



Abraham Lincoln's Health

General Health

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

UNION TROOPS IN NEW MEXICO.

B. T. New York Aug 13, 1861
**THE REBEL LOSS AT BULL
RUN.**

HEALTH OF PRESIDENT LINCOLN.

New York, 12th. A Washington special despatch to the Post says that two regiments have been raised in New Mexico for its defence; one, if not both, will be mounted troops. The Colonels are St. Vrain and Espina; Lieut. Colonels, Kit Carson and Minuel Chavey. It is intended to raise two more.

The statement that Prince Napoleon had an interview with General McClellan after returning from Manassas, is entirely false.

Beauregard's official report states that the rebel loss, killed and wounded, is 1470.

The President is in excellent health and will not leave Washington this year.

FROM THE CAPITAL.

**Very Dangerous Illness of
President Lincoln.**

**What Would Happen, if
he Died.**

LATEST FROM THE ARMY.

**General Kilpatrick Under a
Cloud.**

ANOTHER GREAT RAIN STORM.

**The Text of the New Gold
Bill.**

**Penalties for Gambling in that
Metal.**

SECRETARY CHASE'S SCHEME UNFOLDED.

**How he Expects to Get Back to Specie
Payments.**

THE PRESIDENTIAL CALDROX.

**Little Mac and Old Abe to be
Ruled Out.**

&c., &c., &c.

Our Sunday Morning Special Dispatches.

WASHINGTON, April 16.

PRESIDENT LINCOLN DANGEROUSLY ILL.

There is a good deal of excitement in Washington to-day, touching the dangerous condition of President Lincoln's health. He has never been quite well since his attack of the smallpox, and recently he has been very unwell. To-day, there are grave fears respecting his condition. Of course, this state of things has started the political gossipers. It is alleged that men of Mr. Lincoln's lank, lean, habit of body, do not live long, and that his death should take no one by surprise. Should Mr. Hamlin become President, it would lead to the entire change of the Administration. Fremont would be put at the head of our armies. Butler would be made Secretary of War. Seward would give place to Sumner in the State Department; negroes would be made generals; and an ultra-abolition policy would be carried out. There is intense eagerness to hear how Mr. Lincoln is getting on.

HEALTH AND PHYSIQUE.

Contrast Cited Between Washington and Lincoln.

NEW YORK—The editor of the New York Medical Journal and Medical Record calls attention to the fact that good physique and health do not necessarily go together. He illustrates the point by taking the lives of Washington and Lincoln as examples.

Both Washington and Lincoln, he points out, were of large build. The former, according to the letter which he wrote when ordering a suit of clothes from his London tailor, was "six feet high and proportionately made—if anything, rather slender than thick for a person of that height." The "best weight of his best days" was 220 pounds. Lincoln was four inches taller and weighed 180 pounds, was of narrower chest and less erect. Both lived, in youth, much the same out-of-door life—Lincoln having the ruder existence. Both were very muscular, being the champions of sport in their respective days and localities. Both were robust in mental qualities as in physical strength and endurance. Yet when it came to resistance to bacterial infection, the contrast was as remarkable as was the comparison in other respects.

Washington, at sixteen, had malaria "to an extremity." While in the Barbados with his brother, who was suffering from consumption, he contracted smallpox, which scarred him for the rest of his days. Soon after returning from Barbados he was taken with "violent pleurisy" which reduced him "very low," and which is said to have caused the deformity of his chest.

Again, in the Braddock campaign, he suffered from malaria, and in 1757 was obliged to leave his command and return home on account of dysentery. He had fever for four months, and, believing that he had become a victim of consumption, looked forward to "approaching decay." Three years later he was again ill with malaria. He had several attacks of "influenza," and in one of these, during the presidency, his life was despaired of. For nearly six weeks he was unable to transact business. Again after leaving office he suffered from malaria. His latest illness was quinsy contracted from exposure to cold and wet. Washington suffered also from inflamed gums and carious teeth, and by the age of sixty-three he had lost all these troublesome organs.

In contrast, Lincoln is said never to have been sick, although he would have been considered, at a glance, of inferior physique.

It may be of interest in this time of threatened return of smallpox that, when the disease attacked the continental army, Washington endeavored to have the assembly of Virginia repeal its law against inoculation for this disease. He also urged his wife to secure protection against the disease by this means.

Both Washington and Lincoln were temperate in all things. Both, but especially Washington, led the out-of-door life, but neither fine physique nor temperance can take the place of bacterioidal properties, says the writer, inherent or acquired, in the tissues, when it comes to dealing with invading microbic armies.

How To Keep Well

By Dr. W. A. Evans

Questions pertinent to hygiene, sanitation, and prevention of disease, or matters of general interest will be answered in this column. Where space will not permit, or the subject is not suitable, letters will be personally answered, subject to proper limitations, and where a stamped addressed envelope is inclosed. Dr. Evans will not make diagnosis or prescribe for individual disease. Requests for such service cannot be answered.

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LINCOLN FACED FACTS

LINCOLN, a rapidly growing, ungainly youth, given to fits of mental depression, had very few opportunities for formal education. But, in the opinion of Dr. Stewart Paton of Princeton university, he had a far better education. He says:

"In thousands of ways it was strongly, but unconsciously, impressed on the mind of the young Lincoln that life is a process of adjustment, that progress is slow, and that the person who does not face elementary, biological facts squarely, soon gets into serious difficulty. . . . Circumstances forced Lincoln to learn how to live successfully in a real world.

"If Lincoln had not acquired a fund of information in regard to biological facts, and had been forced by circumstances to accept the academic privileges of the day, the Gettysburg speech he might then have written would undoubtedly have attracted as little attention as the oration of the Harvard graduate, delivered on that same memorial occasion.

"Lincoln was square in his dealings with men, not only because of natural predisposition, but also as the result of having practiced the difficult art of squaring up his accounts with life each day.

"Lincoln had an extraordinary opportunity to study man as he is. The practice he had in analyzing the personality of his friends and acquaintances at very close range gave him a very useful kind of information in regard to his own temperament and character.

"He studied human behavior and the reactions of living beings. He realized that life is a struggle to adjust to present conditions and not those in a remote past, or in an anticipated future.

"He realized that honesty in meeting difficult situations paid

and, also, that it did not pay to form the habit of substituting fictions or phrases for facts and concrete situations."

By way of contrast, Dr. Paton describes the behavior and personality reactions of two school boys.

The first was the son of a hard headed business man without healthy idealism, and of a high strung, artistic, intemperately idealistic mother. The boy, early in life, began to dodge realities.

To get rid of hunger sensations, he cried until fed. To get out of other unpleasant situations and to get his way, he developed the habit of having tantrums.

In school and college he developed a lot of defense reactions that made success, or even happiness in life impossible for him.

The second was the son of high strung, high caste parents. He was not robust, and, presently, as a defense reaction, he, in a superior way, developed the habit of sticking to his books while the other fellows played.

He would brood over slights. He developed grouches. He became conceited, domineering and arrogant.

To hide his own grouches, he became interested in social reform, and soon became an enthusiastic radical.

The above statements, and many more of the same general type, are taken from the "Essentials of Education," written by Dr. Paton. His purpose is to impress on teachers the importance of having pupils assume a proper attitude toward their fellows.

Behavior, personality and character are more important than the acquisition of knowledge.

Little is gained for a pupil unless he goes out of school with a healthy body, free from bad habits, with a healthy mind, free from bad mental habits, and with the right attitude toward the problems of life.

Lincoln's Health

The Ladies Home Journal
May 1927

President Lincoln's physician was Surgeon-General J. K. Barnes, United States Army. He attended the President following the assassin's fatal shot. Mr. Lincoln was very abstemious in his habits and possessed great physical endurance. He was naturally cheerful and loved pleasant conversation, wit, anecdote and laughter. Beneath all this, however, ran a current of sadness and he was frequently subject to hours of depressed silence and introspection. He was a voracious reader, and while he never attended school more than six months in his whole life, by constant study and effort he had acquired a wonderful ability to speak and write in simple, homely language. He was skillful in the athletic games of the frontier and could hold his own with most opponents.

A Sense of Humor

THIS vigorous health, which he acquired through long hours of hard work in the open air, stood him in great stead during the severe trials of office. Mr. Lincoln was six feet four inches in height and weighed about one hundred and eighty pounds. With muscles hardened and nerves steadied by his early life, he entered the White House peculiarly fitted from the standpoint of physique for his arduous duties. The period of his service in the White House was never equaled in its demands upon the occupant in long hours, sleepless nights and heartbreaking disappointments. Mr. Lincoln's sense of humor was unquestionably a great factor in keeping up his spirit and preventing him from being crushed by his heavy responsibilities. To a visitor who protested

that he had not come to the White House to hear jokes, Mr. Lincoln explained: "If I couldn't tell these stories I should die."

Mr. Lincoln came to the Presidency without any executive experience except for a term as a village postmaster, and while he made many mistakes, his is the historical figure most universally loved. His predecessor in office, James Buchanan, came to the White House with a long record of public service and official training, having spent nearly forty years in the legislative, executive and diplomatic branches of the Government; and yet with all this experience his administration left behind a record of failure.

Lincoln's Last Wish

ON THE evening of April 14, 1865, Mr. Lincoln attended the performance of *Our American Cousin* at Ford's Theater on Tenth Street. He was accompanied by Mrs. Lincoln and two friends—Miss Harris, a daughter of Senator Ira Harris, of New York, and Major Henry R. Rathbone. Between the acts he was conversing with Mrs. Lincoln regarding some contemplated travels. "There is no place I should like so much to see as Jerusalem," he remarked to Mrs. Lincoln as the curtain rose again. These were his last words. As the play continued the assassin opened the door of the box and discharged a pistol at the head of the President from behind, the bullet penetrating the brain. Mr. Lincoln rose from his chair, but immediately sank back into it and lapsed into unconsciousness from which he never roused. He was carried to a small house on the opposite side of the street in order to spare him a ride over the cobblestones to the White House, and on the following morning at seven o'clock he breathed his last.

The bullet was discharged at close range and with terrific explosive effect into the brain. There was never any question as to the ultimate outcome, so that medical attention with any prospect of recovery was hopeless from the first. Surgeon-General Barnes of the Army, who attended the President, lived to be Mr. Garfield's physician, also, some sixteen years later, and rendered most devoted service to the President following Guiteau's crime. General Barnes died within two years after the death of Mr. Garfield.

NEW RECORD OF LINCOLN'S LIFE IS DISCOVERED

Personal Physician Was Southern Sympathizer.

New York.—[U.P.]—New historical facts about Abraham Lincoln have just come to light through the enterprise of Margaret Deland, who discovered that the wife of Lincoln's family physician, Dr. Robert Stone, had a considerable store of personal reminiscences which had never before been recorded. Mrs. Deland has begun the recording of these reminiscences in an article published by the Woman's Home Companion.

It is interesting to note that Lincoln's health, during his incumbency of the presidency, was in the hands of a physician who was generally regarded as a southern sympathizer. Dr. Stone's wife was, in fact, a cousin of Robert E. Lee, and it was even gossiped around Washington by southern sympathizers that Lincoln's kindness to Mrs. Stone was "an effort to ingratiate himself with Gen. Lee against the time when Lee should take Washington."

Can't Choose Patients.

The civil war was already under way when Lincoln first sent for Dr. Stone to come to the White House. Mrs. Stone was shocked by the summons. She felt that any connection between her family and Lincoln would be regarded by her confederate friends as a traitorous act against her cousin, Gen. Lee. But her husband decided to go.

"A doctor can't choose his patients," Dr. Stone explained to her. "I don't know why he wants me, because he must know my southern affiliations."

Another guest in the house, a rabid southern sympathizer, urged Dr. Stone to go. "It's the opportunity of your life," this man remarked. "Go and kill him!"

But Lincoln's personality soon won over the hostile family. "My husband loved Lincoln, and couldn't see anything wrong with him, except his man-

ners," writes Mrs. Stone. "Of course the poor man had no manners."

When Lincoln died, the Stones were under suspicion. Mrs. Stone, to overcome that suspicion, bought all the crêpe she could find in the available stores, and covered the entire front of the doctor's house with it. She explained her action by saying: "It was known that I was Gen. Lee's cousin, and people had gone so mad with hate that I thought they might burn our house down."

When soldiers came to get Dr. Stone to go to Lincoln's bedside on the night of the assassination, there was some doubt as to whether the summons was an ordinary professional one, or an arrest with a drumhead court martial in prospect. Mrs. Stone ran down the steps of her house after the soldiers, and screamed at them, "Don't let any harm come to my husband!" Then, when the soldiers paid no attention, she stood weeping on the sidewalk, sobbing, "They will kill him! They will kill my husband, just because I am Lee's cousin! They are beasts, those Yankee soldiers!"

Not Wanted as Spy.

But it turned out that the doctor was not wanted as a spy or traitor, but in hopes that he would be able to alleviate the President's suffering.

The historical importance of Mrs. Deland's new effort is that it shows very clearly Lincoln's broadmindedness and tolerance, in employing as his personal physician a man whose affiliations with the enemy were very close and intimate. Lincoln judged Dr. Stone a man of simple honor, who would never take advantage of his contact with the White House, and when Lincoln reached a judgment of this kind, he invariably stood by it, through thick and thin.

YOUR HEALTH

By Herman N. Bundesen, M. D.

President of Chicago Board of Health, past president American Public Health Association, senior surgeon U. S. Public Health Service

SIMPLE LIVING AND EXERCISE

THE other night one of my youngsters was busily engaged in doing his homework—a floor talk he had to make on February 12, and all of a sudden he shot this question to me: "Dad, what was the one outstanding quality of Abraham Lincoln?" And without a moment's hesitancy my answer was "simplicity." for Lincoln ate simply, lived simply. There were no complexities or problems. He toiled, he sowed, he reaped, he studied, he learned, and he was rewarded by the greatest honor that can come to any American.

* * *

Lincoln grew up in the great outdoors; he was a woodsman, a farmer; had great strength, unlimited physical energy because of the life he led. He was too busy, too close to poverty to waste his time, to waste his health through excesses, physical or mental.

The lesson from his life has been preached many times. All of you know it well. It is said that privation is one of life's greatest teachers. It helps us meet problems and solve them successfully. Then, we are better equipped to meet the next problem. Parents, who have children to rear, should remember the fact well. Too many children are pampered, spoiled, given everything their hearts desire, and are left to do little for themselves. The modern Lincolns will grow up in homes where self-reliance and self-discipline are taught; where children learn that life is not easy, either for the rich man's or poor man's son.

* * *

Lincoln's physical health was excellent. In spite of the enormous strain under which he lived, he continued to be well and strong in the later years of his life, able to give his full measure of physical and mental powers to the job in hand when it was so sorely needed.

Every individual's chances for succeeding in life are greatly improved when his health is good, because good health means energy and vigor to grapple with life's problems.

There are many nowadays who use up as much energy in living as Lincoln did, perhaps more, but they use it in the

wrong way—burning the candle at both ends, eating too much, worrying, getting too little sleep, too little exercise, dodging fresh air, indulging in excesses of all kinds, which take their measure of bodily strength but give nothing in return.

* * *

Lincoln taught us moderation, the benefits to mind and body which come with disciplined and purposeful living. The mind and body must be conserved, not wasted. If we build a reserve of resistance and strength, we can draw on it when life's problems bring extraordinary pressure on us.

Lincoln had the physical and mental resources that kept him physically fit, mentally alert, spiritually poised. We need only follow his simplicity and his grandeur of living also to reap many of the benefits he had from life.

Would it not be well for all of us to pause for just a moment on this Lincoln's natal day, take stock of ourselves and, above all, to rededicate our lives to renewed vigor, better health, and less abuse?

Tomorrow, Dr. Bundesen will discuss how to prevent sleeplessness in a child.

Answers to Health Queries

Q.—What is a floating kidney, and what causes it?

M. F. L.

A.—A floating kidney is a movable one. It may be due to an accident. In many instances, such a kidney causes no discomfort or disturbance. As a rule, no treatment is needed for a so-called floating kidney.

Q.—I am forty-three years old. My mouth is sore. What could cause this trouble?

MRS. G. G. S.

A.—Your trouble may be due to a form of anemia, which is a lack of coloring matter in the blood. It could also come from an infection of the mouth, such as trench mouth. Sometimes, during the change of life, soreness of the mouth occurs as the result of some nervous disturbance.

Dr. Bundesen is glad to answer inquiries from readers who send an addressed, stamped envelope with their questions. Address all letters to Dr. Bundesen in care of Post-Intelligencer, Seattle, Wash.

Load of Attrition

The burden of the Presidency in times of crisis is well-illustrated by the gradual but sure exhaustion of Lincoln. Horace Greeley wrote of the President looking weary and haggard under his tremendous responsibilities. Noah Brooks, who knew him in Illinois, said the change a few years had made was appalling.

Lincoln rarely complained, but he did speak out regarding the exhausting duties that confronted him day after day.

"I sometimes fancy," he said, "that every one of the numerous grist ground through here daily, from a Senator seeking a war with France down to a poor woman after a place in the Treasury Department, darted at me with thumb and finger, plucked out

their special piece of vitality and carried it off."

When urged to rest more, he replied, "The tired part is inside of me and out of reach."

—*Mr. President—How is Your Health?*, by Karl C. Wold, M. D.



Lincoln Lore

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Lincoln Had Smallpox At Gettysburg

It is not generally known that, when Abraham Lincoln delivered his Gettysburg Address on November 19, 1863, he was suffering from the early stages of a dread disease called smallpox. After a very busy day touring the battlefield, meeting people, taking part in the cemetery dedication and attending a political meeting, the President left Gettysburg about 7 P.M. on his special train for Washington, D. C. While enroute home, he became ill, and, while lying down in the drawing room of his railway coach, towels were placed on his forehead to relieve a severe headache. At first it was thought that Lincoln suffered from fatigue, but later his illness was diagnosed as a mild case of smallpox.

The medical doctors who examined the President preferred to call the disease varioloid, which is a mild form of smallpox acquired by the partially immune. Consequently the Executive Mansion was not quarantined, but it was turned into a kind of smallpox hospital, and White House staff members were advised to get vaccinated if they had not already done so. While the disease was described in light form, it held on longer than was expected. Lincoln spent a great deal of time in bed, and was attended by Dr. Robert King Stone, his family physician. The disease was accompanied by fever, and Lincoln suffered chiefly from severe pains in his head.

According to the chronological calendar, *Lincoln Day by Day*, 1861-1865, the President conducted business as usual on November 20th, although he may not have been feeling well. Upon being informed that he suffered a mild case of smallpox, he quipped the following day that, "Now I have something to give to everybody." On November 21st through November 25th, Lincoln, while up and down, carried a light work load, and is reported to have retired early on the 25th feeling unwell. The following day, November 26th, the President was confined to his sick room, and the next day he was forbidden by his physician from receiving visitors or interviewing members of his cabinet.

On November 26th, John Hay, the President's assistant secretary, made the following entry in his *diary*, "The President is sick in bed—bilious." It was on November 27th, that Lincoln

sent a pencilled note to William H. Seward about his condition:

"Hon Secretary of State I am improved but I cannot meet the cabinet today

A. Lincoln

Nov. 27, 1863"

On November 28th, the *Washington Star* informed its readers that, "The President is reported to be much better this morning," The *New York Herald*, on November 30th, reporting the news the day before, carried the statement that, "President Lincoln is much better to-day, and will be able to resume his official duties to-morrow or next day." Edward Bates wrote in his diary that the "President has been sick ever since Thursday (November 26th)." The *Chicago Tribune* of December 1st, reported that (Nov. 30th), "Lincoln (was) still confined to bed but resumes work on (his) message to Congress." On December 1st, the *Washington Star* carried the news that the "President is steadily recovering from his indisposition and it is not doubted that he will in a day or two be equal to the active resumption of his arduous duties." William E. Barton in his book *President Lincoln* made the statement: "Lincoln had to

be well by that time, for on December eighth Congress convened."

Some of the nation's newspapers magnified the nature and extent of Lincoln's illness which prompted the *London Spectator* to speculate on the effect of the war if the President's illness should prove terminal. According to Milton H. Shutes, *Lincoln And The Doctors*, the English newspaper even, "published a brief description of Lincoln's successor, Vice-President Hannibal Hamlin, and closed with this contribution: 'Let us hope, however, that there will be no occasion for the curious medley of associations suggested by the substitution of a Hannibal in the political patriarchy for an Abraham.'"

The Collected Works Of Abraham Lincoln, Vol. VII, 1863-1864, edited by Roy P. Basler indicates that Lincoln wrote twenty letters, orders, telegrams and authorizations from November 20th to December 2nd, not including the pencilled note to Seward dated November 27th. These written communications were addressed to Zachary Chandler, Edward Everett, George G. Meade, Robert C. Schenck, Edwin M. Stanton, E. P. Evans, William H. Seward, Green C. Smith, Seth Eastman and Ulysses S. Grant. In

Executive Mansion
Washington D.C. Nov. 20. 1863
Major General Meade
Army of Potomac
If there is a man by the
name of King, under sentence to be shot, please
stop a execution till further order, and
return answer.
A. Lincoln

From Lincoln Memorial University

Lincoln's letter written the day following his Gettysburg Address regarding a condemned lieutenant by the name of King.

How - Sec. of State
 I am improving but I
 can not meet the cab-
 inet to-day
 Nov 27-1863
 A. Lincoln

From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

This interesting little card was first published in facsimile in *Lincoln Lore*, No. 1433, dated July, 1957, page 4. It is one of the few written reference made by Lincoln concerning his illness. Other written references are to be found in letters to George Opdyke and others, Dec. 2, 1863, and Governor Andrew G. Curtin, Dec. 9, 1863.

not one instance did Lincoln mention his illness.

An index as to Lincoln's condition during the period of his illness might be determined by the amount of his correspondence.

Nov. 20, 1863	9 messages
Nov. 21, 1863	1 message
Nov. 22, 1863	1 message
Nov. 23, 1863	3 messages
Nov. 24, 1863	2 messages
Nov. 25, 1863	4 messages
Nov. 26 to Dec. 2	no messages

However, during those days of seeming inactivity, Lincoln may have worked on his Annual Message to Congress of December 8, 1863.

During the period of Lincoln's illness, he was forced to take action on cases of desertion submitted to him by the military authorities. As these involved the death sentence unless counter-manded by the President, one can understand the anxiety suffered by the ailing Lincoln. In dealing with some half-dozen soldiers involved, Lincoln took a dim view of involving the death sentence before a firing squad, except in one instance, Lincoln lost patience where the deserter wrote letters persuading others to desert. However, even this deserter finally had his death sentence revoked.

One case, which must have annoyed the sick patient no end, was the sentence of the First Lieutenant Edward King, Company H, Sixty-sixth New York Infantry. On Friday, November 20th, the wife of this sentenced man secured an appointment with the President in order that she might discuss the case of her husband's court-martial. So intelligently did she state her case, and so grieved was this woman in distress, that she was able to impress the kindly Lincoln regarding her husband's innocence. However, she failed to give the President her husband's name.

It is to be assumed that Lincoln had

agreed to suspend the sentence of the condemned officer until he could review the case. Very likely, he gave the wife that promise. When she left the White House, the wife gave Lincoln what she considered ample data pertaining to the court-martial. However, on examining the material, Lincoln was at a loss to know the name of the condemned lieutenant. He surmised the name was King. So, on the morning of the 20th of November, 1863, Lincoln wrote to Major General Meade of the Army of the Potomac the following letter:

"If there is a man by the name of King under sentence to be shot, please suspend execution till further order, and send record."

A further study of the document concerning the case revealed the signature of "Mrs. Anna S. King", but not the full name of the condemned lieutenant. So much was Lincoln concerned with this trying problem that he wrote a second letter on the same day to General Meade as follows:

"An intelligent woman in deep distress called this morning, saying her husband, a lieutenant in the Army of the Potomac was to be shot next Monday for desertion, and putting a letter in my hand, upon which I relied for particulars, she left without mentioning a name or other particulars by which to identify the case.

"On opening the letter I found it equally vague, having nothing to identify by except her own signature, which seems to be Mrs. Anna S. King! I could not again find her. If you have a case which you shall think is probably the one intended, please apply my dispatch of this morning to it."

The ensuing correspondence of Gen-

eral Meade regarding Lieutenant Edward King is unknown. However, the sentence was commuted to imprisonment on the Dry Tortugas, May 13, 1864. An interesting postscript to this affair revealed, through correspondence from Lincoln's secretaries, John Nicolay and John Hay to Joseph Holt, Judge Advocate General, how Mrs. King was swindled by "An officer who gave his name as Captain Parker Co. M. 12th Pa Cavalry, who promised for \$300 to get her husband pardoned—claimed to know you, & got all the money the poor creature had."

One anxiety the sick President was spared was the recovery of his son, Tad, who may also have suffered from the same light form of smallpox. However, some doctors diagnosed the illness as scarlatina. On November 20th, Lincoln wrote Edward Everett, and among other things, revealed that, "Our sick boy, for whom you kindly inquire, we hope is past the worst." The *Washington Star*, November 28th, reported that, "The President's youngest son, who has been sick for some time past with scarlatina, was much better today."

Now that both the President and Tad were well on the way to complete recovery in early December, the First Lady, went on a four day trip. The press, however, continued to report on the President's health. The *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 11th, stated that, "Lincoln's health much improved; he sees visitors with special business." The *Washington Chronicle* (Dec. 11) reported that, "President Lincoln, we are happy to state, is now convalescent, and yesterday passed several hours in the transaction of official business." It appears, however, that on December 12th, Lincoln suffered a setback. Orville H. Browning recorded in his *diary* the following entry, "President sees no callers today because of illness." On December 15th, the *Washington Star* reported that, "The President this morning was able to be in his office and attend to business."

Meanwhile, the Capitol City continued to fear the smallpox scourge. Robert, the eldest son, a Harvard student, proposed to bring some friends to Washington for a White House visit, but the President on January 19, 1864, telegraphed his son that, "There is a good deal of smallpox here. Your friends must judge for themselves whether they ought to come or not." Apparently the decision Robert's young friends made was to accept the invitation, because a telegram from Robert, then in Washington, to Fred P. Anderson, at the Astor House in New York City, dated January 24, 1864, conveys this message: "Bring Robeson along with you—Come tomorrow." At the bottom of the telegram, there is a typical fatherly endorsement, "Charge to me A. Lincoln," written in his well known hand.

3000
Return to
Dr. Richard D. Modell
7001 Hoyt Avenue
Saginaw, Michigan 48607

Abraham Lincoln—Health, Habits and Doctors

By Emmet F. Pearson, M.D./Springfield

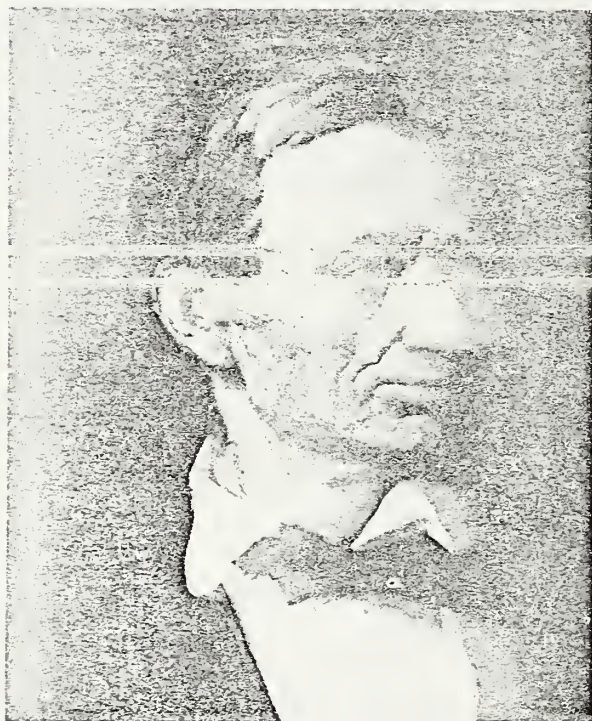
"I have within the last few days, been making a most discreditable exhibition of myself in the way of hypochondria and thereby got an impression that Dr. Henry is necessary for my existence," wrote Abraham Lincoln to his law partner, Congressman John Stuart, on January 20, 1841.

Abraham Lincoln—Health, Habits and Doctors

By Emmet F. Pearson, M.D./Springfield

"I have within the last few days, been making a most discreditable exhibition of myself in the way of hypochondria and thereby got an impression that Dr. Henry is necessary for my existence," wrote Abraham Lincoln to his law partner, Congressman John Stuart, on January 20, 1841.

In this statement, Lincoln reveals his over-concern with personal health and his reliance on a physician. A chronological analysis of Lincoln's career and intimate thoughts, as recorded by friends and historians, painfully points out



Abraham Lincoln as a young man

EMMET F. PEARSON, M.D., is Clinical Professor of Internal Medicine and History of Medicine, SIU School of Medicine. A graduate of Washington Univ. School of Medicine, St. Louis, Dr. Pearson has devoted substantial time in exploring medical history, serving as vice-president of the Illinois Historical Society. He is the author of numerous papers on medical history subjects.

his brushes with death and periods of morbidity and melancholia. Lincoln's health, habits and doctors greatly influenced his career. By looking into some of the intimate aspects of Lincoln's life, the human side of the man comes through in contrast to the idealistic picture portrayed by many historians.

The richest source of manuscript material concerning Lincoln's early life is to be found in the Lamon papers, which were perused in the Huntington Library at San Marino (Pasadena) California. William A. Herndon, Lincoln's long time law partner and biographer, collected this vast documentary material and generously made it available to other historians in addition to using it in the *LIFE OF LINCOLN* by Herndon and Jesse W. Weik. He later sold the material to William Lamon, a one-time law partner of Lincoln, who also wrote on the life of Lincoln. The Huntington Library obtained the collection from the Lamon heirs.

Herndon has been criticized as an unreliable historian, but as a reporter and biographer he had the devotion of a Boswell, and certainly knew Lincoln longer and better than any other historian. He began gathering and recording material before Lincoln's death, whereas other biographers started more than twenty years later. When Herndon's *LIFE OF LINCOLN* was published, in the 1880's, a loud cry of indignation was raised and Herndon was called a liar, a fool and an embittered destitute drunkard. Herndon forthrightly answered all of these charges and chastised others for suppressing the truth. One edition of a book containing Herndon's material was vigorously suppressed and abridged; some of the material quoted herein may have been a part of the expurgated copy. Not surprisingly, most Lincoln writers use Herndon's material freely when they like what he said, but ignore or condemn that part of his testimony which they do not like.

A Description of Lincoln

Herndon described Abe as follows: "Mr. Lincoln was of low (bad) physical organization, slow digestion, slow circulation, slow function—blood—not hot—not impulsive—cold flush. Liver had no action, bowels slow, costive, sometimes feverish, sometimes cold, had not a strong life, but a treacherous one. He had no haste, no impulses, no wear of cellular tissue, muscles or nerves. He took life easy, had no haste—no spontaneous emotions, was sympathetic and emotional in the presence of the object."

Lincoln was a muscular youth; however, he was neither a robust, vigorous, nor healthy man. Rawboned and wirey, he stood 6' 4" and weighed about 175 pounds. He had stooped shoulders, bony arms and legs, and spidery fingers. His ears were large and set at a right angle to his long head. He had no spring to his gait and walked flat on his feet. He had a dark complexion and often a drawn and worried look, except when he was in animated conversation, at which time his eyes twinkled and he broke into unrestrained laughter. Lincoln's eyes were small, and the left eye turned upward and outward as may be seen in some photographs. At times he had double vision. That he preferred to read lying down was probably because of eye strain, which may have accounted for his chronic fatigue. At age 48 he began wearing glasses for magnification. He may have been color blind because he could not see much beauty in flowers or in the sunset.

Herndon wrote that he thought Lincoln was illegitimate, and that Abe, himself, considered that possibility. Herndon had been told that Thomas Lincoln had testicular atrophy, probably from mumps, and that Abraham Enloe, a neighbor, stated on occasions that he was Abe's father. Some thought that Lincoln's personal appearance and disposition resembled Abraham Enloe rather than Thomas Lincoln. Herndon further stated that he heard in Kentucky that Thomas Lincoln and Abraham Enloe had a terrible fight over Nancy, and that the Lincolns moved to Indiana so that Nancy could not continue her relationship with Enloe. Few historians disagree that Nancy Hanks, Lincoln's mother, was illegitimate. Even by "backwoods standards," the Hanks and the Linkhorns (as they were known in those parts) were at the bottom of the social structure. Abe's mother died of "milk-sick" in 1819 (a disease caused by cows milk containing a toxic alkaloid from eating snakeroot). Her death, and that of an older sister, Sarah, were the first of many early contacts with pre-

mature death in Lincoln's immediate family and among friends, causing him recurrent episodes of despair.



William Herndon
Lincoln's law partner and biographer
Courtesy of Illinois Historical Society

Early Life

Lincoln was fortunate to have been born in a log cabin in the backwoods, and to have grown up in the wilderness, where he learned things not taught in books or schools; he acquired a kind of transcendentalism. This resource of intuition helped him through many episodes of despair and gave him a form of intellectual arrogance.

When he wandered into New Salem, Illinois, in 1831, Lincoln was physically strong but emotionally weak. He became interested in the innkeeper's daughter, Ann Rutledge, who died during the time he was living in the Rutledge Tavern. Although she was engaged to another man, Lincoln took her death very seriously. He was having chills and fever, probably malaria, at that time, and the physical and emotional strain caused a severe nervous breakdown. His physician and confidant, John Allen, of New Salem, evidently performed some very good psychotherapy. He probably encouraged Lincoln to split rails, and to walk through the woods and re-establish his rapport with nature so as to find tranquility. Dr. Allen also probably treated Abe's chills with Chandler pills (quinine), which was a new drug to Illinois at that time.

His Associations

Lincoln had close association with doctors throughout his life, some as friends and others for benefit of his health. Doctors often were community leaders and the best educated citizens. While a storekeeper and postmaster in New Salem, Lincoln read voraciously, borrowing many books from others. From reading he learned to survey, and offered this skill to Dr. Charles Chandler, founder of Chandlerville, not far from New Salem. In exchange, Chandler supplied Lincoln with books, and encouraged him to go into politics.

Some biographers have said that Lincoln was shy with women and indifferent to sex, but Herndon paints a more vivid picture. He recounts that when Lincoln became a state legislator and moved to Springfield, he lived with Joshua Speed, a storekeeper. One day Lincoln said to Speed, "Do you know where I could get some?" Speed, who kept a woman nearby, sent Abe over with a note of introduction. They got into bed and Lincoln asked, "How much will this cost?" When she replied, "Five dollars," he told her he only had three dollars and that he would not do business on credit. He then got out of bed and departed. The woman told Speed later that she had never seen such an honest man, thus the nickname, "Honest Abe."

About 1841, according to Herndon, Lincoln made a business trip to Beardstown, and while there was possibly exposed to venereal disease. Herndon thought that Lincoln's obsession with having contacted syphilis was the reason he broke his engagement to the newly arrived Springfield belle, Mary Todd, in 1841.

Also about that time, Lincoln met the famous Dr. Daniel Drake, of Cincinnati, who was visiting Springfield while making an epidemiological study of disease in the Mississippi Valley. Lincoln later wrote Drake requesting a prescription for venereal disease. Herndon says that Lincoln showed the letter to his friend, Speed, but put his hand over the part that concerned the possibility of syphilis. Drake advised Lincoln to travel to Cincinnati for an examination, but Lincoln did not go. Lincoln's fear of V.D. was probably more psychosomatic than infectious.

Herndon mentions another historical sexy footnote, told to him by Lincoln himself, in the presence of others. One night Lincoln slept in the one room log cabin of a friend near Bloomington. The family's daughter slept in a bed next to him. During the night, Lincoln thought she was getting friendly and he put his hand where

it should not have been. The daughter immediately got up and told her mother, but the two decided not to tell the girl's father, because he would shoot Lincoln. The next morning the father did, indeed, get up and get out a big knife. Fortunately he went off to hunt, rather than to use it for the purpose which Lincoln feared.

After the engagement to Mary Todd was broken, Lincoln "lost his mind," spoke of suicide, and was advised by his friend, Dr. Anson Henry, and others, to take a long rest and to visit Joshua Speed's family in Kentucky, which proved to be good therapy. He returned to Springfield to take up a successful law practice and politics. Upon his return, Abe was encouraged by Dr. Elias Merriman to reconcile his differences with Mary Todd—he did and soon married her.

Lifestyle

Lincoln's habits and lifestyle while in Springfield are well documented and give some insights into his health. Although he admitted to be tipsy on one occasion, he seldom drank and never used tobacco. At one time he even joined the forces of the Washington Temperance Society, and drove around the country in a buggy making temperance speeches and giving pledges of temperance to young men. He was not a gourmet; but simply ate to live. He was quoted as saying, "Men abuse their stomachs with imprudence in drinking and eating and in that way health is impaired and ruined and life is shortened." Although a railsplitter in his youth, he admitted he learned to do physical work but never learned to like it. He exercised little, and spent much of his free time reading. His favorites were the works of poet Robert Burns, Shakespeare, and the *Bible*.

Herndon said that Lincoln was an atheist in his youth, and that while living in New Salem he wrote a book extolling infidelity. Historians agree, however, that as tragedies piled upon Lincoln he turned more to religion, but never joined a church (he seldom mentioned Jesus Christ but related directly to God).

Lincoln was superstitious, as were most backwoods Kentuckians of the time, but he did not believe in quack healers, although they were abundant in his time. Lincoln once did take his son, Robert, to Terre Haute, Indiana, to have a "Mad Stone" applied to a dog bite, but that was then considered to be a reliable preventative of hydrophobia. Lincoln said, "The best way to judge a remedy was the peoples faith in it."

His Health

Lincoln had a habit, in the 1850's, of almost daily visiting the Diller Drug Store, Springfield, a hangout for most of the town's intellectuals, including physicians. Records show that he often bought medicine including: pennyroyal, castor oil, ipecac, Brown's mixture, camphor, glycerine, cathartics, blue mass (Mercury), tonics, (no sedatives) and brandy. In addition to self medication, he probably often treated his own family.

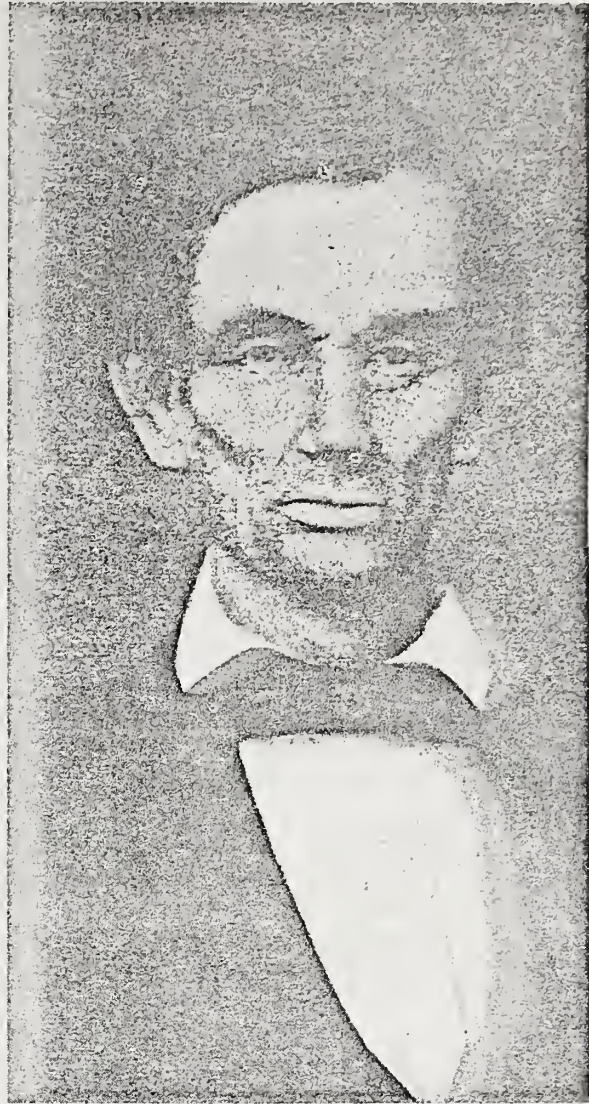
Lincoln described himself as having "hypo," meaning he was a hypochondriac. He never carried a pocketknife for fear he would harm himself. His melancholic, depressive disposition caused him to have several nervous breakdowns. He was a great joke teller, which helped to relieve his melancholia, and he sought company, fun and hilarity to overcome a morbid state of mind.

All of Lincoln's ailments were not psychosomatic. He suffered many minor physical ailments including indigestion, constipation, frequent chills, and ease of fatigue. As a child he had nearly drowned, at 13 he was kicked unconscious by a horse, and at one time he had a tooth extracted which carried with it a piece of jawbone, causing great pain. In July, 1860, the two younger Lincoln sons had severe cases of scarlet fever, and Abe wrote to his old friend, Dr. Henry, that he thought that he "had an inferior type of the same thing."

After serving one uninspiring term in Congress, in 1841 Lincoln returned to Springfield, unemployed. Although offered a partnership with a lawyer in Chicago, he declined, with the explanation that he tended to *consumption* and living in Chicago would kill him. Tad Lincoln, his youngest son, died in Chicago at age 17, from an illness which was certainly T.B.; the death certificate of Eddie Lincoln, who died at age 18 months, stated "consumption." These facts cause one to consider the possibility that T.B. did "run in the family." Lincoln was said to often be feverish and greatly fatigued. No doctor ever diagnosed consumption, but photographs of him near the end of life show that he was cachectic and that he had Hippocratic facies.

Physicians

The same Dr. Merriman who encouraged his marriage, was also to be second at a saber duel between Lincoln and United States Senator James Shields. Merriman may have saved Lincoln's life by helping to stop the duel. He was



Abraham Lincoln about 1860

Courtesy of Illinois Historical Society

also known to have surgically removed a "lump" from Lincoln's cheek.

The doctor who was the most intimate with the Lincolns in Springfield was Dr. Anson Henry, who had been a student of Dr. Daniel Drake in Cincinnati. Mrs. Lincoln wrote on several occasions that he (Dr. Henry) was their dearest friend. Dr. Henry may have delivered the Lincoln sons, but no documentation of that exists. He visited the Lincolns in the White House, and was sent by Lincoln to the Puget Sound area on a government mission, where he drowned in a boat accident.

Dr. John Todd, uncle of Mary Todd Lincoln, also a Springfield physician, probably gave the family medical advice. Dr. William Wallace, who married a sister of Mrs. Lincoln, also was con-

sulted for medical advice by the Lincolns, and when Lincoln went from Springfield to Washington to become President, he was accompanied by Dr. Wallace. After Lincoln became President he appointed several of his old doctor friends from Springfield to high political offices.

Among the other doctors in Springfield in the 1840's was Dr. Charles Henry Ray who tremendously influenced Lincoln's political career. One historian, Jay Monahan, called Ray "The man who elected Lincoln." Dr. Ray served with Lincoln on committees which founded the Republican Party. He later forsook medicine for journalism and became part owner and chief editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, just in time to boost Lincoln on the national political scene. He advised Lincoln during the Lincoln-Douglas debates, encouraged Lincoln's abolitionist views, and played a decisive editorial role in electing Lincoln to the Presidency. Ray became a king-maker for office seekers in the early phase of the Lincoln administration. Lincoln sent Dr. Ray into the South to trade whiskey for cotton during the Civil War.

Within a year after Lincoln became President his gifted son, Willie, contacted a lung disease and died. Greatly depressed, Lincoln cancelled cabinet meetings and all public appearances for several months during the Civil War. He told of having hallucinations and frequent frightening dreams while in the White House.

Lincoln had fever on the day of the famous Gettysburg speech (which may be the reason for its brevity). When he returned to Washington he developed what was thought to have been a mild form of small pox. Lincoln quipped, "Now I have something I can give to everybody." A young Negro servant, Willie Johnson, who had moved from Springfield to Washington, accompanied Lincoln to Gettysburg. When Willie developed small pox and died, Lincoln blamed himself for giving Willie the disease. There is no record of Lincoln or his sons having been vaccinated against small pox.

When President Lincoln was asked to support the Zionist plan to restore European Jews to their homeland in Palestine, he said, "I myself have a regard for the Jews; my chiropodist is a Jew and he has so many times put me on my feet that I should have no objection to giving his countrymen a 'leg up'." A. Zacharie, a most aggressive chiropodist, arrived in America from England in 1837. In addition to treating Lincoln's corns and bunions, Zacharie became a personal confidant and informer to Lincoln. Zacharie called himself doctor and affixed "M.D."

after his name, but there is no evidence that he earned this degree.

Lincoln's association with doctors kept him aware of public health problems. While living in Springfield he added his influence to improving sanitation. He was a member of a committee largely made up of doctors who were attempting to promote proper care of privies, removal of putrifying garbage, and general cleanliness in a successful effort to forestall an epidemic of Cholera in the 1830's.

He was much concerned with medical inadequacies in providing care for troops during the Civil War and encouraged reorganization of the medical department. He indirectly played an important role in establishing the foundation for state supported medical and health education. By signing the Land Grant Act, he promoted the establishment of land grant universities across the country, including the University of Illinois.

Lincoln's Death

Dr. Robert Stone, Professor of Medicine at Georgetown University, was the Lincoln's White House family physician. Stone did not keep good records of his patients, which is unfortunate, for he could have shed valuable light on Lincoln's health, and that of Mary Lincoln and the boys.

Photographs of Lincoln taken at the Civil War's end show him thin and exhausted. Some people have speculated that he was at the point of death due to heart trouble or other physical disease. Horace Greeley, the famous editor of the *New York Herald*, saw Lincoln near the end of the Civil War and said he looked so weary and haggard that he seemed unlikely to live out his term. Lincoln said that at the end of each day he was "flabbished" and that the tired part was "inside and out of reach."

Lieutenant Charles Liele of the Army Medical Department was the first doctor to Lincoln's aid in the Ford Theatre in Washington, after Booth's fatal shot on April 14, 1865. Two other doctors, Charles Taft and Albert King, also appeared promptly and the three doctors moved the stricken President to a house across the street. When Lincoln died a few hours later, nearly every important doctor in Washington, including Dr. Robert Stone and Surgeon General Joseph Barnes, were at his bedside.

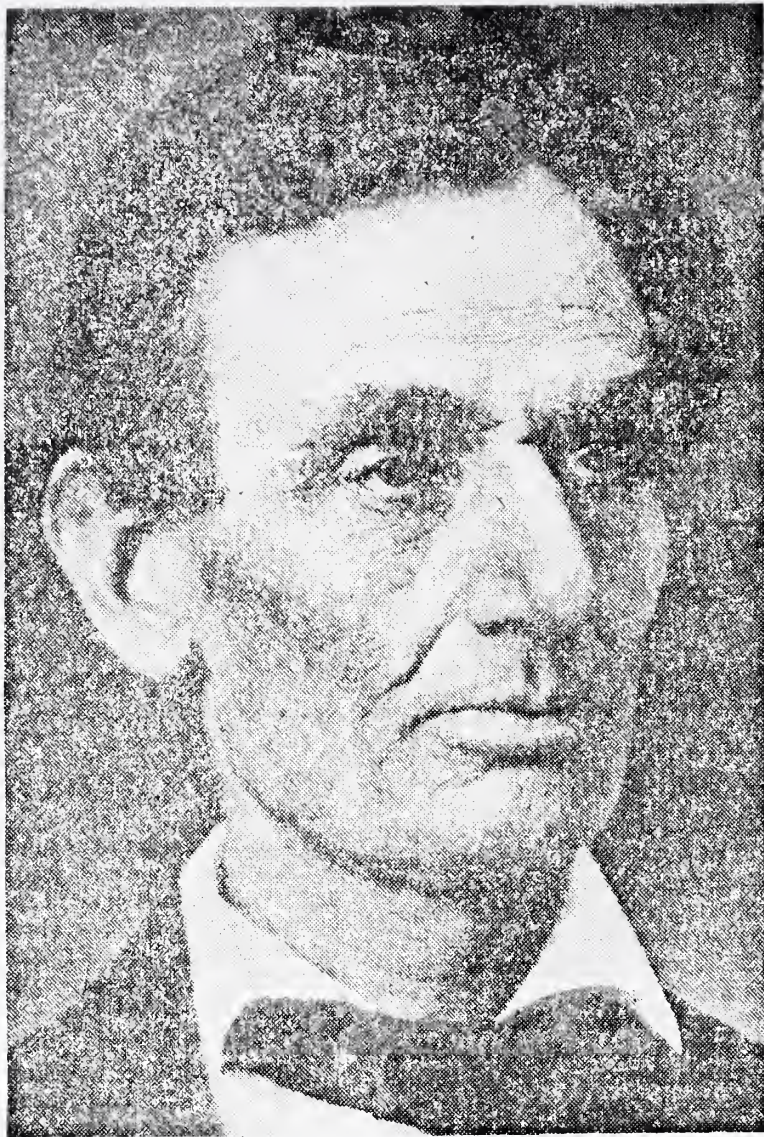
Unfortunately, the postmortem examination of Lincoln was limited to the head. A thorough pathologist's examination might have clarified many controversial points about his health. Arm-

chair post-mortem diagnoses have been: endocrine disorders, hypogonadism, tuberculosis, Marfan's Syndrome, old depressed skull fracture with neurological complications, heart failure and oedipus complex with other psychiatric abnormalities.

In conclusion, by contemporary standards Lincoln would not have appeared fit emotionally, and possibly not physically, for the rigors of the Presidential race and the responsibilities of that high office. ▲

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Abraham Lincoln in a photograph taken in Springfield in 1860 by Chicago photographer Alexander Hesler.

Would you buy a used horse from this man?

By Ronald Kotulak

The author is The Tribune's science editor.

WOULD AMERICANS vote for a man who was a hypochondriac, illegitimate, suffered nervous breakdowns, was moody and color blind and an atheist, who was chronically fatigued and perhaps had a touch of venereal disease?

If not, then Abraham Lincoln might never have been President. Medically speaking, Lincoln was a basket case, or so contends Dr. Emmet F. Pearson, a medical historian at the Southern Illinois University School of Medicine in Springfield.

Would you buy 1-2

"By contemporary standards Lincoln would not have appeared fit emotionally, and possibly not physically, for the rigors of the Presidential race and the responsibilities of that high office," Pearson reports in the current Illinois Medical Journal.

PEARSON MADE his medical assessment of Lincoln after studying the vast documentary material collected by William A. Herndon, Lincoln's long-time law partner and biographer. Known as the Lamon papers, the collection is housed in the Huntington Library at San Marino, Cal.

"Some of it might be true, but the evidence is shaky," says Ralph G. Newman, the noted Lincoln scholar, Chicago Public Library chairman, and himself no stranger to controversy. Last month Newman was indicted for attempting to obtain an illegal income tax deduction for his use of some of his pre-Presidential papers.

"There is no question that there are some things about Lincoln we don't like to talk about, such as the fact that he obviously hated his father and that by today's standards he would be called a juvenile delinquent in his youth, but that doesn't make all the other things true," Newman says.

Pearson says he is attempting to show Lincoln's human side in contrast to the idealized image of him held by many historians.

For instance, Pearson says that Herndon attributed the nicknaming of Lincoln as "Honest Abe" to a prostitute.

Herndon alleged that Lincoln asked storekeeper Joshua Speed, his landlord, about finding female companionship.

Speed, who kept a woman nearby, is reported to have sent Lincoln over with a note of introduction. When the woman told Lincoln winning "Honest Abe" he told her that he only had \$3, did not believe in credit and left. The woman later was to observe to Speed that she had never met such an honest man.

"That story's been told before, but I doubt that it's true," says Newman. "What man would get out of bed because he was short \$2?"

PEARSON ALSO attacks Lincoln's image as a rail splitter. Lincoln had suffered a severe nervous breakdown after the death of Ann Rutledge, a young woman he had been interested in.

Using a form of psychotherapy, his physician and confidant, John A. Roy, allegedly encouraged Lincoln to split rails, and to walk thru the woods and reestablish his rapport with nature so as to find tranquility," Pearson says.

As for Lincoln's famous Gettysburg address, it probably was brief, Pearson contends, because the President had a fever and didn't feel well.

The question of Lincoln suffering from venereal disease is open to debate, Pearson. However, Pearson reports, the reason Lincoln broke off his engagement to Mary Todd in 1841 was because he feared he had contracted syphilis during a business trip to Beardstown.

Herndon's account says that Lincoln had written a letter to Dr. D. C. Beardsley asking for a prescription for venereal disease, tho not mentioning it was for himself. Pearson concludes that Lincoln's "fear of VD was probably more psychosomatic than infectious."

NEWMAN SAYS there is "absolutely no proof at all that Lincoln ever had VD. Lincoln was afraid of the institution of marriage like a lot of men are and he probably got cold feet when he broke up with Mary."

However, Newman says it is possible that Lincoln was color blind (he did not see much beauty in flowers or a sunset), had eye strain, double vision, and that his left eye turned upward and outward.

Herndon wrote that he thought Lincoln was illegitimate and that Abe, himself, considered that possibility, Pearson says. Herndon had been told that Abe's father, Thomas Lincoln, had become sterile as a result of the mumps and that Abraham Enloe, a neighbor, was his natural father.

Photographs of Lincoln taken at the end of the Civil War show him thin and exhausted.

"Some people have speculated that he was at the point of death due to his illness," Pearson says.

He points out that Horace Greeley, the editor of the New York Herald, was alarmed at Lincoln's condition at that time, saying the President looked so weary and haggard that he seemed unlikely to live out his term.

Lincoln was melancholic and depressive, a disposition that led to his nervous breakdowns, Pearson says. He told stories and jokes to overcome a morbid state of mind, he adds.

Newman doesn't buy this interpretation. "It's performance that counts. If he had continual fits of depression he wouldn't have been

5-24-1982

Lithium Research: Moodswings May Be Biochemical

Mood disorders, which have been classed as psychiatric illnesses and thought to have afflicted a number of historical, political and creative figures, may be related to biochemical defects.

This has been suggested in research with lithium. This lightest of all metals and an ingredient in nuclear reactions has been the basis of treatment of manic-depressive illness for more than a decade in this country.

Lithium carbonate has been hailed as a miracle drug in some quarters. Its acceptance in recent years as a specific treatment and maintenance medication for manic-depression marked the first time in the history of psychiatry that a simple, inexpensive, naturally-occurring salt controlled a major mental disorder. Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and composer Hugo Wolf may all have been victims of this mental ailment.

Scientists at UCLA School of Medicine have found some clues as to how lithium controls extreme moodswings from elated highs to depressed lows.

Collaborating in the research are Drs. Jared Diamond, Barbara Ehrlich, R.S. Jope, Donald Jenden, Lawrence Gosenfeld and researchers Kay Meier and Vince Fry.

The investigation is concerned primarily with membrane transport mechanisms, that is, how substances involved in metabolism are transported in and out of cells.

In order to control debilitating manic episodes, patients often have to take lithium for the rest of their lives. Oral

Biochemical Disorder?

Lithium Might Have Helped Lincoln

(Continued from Page 1)

doses are administered several times a day. Blood levels of lithium must be carefully monitored because high levels are extremely toxic and can be fatal, especially to those on restricted sodium intake.

Lithium was discovered in 1817 and is named for the Greek word for stone — lithos. It is never found free in nature but occurs as an alkaline salt in mineral rocks and mineral waters.

Some 1800 years ago in early Greek and Roman tent hospitals, mineral water was prescribed for manic insanity and melancholia. Many of those alkaline springs developed by the Romans are today's European spas known to contain high quantities of lithium and thought to promote physical and mental health.

A number of historical figures — creative individuals and inspiring political leaders — have been diagnosed in retrospect as manic-depressive, according to UCLA psychiatrist Lawrence Gosenfeld. Their lives exhibit periods of inexplicable depression and inactivity alternating with periods of boundless energy and creativity.

Lincoln was perhaps known more for his melancholy, but there were well-documented periods when he swung out of his melancholy and lethargy into states of excess energy. At one time he delivered twenty speeches in two weeks.

The ebullient Theodore Roosevelt's mood, unlike Lincoln's, was predominantly high, although he did have periods of marked depression. Churchill had bouts of depression in his younger years, but his fabulous energy and en-

thusiasm that helped lead England through World War II perhaps stemmed from his manic side, according to some psychiatrists.

Hugo Wolf wrote 171 of his finest songs in a frenzy of creativity ending in 1890 and lapsed suddenly into musical impotence for a year. He recovered to compose 15 great songs in three weeks, again lapsed into depression and again recovered to a five-week burst of creativity that yielded his last 24 songs.

Would lithium treatment have stifled creativity and inspiring leadership in these exceptional people? Probably not, answers psychiatrist Gosenfeld. The drug would most likely have kept them on a plateau of more evenly paced creativity, reducing high energy peaks and deep valleys of paralyzing depression.

From: Elizabeth Kehoe
To: Museum Staff
Date: 7/17/01 8:41AM
Subject: *Chicago Tribune* article today

For Lincoln, ancient cure worse than his malady Depression treated with mercury pills

By Jeremy Manier
Chicago Tribune staff reporter
July 17, 2001

Before Abraham Lincoln became president, his Illinois friends and colleagues noted that the lanky lawyer was prone to sudden mood swings and angry outbursts--one story claims he grabbed a bystander at a political debate, lifted him up by the collar and shook him violently.

Now researchers believe those flashes of temper may have been symptoms of mercury poisoning, brought on by a common remedy for depression.

A study published Tuesday gives a new perspective on a president revered for his calm and focused leadership through the historic crisis of the Civil War. That steady temperament appears to have emerged only after Lincoln stopped taking the pills that his law partner William H. Herndon described as "blue mass."

Several historians have recorded that Lincoln took the pills, which were as widely used in the 1800s as Prozac is today, said Dr. Norbert Hirschhorn, a New York medical historian and lead author of the study. But many Lincoln scholars appear not to appreciate the dangers blue mass posed.

Hirschhorn and researchers at the University of Minnesota used a common 19th Century formula for blue mass to re-create the concoction, which contained about 65 milligrams of elemental mercury per pill. They found that a typical regimen of two to three such pills each day would have exposed Lincoln to mercury levels nearly 9,000 times what current federal rules allow.

In addition to outbursts of rage, the researchers believe the mercury Lincoln ingested may have caused insomnia, forgetfulness and possibly a hand tremor. One historical account suggests he quit the blue pill regimen about five months into his presidency because it "made him cross."

"He stopped taking this medicine at the most crucial time in our history, when we needed his saintliness the most," said Hirschhorn, whose study appears in the journal *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*.

It may be impossible to prove Lincoln's mercury poisoning without a hair sample from the period when he took the pills, experts said. But historians said the diagnosis fits much of what is known about the former president's behavior.

"I think they make a compelling case," said Robert John, a professor of 19th Century history at the University of Illinois at Chicago. "We know so much about Lincoln--there's probably no American figure about whom more is written. To have what could be a fresh insight about him is remarkable."

Historians without backgrounds in medicine traditionally have not delved into

the detailed clinical problems of figures such as Lincoln, said Thomas Schwartz, state historian with the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.

Schwartz said although it's still unclear how much of Lincoln's behavior can be traced to mercury poisoning, it would make sense if he stopped the regimen because it kept him from thinking clearly.

"It's certainly an interesting hypothesis," Schwartz said. "It's something historians are going to be more mindful of."

Analyzing Lincoln's health

Lincoln's health has been more scrutinized in recent decades, as some scientists have sought to show that he inherited a genetic ailment called Marfan Syndrome, which can lead to a gaunt frame, slender fingers and internal bleeding.

The hypothesis that he also suffered from mercury poisoning puts him in a roster of historical figures who may have felt its effects, including President Andrew Jackson, physicist Isaac Newton and author Charlotte Bronte. Last year, a study of composer Ludwig van Beethoven's hair indicated that he had lead poisoning.

In Lincoln's case, the mercury poisoning may have been a side effect of medicine he took in his lifelong battle against depression. One of the worst early episodes of his "constitutional melancholy" began on Jan. 1, 1841, when an engagement to his future wife, Mary Todd, was broken off.

The incident sent Lincoln into a state that physicians of the time knew as hypochondriasis.

Many medical experts in the 1800s still believed that such mental conditions were linked to the ebb and flow of bodily fluids that the ancient Roman physician Galen had outlined. In that system, hypochondriasis stemmed from a buildup of black bile in the liver.

One of the most common treatments for the disorder called for stimulating the liver and getting black bile moving again through use of mercury pills--the so-called blue mass.

"It really was the Prozac-plus of the time, because they used it to treat a lot of conditions," Hirschhorn said. "They used it for anything they thought was related to the liver. But that was based on a faulty theory. It only poisoned you."

Mercury's effects can include decreased brain-wave activity, irritability, depression, memory loss and impaired kidney function.

There are no records showing when Lincoln started taking his blue pills, though many friends knew he used them. Ward H. Lamon, a bodyguard of Lincoln's, wrote that "blue pills were the medicinal remedy which he affected most."

Hirschhorn believes some of Lincoln's most unusual behavior linked to the blue pills came during the 1850s.

Wild, incoherent nonsense

One of Lincoln's fellow Illinois lawyers and traveling companions, Henry Clay Whitney, described awakening before daylight one morning to see Lincoln sitting up in bed and "talking the wildest and most incoherent nonsense to himself."

Another incident recounted by Lamon's daughter supposedly occurred during one of the famous 1858 Senate debates between Lincoln and Stephen Douglas. In response to an accusation by Douglas about Lincoln's record in Congress, Lincoln furiously grabbed the collar of a former congressional colleague who, Lincoln said, knew the charge was false. While making his point, Lincoln shook the man "until his teeth chattered."

The effects of mercury on the brain can be reversed, and that was fortunate for Lincoln, Hirschhorn said.

"He recognized that it wasn't doing him any good during his first months in the White House," Hirschhorn said. "I think that was a crucial decision. Who knows what would have happened if he had continued taking it?"

SCIENCE

Notebook

No Signs of Hurricane Relief

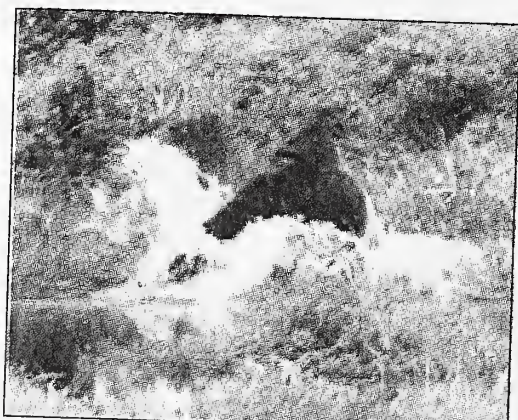
During the past six years, the number and intensity of hurricanes in the Atlantic Ocean, including the Caribbean Sea, increased sharply. New research indicates that this upsurge is part of a trend that's likely to continue for the next 10 to 40 years.

Stanley B. Goldenberg of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in Miami and colleagues analyzed the history of two major climactic conditions that influence the formation of hurricanes—sea surface temperatures and vertical wind shear.

Measurements of both since the late 1800s showed a pattern that switched back and forth every few decades to either favor the formation of hurricanes or not, the researchers reported in the July 20 issue of *Science*. The record of hurricane activity matched that pattern. As a result, the researchers predicted it will be several more decades before hurricane activity diminishes.

"Government officials, emergency managers, and residents of the Atlantic hurricane basin should be aware of the apparent shift in climate and evaluate preparedness and mitigation efforts in order to respond appropriately in a regime where the hurricane threat is much greater than it was in the 1970s through early 1990s," they wrote.

In an accompanying article, however, Lennart Bengtsson of the Max Planck Institute for Meteorology in Germany cautioned that such long-term projections are notoriously unreliable.



BY RICHARD PARNELL—UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING

Researchers think male Western lowland gorillas splash water to impress each other, not females.

Gorilla Study Makes a Splash

Western lowland gorillas have been very difficult to study because they spend most of their time obscured in dense tropical forests. But researchers recently discovered that the gorillas do feed in open, swampy clearings in northern forests in the Congo Republic, offering a rare opportunity to learn more about the relatively mysterious, endangered primates.

And now, researchers report that they have earned something they never knew about the big

creatures—males like to splash water like a baby in a bathtub, apparently to establish dominance over other males by demonstrating their strength.

Richard J. Parnell and Hannah M. Buchanan-Smith of the University of Stirling in Britain observed 124 gorillas over 32 months. The researchers recorded 90 "splash displays" by 19 males, they reported in the July 19 issue of *Nature*. Females never splashed.

The displays came in 10 forms, but three types occurred most commonly—the "body splash," in which a gorilla runs or leaps into standing water, and the "one-handed and two-handed splashes, in which one or both arms are raised and then brought down forcibly, the open palms striking the water surface at a slight angle. Each of these three techniques generates large plumes of spray," the researchers wrote.

"Directly attracting the attention of females is not considered the prime purpose of splash displays, because solitary males displayed almost as frequently to other solitary males as to groups, and more than half of these cases no females were in sight. The more likely purpose is to intimidate competitors for acquiring females," they wrote.

Lincoln's Not-So-Happy Pill

Before he became president, Abraham Lincoln was prone to sudden, inexplicable outbursts of rage. For example, he once grabbed a bystander at a political debate, lifted him up by the collar and shook him violently. But by the time he arrived at the White House, such behavior had subsided.

A new analysis concludes that the cause of Lincoln's earlier outbursts was mercury poisoning from "little blue pills" that he had been prescribed for "melancholia," but that he stopped taking before becoming president.

Norbert Hirschhorn, a retired public health physician and medical historian, and two colleagues studied historical records about Lincoln and the pills. They also recreated the medicine based on old recipes and tested the pills in the laboratory.

The pills contained such high levels of mercury that Lincoln would have been taking a daily dose exceeding today's federal standard by nearly 9,000 times, the researchers found. Mercury is known to affect mood, but the effects disappear once the mercury is discontinued.

"If blue pills prompted Abraham Lincoln's remarkable behavior in the decade before he went to the White House, then his insightful decision to stop taking them may have been crucial to the outcome of the Civil War," the researchers wrote in the summer issue of the journal *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*.

"Imagine a President trying to cope with political intrigue, military reversals, the incompetence of his generals, and his own personal tragedies. His calm steadiness was at least as necessary in preserving the Union, it may be argued, as battlefield decisions, military appointments, or political strategies that history records as important for the success of the Federal cause."

— Compiled from reports by Rob Stein

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The Health and Medical History of President

Abraham Lincoln

=====> UNDER CONSTRUCTION <=====

"He may be President of the United States, but he has dirty fingernails." [26a]

President #16. Lived: 1809-1865. Served: 1861-1865.

Maladies = color blind · near-drowning · concussion · malaria prophylaxis · ague? · habitus - ?Marfan · habitus - ?Stickler · pectus excavatum? · depression · vertical strabismus · presbyopia · jaw fracture · penetrating voice · sleep talking · snored · swollen feet · scarlet fever? · unusual face and head · face & beard · dentist phobia · pulsations · mild smallpox · upset stomach · very strong · receding hairline · gas leak · assassination & resuscitation · Odds & Ends · Resources

Maladies and Conditions

[Top]

color blind Lincoln was color blind. [2a]

As a child Lincoln almost drowned in Knob's Creek, Kentucky. A neighbor boy saved him. [2b]

near-drowning Austin Gollaher ... claims to have saved Lincoln from drowning one day as they were trying to 'coon it' across Knob Creek on a log. The boys were in pursuit of birds, when young Lincoln fell into the water, and his vigilant companion ... fished him out with a sycamore branch. [7a]

concussion As a youth Lincoln was driving an old horse to turn a grist mill. Losing his patience at one point, Lincoln applied the whip and was rewarded with a kick square to the head. He was knocked unconscious and suffered a concussion. [2c] "The boy probably suffered a concussion. At least one historian has suggested that this caused 'petit mal' [sic] and possibly brought on attacks of transient aphasia, where Lincoln would drift off into another world or be asleep momentarily while apparently awake." [4a].

malaria prophylaxis When Lincoln moved to malaria-ridden Pidgeon Creek, Indiana, he and the other Lincoln children had to take "Peruvian bark" as preventive therapy [2c]. The active ingredient in Peruvian bark is now known to be quinine, an effective anti-malarial compound.

Later, when living in Decatur, IL, Lincoln purchased a tonic made with Peruvian bark from Renshaw's Store to ward off the "Illinois shakes" [4b] (malaria, most likely).

ague? While living in Decatur, IL in the fall of 1830, "most of the Lincoln family fell ill to a common fever and ague affecting the area" [4c]. Gray does not specifically say if Abraham became ill or

whether the Peruvian bark purchase (see above) was related to this ague.

Lincoln was 6 feet 4 inches tall, at a time when the median height of adult men in the United States was 5 feet 6 inches. He attained this height at age 17. Although an excellent athlete, he was lean all his life. At age 7 was described as a "tall spider of a boy" and as an adult he weighed between 160 and 185 pounds [13a].

Lincoln's height came from his legs. Sitting, he was no taller than the average man. The legs sprouted from size 14 feet. (His footwear had to be custom made.) [13b] For example, while reviewing troops in April 1863, Lincoln was described as "an awkward figure on horseback with a stovepipe hat and elbows stuck out keeping time to the motion of the horse with his chin almost buried between his knees of his long bony legs" [4d].

habitus - ?
Marfan Lincoln also had disproportionately long arms and fingers [13b]. A contemporary noted Lincoln's hands were "very large" [20a], including a first phalanx of the middle finger nearly half an inch longer than that of an ordinary hand [13b]. However, a cast of his hands shows them to be muscular and powerful, not the slender hands of Marfan syndrome (see below) [10] [21].

Poet Walt Whitman saw Lincoln in February 1861. Whitman described a "seam'd and wrinkled face" atop a "disproportionately long neck" [4e]. (For those interested, the medical word for a long thin neck is "dolichostenocollis.")

Lincoln's height, long legs, leanness, and thin face are skeletal features of Marfan syndrome [6]. Evidence for other features of Marfan syndrome (ocular, cardiovascular) in Lincoln has been presented, but found weak [13c]. In 1959, Marfan syndrome was diagnosed in a distant relative of Lincoln's (a third cousin four times removed) [23]. Sharing 1/4096th of Lincoln's genetic material, it is difficult to ascribe much significance to this fact [13d]. Although the world's greatest authority on Marfan syndrome thinks it's "50-50" that Lincoln had the condition, other geneticists think it unlikely [13e] [22].

habitus - ?
Stickler J. Hermann et al wonder whether Lincoln and his son Tad had Stickler syndrome, "the most common autosomal dominant connective tissue dysplasia in the North American Midwest" [14a]. This is thought unlikely, however [13f].

pectus
excavatum? Lincoln's chest was described as so thin that it appeared to be a "sunken breast" [13g]. Yet, none of the several physicians who saw Lincoln's naked body at autopsy remarked on a sunken chest [13h].

depression Much has been written about Lincoln's "melancholia," but the evidence to some is not convincing [12a]. Others note several periods of major depression in Lincoln's life: (1) After the death of his mother, (2) After the death of his fiancée, Ann Rutledge, and (3) About the time of his engagement to Mary Todd. Lincoln had deep, but relatively brief episodes of depression after the terrible Union loss at the battle of Chancellorsville (he entertained suicide) and after the death of his son Willie. [2d]

Lincoln's depression has been variously ascribed to familial tendencies (his mother and sister had "melancholy dispositions," as did first cousins afflicted with the "Lincoln horrors" [4f]), to

the horse-induced concussion, and to neurosyphilis. The last of these is generally discounted ("not a shred of truth"). [2d] A new (2005) book devotes 350 pages to Lincoln's melancholy [27]. That's a lot of melancholy.

vertical strabismus See: Goldstein JH. Lincoln's vertical strabismus. J Pediatr Ophthalmol Strabismus 1997 Mar-Apr;34(2):118-20.

presbyopia See: [2a].

jaw fracture A dentist broke off part of Lincoln's jaw bone while pulling a tooth -- without anesthesia [2a]. The extraction may have taken place in Louisville, KY in Sept. 1841 [4g].

penetrating voice Lincoln had a "penetrating and far-reaching" voice that could be heard over great distances [20b]. It was high-pitched and "tended to become even more shrill when he became excited. At times, it was even unpleasant. But his voice was a great asset because it could be heard at the farthest reaches of the crowds that gathered outdoors to hear him speak" [20c]. "For example, everyone present heard the Gettysburg Address, and there were at least 15,000 people in attendance" [20b].

sleep talking Henry Whitney, a lawyer who knew Lincoln in Illinois, once found him asleep before a fireplace, talking "the wildest and most incoherent nonsense. ... A stranger to Lincoln would have supposed he had suddenly gone insane. Of course, I knew Lincoln and his idiosyncrasies and felt no alarm, so I listened and laughed" [4h].

Another sleep anecdote: The Illinois Republican party nominated Lincoln for President in a wild, tumultuous meeting. Lincoln left the meeting early, and was found in a nearby jewelry store, asleep on a couch [4i].

snored Reliability of this information is uncertain [3]. Its credibility is somewhat enhanced by the description of Lincoln's breathing as "exceedingly stertorous" (i.e. loud) as he lay comatose and dying in Ford's Theater [5a]. Snoring sounds are a sound of an endangered airway, and Dr. Zebra guesses that anyone can be made to snore if coma is deep enough.

swollen feet In 1858 Lincoln walked from the Danville, IL train depot to the home of Dr. William Fithian (116 Gilbert St.), with a crowd in tow. Lincoln went upstairs, took off his boots to relax, but the crowd insisted on a speech. Unable to easily get his boots on over his swollen feet, Lincoln, at Fithian's suggestion, spoke from the window, so the crowd could not tell he did not have his boots on. [4j]

scarlet fever? While campaigning for the Presidency in 1860, Lincoln developed sore throat, headache, fever, and malaise which lasted for a few days. Simultaneously, his son Willie was in bed with scarlet fever. Lincoln felt he had a form of the same disease. [2a]

unusual face and head A single photograph of Lincoln (before he grew a beard) [\[More\]](#) shows numerous unusual features: (1) his eyes appear smaller than they should be, (2) he has ptosis (drooping eyelids), (3) large ears that protrude, (4) a long straight nose, and (5) heavily wrinkled skin, even at an early age [\[13i\]](#).

These features pertain to the discussion of Lincoln's body habitus.

face & beard Lincoln began his beard about the time he left Illinois for Washington (early 1861). On Feb. 16, 1861 his inauguration train stopped in Westfield, NY where he sought out 11 year old Grace Bedell, who had before written to advise him to grow a beard: "I have got four brothers and part of them will vote for you anyway and if you let your whiskers grow I will try and get the rest of them to vote for you; you would look a great deal better for your face is so thin." [\[4k\]](#)

dentist phobia It has been said that Lincoln was afraid of dentists (see episode above for a good reason why he might have been). In 1862 Lincoln developed a severe toothache and consulted Dr. G. S. Wolf, who had an office near the White House. As Wolf prepared to pull the tooth, Lincoln asked him to wait. Lincoln "took a container of chloroform from his pocket, inhaled it deeply, and sleepily gave the signal for the dentist to proceed" [\[2a\]](#).

pulsations A photograph taken November 15, 1863 by Alexander Gardner shows Lincoln sitting with legs crossed. The image of the left foot -- the one nearest the camera -- is blurry, however. Lincoln noticed this and wondered why. Newspaperman Noah Brooks suggested it was because throbbing of the arteries may have imparted a slight motion to the foot. To test this idea, Lincoln crossed his legs, watched his foot, ... and saw that it moved. "That's it! That's it! Now that's very curious, isn't it?" he exclaimed [\[13j\]](#). This incident is cited as evidence that Lincoln had aortic regurgitation [\[24\]](#) [\[25\]](#).

Comment: Aortic regurgitation is caused by a leaky heart valve. When severe, large swings in blood pressure occur with every heartbeat, causing structures in the body to pulsate. Diagnosing aortic regurgitation from photographic blurriness is a clever idea, but, in this case, wrong. First, Lincoln's foot may simply have been out of focus. Second, such foot movement is normal: Dr. Zebra's foot moves in a similar way, and he does not have aortic regurgitation or Marfan syndrome. Third, Lincoln was incubating smallpox when the photograph was taken, so possibly he was vasodilated for that reason and more prone to foot movement.

mild smallpox Shortly after delivering the Gettysburg Address on November 19, 1863 [\[2a\]](#) Lincoln became ill with red blotches "all over" his skin. Lincoln's physician arrived while an office-seeker was with Lincoln. The doctor made the diagnosis of varioloid, a mild type of smallpox, and informed Lincoln the disease was highly contagious. The office-seeker made excuses and left immediately, causing Lincoln to remark: "There is one good thing about this. Now I have something I can give everybody" [\[1a\]](#).

upset stomach Lincoln and son Tad visited the battlefield area near Petersburg, VA on June 21-22, 1864. When Lincoln and General Grant steamed part way up the James River the next day, Lincoln had an upset stomach. He was offered champagne, but declined, noting that many people get "seasick ashore from drinking that very stuff" [\[4l\]](#).

Lincoln was immensely strong. As a young adult he was rarely bettered in wrestling. While visiting troops in the field, less than a month before his death, Lincoln picked up a heavy axe, chopped wood for several minutes, then held the axe "straight out horizontally, steady without a quiver." Several soldiers, strong ones, tried to duplicate his feat, but could not [4m].

very strong

Yet, just two years before, he was described as "cadaverous and emaciated" in appearance [4n].

Lincoln performed the "horizontal" feat several times, e.g. at Milwaukee, WI on Sept. 30, 1859 [4o].

receding
hairline

Lincoln is generally not thought of as bald, but a photo showing the top of his head in November 1863 (while giving the Gettysburg address) discloses significant temporal recession of his hairline. [See photo [More](#)]

gas leak

On Sept. 9, 1864 Lincoln was almost overcome by gas leaking from lighting fixtures in his White House office [17]. (I'd appreciate it if anyone having another reference to this incident would let me know. Thanks.)

Death:
assassination
&
resuscitation

The bullet from Booth's gun entered behind the left ear and lodged behind the right eye. When Dr. Charles Leale arrived in Lincoln's box at Ford's Theater, he found the President without a radial pulse and breathing laboriously, still sitting upright in his chair. Leale, just two months out of medical school [8a], laid Lincoln onto the floor, and resuscitated him using various "physiological" techniques. Modern authors speculate that the technique of anal dilation, popular at the time, may have been used [9].

Eyewitness accounts of the shooting and its immediate aftermath are available from Dr. Leale [More](#) and from Dr. Charles Taft [More](#).

An autopsy was performed in the White House, as was the embalming [4p].

Odds & Ends

[\[Top\]](#)

- In reference to discussions of Lincoln's health, one Lincoln scholar writes: "Lincoln was not a sufferer from much of anything, and students should be thinking what an edge his fabulous health gave him in the quest for success as politician and president" [19].
- In declining a job offer in Chicago (about 1849) Lincoln gave as a reason
that he tended to consumption, and, if removed to a city like Chicago, he would have to sit down and study harder than ever. The close application required of him and the confinement in the office, he contended, would soon kill him. [7b]

It is hard to know if Lincoln was being diplomatic or was referring to his leanness.

- His eyes were gray [7c].
- Stephen Douglas called Lincoln "two-faced." Lincoln responded: "I leave it to my audience. If I had another face, do you think I would wear this one?" [1b].

- Walking barefoot through Dixon, IL in 1832, Lincoln complained that his feet (size 14 as noted above) were cold. Someone told him: "No wonder, there's so much of you on the ground" [4q]. The same story is told about him in the post-1839 time frame [4r].
- Lincoln was "devoid of any natural ability as a singer" [7d]. After being serenaded by a quartet of singers in 1860, Lincoln said he wished he could sing like that, "but he knew only two tunes; one is 'Old One Hundred' and the other isn't" [4s]. Essentially the same anecdote is told about Ulysses Grant.
- Lincoln once used his knowledge of medicine to get rid of someone who often encroached upon his time. The encroacher was bald. In one of their meetings, Lincoln got up, walked over to the wardrobe, picked up a bottle, and asked "Did you ever try this for your hair?" The man answered no, so Lincoln said "Well, I advise you to try it and I will give you this bottle. If at first you don't succeed, try, try, again. Keep it up. They say it will make hair grow on a pumpkin. Now take it and come back in eight or ten months and tell me how it works." The man left with the bottle, and Lincoln was still convulsed with laughter when the next visitor entered the room [1a].
- During his 1860 campaign speeches, Lincoln would tell of seeing a man nearby with a sore on his neck. The man, he said was like the slavery question: it was dangerous to cut out because the man might bleed to death, but if he did not have it removed, it would shorten the man's life. [4t]
- Soon after the fall of Richmond, Lincoln walked through the city. He was immediately recognized. Black citizens crowded around him and knelt before him. Lincoln, famously, told them "Don't kneel to me. That is not right." Less famously, but equally telling of the status in which Lincoln was held, one black woman was later heard to tell her child that "a touch of Lincoln's garment would cure his pain" [4u].
- In 1842 Lincoln admitted writing letters to the newspaper in Springfield, IL satirizing the state auditor, James Shields. (Whether Lincoln wrote one, some, or all of the letters is unclear.) To uphold his honor, Shields, a crack shot, challenged Lincoln to a duel. As the challengee, Lincoln was to make the choice of weapons. He chose cow pies. Shields would not be deterred, however, and eventually Lincoln chose to duel with cavalry broadswords. When Lincoln and Shields met at the appointed place, Lincoln picked out a sword and, with his remarkable height and long arms, began slashing at tree branches that the shorter Shields could not reach. After this, an accommodation was reached and the duel never took place. Although humorous in retrospect, the affair was deadly serious. (Shields later became a Brigadier General and a U.S. Senator from Illinois, Missouri, and Minnesota.) [4v] [18]
- Some family history:
 - Lincoln's mother, Nancy Hanks, died during an epidemic of "milk sickness," caused by drinking the milk of cows feeding on poisonous plants [2b] [More](#). Fear of the milk sickness' return seems to have been a factor in the surviving Lincolns' decision to move from Indiana to Illinois in 1830 [7e]. [4w]. [More](#).
 - Lincoln's son Tad had a cleft palate. Because of a speech impairment he was known as "stuttering Tad." He died in 1871 of a pulmonary condition that included intractable pleurisy. [4x] He contracted, but survived, the illness that killed his brother Willie in 1862 [4y].
 - Among Lincoln's children, Willie was the most like his father mentally. Willie died in the White House while still a child, probably from typhoid fever he contracted from the recently installed indoor plumbing that was fed from the Potomac River [4z]. (Willie had survived typhoid fever in 1860 [4a1].)
 - Lincoln's son Robert had a son, Abraham II, who resembled his grandfather mentally and physically, and supposedly had great promise. However, Jack, as he was called, died at age 17 of blood poisoning after an operation for an abscess (or carbuncle) [4b1]. Abraham Lincoln's last descendant died in 1985 [4c1].
 - There is a tradition in Terre Haute, IN that Lincoln brought his son Robert there to be treated with a "mad stone" after a dog bite, possibly in September 1859 [4d1].

- During the time Lincoln lived in Kentucky and Indiana, the family name was pronounced "Linkhorn" [4e1].
- A neurological disorder, spinocerebellar ataxia type 5, has been found in 56 of 170 individuals descended from the paternal grandparents of Abraham Lincoln. The problem has been traced to a gene on chromosome 11. Lincoln was not one of the 56 with disease. Disease onset among the 56 varied from age 10 to age 68. Lincoln died at age 56. His father lived to age 73. I have not read anything suggesting Lincoln's father had the condition. [14b]
- To do: (1) height by age, (2) presbyopia and headaches, (3) depression and mercury, (4) healed skull fracture from horse? (Goldstein article)

Resources

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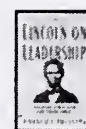
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29.

PubMed Search

 (64 matches when checked in November 2003)

Alternate index terms: Medical history of President Lincoln, Medical history of Honest Abe, Medical history of Abe Lincoln.

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Was Lincoln a leader in maladies, too?

UNION-TRIBUNE

February 8, 2006



When people debate the greatest presidents in American history, Abraham Lincoln invariably makes the short list. Often, he tops it. His leadership, vision and strength are beyond dispute and enduring.

So too, it seems, are the man's physical ailments, real and hypothesized.

A new study by researchers at Johns Hopkins University and the University of Minnesota suggests that Lincoln may have suffered from a genetic disease that destroys nerve cells in the cerebellum, the part of the brain that controls movement.

Spinocerebellar ataxia type 5 belongs to a family of neurodegenerative disorders caused by a gene mutation that disrupts neural communication. Symptoms include loss of fine control in arm and leg muscles, and Lincoln, it's said, possessed an uneven gait, which is considered an early sign of ataxia.

The study doesn't say Lincoln definitely had the disease. It's based on exams of 299 living descendants of the 16th president. The only way to determine whether Lincoln suffered from ataxia would be to study samples of his DNA, which the researchers hope eventually to do.

If Lincoln proves to have had ataxia, it would only be the latest on a long list of diseases and ailments linked to him. Many medical experts now believe Lincoln suffered from chronic clinical depression. He wept in public. He recited maudlin poetry. He spoke of suicide. His law partner William Herndon once said of Lincoln: "His melancholy dripped from him as he walked."

It's also been argued that Lincoln was afflicted with Marfan syndrome, a heritable connective tissue disorder characterized by unusually long limbs, a narrow face, cardiovascular and breathing problems. Lincoln had disproportionately long arms and legs, hands and feet. He also had a sunken chest and unusually lax joints.

But the Marfan connection, first proposed in 1960, remains hotly contested. Many scientists say there's no real scientific proof. It's not enough that Lincoln *looks* like he had the disease.

Medical history

Perhaps he was simply typical of his time, but Lincoln's 56 years of life were fraught with medical mishaps and misfortune. A quick review:

- He was colorblind.

- While working at a grist mill, Lincoln was kicked in the head by a horse, knocking him unconscious. The resulting concussion, according to some historians, also produced a passing bout of small seizures and narcolepsy. ■ Lincoln may have contracted malaria while living with his family in Pidgeon Creek, Ind., where the disease was endemic but better known as the "Illinois shakes."

- In 1860, while campaigning for president, Lincoln became ill with a sore throat, headache, fever and general malaise. He recovered after a few days, but was convinced that he had contracted a mild form of scarlet fever, which his son, Willie, had at the time.

■In 1863, Lincoln was photographed sitting with his legs crossed. The image of his left foot – the one nearest the camera – was blurry. When Lincoln asked why, it was suggested that throbbing arteries caused a slight motion in the foot.

Intrigued, Lincoln tested the notion by crossing his legs and observing his foot, which moved again. The incident is cited by some as evidence that Lincoln suffered from aortic regurgitation, in which a leaky heart valve causes wild swings in blood pressure and flow. Most experts dismiss the idea.

A second medical explanation has also been suggested: Lincoln was in the early stages of smallpox when the photo was taken. The incubating disease caused his body to be vasodilated, the increased blood flow producing the unintentional foot movement.

And Lincoln fell ill shortly after the Gettysburg Address on Nov. 9, 1863. His physician diagnosed it as varioloid, an usually benign form of smallpox.

Of course, the photo might merely have been out of focus.

■Singularity runs the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month.

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YOUR HEALTH

Kentucky of Lincoln's Day Was a Leader In Medicine

BY

LOGAN CLENDENING, M. D.

IT is usually said Lincoln was born in a log house in the backwoods of Kentucky, but that by no means gives a fair idea of the case. He was born in or on the border of the blue grass region of Kentucky, which at that time was the center of as fine a culture and civilization as any part of the United States. In fact, for originality and mental vigor, it was ahead of every other part of America at that time, Philadelphia and Boston alone excepted.

I have in mind medical science, but other intellectual activities were there. In Lexington, not far from the birth house of Lincoln, there was a thriving university—Transylvania, the first west of the Alleghenies. Its medical school was the fourth established in the United States, being preceded only by Pennsylvania, King's college, New York; Harvard and Dartmouth. It had been in operation since 1799—nine years, when Lincoln was born. Dr. Samuel Brown, professor of medicine on the faculty, had begun vaccination against smallpox in 1802, four years after the procedure was announced by Jenner.

In 1809, a year after Lincoln's birth, Dr. Ephraim McDowell in Danville, Ky., performed the first successful abdominal operation for ovariectomy on a real pioneer mother, Jane Todd Crawford, who must have lived not far from Lincoln's home.

THESE men were university graduates, and had come from Virginia to the new territory, where they founded a civilization and cultivated the amenities in a way that rivaled the culture of their native state.

The pioneers were tortured mostly by fevers. These were probably largely malarial in nature, or typhoid. Drake speaks of autumnal fever which might have been either. He also describes "bilious remittent fever" and "phlogistic fever," which have no meaning nowadays.

Smallpox also was a problem. So much so that the pioneers were very energetic in using the new method of vaccination. We have become indifferent and neglect vaccination. With the consequence that every once in a while an alarming epidemic occurs.

The pioneers were also plagued with insect parasites. One doctor, a violent abolitionist, moved out of Kentucky, to get away, as he said, from "head ticks and slavery."

Lincoln's mother died of milk sickness, which came from cows' feeding on a certain poisonous plant.

The usual remedy for everything was calomel. Drake's contemporary, Dr. Moorhead, was known among the medical students as "Old Hydrarg"—hydrarg being part of the Latin name for calomel.

These diseases are things of the past. Now and then a sporadic case crops up, but medical science has scotched them.

A California physician says that if Abraham Lincoln had not been assassinated, there was a chance he would have died of a heart attack while in office. Harold Schwartz, MD, Lakewood, Calif., writing in the *Western Journal of Medicine*, notes that only weeks before he was killed, Lincoln had complained of cold hands and feet, an episode of falling back while trying to rise from bed, extreme tiredness at the end of the day, severe headaches, and generally declining health. All these symptoms point to an inadequate aortic valve, said Dr. Schwartz, an instructor of medicine at USC.

This has recently varified in the media

