

REPORT ON THE OBSERVANCE OF THE LINCOLN SESQUICENTENNIAL IN WASHINGTON  
STATE FOR THE YEAR 1959

The Washington State Historical Society was requested by Governor Albert D. Rosellini to coordinate the celebration of this important Sesquicentennial during 1959. No special commission or group was appointed to work on this objective, but the Director and staff of the State Historical Society focussed their energies upon the problem of working out a statewide observance.

ADVISORS:

The Director of the historical society drew upon the advice of several experts in the field. These were: Judge Matthew W. Hill, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Washington; Mr. Robert Hitchman, a member of the Board of Curators of the Washington State Historical Society; Dr. Norman Thomas, professor of History at the College of Puget Sound; Mr. Joel E. Ferris, President of the Eastern Washington Historical Society. Each gentleman made a particular contribution in his special field of knowledge.

SPECIAL LINCOLN CELEBRATIONS:

The Washington State Historical Society presented "AN EVENING WITH MATTHEW BRADY", a special lecture, featuring original slides from its Brady Collection. Dr. Norman Thomas, expert on the life and important achievements of Matthew Brady, was the speaker. A capacity audience turned out for the lecture. Many requests for a repeat performance will probably result in rescheduling this show next year.

Many of the county and local historical societies of the state had special Lincoln programs at the request of the state historical society.

The Washington State Legislature met in Joint Session on Lincoln's birthday, February 12th, 1959. Judge Matthew W. Hill addressed the Session on the life of Abraham Lincoln. A full Memorial Program featured music and other talks by members of both Houses of the State Legislature.

STAMPS ON COVERS:

The Washington State Historical Society used a special imprinted envelope throughout the year which read: "WASHINGTON OBSERVANCE OF THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN SESQUICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION SPONSORED BY THE WASHINGTON STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, State Historical Building, Tacoma, Washington."

ESSAY CONTEST:

The Washington State Historical Society sponsored participation in the national Essay Contest featuring as its theme "REFLECTIONS WHILE STANDING BEFORE THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL". The name of the winner was transmitted to the American Association for State and Local History for competition with other state winners at the national level. Entries from all over the state were screened and judged for this contest; The State Historical Society plans to bring the state winner to Tacoma for a special presentation ceremony at which time the winner will be given an engraved medal bearing the portrait of Abraham Lincoln. The medal was designed by James Wehn, eminent Washington sculptor.



PUBLICITY:

Newspapers, radio and television stations gave wide publicity to Lincoln releases. Two stories which received special attention were the release concerning the Lincoln Essay Contest and the Abraham Lincoln Census. (More on this second story to follow in this report.) Announcements of the Matthew Brady show, as well as publicity concerning the acquisitions of manuscript and pictures by the State Historical Society were well covered by the press, radio and television media.

RADIO AND TELEVISION:

A program on Channel 13, Tacoma TV, called CITY IN ACTION, featured a panel discussion on activities of the Washington State Historical Society with particular emphasis upon the Lincoln Sesquicentennial Celebration. Murray Morgan, Washington novelist, George Smith, assistant to the City Manager of Tacoma, Keith Goodman, local historian, and Bruce Le Roy, Director of the State Historical Society, participated.

PUBLICATIONS:

The quarterly issues of NEWS NOTES OF THE WASHINGTON STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY, a printed 8 page bulletin, carried continuous reports on the Lincoln Sesquicentennial with much space given over to the fine collections gathered by the Washington State Historical Society resulting from the Lincoln Census. (Copies attached to this report)

The Washington State Historical Society is compiling a report of the Lincoln Census, to be issued as its special contribution to the scholarly world for this significant year. The Lincoln Census was a project carried out by the State Historical Society which attempted to locate all Lincoln or related items held in the state in private or non-institutional hands. Many collections of real importance were brought to light. The actual Lincoln items were few. However, such collections of papers as those of William Burr, self-styled inventor of the first iron-clad ship, an early submarine and floating dry-dock, plus correspondence with Cabinet officers and Naval personnel during Lincoln's administration were gathered by the State Historical Society. Another collection of importance was the papers of William Hunter, Assistant Secretary of State under nine Presidents (including Lincoln). The collection included letters from all nine Presidents. According to the Hunter papers, William Hunter served as Acting President the day of Lincoln's assassination. This signal honor supposedly resulted from the fact that Andrew Johnson was unable to take the oath of office due to an overindulgence in "spirits", the Secretary of State had been attacked and was unable to serve, so William Hunter, Assistant Secretary of State, became Acting President for one day!

EXHIBITS:

Special exhibits at the Museum of the Washington State Historical Society featured cases of Abraham Lincoln letters and artifacts; Civil War weapons exhibit; Civil War letters, maps, pictures. These were all tied in to the Sesquicentennial theme.

Many of the local historical societies around the state had similar exhibits of Lincoln and Civil War items during the year.

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BML:MFMc