 renovation to restore the theater as it was on the night of April 14, 1865, under the direction of Interior Department historian George Olszewski, the results of which you see today.

Basically, the restoration was done from Matthew Brady photographs taken shortly after the tragedy. The Interior Department contacted the Ford Museum in hopes that they would return the Lincoln rocker when they were informed of the restoration, but they could not be persuaded. That meant a reproduction rocker was necessary.

Among the many names submitted to Olszewski for consideration, the Carlton McLendon Furniture Company in Montgomery, Alabama, was determined to be the best qualified. At first McLendon refused the task, balking at signing a contract. He said "I've been in business for 30 years and I have never yet signed a contract. Somebody tells me they want something; I build it, deliver, send an invoice, and they pay me. That is the end of it." McLendon finally agreed to make the reproduction rocker at no charge "…just as a gesture to my government." But the government, true to its red tape image, said they didn't work that way and that McLendon had to charge them!

Since the original chair was not available for measurements, McLendon was obliged to use enlargements made from Brady's original negatives. The rocker is "an exact duplicate of the original, made of walnut and covered with red damask,…with every dimension and carving detail accurate to a tolerance closer than one sixteenth of an inch."

The company also duplicated the Mary Todd Lincoln chair, restored the original sofa that Major Rathbone was seated upon that night, and made reproductions of the two additional straight back chairs in the box.

The newly restored theater was dedicated on January 21, 1968, and the McLendons were among the invited guests. *The Washington Post* gave a complete rundown on the persistent research applied to Ford's restoration and, of course, told of McLendon's work on the reproduction furniture. As a result of this and several ensuing television programs and interviews, the McLendons found themselves receiving many orders for both the Lincoln rocker and the Mary Todd Lincoln chair.