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PERSONALITY

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# Abraham Lincoln's Personality

## Anger

Excerpts from newspapers and other  
sources

From the files of the  
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

## LINCOLN COULD GET ANGRY.

**As, For Example, When His Telegrams Were Delivered to Stanton.**

"I have read several Lincoln anniversary speeches," said Mr. Charles Frederick, "and have been struck with the statement contained in some of them to the effect that Mr. Lincoln seldom got mad, and that when he did get mad he did not allow himself to get very mad. If these speakers spoke from their personal experience, it is all right, but my personal experience with him one night satisfied me he could get up a terribly good sized case of mad at times.

"I was a boy at the time and was a messenger for the old American Telegraph company, which in after years was absorbed by the present Western Union telegraph. For several days there had been a number of telegrams for the president from army officers, and among them I remember two or three from General McClellan. I don't remember now why they did not come over the military telegraph lines. Well, one night I started over to the White House with a telegram that I knew came from General McClellan. It was for the president.

"In those days there was always a guard of soldiers stationed at the two avenue gates, as also at the other gates, but messenger boys were generally well known, and they were admitted day or night without any question, at least to the front door, where another soldier guard was also stationed. There was always an officer about the door, who receipted for telegrams. This night, however, I saw Mr. Lincoln coming toward the outer gate, and I thought I would personally hand him the telegram, which I did. He smiled pleasantly enough as he opened it, but a change suddenly came over him.

"'Have you the other telegrams?' he demanded of me. I replied that I had but the one, though I informed him that I knew that there had been one or two others that day from General McClellan.

"'That is what he says,' added the president, 'and what annoys me is that I have not received them.'

"'Then, turning to the sentry, he said: 'Send up to the door for the officer in charge and tell him that when telegrams come here addressed to me they should and must be delivered to me. Tell him also,' and by this time the president was very mad, 'that if he sends any more of my telegrams over to Mr. Stanton's house I'll drive him away from here. Mr. Stanton has enough telegrams of his own and should not have mine.'

"'Though I was but a boy,' said Mr. Frederick, 'I could see that Mr. Lincoln was mad all the way through, and that, for the moment at least, he was displeased with his war minister, Secretary Stanton, and that he intended exactly what he said. The president, then directing himself to me, continued: 'Boy, tell your folks that I must have my telegrams, and that if these soldiers about the door interfere any more I'll drive every one of them away. I don't want them and never did want them about the place.' "--Washington Star.

## LINCOLN IN ANGER.

He Rarely Was Mad and Always in a Good Cause.

From the Philadelphia Press.

President Lincoln revealed his greatness in many ways, and especially in one which greatly impressed his Cabinet. He controlled his temper. When he did give way to indignation it was not because of any offense to himself, but usually because of injustice to others. Captain Page, of Philadelphia, who was employed in the office of the Paymaster General, told a group of friends the other day a little anecdote illustrative of Lincoln's capacity to get grandly angry. There came into the White House one day, among the throng who were anxious to heseech the President for this or that, a girl not more than eight years of age. She was coarsely but neatly dressed. She had beautiful eyes, but her features were plain, and the sun had tinted her cheeks so that they were swarthy as a sailor's. Her hair was short and curly.

She carried her left arm in a sling, and now and then it seemed to pain her. She was jostled this way and that, but she was patient, and at last was in the presence of the President. Lincoln eyed the queer visitor for a moment, and there was something so pathetic suggested by her appearance that he stepped up to her and took her hand, and then said, speaking very gently: "Is there something I can do for you, my girl? What is your story?"

"I was a soldier, Mr. Lincoln," she said, "and I can't get my pay."

Then again for as much as a minute the President looked searchingly and pityingly at her, and he seemed to see the truth in her glance.

"You a soldier? Why, you're a young girl," said he.

"But I was a soldier, Mr. Lincoln, and I was wounded three months ago in battle."

"Now, my girl, tell me about it, for this is a very strange statement for you to make."

She seemed not at all afraid of the President, and she told him in most innocent and childlike manner of speech that she had put on boy's clothes, enlisted in one of the Indiana regiments, gone to the front, taken part in several battles, and at last was badly wounded in the left arm, the bullet passing between the elbow and the shoulder and grazing her chest.

"When they took me to the hospital," she said, "and began to dress my wound, I told them that I was a girl. The lady nurses came and were very kind to me, and after a while I was discharged from the hospital. But I couldn't do my duty, and I have been trying to get my three months' pay."

Mr. Lincoln by this time was affected. "Tell me," he said, "why you can't get your pay." And she replied that the Paymasters all said that they were not authorized to pay a woman for services as a soldier. Then Mr. Lincoln blazed with anger. He reached over to his desk and wrote swiftly a message reading something like this: "To the Paymaster General: Inquire into the case of this girl, identify her; if you find that she enlisted as a soldier, went to the front, was wounded in battle, pay her what is due her, and don't send her from one Paymaster to another. If the Second Auditor of the Treasury objects to paying, let him know that it is my wish and that I will be responsible." And then taking the hand of the girl in both of his he said: "My little child, I believe you have told the truth. You have done a brave thing; tell me why."

"Well, Mr. Lincoln, there wasn't anything else I could do for the country and I was strong and well and had been used to work, so I enlisted."

"Well, if you don't get your money, come and see me again," said Mr. Lincoln, and as the girl thanked him and went from the room he turned to the gentleman who had heard and seen this strange thing and said: "She represents the sentiment that will save this Union."

Mr. Lincoln's note was sufficient, the girl got her money, and she was afterward honorably discharged.

New York Commercial  
SATURDAY, MARCH :

**General Category => General Discussion => Topic started by: NoahBriggs on September 13, 2006, 12:31:04 pm**

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**Title: Article on Lincoln's Blue mass prescription**

**Post by: NoahBriggs on September 13, 2006, 12:31:04 pm**

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Source: University Of Chicago Medical Center

Date: July 19, 2001

#### Lincoln's Little Blue Pills

Abraham Lincoln reached over and picked a man up by the coat collar at the back of the neck and shook him "until his teeth chattered." He became so angry "his voice thrilled and his whole frame shook." Lincoln only stopped when someone, "fearing that he would shake Ficklin's head off," broke his grip. A new study suggests that mercury poisoning may explain Lincoln's bizarre behaviour.

Lincoln during in this 1858 Lincoln-Douglas debate is a far cry from our vision of Lincoln at the Lincoln Memorial, sitting patient and thoughtful with the weight of the nation on his shoulders. A study published in the Summer 2001, issue of Perspectives in Biology and Medicine reformulates a common anti-depressive medication of the nineteenth century and shows that it would have delivered a daily dose of mercury exceeding the current Environmental Protection Agency safety standard by nearly 9000 times.

"We wondered how a man could be described as having the patience of a saint in his fifties when only a few years earlier he was subject to outbursts of rage and bizarre behaviour," said Norbert Hirschhorn, M.D., retired public health physician, medical historian and lead author of the study.

"Mercury poisoning certainly could explain Lincoln's known neurological symptoms: insomnia, tremor and the rage attacks," said Robert G. Feldman, M.D., professor of neurology, pharmacology, and environmental health at the Boston University Schools of Medicine and Public Health, an expert on heavy metal poisoning and co-author of the paper. "But what is even more important, because the behavioural effects of mercury poisoning may be reversible, it also explains the composure for which he was famous during his tenure as president."

Lincoln was known to have taken "blue mass," a pill containing mercury, apparently to treat his persistent "melancholia," (then known also as hypochondriasis.) In 1861, a few months after the inauguration, however, perceptively noting that blue mass made him "cross," Lincoln stopped taking the medication.

"We wanted to determine how toxic the mercury in the blue mass pills was likely to be," said Ian A Greaves, M.D., associate professor of environment and occupational health and associate dean at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health, co-author. "We used a nineteenth century recipe to recreate blue mass. The ingredients included, besides mercury, liquorice root, rose-water, honey and sugar and dead rose petals. It was compounded with an old-fashioned mortar and pestle and rolled to size on a 19th century pill tile. But, in accord with 20th century safety standards, we wore surgical gowns, gloves, masks and caps and worked with modern ventilation equipment."

Caution was well advised. The method of compounding the blue mass pill, dispersing the mercury into fine particles and increasing its surface area, was meant to assure its absorption into the body and did. The vapour released by the two pills in the stomach would have been 40 times the safe limit set by the U.S. National Institute for Occupational Health. The solid element of mercury absorbed from two pills would have

been 750micrograms. The EPA indicates that only up to 21micrograms of any form of mercury per day may safely be ingested. Someone who ate the common dose of two to three little pills per day would have seriously risked poisoning.

"The wartime Lincoln is remembered for his self-control in the face of provocation, his composure in the face of adversity," said Hirschhorn. "If Lincoln hadn't recognized that the little blue pill he took made him 'cross,' and stopped the medication, his steady hand at the helm through the Civil War might have been considerably less steady."

Noah Briggs

Article found online at - [www.sciencedaily.com](http://www.sciencedaily.com)

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Title: **Re: Article on Lincoln's Blue mass prescription**

Post by: **mmartin4600** on **September 17, 2006, 02:27:50 pm**

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Excellent article, thanks for posting it. I always wondered what the recipe was for Blue Mass. We look back at them now and wonder, "What the heck were they thinking?"

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Title: **Re: Article on Lincoln's Blue mass prescription**

Post by: **NoahBriggs** on **September 17, 2006, 05:23:04 pm**

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Or, what others will think of us in the future with all of our miracle pills and Viagra - "what the hell were they thinking?" We cannot judge them for what they honestly did not know.

Noah Briggs

<http://www.acwotaku.blogspot.com/>

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## Did Mercury Pills Cause Abe Lincoln's Fits of Rage?

LONDON (March 24) — Abraham Lincoln was one cool leader. Allies and opponents alike praised his steady, even temper. His personal physician commented that even during the bloodiest years of the Civil War, the president “was so mentally balanced that he could calmly share the triumph or endure defeat.”

But Honest Abe wasn't always so serene. During his failed campaign for Illinois' Senate seat in the late 1850s, friends reported that he suffered explosive and unexplained fits of rage. On one occasion, the soon-to-be president is alleged to have grabbed a fellow politician and shaken him “until his teeth chattered.” Now, British scientists say they have identified the cause of this un-Lincolnesque behavior: exceptionally high levels of mercury in tablets he took for constipation.

Alexander Gardner, Getty Images

British scientists says pills that Abraham Lincoln took for constipation contained such high levels of mercury that they may have caused the 16th president to have fits of rage.

Researchers at the Royal Society of Chemistry recently uncovered several of

these little blue pills — popularly called “Blue Mass” — in a museum in Devon County, England. Lincoln's law partner and biographer, William H. Herndon, was among the contemporaries who said that Lincoln took the pills, which were widely used in the mid-19th century to treat everything from toothache and bowel troubles to depression.

The chemists' analysis of the tablets revealed that if Lincoln followed common practice and took two or three pills a day, he would have ingested 80 to 120 times the World Health Organization's acceptable daily intake of mercury.

This highly toxic dosage could explain Lincoln's uncharacteristic outbursts, as symptoms of mercury poisoning include sudden violent mood changes as well as nausea, insomnia and depression.

“To think that the president was meant to be taking two of them a day is appalling,” said Dr. Bin Chen, who carried out the test.

Reports by Herndon and others suggest that Lincoln first started popping “Blue Mass” around 1858 and quit at the beginning of 1860, shortly before the Republican Party nominated him for the presidency. But James Cornelius, curator

of the Lincoln Collection at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Ill., says that because the president didn't keep a diary, it's almost impossible to tell how long he took them for, or how many he popped a day.

Cornelius adds that the late 1850s were a tense time for Lincoln, so it's possible his foul mood was caused by any number of stresses. He points out that "arguably the biggest event of his life" — a series of seven debates with Stephen A. Douglas, his rival in the Illinois Senate race — took place in 1858, the year when Lincoln allegedly suffered most of his bad tempers.

"It was a grueling, long, hot, dusty summer," Cornelius says. "So while it's possible that he was taking these pills on the road, these supposed outbursts of anger might just as well have been triggered by the heat of the debates, the exhausting schedule and the importance of the political issues. They were essentially fighting about whether slavery should continue to expand in the U.S."

However, Cornelius suspects that the little blue pills did play a significant role in his rages. "What's remarkable about Lincoln — and people said this all up and down the line — is that he never took personal offense at his enemies," he says. "So if there's even a single example of him getting angry with somebody and getting into a shouting match, then it looks like [these pills] would be among the likelier explanations. Because he just didn't lose his temper."

After quitting the pills, that cool demeanor quickly returned. Cornelius says Lincoln likely dumped the pills around January 1860, a month before he was due to give a speech to a group of Republican high-ups at New York's Cooper Union. That oration was intended to show that an almost unknown Westerner with no formal education could head the country as well as any Easterner.

"He suspected that this would be the biggest speech of his career," says Cornelius. "He would have been focused like never before on making a good appearance. And if he had a sense that these medications were not doing him good, he would have stopped taking them before heading off on that trip."

The pill-free Lincoln wowed his audience, proving himself to be composed, intelligent and dignified, and a better prospective leader than New York's own Sen. William Henry Seward. Lincoln was picked as the Republicans' presidential candidate three months later. And in November 1860, the American people chose that coolheaded lawyer as their new president.

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