

Illinois History and Lincoln Collections

Undoubtedly, the most important and most welcome change in the fortunes of the Library's Illinois History and Lincoln Collections (IHLC) occurred on February 16, 2015, when Krista Gray joined me in staffing the unit. For two full years before that day, I had "held the fort" on my own. With quiet tactfulness and remarkable efficiency, Krista has revamped the unit's website, handled numerous scanning requests, and undertaken to identify and list the work that we need to do to make dozens of manuscript collections accessible. It has been a joy to have her as a colleague.

We are of course both conscious of the marked decline in the number of onsite users of the unit, as is the case for most units of the Library. However, this drop has been partly offset by the flow of phone, postal, and e-mail questions which Krista and I regularly answer. I have for years kept a log that documents in detail my time at my desk, which with few exceptions averages more than ten hours every day except Sunday throughout the year.

A few projects may serve to illustrate this work, the variety and unpredictability of which sustains my interest in it. A year ago, I initiated an exhibit in the Rare Book and Manuscript Library (RBML) to commemorate the sesquicentennial of Lincoln's assassination. Prepared by Library conservators and mounted by RBML, the exhibit ran from February 11 to May 4, and apparently served the purpose. I only regret that a number of choice exhibit items were acquired too late to include, that the head of a Lincoln bust broke off as it was enroute from IHLC to the exhibit venue (although the pieces were later reconnected by a Spurlock Museum conservator), and that the leading authority on the Lincoln funeral in Springfield cancelled his appearance.

Work on the unit's Lincoln collections continues to interest me. For the Lincoln Studies Center which is editing the writings of William H. Herndon, Lincoln's law partner, I discovered a cache of documents that had been separated from the papers of Robert Todd Lincoln, the President's son. By finally processing the papers of Harlan Hoyt Horner and Henrietta Calhoun Horner, I made it possible to trace the development of the Library's Lincoln Room, which is now an integral part of IHLC.

The unit's collections facilitate research in Illinois history as well as in Lincoln studies, and I am repeatedly surprised by the variety of questions for which they are useful. For example, the papers of Henry I. Green, who formulated the "pension" provision of the Illinois Constitution of 1970, were cited as decisive in the Illinois Supreme Court's recent decision on that matter. At the same time, I am disappointed now and then when researchers fail to use sources that I point out as pertinent, such as papers of Fr. Martin Mangan on labor disputes in Decatur in the mid-1990s; letters, 1938-1999, of William

Maxwell, editor of *The New Yorker*, or even photographs of Marilyn Monroe at the Bement centennial in 1955. Enough for now.

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