

Lincoln Legends Part II – Robber's Cave

Living in Lincoln Nebraska was really cool; it was interesting to be in the western part of the midwest and away from the Great Lakes region – there are differences both in culture and in topography. The story of Robber's Cave in Lincoln interested me for a few reasons, but especially for the wild-west themes; sandstone bluffs, outlaw hideouts – ok, so I've eaten dinner at one of Al Capone's old hideouts in the Chicago area which is now a steakhouse, but I was talking Jesse James-type outlaws... Hmm, interesting, old Lincoln had outlaws, and old Chicago had gangsters, there's one comparison...

Back from the minor tangent and onto Robber's Cave – the entrance is a now a sandstone bluff located behind a Subway restaurant. We did get a chance to visit it and found it quite easily, but by 2002 when we were there, it had been sealed. In the 1970's, there was a little old lady who would open up Robber's Cave for explorers who paid the admission fee. You would then follow her down a small rickety staircase and be on your own to explore the cave. I've read various reports on the internet about people who grew up on Lincoln and used to go down into the cave all the time – one person even talks of having kids' birthday parties down there! There are tunnels, rooms, a well, and even a natural fireplace with a chimney! There are also legends of western outlaws (like Jesse James, supposedly, though his presence at the cave hasn't been proven) that used to use Robber's Cave as a hideout to count their loot and evade law enforcement after robbing trains, stage coaches, etc. Before the outlaws took over, it's said that Native Americans used the cave for spiritual ceremonies. Robber's Cave also carries legends of being a stop on the Underground Railroad, an underground brewery, and a tunnel that connected the state penitentiary

with the State Hospital for the Insane. Hmm, that almost sounds TOO haunted to be true – supposedly patients and convicts would use the tunnels to escape. Then again, when we were there, I did note the State Penitentiary within view of the entrance to Robber's Cave. And speaking of Nebraska's death row, I'll note that NE is the only state in the country to still have the electric chair as the exclusive means of carrying out the death penalty.

But anyway, Robber's Cave is a neat place, steeped in many decades of history. And the reason I'm bringing this up now? [Robber's Cave is for sale!](#) Well, at least the lot that includes the sealed entrance is for sale – I'm not sure if that then entitles the owner to free roam of all the caves or not if they continue onto other parcels underground. If you'd like more details about the legends of Robber's Cave, [this is an interesting read](#).

Not For The Faint Of Heart

After we got back from our trip to New York City a month ago, I did a bunch of research about September 11, 2001. I guess seeing the World Trade Center site in person piqued my curiosity about some of the details of that dreadful day. Some of the websites I found with information about the disaster were intriguing, and I'd like to share them – they are the stories of survivors of the World Trade Center. But I warn you, the following depictions are very graphic, very disturbing, and most of all, very tragic.

[John Schroeder of Engine 10](#)

[Witness Accounts from inside the north tower](#)

A Time Capsule – Literally

And while I'm on the subject of time capsules, the following article about hidden history really caught my eye:

(CNN) by Kelly Marshall – A long-hidden message has been discovered inside Abraham Lincoln's pocket watch, the Smithsonian's Museum of American History announced Tuesday.

Watchmaker Jonathan Dillon was repairing Lincoln's watch in April 1861 when he heard about the attack on Fort Sumter, South Carolina, and wrote a short message on the metal inside the watch, the Smithsonian said.

There it remained, unseen for almost 150 years, it said.

In a 1906 interview with The New York Times, Dillon reported that as soon as he heard the news about the first shots of the Civil War, he unscrewed the dial of the watch and wrote on the metal, "The first gun is fired. Slavery is dead. Thank God we have a President who at least will try."

The actual message that the museum found differs from the watchmaker's recollection. It says, "Jonathan Dillon, April 13-1861, Fort Sumpter [sic] was attacked by the rebels on the above date J Dillon, April 13-1861, Washington, thank God we have a government, Jonth Dillon."

According to the Smithsonian, it was not unusual for professional watchmakers to record their work inside a watch.

"Lincoln never knew of the message he carried in his pocket," said Brent D. Glass, director of the National Museum of American History.

The museum decided to open the watch after being contacted by

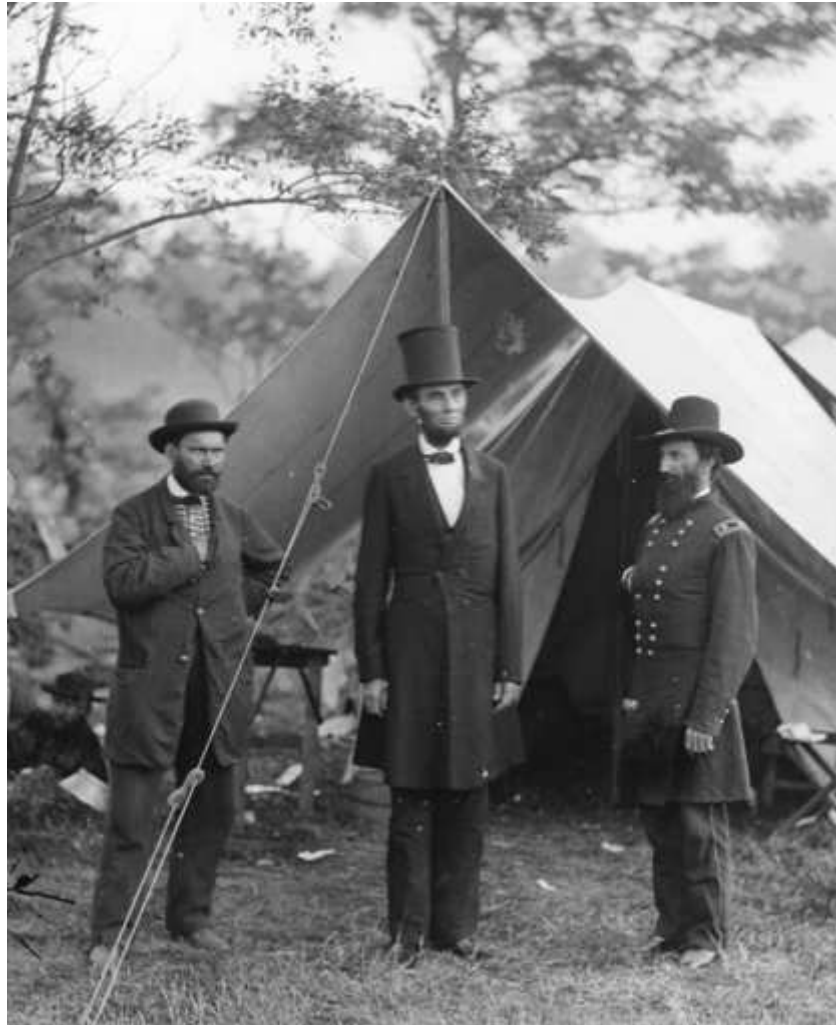
the watchmaker's great-great-grandson, Doug Stiles, who had heard about the message Dillon said he had inscribed and wanted to see if it was really there.

I think it's really cool that this window into history was only recently discovered. If we had known about it all along, I don't think the message would carry as much significance. The fact that the message's existence was the subject of a family legend only adds to the mystique, and it's a good thing the museum decided to follow up on the great-great-grandson's tip!

Happy Birthday Abe!

Today is Abraham Lincoln's birthday. The 16th president of the United States would be 200 years old today if he was still alive. Unfortunately, an assassin's bullet cut his remarkable life short at the age of 56 – not that he would still be alive today, but his assassination was still very tragic of course. Because this is such a milestone “birthday”, Lincoln has been in the news a lot lately. I learned something really interesting about his widow, Mary Todd. Ten years after Lincoln's death, Mary was hospitalized in a mental institution for being delusional and for spending too much money. I guess her delusions were caused by a sleep medication she was taking, but intriguing to me is the fact that the institution where she was hospitalized was in Batavia Illinois – a stone's throw from where I spent most of my childhood. Next time I'm in the area, I'm going to have to take a look at the place – it's now apartment buildings, but I think it would still be cool to see the land that used to be the mental institution which housed Mary Todd Lincoln.

Another interesting Lincoln tidbit; I found this picture on the internet, and I thought it was so cool I had to share it. It captures Lincoln in real life, not just posing for a portrait as many people are used to seeing him. The man on his left was his bodyguard, Allan Pinkerton, and the man on the right was Major Gen. John A. McClernand.



Presidential In-Laws

In-laws have a bad stigma in our country, to say the least. From sayings like, "You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your relatives" or "When you marry your spouse, you're marrying her whole family" to classic TV shows which depict

the dreaded mother-in-law as a horrible threat or consequence for a character's bad behavior (The Honeymooner's, Bewitched, The Flintstones, to name just a few), in-laws definitely have a bad rap. Scenes from these shows flooded my brain recently when I read the following article on cnn.com – seems even the leaders of the free world have had problematic situations with their mothers-in-law. The reason the article was published is because apparently Barrack Obama's mother-in-law, wife Michelle's mother Marian Robinson, might move with the new first family to Washington. So will Mr. Obama's situation be comparative to poor Harry Truman, whose mother-in-law refused to call him anything but Mr. Truman? Or will it be more like Dwight Eisenhower, who got along famously with his mother-in-law – in a good way? In recognition of Inauguration Day, read the following article for some interesting historical lessons about the complex familial relationships formed as a result of the union of two people:

From cnn.com, by David Holzel

(Mental Floss) – President-Elect Obama's mother-in-law will be moving to Washington with the first family, at least temporarily, his transition team has confirmed. Marian Robinson will be the latest in a line of presidential in-laws who, for good or ill, lived under the same roof as the president.

President Dwight Eisenhower and his mother-in-law, Elivera Doud, pose for pictures with some of the grandchildren.

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Here are four stories that confirm the old truism: While America can choose its president, the president can't choose his in-laws.

1. Ulysses S. Grant and 'The Colonel'

You would think that the Civil War was settled at Appomattox,

and no question of its outcome would have been raised in the White House of Ulysses S. Grant, who, after all, was the general who won the war.

But you would be wrong, because living with Ulysses and Julia Grant was the president's father-in-law. Colonel Frederick Dent (his rank seems to have been self-selected) was an unreconstructed Confederate, a St. Louis businessman and slaveholder who, when his daughter Julia went to the Executive Mansion early in 1869, decided to relocate there as well.

The Colonel didn't hesitate to make himself at home. When his daughter received guests, he sat in a chair just behind her, offering anyone within earshot unsolicited advice. Political and business figures alike got a dose of the Colonel's mind as they waited to meet with President Grant.

When the president's father, Jesse Grant, came from Kentucky on one of his regular visits to Washington, the White House turned into a Civil War reenactment. According to "First Families: The Impact of the White House on Their Lives", by Bonnie Angelo, Jesse Grant preferred to stay in a hotel rather than sleep under the same roof as the Colonel.

And when the two old partisans found themselves unavoidably sitting around the same table in the White House, they avoided direct negotiations by using Julia and her young son, named for the president's father, as intermediaries. Betty Boyd Caroli writes in "First Ladies": "In the presence of the elder Grant, Frederick Dent would instruct Julia to 'take better care of that old gentleman [Jesse Grant]. He is feeble and deaf as a post and yet you permit him to wander all over Washington alone.' And Grant replied [to his grandson and namesake], 'Did you hear him? I hope I shall not live to become as old and infirm as your Grandfather Dent.'"

The Colonel remained in the White House – irascible and unrepentant – until his death, at age 88, in 1873.

2. Harry S Truman and the Mother-in-Law from Heck

Harry Truman and Bess Wallace met as children. He was a farm boy; she was the well-heeled granddaughter of Independence, Missouri's Flour King. When they married in 1919, Truman was a struggling haberdasher, and Bess's mother, Madge Wallace, thought Bess had made a colossal social faux pas. Until she died in 1952, Madge Wallace never changed her mind about Harry Truman. Her Bess had married way below her station.

Madge had plenty of opportunities to let her son-in-law know it. The newlyweds moved into the Wallace mansion in Independence, and the three lived together under the same roof until the end of Madge's life.

When Harry Truman was elected senator, "Mother Wallace," as Truman judiciously called her, moved with her daughter and son-in-law to Washington. In the family's apartment, she shared a bedroom with the Trumans' daughter, Margaret. And when Truman became president, she moved with them into the White House, where she cast her cold eye on the new commander-in-chief.

"Why would Harry run against that nice Mr. Dewey?" she wondered aloud, as Truman was fighting for his political life in the 1948 presidential race, according to "First Mothers" by Bonnie Angelo. And when Truman fired Gen. Douglas MacArthur for insubordination, Mother Wallace was scandalized. "Imagine a captain from the National Guard [Truman] telling off a West Point general!"

In December 1952, shortly before Truman's term ended, Madge Wallace died, at age 90. For the 33 years they lived together, she never called her son-in-law anything but "Mr. Truman" to his face.

3. Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Mother-in-Law of the Year

If Truman's story sounds like the set-up for a film noir, his

successor's relationship with his mother-in-law might have been a Technicolor musical.

Elivera Mathilda Carlson Doud, Mamie Eisenhower's mother, was "a witty woman with a tart tongue," Time magazine wrote, and Dwight Eisenhower thought she was a hoot. "She refuted every mother-in-law joke ever made," Time wrote. There was no question that she would join her daughter and son-in-law in the White House.

Ike called her "Min," the name of a character in the Andy Gump comic strip. Ike and Min "constituted a mutual admiration society, and each took the other's part whenever a family disagreement would arise," said Eisenhower's son, John. The New York Times observed, "The president frequently looks around him sharply, and inquires, 'Where's Min?'"

Widowed shortly before Eisenhower became president, Min spent the winters in the White House and summers at her home in Denver. It was while visiting his mother-in-law's home that Eisenhower suffered a heart attack in 1955. Two years later, in failing health, Min returned permanently to Denver. She died in 1960, at age 82.

4. Benjamin Harrison and the Reverend Doctor

Benjamin Harrison's father-in-law, John Witherspoon Scott, bore a double title: "reverend doctor."

Scott was born in Pennsylvania in 1800, did post-graduate work at Yale and took a professorship in mathematics and science at Miami University, in Ohio. He was also a Presbyterian minister and an outspoken abolitionist. The reverend doctor was rumored to have shielded runaway slaves in his home as a stop on the Underground Railroad. Whatever the truth, Miami University dismissed him for his anti-slavery beliefs.

He accepted a post at Farmer's College, a prep school in Cincinnati, where he became a mentor of a student named

Benjamin Harrison. During his visits to the Scott home, Harrison became friendly with the reverend doctor's daughter, Caroline.

Young Harrison spent so many evenings at the Scotts' home that he got the nickname "the pious moonlight dude," according to "The Complete Book of the Presidents" by William A. DeGregorio. He and Caroline were married in 1853 at the bride's house. The reverend doctor officiated.

John Witherspoon Scott later became a clerk in the pension office of the interior department. He gave up the position when Harrison was elected president in 1888. A widower since 1876, Scott moved into the White House with his daughter and their family.

It was the president's custom to lead the family in a half-hour of Bible reading and prayer after breakfast, Anne Chieko Moore and Hester Anne Hale wrote in "Benjamin Harrison: Centennial President." When the president was absent, his father-in-law took his place.

Caroline Harrison died in October 1892, two weeks before her husband lost the presidential election. Her father died the next month, at age 92. An obituary described John Witherspoon Scott as "a man of wonderful physical vigor, tall, broad chested and well preserved mentally."