

## Update on research into stovepipe hat

### Statements:

#### **Ray LaHood, chairman of the presidential library's board of trustees:**

"Dr. Wheeler and other historians at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum have done important work in trying to track the history of this object. We look forward to working with the foundation to explore continued research and ultimately decide how the hat can best be used to educate museum visitors."

#### **Melissa Coultas, acting director of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum:**

"Part of the Lincoln Presidential Library's mission is to learn from the past and share those lessons with the public. This process has taught us more about the hat and, just as importantly, about how to handle questions regarding our collections and policies. We see this as an opportunity to improve."

### Background:

The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum today released a summary of research into the history of a hat purchased by the private Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Foundation in 2007 to assist the state-run facility.

The hat, long owned by the Waller family in southern Illinois, was purchased as part of a collection of Lincoln artifacts and documents. Family lore held that a man named William Waller got the hat from Lincoln on a trip to Washington during the Civil War.

The research was conducted by State of Illinois Historian Samuel Wheeler, and began in August of 2018. After months of research, Wheeler found no records linking the hat to Abraham Lincoln or showing a clear connection between Lincoln and the Waller family. He also found that it is plausible – but unconfirmed – that William Waller acted as some sort of special agent during the war, as Waller family lore claimed.

Wheeler and other historians at the presidential library searched records in Washington, Chicago, Springfield and Carbondale. Their work included examining court documents, newspapers, military records and personal letters, and interviewing people around the country.

Wheeler recommended additional research including:

- Having multiple experts on men's headwear examine the hat to see if its material and construction are from Lincoln's era.
- Carefully measuring the hat size to see if it matches other Lincoln hats.
- Searching additional archives that might shed light on William Waller's work during the Civil War.

Status Update:

Provenance Research on the Stovepipe Hat (TLR 001)

December 16, 2019

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## SUMMARY

As the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum (ALPLM) prepared to open its doors in 2005, museum officials felt they needed to acquire additional archival material to ensure visitors would encounter world-class artifacts during their museum experience. From 2005 through 2007, museum officials worked closely with members of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Foundation (ALPLF) to acquire the 1,500-piece Lincoln collection of Louise Taper for \$23,018,025. The acquisition ensured ALPLM would remain one of the premier Lincoln research archives in the world and have one-of-a-kind objects to add to its rotation schedule in the museum. The centerpiece of the collection was a \$6.5 million stovepipe hat that was purportedly once owned by Abraham Lincoln.

The provenance of the stovepipe hat relied on a 1958 affidavit signed by Clara Waller of Carbondale, Illinois. In the document, Waller claimed Lincoln gave the hat to her father-in-law, William Waller, during the Civil War in Washington. When Waller died in 1891, his son Elbert Waller inherited the artifact and treasured it for the rest of his life. When Elbert died in 1956, Clara sold it to an antique store in Carterville, Illinois, where James T. Hickey, the curator of the Lincoln Collection at the Illinois State Historical Library, purchased it for his personal collection. Louise Taper purchased the artifact from Hickey in 1990, before selling it to the ALPLF in 2007.

In 2012 a series of media stories raised doubts about the authenticity of the stovepipe hat. In response, ALPLM staff revised the provenance story to what they believed was a more plausible scenario and began making claims about the physical characteristics of the object that seemed to increase the likelihood it had once belonged to Lincoln. Subsequent newspaper stories and internal reviews by ALPLF, which included testing the stovepipe hat for DNA evidence, only furthered doubts and ultimately failed to provide a definitive conclusion. Most troublingly, some observers claimed ALPLM administrators were encouraging doubts about the stovepipe hat's authenticity. As a result, the once-close relationship between ALPLM and ALPLF deteriorated.

By August 2018, senior administrators at ALPLM were once again at odds with ALPLF. ALPLM Executive Director Alan Lowe ordered Dr. Samuel Wheeler, State Historian of Illinois, to conduct a formal review of the stovepipe hat and the Taper acquisition. Over the next several months, Dr. Wheeler conducted a historical analysis of the provenance story laid out in the 1958 affidavit and examined the physical characteristics of the hat. During his research, he discovered that no one at ALPLM conducted any credible research into the stovepipe hat before the artifact was purchased. In addition, Dr. Wheeler uncovered new sources of information, including two previously unknown letters written by Clara Waller to James Hickey, in which she claimed William Waller had been involved in espionage activity for the Union in southern Illinois during the Civil War, which took him to Washington, where he had a brief encounter with Lincoln in which the two traded hats.

As Dr. Wheeler worked to verify the intriguing story, he also conducted a physical examination of the stovepipe hat. He concluded that several of the previous claims about the hat were dubious, while others required further analysis by a textile expert who specialized in nineteenth century men's headwear. However, before these steps could be taken, senior

administrators at ALPLM halted the research and ordered Dr. Wheeler to write a report detailing his research efforts to date.

Therefore, the resulting “Status Update: Provenance Research on the Stovepipe Hat, TLR 001” does not offer a definitive conclusion regarding the object’s authenticity because the research remains unfinished. The following document does, however, illustrate what is known about the stovepipe hat from 1958 to the present, including the public controversy over the object’s provenance, as well as the steps that have been taken during this research inquiry. The report concludes with several recommendations that are intended to bring a resolution to questions regarding the authenticity of the stovepipe hat, avoid the mistakes of the past, and repair the once-close relationship between ALPLM and ALPLF. The recommendations are:

- Further research is abundantly warranted, but both ALPLM and ALPLF should work collaboratively to outline the next steps in the process.
- ALPLM should immediately improve its acquisition process to ensure adequate research is completed prior to adding an item to its collection or advising ALPLF to acquire an item on its behalf.
- ALPLF should reexamine its conflict of interest policy to ensure it conforms with national standards and engage its board members in regular conversations concerning their duty of loyalty.
- The weaponization of the stovepipe hat must end immediately and both the ALPLM and ALPLF should rededicate themselves to working collaboratively.
- ALPLM and ALPLF should rededicate themselves to truth, transparency, and strive to achieve “excellence,” by fulfilling their educational mission and operating according to accepted professional standards.

## INTRODUCTION

On August 23, 2018, then-ALPLM Executive Director Alan Lowe directed me to conduct research into the provenance of the stovepipe hat and “the broader issue of the Taper purchase.”<sup>1</sup> For the next ten months I balanced this research alongside my duties as State Historian of Illinois, which included, among many other things, managing the daily operations of five ALPLM departments and maintaining an active speaking schedule to groups throughout the state. As I began to uncover more information about the stovepipe hat and learned details about the 2007 acquisition, as well as the controversies over the object’s provenance, I became increasingly determined to follow the story to its conclusion and tell it in full. It was my hope that by reaching a definitive conclusion and revealing the story in its entirety, it would bring closure to an unfortunate period in ALPLM’s troubled history and might signal a new beginning, where ALPLM and ALPLF could move forward together in good faith and better realize the institution’s untapped potential.

However, on May 22, 2019, Director Lowe abruptly halted my research and told me to write “a summary report.”<sup>2</sup> I was disappointed because I was making real progress. I was reluctant to write a report for several reasons, but most importantly because my research was not yet complete and there were still several avenues to pursue that could shed light on aspects of the stovepipe hat’s provenance. Moreover, my research convinced me that senior officials at ALPLM had repeatedly weaponized the stovepipe hat against the ALPLF, as part of a power struggle dating back to 2012. My observations convinced me the same tactic was being employed throughout 2018 and 2019 and I did not want my research to be misused in this way.

My suspicions were heightened in mid-September 2019, when I received a phone call from a reporter who told me he was in possession of an email Director Lowe sent to Jesse Ruiz, Deputy Governor of Illinois, on June 5, 2019. “It appears from my discussions with the state historian that he and his team have found no evidence confirming the hat belonged to President Lincoln,” Lowe wrote to Ruiz.<sup>3</sup> The reporter told me he had acquired the email through a recent Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. I had seen the FOIA request and noted it was odd that the reporter was specifically requesting communications about the stovepipe hat involving ALPLM and members of the governor’s office, specifically Jesse Ruiz.<sup>4</sup> The reporter told me he had written a story based on the email from Lowe to Ruiz, but he wanted to give me the opportunity to refute, confirm, or add context to Director Lowe’s characterization of my research. I told the reporter it was against ALPLM policy for me to speak to the media without permission from ALPLM senior staff. I asked him to reach out to them and obtain such permission and, if it was approved, I would be happy to speak to him. I never heard back from the reporter or ALPLM senior staff about this issue.

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Lowe email message to Samuel Wheeler, cc: Nadine O’Leary and Hannah Ross, “Follow up re Taper,” August 23, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Alan Lowe email message to Samuel Wheeler, cc: Hannah Ross, Nadine O’Leary, Dave Kelm, “RE: Request for Permission,” May 22, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Dave McKinney, “State Historian Finds ‘No Evidence’ Disputed Hat Belonged to Abraham Lincoln,” WBEZ News (Chicago), September 26, 2019, <https://www.wbez.org/shows/wbez-news/state-historian-finds-no-evidence-disputed-hat-belonged-to-abraham-lincoln/9aee051d-8be5-40fb-a48a-7a0a80ae9b61> (accessed on 11/22/19).

<sup>4</sup> Dave McKinney email message to Dave Kelm, cc: Chris Wills, “RE: Recent FOIA,” August 27, 2019.

The resulting article published under the headline, “State Historian Finds ‘No Evidence’ Disputed Hat Belonged to Abraham Lincoln,” used Director Lowe’s characterization of my research to tell the world I had concluded the hat did not belong to Lincoln.<sup>5</sup> I believed the statement was premature and mischaracterized the nature of my research.

When I began this research, I understood that the stovepipe hat’s provenance hinged on family lore. That story was memorialized in the form of an August 9, 1958 affidavit, signed by Clara Waller. Ms. Waller claimed Abraham Lincoln gave her father-in-law, William Waller, the stovepipe hat during the Civil War in Washington. When William died, his son Elbert inherited it. When Elbert died, his widow Clara became the owner. Ms. Waller’s affidavit stated she “disposed of the hat with other items” to a couple in Carterville, Illinois and they later sold the hat to James T. Hickey, of Elkart, Illinois.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the affidavit provided a starting point for my research. Each claim Ms. Waller made needed to be analyzed to determine if it was plausible and verifiable.

During the course of this research I was able to gain access to several important pieces of additional information. Dr. Thomas F. Schwartz, former State Historian of Illinois, agreed to meet with me to discuss the role he played in the Taper acquisition. At the end of our two-and-a-half-hour interview, I asked him to reach out to Louise Taper and ask her if she had an original copy of the 1958 Waller affidavit because ALPLM files only contained a copy. A month later, I received an envelope from Dr. Schwartz that contained two previously unknown letters written by Clara Waller. In addition to serving as the basis of information to construct the 1958 affidavit, the letters contained an important revelation that possibly explains why Waller went to Washington and interacted with Lincoln. In addition, ALPLF also gave me access to a trove of documents that detail the negotiations that took place from 2005 through 2007 to acquire the Taper Collection. “Part II: Historical Analysis” compiles and analyzes this information.

In addition to the affidavit and a handful of newspaper clippings documenting the stovepipe hat controversy, ALPLM’s scant research file on “Stovepipe Hat, TLR 001” also contained a document titled, “Lincoln Stovepipe Hat: The Facts,” dated February 26, 2013. The document was drafted by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (ALPLM’s then-parent agency) and was apparently intended to quell mounting doubts about the stovepipe hat’s provenance. The first three claims in the document referenced the hat’s physical characteristics, which were used to bolster claims of authenticity.<sup>7</sup> The document encouraged me to conduct a physical analysis of the object to confirm what ALPLM had previously claimed about the stovepipe hat, as well as to determine if any new evidence could be found. “Part III: Physical Analysis” documents my findings thus far.

Shortly after Director Lowe was fired on September 20, 2019, senior administrators at ALPLM again insisted I write a report that summarized my research findings on the

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<sup>5</sup> Dave McKinney, “State Historian Finds ‘No Evidence’ Disputed Hat Belonged to Abraham Lincoln,” WBEZ News (Chicago), September 26, 2019, <https://www.wbez.org/shows/wbez-news/state-historian-finds-no-evidence-disputed-hat-belonged-to-abraham-lincoln/9aee051d-8be5-40fb-a48a-7a0a80ae9b61> (accessed on 11/22/19).

<sup>6</sup> Clara Waller, Affidavit, Jackson County, Illinois, August 9, 1958.

<sup>7</sup> Chris Wills, Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, “Lincoln Stovepipe Hat: The Facts,” February 26, 2013, ALPLM Research File, “Stovepipe Hat, TLR 001.”

stovepipe hat. I protested this directive because my research was not yet complete and I was concerned anything I wrote would appear in the media and revive the controversy over the hat. Instead, I asked permission to resume my research, reach a conclusion, and then write a report that was definitive. In response, I was given a directive from Chief Operating Officer of ALPLM Toby Trimmer, ordering me to produce a list of reference materials I had reviewed during the course of my research.<sup>8</sup> In compliance with the directive, I produced a five-page document, listing 91 research tasks my team and I completed during our research.<sup>9</sup>

On October 28, 2019, I received a second memo from Trimmer asking me to expand on the list I had given him. For instance, I had listed “Conducted close reading of the Clara Waller affidavit” on my list of research tasks. Trimmer now asked, “what is this document and why examine it?” He also asked for a “who, what, when, where, why” explanation for each of the research tasks I listed in my previous document.<sup>10</sup>

In response to Trimmer’s request, I wrote him a letter, explaining that it would be far more productive if he instead brokered a meeting where I could speak directly to representatives from the ALPLM and ALPLF to let them know what research I had done, the things I had found, and explore the possibility of working together on a plan to move the research forward. I also told him I would be pleased to meet with representatives from the governor’s office about this issue, as he indicated they too were deeply interested in this research.<sup>11</sup>

Later the same day, Trimmer informed me that Deputy Governor Jesse Ruiz wished to speak with me the following day.<sup>12</sup> When I asked Trimmer what the subject of the meeting would be, he told me he did not know.

On November 12, 2019, I met with Deputy Governor Jesse Ruiz in his office in the Illinois State Capitol, along with Trimmer and ALPLM Acting Executive Director Melissa Coultas. Ruiz inquired about the progress of my report. I explained that there is currently deep mistrust between the ALPLM and ALPLF and the stovepipe hat resides at the core of the problem. I recommended that instead of insisting on a report detailing incomplete research that would appear in the media and create further mistrust between the two organizations, I could verbally present my research to ALPLM, ALPLF, and the governor’s office. Together, all being equipped with the same information at the same time, we could then outline a plan moving forward. ALPLM Acting Executive Director Melissa Coultas disagreed with my proposal. She said she had discussed the issue with ALPLM General Counsel Dave Kelm and concluded if ALPLM received another FOIA and I still had not written a report, she and Kelm would give the reporter all my research notes regarding the stovepipe hat.

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<sup>8</sup> Toby Trimmer email message to Samuel Wheeler, cc: Melissa Coultas and Dave Kelm, “Important Status Update Request,” September 27, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Wheeler to Toby Trimmer, September 30, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Toby Trimmer to Samuel Wheeler, “Stovepipe Hat: Draft Status Document,” October 28, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Samuel Wheeler to Toby Trimmer, November 4, 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Toby Trimmer email message to Samuel Wheeler, cc: Melissa Coultas, “Deputy Governor Ruiz meeting 11/07/19,” November 6, 2019. A follow-up email the same day pushed the meeting back to November 12, 2019.



By the end of the meeting, I was given a directive from Coultas, Trimmer, and Ruiz to prepare a report detailing my research into the provenance of the stovepipe hat and the Taper acquisition. I was directed to send the report to Trimmer on November 25, 2019, who would review it with Coultas and Kelm, and then share it with Ruiz and Ray LaHood, incoming chairman of the newly constituted ALPLM Board, who would then share it with Ray McCaskey, chairman of the ALPLF Board.

As I was preparing my report, ALPLM administrators contacted me to say I would also be expected to summarize my findings on November 26, 2019 during a conference call with members of the ALPLF board, ALPLM Chairman LaHood, Deputy Governor Ruiz, and ALPLM administrators, which would include Coultas, Trimmer, and Kelm.

During the ensuing conference call I learned that no one had received a copy of the report I had submitted to ALPLM administrators the previous day. For the next 40 minutes, I summarized the report, detailing the steps I took during the research, the new information I was able to uncover, and advocated for restarting the research process so I could reach a definitive conclusion and write a report that would put the issue to rest. When discussion turned to whether my report would become a public document, Coultas said ALPLM might redact some of the material I had written, specifically my claim that the hat had been weaponized by ALPLM administrators. I objected to any redactions, especially this one, because it was an essential part of the story. As far as I was concerned, everything that has happened regarding the stovepipe hat since it was acquired in 2007 is part of the hat's history and helps inform the current troubled relationship between ALPLM and ALPLF. By the end of the call, ALPLF board members suggested my report might benefit from a collection of documents they had compiled that detailed the complicated negotiations that took place in 2005-2007 between ALPLM, ALPLF, and Taper. I replied that I would be happy to look at the documents and consider incorporating them into my report. The next day, I received a call from Trimmer, telling me to go to the ALPLF office and make use of the documents they mentioned on the phone call the previous day.

ALPLF made approximately 1,500 pages of material available to me. Two large binders and two folders contained documents such as timelines, board minutes, and emails that detailed the Taper acquisition. I was told I could look at the material in the ALPLF offices but was not allowed to make copies. ALPLM administrators were anxious for me to complete my work, initially giving me just one day to use the material and make the necessary revisions to my report.<sup>13</sup> In response, I negotiated a December 16, 2019 deadline for my revised report.<sup>14</sup> My assessment of this material appears in the section titled "The Negotiation," at the end of "Part II: Historical Analysis."

The following report is not a final analysis. It does not determine whether the stovepipe hat, acquired by ALPLF at the recommendation of ALPLM, was once owned by Lincoln. However, I hope this report will clearly define where we are with this issue at this moment in time and inspire a conversation about how best to move forward.

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<sup>13</sup> Toby Trimmer email message to Samuel Wheeler, "Followup...", December 3, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Samuel Wheeler email message to Toby Trimmer, cc: Melissa Coultas, "RE: Followup...", December 5, 2019; Melissa Coultas email message to Samuel Wheeler and Toby Trimmer, "RE: Folowup...", December 5, 2019.

The report begins with “Part I: The Acquisition,” in which I attempt to reassemble everything that has previously been published about the Taper acquisition and the stovepipe hat. Using newspaper articles and the documents reporters were able to acquire through the Freedom of Information Act, as well as a small collection of supplementary documents collected during this research, I constructed a narrative that traces the stovepipe hat controversy from 2007 to the present. This synopsis demonstrates how closely ALPLM and ALPLF were linked during the time of the acquisition—Rick Beard served as the executive director of both the ALPLM and ALPLF during this period, while State Historian Dr. Thomas F. Schwartz was the primary advisor to the ALPLF on all history-related matters. Without them, the Taper acquisition would have never been accomplished. Beard facilitated the negotiations with Taper’s team and steadied the nerves of ALPLF board members who waived before the deal was completed, while Dr. Schwartz, a friend of Taper’s, was intimately familiar with her collection and vouched for the authenticity of the items. The Taper acquisition was a joint ALPLM-ALPLF endeavor, but after Beard’s dismissal in 2008, a new administrative structure led to the hiring of separate directors of ALPLM and ALPLF and the once-close relationship began deteriorating and an era of distrust emerged, with the stovepipe hat at the heart of the struggle. In many respects, this era continues today.

After presenting my research in “Part II: Historical Analysis” and “Part III: Physical Analysis,” I conclude the report with a section devoted to recommendations for both ALPLM and ALPLF moving forward. I believe the past can be instructive, if we take the time to examine it and resolve never to repeat the same mistakes. By implementing these initial recommendations, ALPLM and ALPLF can chart a course for the future that will establish the stovepipe hat’s provenance and, I hope, lay the groundwork for a new relationship with one another.

## PART I: THE ACQUISITION

### A. THE DILEMMA

Before the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum (ALPLM) greeted its first visitor, the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Foundation (ALPLF) faced a dilemma. Though they had been fundraising for the construction of the long-anticipated library and museum in Springfield, Illinois, their board members expressed a desire to raise additional money to acquire new archival materials that would ensure the world-class museum they were building would also contain the world's finest collection of Lincolniana.<sup>15</sup>

According to the minutes of the September 26, 2002 ALPLF board meeting, State Historian Dr. Thomas F. Schwartz was asked to discuss an upcoming auction at Christie's Auction House. He provided board members with a prioritized list, totaling \$1.2 million, of Lincoln items that would be available at the auction and expressed a desire to add them to the ALPLM collection. Board member Louise Taper, a major collector of Lincoln items, said she believed it was important to acquire as many items as possible at the auction because few quality Lincoln items were still available on the open market, but she cautioned fellow board members that Lincoln items often exceed pre-auction estimates.<sup>16</sup>

ALPLF board member Zale Glauberman articulated the dilemma board members now faced: though they wanted to help ALPLM acquire world-class objects for display in the world-class facility currently under construction, ALPLF had not yet reached its fundraising goals and he worried that overextending themselves at this moment might not be advisable. The meeting adjourned with a promise to form a committee that would contemplate making a percentage of fundraising dollars available for new acquisitions in the future.<sup>17</sup>

Less than four years later, the *Chicago Sun-Times* reported that the ALPLF was close to purchasing the Lincoln collection of ALPLF board member Louise Taper. "We've been eyeing her collection for a number of years, and I think there's always been a discussion of possibly acquiring some of it," ALPLM spokeswoman Jill Burwitz told a reporter, but "as of now, there's no deal."<sup>18</sup>

Initial reports indicated the acquisition would include one of Abraham Lincoln's stovepipe hats. Daniel Weinberg, owner of the Abraham Lincoln Book Shop in Chicago, which buys and sells Lincoln artifacts, told a reporter he was familiar with the hat, calling it "one of the best known and preserved" on the market. He suggested the hat was worth "above a million," but warned that a bidding war might soon break out if the deal was not closed quickly. "There could be people who would approach her [Taper] now that it's out,"

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<sup>15</sup> Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum Foundation, Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting, June 27, 2002, 7; *Ibid.*, September 26, 2002, 8-9

<sup>16</sup> ALPLF, Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting, September 26, 2002, 9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Dana Heupel, "Headed Home? Lincoln's stovepipe hat, other artifacts may return to Springfield," *State Journal-Register* (Springfield, IL), April 12, 2007.

he said. “There are collectors out there with real money and interest who might like to pick off things.”<sup>19</sup>

## B. A CELEBRATED ACQUISITION

On June 18, 2007, Abraham Lincoln’s hometown newspaper, the *State Journal-Register*, announced ALPLF had finalized a deal with board member Louise Taper to acquire approximately 1,500 items from her personal collection, including the stovepipe hat.<sup>20</sup> Details would follow later, but ALPLF board members voted unanimously to purchase the items from their fellow board member for approximately \$23 million, while she agreed to donate items worth an additional \$2 million as a tax-deductible gift. Taper recused herself from the board vote.<sup>21</sup>

Initial reaction to the acquisition was overwhelmingly positive. Lincoln scholar Harold Holzer, who had previously used parts of Taper’s collection in his research, told a reporter from the *New York Times* it was “easily the best collection of Lincoln material in private hands.”<sup>22</sup> Daniel Weinberg called the acquisition “a coup” for the museum.<sup>23</sup> Weinberg now speculated that the stovepipe hat alone might be worth \$3 to \$5 million.<sup>24</sup>

Rick Beard, the executive director for both ALPLM and the not-for-profit ALPLF, credited Dr. Schwartz, the Illinois State Historian, for ensuring the Taper collection would reside at ALPLM. Beard told reporters that Dr. Schwartz “has known Taper for 20 years, often serving as an adviser to her in purchases, and the two became friends.” As a result of their close relationship, Beard said ALPLM and ALPLF had “few concerns about [the collection’s] authenticity. . . . we feel real confident there is no phoniness here.”<sup>25</sup> The stovepipe hat, in particular, was “of indisputable provenance,” Beard told another reporter.<sup>26</sup>

## C. DOUBTS EMERGE

Less than eighteen months later, Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich fired Beard from the ALPLM and the ALPLF followed suit. Newspaper reports stated Beard had been arrested for misdemeanor shoplifting in February 2007, November 2007, and again in August 2008.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Pete Sherman, “Vast collection of Lincoln items comes to library,” *State Journal-Register* (Springfield, IL), June 18, 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, Press Release, “Papers show care in acquiring vast Lincoln collection: Foundation for Lincoln Presidential Museum got two separate appraisals, carefully examined collection,” March 8, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> “Lincoln’s Birthday,” *New York Times*, February 8, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Christopher Wills, “Stovepipe hat, bloody gloves found in new Lincoln purchase,” *The Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), June 18, 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Charles Storch, “Lincoln trove heading to Springfield,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 18, 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Doug Moore, “The stovepipe hat that saw the Civil War,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 1, 2007.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Storch, “Lincoln trove heading to Springfield,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 18, 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Adriana Colindres, “Beard Fired from ALPLM,” *State Journal-Register* (Springfield, IL), October 29, 2008.

For nearly the next two years, ALPLM and ALPLF went without a permanent executive director. During that time, representatives from the American Association of Museums (now the American Alliance of Museums) completed an Institutional Assessment Report of ALPLM. The report recommended hiring a separate director for the ALPLM and ALPLF to clarify responsibilities and sidestep any potential conflicts of interests.<sup>28</sup>

ALPLM and ALPLF accepted the recommendation and two independent searches were simultaneously conducted to select chief executives for each institution. In December 2010, the state of Illinois announced that Eileen Mackevich had been hired as the Executive Director of the ALPLM, while the ALPLF hired Dr. Carla Knorowski in March 2011. In May 2011, Dr. Schwartz resigned his position as Illinois State Historian and accepted a position with the National Archives and Records Administration as director of the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum in West Branch, Iowa.<sup>29</sup>

Shortly after Mackevich and Dr. Knorowski were in place, Dave Blanchette, public information officer for the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (then-parent agency of ALPLM), began hearing rumors that the new administrative structure of ALPLM and ALPLF was not going to work. He was told Mackevich and Dr. Knorowski had previously worked together in the Chicago area, but had a falling out that was never reconciled. Though he tried to dismiss the gossip, it soon became obvious to him that the new ALPLM executive director had no intention of working together in good faith with the ALPLF CEO. Moreover, Blanchette became convinced that Mackevich, and possibly an IHPA board member, were working with the media to sabotage ALPLF's fundraising efforts to pay off the \$23 million Taper debt. He suspected they were encouraging reporters to ask probing questions about the stovepipe hat.<sup>30</sup>

On April 15, 2012, the 147<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lincoln's death, the *Chicago Sun-Times* published a story that would have immense implications for the repayment of the Taper debt. Reporter Dave McKinney penned an article asking, "Was Famous Stovepipe Hat Really Abe Lincoln's?" He revealed that the ALPLF paid \$6.5 million for the hat but questioned whether the object could definitively be connected to Lincoln. For instance, ALPLM had previously cited Clara Waller's 1958 affidavit and claimed Lincoln gave his stovepipe hat to a farmer from Murphysboro, Illinois, named William Waller during the Civil War in Washington, D.C. McKinney wanted to know why the farmer went to Washington, D.C., in the middle of the Civil War. In response to his inquiries, Dr. James Cornelius, then-curator of ALPLM's Lincoln Collection, announced that the museum had decided on another scenario entirely. Instead of acquiring the hat during the Civil War, Dr. Cornelius said Lincoln must have given Waller his hat in 1858, in Jonesboro, Illinois, during the Lincoln-Douglas debates. Dr. Cornelius explained that Dr. Schwartz told him about the new interpretation shortly before he resigned as state historian the previous year. "I guess you'd

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<sup>28</sup> Judith E. Endelman and Claudine Klose, "Institutional Assessment Report: Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library & Museum," June 7-8, 2010, American Association of Museums, 20.

<sup>29</sup> Chris Wetterich, "State historian leaving to head Herbert Hoover presidential museum, *State Journal-Register* (Springfield, IL), May 3, 2011.

<sup>30</sup> David Blanchette, Oral History interview with Mark DePue, August 5, 2015, 1:21-1:26. [https://multimedia.illinois.gov/alplm/Oral\\_History/IHPA\\_Legacy/Blanchette\\_Dav/Blanchette\\_Dav\\_03.mp3](https://multimedia.illinois.gov/alplm/Oral_History/IHPA_Legacy/Blanchette_Dav/Blanchette_Dav_03.mp3) (accessed on 11/24/19).

say we've taken something of a historic liberty in re-dating it to a much more plausible time and place," Dr. Cornelius explained.<sup>31</sup>

The doubts raised by McKinney's article surfaced during a February 13, 2013 IHPA (then-parent agency of ALPLM) Board of Trustees meeting. During a discussion about the stovepipe hat's provenance, IHPA trustee Tony Leone suggested DNA testing could help authenticate the hat. In response, Dr. Cornelius, then-Lincoln curator at ALPLM, replied, "This is a dead issue. This is a non-issue. Dandruff, bone, hair—it's not there." IHPA trustee Dr. Shirley Portwood echoed Leone's call for further testing, stating she had not yet "heard an explanation that fully satisfies me about the provenance of the hat."<sup>32</sup>

#### D. RESPONDING TO DOUBTS

In response to the doubts about the stovepipe hat's provenance, ALPLM issued a press release detailing how much care went into the Taper acquisition, emphasizing that historians at ALPLM, "including the official Illinois historian [Dr. Thomas Schwartz], carefully examined the collection." The press release stated the ALPLM and ALPLF worked closely together on the Taper acquisition. It acknowledged that ALPLF was a "private, non-profit organization, operating in support of" ALPLM, but "the presidential library, its executives and historians helped the foundation evaluate and acquire the [collection]."<sup>33</sup> In addition, ALPLM produced a document titled, "Lincoln Stovepipe Hat: The Facts," a list of nine statements about the hat intended to quell doubts about the object's provenance.<sup>34</sup>

In the wake of the controversy, the ALPLF formed an Independent Committee to take another look at the Taper acquisition to see if the board had done its due diligence and determine what steps could be taken to examine the stovepipe hat to confirm its provenance.<sup>35</sup> On November 4, 2013, at the committee's request, representatives from the Smithsonian National Museum of American History and the Chicago History Museum collaborated on an assessment of the stovepipe hat, which concluded that the artifact's provenance rested on Clara Waller's 1958 affidavit, but in the absence of additional evidence, the affidavit alone was "insufficient to claim that the hat formerly belonged to President Abraham Lincoln." The report encouraged ALPLM to "take a less defensive

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<sup>31</sup> Dave McKinney, "Was famous stovepipe hat really Abe Lincoln's?" *Chicago Sun-Times*, April 15, 2012.

<sup>32</sup> Bruce Rushton, "Lincoln appraisal released: Disclosure comes amid questions," *Illinois Times* (Springfield), February 15, 2013.

<sup>33</sup> Chris Wills, Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, Press Release, "Papers show care in acquiring vast Lincoln collection: Foundation for Lincoln Presidential Museum got two separate appraisals, carefully examined collection," March 8, 2013.

<sup>34</sup> Chris Wills, Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, "Lincoln Stovepipe Hat: The Facts," February 26, 2013, ALPLM Research File, "Stovepipe Hat, TLR 001."

<sup>35</sup> ALPLF, "Oral Report of the Independent Committee of the Board of Directors of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Foundation to the Executive Committee," March 23, 2016. The Committee reported they "found no evidence that the Board acted improperly in deciding to bid on and acquire the Taper Collection. Even with the benefit of hindsight, we believe the Board acted prudently to move very quickly to bid on the unique Taper Collection when it became available." In addition, they reported they "did not find any additional evidence to strengthen the provenance of the hat" but noted they "did not find any evidence to the contrary that suggested the hat was not President Lincoln's." Their report cited circumstantial evidence they believed tied the hat to Lincoln, including the hat's size, the fact the hat was made in Springfield, and the stretched brim, which they viewed as consistent with Lincoln's habit of storing papers in his hat. The committee did note they were disappointed that Louise Taper did not cooperate with the committee.

position” regarding the hat, conduct further research on the object, and even consider “asking the seller to take back the hat if greater documentation is not found.”<sup>36</sup>

ALPLF’s Independent Committee also reached an agreement with the FBI in March 2015 to conduct DNA testing on the stovepipe hat. On two separate occasions, ALPLF worked with Dr. Cornelius to bring FBI agents into the ALPLM to collect samples for testing. However, senior ALPLM administrators were not made aware the testing was taking place, nor were they aware the Lincoln Curator was bringing FBI agents into building. There is also evidence the Lincoln Curator told security guards the FBI agents were simply a news crew doing a story on Lincoln. In the end, the FBI found DNA consistent with the profile of an individual who recently handled the objects, most likely Dr. Cornelius, but failed to recover any relevant nineteenth-century DNA on the stovepipe hat.<sup>37</sup>

## E. NEW LEADERSHIP

Following Eileen Mackevich’s resignation on October 16, 2015, officials conducted a nationwide search to find a new director of ALPLM. Governor Bruce Rauner announced that Alan Lowe, the founding director of the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum, had been selected and would start on July 11, 2016.<sup>38</sup>

As with Director Mackevich, Director Lowe was soon in an oppositional relationship with ALPLF. At the time ALPLF was lobbying the Illinois General Assembly to secure an appropriation to help retire the remaining \$9 million on the Taper debt, Lowe was quoted in the *New York Times* accusing ALPLF of misleading him about the provenance of the stovepipe hat, claiming he had only been told about the DNA test in January 2018 and only recently been made aware of the report written by representatives of the Smithsonian and Chicago History Museum.<sup>39</sup> Lowe promptly dissolved his \$25,000 annual consulting agreement with the ALPLF that was offered to him when he was hired, telling the Associated Press he had done so because he and ALPLF were “at odds on some issues” and “I don’t want there to be any question about my priorities.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Harry Rubenstein and Russell Lewis, “Assessment of Hat Formerly Belonging to Abraham Lincoln,” November 4, 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, “DNA Analysis of a Stovepipe Hat Believed to have Belonged to Abraham Lincoln,” July 19, 2017; See also: Dave McKinney, “Report: Existing Evidence ‘Insufficient’ to Prove Hat Belonged to Lincoln,” WBEZ News (Chicago), September 19, 2018, <https://www.wbez.org/shows/wbez-news/report-existing-evidence-insufficient-to-prove-hat-belonged-to-lincoln/fba96bef-2012-4aed-884e-81d562d930c7> (accessed on 11/24/19); See also: Julia Jacobs, “F. B. I and Expert Reports Cast Doubt that Celebrated Stovepipe Hat was Lincoln’s,” *New York Times*, September 23, 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Chris Dettro, “ALPLM director Eileen Mackevich resigns; Rauner sought ‘different direction,’” *State Journal-Register* (Springfield, IL), October 16, 2015; Doug Finke, “Director of George W. Bush museum appointed to lead Lincoln museum in Springfield,” April 29, 2016.

<sup>39</sup> Dave McKinney, “Report: Existing Evidence ‘Insufficient’ to Prove Hat Belonged to Lincoln,” WBEZ News (Chicago), September 19, 2018, <https://www.wbez.org/shows/wbez-news/report-existing-evidence-insufficient-to-prove-hat-belonged-to-lincoln/fba96bef-2012-4aed-884e-81d562d930c7> (accessed on 11/24/19); Julia Jacobs, “F.B.I. and Expert Reports Cast Doubt that Celebrated Stovepipe Hat was Lincoln’s,” *New York Times*, September 23, 2018.

<sup>40</sup> John O’Connor, “Lincoln hat spat continues as Illinois museum director cuts ties with fundraising group,” Associated Press (AP), October 7, 2018.

On August 23, 2018, Director Lowe ordered Illinois State Historian Dr. Samuel Wheeler to conduct research into the provenance of the stovepipe hat and “the broader issue of the Taper purchase.”<sup>41</sup> However, Lowe apparently did not inform ALPLF that he had ordered further research on the artifact and soon issued a directive requiring all direct communications between ALPLM staff and ALPLF to cease and instead go through ALPLM Chief of Staff Nadine O’Leary.<sup>42</sup>

The controversy over the provenance of the stovepipe hat even became a campaign issue in October 2018, when Congressman Rodney Davis’s (R-Illinois) campaign debuted an attack ad that tied his Democratic challenger, Betsy Dirksen Londrigan, to the stovepipe hat because she had once worked for ALPLF.<sup>43</sup>

On November 13, 2018, the Illinois House Tourism, Hospitality and Craft Industries Committee held a hearing in the statehouse on whether or not to recommend state funding to ALPLF to retire the Taper debt. Issues regarding the provenance of the stovepipe hat and the troubled relationship between Lowe and ALPLF were topics of testimony. The hearing ended with a chastisement from Representative Tim Butler (R-Springfield), who expressed frustration over the public split between Lowe and ALPLF. “What has happened over the last several months is absolutely a shame. To have front-page stories in *The New York Times* making light of this great institution should not have happened,” he said. “I don’t know if you’re going to get state funding. I have a hard time going to bat for state funding in the current environment,” Butler concluded.<sup>44</sup>

With the research effort ordered by Director Lowe still ongoing in May 2019, Dr. Wheeler requested the assistance of a textile expert to conduct a stylistic analysis of the stovepipe hat. At Director Lowe’s request, Dr. Wheeler made the request in writing to ALPLF.<sup>45</sup> In response to Dr. Wheeler’s request, ALPLF Chairman Ray McCaskey sent a letter to Director Lowe explaining that the Foundation was unaware any research was taking place. McCaskey asked Lowe to meet with the ALPLF board to update them on the research and work with the board “collaboratively” to “make an informed decision as to how best to move forward” with the research. An ALPLF spokesperson later told a reporter that the foundation was open to further research into the stovepipe hat’s provenance, but they wanted to be part of the process, as they were the owners of the artifact. The spokesman said Lowe never responded to McCaskey’s letter.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Alan Lowe email message to Samuel Wheeler, cc: Nadine O’Leary and Hannah Ross, “Follow up re Taper,” August 23, 2018.

<sup>42</sup> Alan Lowe email message to Hannah Ross, Nadine O’Leary, Dave Kelm, Samuel Wheeler, Lisa Horsley, Melissa Coultas, “Foundation communications,” April 11, 2019.

<sup>43</sup> “Davis Ad Criticizes Londrigan Over Lincoln Hat Controversy,” WMAY, October 11, 2018. <https://www.wmay.com/2018/10/11/davis-ad-criticizes-londrigan-over-lincoln-hat-controversy/> (accessed on 11/22/2019).

<sup>44</sup> Mike Riopell, “Lincoln museum foundation pleads for state money to avoid selling off historic artifacts,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 13, 2018.

<sup>45</sup> Samuel Wheeler email message to Carla Knorowski, cc: Alan Lowe, “Request for Permission,” May 6, 2019.

<sup>46</sup> Dave McKinney, “State Historian Finds ‘No Evidence’ Disputed Hat Belonged to Abraham Lincoln,” WBEZ News (Chicago), September 26, 2019, <https://www.wbez.org/shows/wbez-news/state-historian-finds-no-evidence-disputed-hat-belonged-to-abraham-lincoln/9aee051d-8be5-40fb-a48a-7a0a80ae9b61> (accessed on 11/22/19).



In the midst of the spring session of the Illinois General Assembly, Governor J. B. Pritzker's spokeswoman Jordan Abudayyeh announced on May 21, 2019, that the governor and Senator Andy Manar agreed that it was not appropriate to use state funds to retire ALPLF's Taper debt.<sup>47</sup> The next day, Director Lowe informed Dr. Wheeler to suspend his research into the stovepipe hat, citing his frustration with ALPLF for not agreeing to bring in a textile expert.<sup>48</sup>

On June 5, 2019, Director Lowe sent an email to Deputy Governor of Illinois Jesse Ruiz, which stated, "It appears from my discussion with the state historian that he and his team have found no evidence confirming the hat belonged to President Lincoln." The email was obtained by Dave McKinney, the reporter who broke the story in 2012 that questioned the provenance of the stovepipe hat, via FOIA. He used Lowe's quote to produce an article titled, "State Historian Finds 'No Evidence' Disputed Hat Belonged to Abraham Lincoln."<sup>49</sup>

Illinois Governor J. B. Pritzker fired Director Lowe on September 20, 2019, due to a recommendation from the Office of the Executive Inspector General (OEIG).<sup>50</sup> The OEIG had investigated an anonymous complaint and concluded that Lowe had violated museum procedures in June 2018 when he loaned ALPLM's copy of the Gettysburg Address, handwritten by Lincoln, to a "pop-up museum" in Dallas run by Mercury One, a non-profit organization tied to radio personality Glenn Beck. In exchange for the loan of the historical artifact, Beck had promised Lowe he would fundraise and help retire the Taper debt, which at the time stood at approximately \$9 million. In the end, Beck's organization sent Lowe a donation of \$50,869 to help pay down the debt. The OEIG concluded that an anonymous tip claiming Lowe had "pimp[ed] out" the ALPLM's most precious artifact was accurate and called for his immediate dismissal.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Dave McKinney, "Gov. Pritzker's Office Nixes State Funding For Lincoln Foundation Debt," WBEZ (Chicago), May 21, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/local/309/2019/05/21/725169575/gov-pritzker-s-office-nixes-state-funding-for-lincoln-foundation-debt> (accessed on 11/24/2019).

<sup>48</sup> Alan Lowe email message to Samuel Wheeler, cc: Hannah Ross, Nadine O'Leary, Dave Kelm, "RE: Request for Permission," May 22, 2019.

<sup>49</sup> Dave McKinney, "State Historian Finds 'No Evidence' Disputed Hat Belonged to Abraham Lincoln," WBEZ News (Chicago), September 26, 2019, <https://www.wbez.org/shows/wbez-news/state-historian-finds-no-evidence-disputed-hat-belonged-to-abraham-lincoln/9aee051d-8be5-40fb-a48a-7a0a80ae9b61> (accessed on 11/22/19).

<sup>50</sup> Bruce Rushton, "Another one bites the dust: Lowe fired from ALPLM," *Illinois Times* (Springfield), September 20, 2019.

<sup>51</sup> Angela Luning and Melissa Brandenburg, Case # 19-00300, Executive Ethics Commission of the State of Illinois in re: Alan Lowe and Michael Little, Office of the Executive Inspector General, September 3, 2019.

## PART II. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

At the beginning of this research inquiry, ALPLM's research file for "Stovepipe Hat, TLR 001" consisted of approximately a dozen newspaper articles chronicling the Taper acquisition and the controversy over the object's provenance, as well as an affidavit signed by Clara Waller in 1958 that detailed a nearly century-old story of how she came to possess a stovepipe hat that purportedly once belonged to Abraham Lincoln. From August 23, 2018 to May 22, 2019, Dr. Wheeler conducted a historical analysis to determine if the family legend was plausible and verifiable.

### A. THE WALLERS

When Elbert Waller died in Carbondale, Illinois on June 16, 1956, at the age of 85, he left behind his wife of seven years, Clara, as well as a son and grandson who lived in Kansas. His obituary listed his numerous accomplishments, including his background as a newspaperman, teacher and school superintendent, multi-term member of the Illinois General Assembly, and the author of several books on the history of Illinois.<sup>52</sup>

Elbert was the third husband Clara had lost. As she made plans to move to Florida to be closer to her daughter, she was tasked with disposing of her husband's possessions. Elbert had been an avid collector of antiques, maintained a large book collection, and even owned some historical memorabilia.<sup>53</sup> In 1929, for instance, the *Illinois State Journal* praised his "large collection of Lincoln relics" and announced he had recently acquired a commission signed by Abraham Lincoln in 1863.<sup>54</sup> Presumably, a lifetime worth of possessions were disposed of in many different ways. Some were thrown out, perhaps others were given away or sold. Clara also took several of her husband's possessions to the Tregoning Antique Shop in Carterville, Illinois. She heard there were people associated with the store who were interested in southern Illinois history and might even have interest in starting a museum.<sup>55</sup> One of the items she sold to the storeowners was a stovepipe hat with a particularly compelling story. Mrs. Waller claimed it once belonged to Abraham Lincoln.

### B. JAMES T. HICKEY

James Hickey was born in Elkhart, Illinois in 1922 and by the time of his death in 1996, he had established himself as one of the foremost authorities on the life of Abraham Lincoln. While still in grade school, Hickey befriended Lawrence Stringer, an Illinois judge, congressman, and avid Lincoln collector. Inspired by Stringer, Hickey began building his own Lincoln collection, which he maintained for the rest of his life. He befriended local families who boasted of a Lincoln connection and sometimes acquired their relics to add to

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<sup>52</sup> "Elbert Waller Dies at 85; Served in Assembly," *Southern Illinoisan* (Carbondale), June 18, 1956.

<sup>53</sup> James L. Beane to Elbert Waller, November 12, 1940, Correspondence: May-December 1940, Elbert Waller Papers, Southern Illinois University Special Collections Research Center (Carbondale); Clara Waller to James Hickey, July 22, 1958, ALPLM; Clara Waller to James T. Hickey, August 9, 1958, ALPLM.

<sup>54</sup> "Waller Obtains Lincoln Relic," *Illinois State Journal*, January 17, 1929. The signed commission appointed John Moses assessor of internal revenue for the tenth Illinois district. I have been unable to locate this document.

<sup>55</sup> Clara Waller to James Hickey, July 22, 1958, ALPLM.

his collection. He also became familiar with courthouses throughout central Illinois and established friendships with the court clerks who policed the buildings. Hickey often used their files for research and was even allowed to search courthouse archives for Lincoln documents, some of which he acquired for his personal collection.<sup>56</sup>

In 1954 George Bunn, Marine Bank president, asked Hickey to go through the bank's voluminous records and search for Lincoln items. After days of searching, Hickey discovered bank ledgers with Lincoln's name in them.<sup>57</sup> His discovery was featured in *Life* magazine, where he was described as a "farmer turned detective."<sup>58</sup>

Soon after Hickey's discovery, Clyde Walton, the State Historian of Illinois and Director of the Illinois State Historical Library (now ALPLM), created a new position in the library, and hired Hickey to fill it. In early 1958, Hickey became the first Curator of the Lincoln Collection at ISHL.<sup>59</sup> Hickey came to the ISHL with more than twenty years of collecting experience, was knowledgeable about manuscripts and handwriting, and had scores of contacts with dealers and auction houses. However, while overseeing the state of Illinois's most precious items related to the life and times of Abraham Lincoln, Hickey continued adding to his personal collection of Lincolniana, a practice that is widely recognized today as unethical.<sup>60</sup>

Sometime in mid-1958, Hickey purchased the Waller stovepipe hat from the Tregoning Antique Shop for his personal collection. Knowing the value of a historical artifact depended on its provenance, Hickey wrote to Clara Waller and asked her to write him a letter, detailing everything she knew about the object. Her reply has recently been located and is cited here for the first time:

711 Carico  
Carbondale. Ill  
July 22, 1958

Mr. James Hickey  
Elkhart. Ill.

Dear Mr. Hickey,

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<sup>56</sup> Paul Beaver, "Hickey Retires," in *Lincoln Newsletter* (Winter, 1985), 5:3:1-2; Mark E. Neely, Jr., "James T. Hickey, Lincoln Curator," in *The Collected Writings of James T. Hickey* (Springfield, IL: The Illinois State Historical Society, 1990), vii; Thomas F. Schwartz, "James T. Hickey: Lincoln 'Detective' and Curator, unpublished manuscript, ALPLM.

<sup>57</sup> "Rare Lincoln memorabilia is this history 'detective's' reward," *The Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), May 10, 1987,

<sup>58</sup> Robert Wallace, "The Never-Ending Search: Farmer turned detective finds ledger revealing unknown details of Lincoln's life," *Life Magazine*, February 1955, 107-108; 110; 113-114; 116.

<sup>59</sup> "Lincoln Scholar Hired By Historical Library," *Morning Star* [Rockford, IL], February 4, 1958.

<sup>60</sup> See *A Code of Ethics for Curators*, American Association of Museums, 2009, 8. "Curators must not develop a personal collection that in any way compromises or is in conflict with the credibility or interests of their institution. When curators build and maintain a personal collection in any area of interest that overlaps with their museum's identity and mission, a serious potential for an ethical conflict exists. . . . Curators or guest curators may not be active dealers in the museum's areas of interest. Active dealers are individuals who have a registered business with commercial tax status or, more broadly, are actively engaged in the buying and selling of objects for personal or commercial profit."

Today I received your letter saying you bought the high top hat from Mr. Tregoning in Carterville. This is the history of the hat. During the Civil War Elberts' father held a position we would now call (F. B. I). His name was Wm. Waller of Murphysboro Ill. This position [brought] Mr. Waller in contact with Abraham Lincoln and one evening finding they wore the same size hats they traded hats. He took Abe's hat and Mr. Lincoln took Mr. Wallers hat. At Mr. Wallers death Elbert asked his mother if he might lay claim to the stovepipe hat and she gave her permission and if you ever knew Elbert you know how it pleased him. Elbert was an antique collector and had many such things when he passed away. I hope I have given you all the information necessary.

Sincerely Clara D. Waller  
(Mrs. Elbert Waller)<sup>61</sup>

Hickey used the details in Clara Waller's letter to compose an affidavit, which he enclosed in another letter to her, asking her to sign the affidavit and have it notarized. He explained that by doing so, she would "solve a problem" for him.<sup>62</sup> Clara Waller complied with his request and had her daughter, Reva Frakes, serve as notary.<sup>63</sup>

## AFFIDAVIT

State of Illinois  
Jackson County

I, Clara D. Waller, being duly sworn upon my oath, say that I am the widow of Elbert Waller.

I further solemnly swear that I was the owner of a certain stovepipe hat which had once belonged to Abraham Lincoln.

I further solemnly swear that this said hat had been given to William Waller by Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War in Washington. That on the death of said William Waller it passed to his son Elbert Waller.

I further solemnly swear that at the death of Elbert Waller the hat came to me as his widow.

I further solemnly swear that I disposed of the hat with other items to a Mr. and Mrs. Tregoning of 115 East Illinois Avenue, Carterville, Illinois and that they in turn sold the hat to James T. Hickey, Elkhart, Illinois.

I further solemnly swear that I believe the hat to have once belonged to Abraham Lincoln.

I further solemnly swear that it was one of my husband's (Elbert Waller) proud possessions during his lifetime because it had been given to his father by Abraham Lincoln.

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<sup>61</sup> Clara Waller to James Hickey, July 22, 1958, ALPLM.

<sup>62</sup> Clara Waller to James T. Hickey, August 9, 1958, ALPLM.

<sup>63</sup> Genealogy research established this relationship.

Signed  
Clara D. Waller  
(Mrs. Elbert Waller)  
711 Carico Street  
Carbondale, Illinois

Subscribed and sworn before me this 9<sup>th</sup> day of August 1958.

Reva Frakes  
My commission expires Feb 27, 1960.<sup>64</sup>

Clara Waller enclosed the signed affidavit together with another letter to Hickey that contained additional information. Her letter was recently located and is cited here for the first time:

711 Carico  
Carbondale, Ill.  
August 9 1958

Mr. James T. Hickey  
Elkart Ill.

Dear Sir,

I have filled out the statement, and hope it will solve a problem for you.

Of course Mr. Waller and I had been married only 10 years<sup>65</sup> but he I am sure had told me all he knew about all his antiques. I certainly did not know the value of antiques. I sold the hat to these people for \$1.00 as they told me they were getting ready to plan a nice museum for the old southern Ill Relics. Any time I can be of service I will be glad to do it. I spend 6 months in Florida and summer 6 mo. in Illinois. I will return to 2327 Woodlawn Circle east St. Petersburg, Florida Sept 1<sup>st</sup>.

Sincerely Clara D. Waller<sup>66</sup>

After receiving the correspondence from Clara Waller, Hickey wrote to John W. Allen in Carbondale, who served as curator of the museum at Southern Illinois University, wrote the weekly newspaper column, "It Happened in Southern Illinois," and was a prolific collector of folklore and local history. Hickey apparently related the story contained in the Clara Waller affidavit and asked Allen if he had ever heard the story.<sup>67</sup> Allen replied on August 22, 1958, writing that he heard the same story from Elbert Waller himself and was "inclined to give it full credence."<sup>68</sup> However, though Allen wrote extensively about

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<sup>64</sup> Clara Waller, Affidavit (photocopy), Jackson County, Illinois, August 9, 1958. I have never seen the original affidavit. The ALPLM research file contains a copy.

<sup>65</sup> They were married for seven years, not ten. See: Arkansas, County Marriages Index, 1837-1957, Clara D. Bloodworth and Elbert Waller, married October 21, 1948, FHL Film Number 2169879.

<sup>66</sup> Clara Waller to James T. Hickey, August 9, 1958, ALPLM.

<sup>67</sup> "John Willis Allen Papers," Biography, Elbert Waller Papers, Southern Illinois University Special Collections Research Center (Carbondale).

<sup>68</sup> John W. Allen to Jim Hickey (photocopy), August 22, 1958. I have never seen the original letter. ALPLM Research File, "Stovepipe Hat, TLR 001" contains a copy.

southern Illinois history, folklore, and local legends, his letter to Hickey represents the only known time he wrote about Lincoln's stovepipe hat or the Waller family's connection to it.

The previous three letters and affidavit represent the only historical documentation tying the stovepipe hat to William Waller and Abraham Lincoln. The earliest letter dates to July 1958, 93 years after the death of Abraham Lincoln and 61 years after the death of William Waller. This chronological gap requires Clara Waller's claims to be thoroughly investigated to determine if they are plausible and verifiable.

### C. WILLIAM WALLER AND THE F.B.I.?

Clara Waller's most intriguing claim states, "During the Civil war Elbert's father held a position we would now call (F. B. I). His name was Wm. Waller of Murphysboro Ill."<sup>69</sup> According to Clara Waller, it was this detail that brought William Waller into contact with Lincoln in Washington, D.C. However, is the claim plausible and, more importantly, verifiable?

William Waller was born in 1823 and grew to adulthood in Union County, Illinois. He was married at 22, but lost his wife a year later. He married his second wife in 1848 and had four children with her, raising them on a farm just south of Murphysboro, Illinois. Politically, he identified as a Democrat and supported Stephen A. Douglas in the election of 1860. When the war broke out, the 38-year-old Waller continued to support Douglas, who encouraged Democrats to stay loyal to the Union cause, but by 1864, Waller's political outlook had shifted and he voted for Lincoln.<sup>70</sup>

According to a biographical sketch published in 1912, possibly written by his son Elbert, William Waller allegedly tried to enlist in the Union army, but was "rejected on account of ill health." Instead of fighting in the army, Waller stayed behind in southern Illinois and "looked after several families whose natural providers were away fighting for the Union."<sup>71</sup>

On January 13, 1864, Waller's wife Lucinda died, leaving him with four children between the ages of four and thirteen. Almost a month later, Waller signed his name as a witness on a document for a widow's pension for Martha Cox, who had lost her husband Dennis while he was a member of the 81<sup>st</sup> Illinois, which was recruited entirely from southern Illinois.<sup>72</sup> Before 1864 was over, Waller married for the third time, this time to

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<sup>69</sup> Clara Waller to James Hickey, July 22, 1958, ALPLM.

<sup>70</sup> For biographical information on Waller, see: "William Waller, Esq.," in *History of Jackson County, Illinois: With Illustrations Descriptive of Its Scenery, and Biographical Sketches of Some of its Prominent Men and Pioneers* (Philadelphia: Brink, McDonough, & Co., 1878), 77; "Mrs. Mary Ann Waller," in *Portrait and Biographical Record of Randolph, Jackson, Perry, and Monroe Counties, Illinois* (Chicago: Biographical Publication Co., 1894), 744; George Washington Smith, "Elbert Waller," in *A History of Southern Illinois*, 3 volumes (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1912), 3:1227-1229.

<sup>71</sup> Smith, 3:1228; "List of Persons Exempted from Service," entry 5890, RG 100: Records of the Provost Marshal, National Archives Chicago. Waller's name does not appear on the list of individuals exempted from military service in the 13<sup>th</sup> Illinois District.

<sup>72</sup> Martha Cox, widow of Dennis Cox 81<sup>st</sup> Illinois, Widow's Pension, February 20, 1864, <https://www.fold3.com/image/264337540> (accessed on 11/24/19).

Mary Ann Hagler, a widow with four children of her own who had lost her husband, also a member of the 81<sup>st</sup> Illinois, in January 1863, a casualty of the Civil War.<sup>73</sup>

According to the 1912 biographical sketch, Waller became a Republican supporter during the war and ultimately joined “an organization opposed to the Knights of the Golden Circle and all they represented and several times they tried to take his life.”<sup>74</sup> Similarly, in an unpublished manuscript written by his son Elbert Waller in 1955, Elbert claimed his “father was in federal service, running down disloyal organizations such as Knights of the Golden Circle.”<sup>75</sup>

The claim that William Waller held a position akin to the F.B.I. and was involved in hunting down members of the Knights of the Golden Circle, a paramilitary organization formed to disrupt the Union war effort in northern states, is an intriguing one. Thus far, no evidence has emerged that verifies this claim, but Waller was certainly in a position to be involved in such activity. Southern Illinois was rife with internal dissent during the Civil War. Even a cursory search of the papers of Richard Yates, governor of Illinois during the Civil War, for example, reveals scores of letters from concerned citizens in southern Illinois, claiming their neighbors were disloyal, rebels were infiltrating the area recruiting disloyal citizens and army deserters, and individuals were planning an attack behind Union lines.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, newspaper columns were also filled with such fears, as well as reports of the homes of loyal Union supporters being vandalized, their crops being sabotaged, or in some cases, reports of Copperheads committing acts of physical violence, including murder.<sup>77</sup> No evidence has yet emerged connecting William Waller to organizations like the Union League, which were devoted to suppressing anti-Union groups, though there were several such organizations in Jackson County, Illinois.

It would also not be uncommon for men like Waller to work directly with military authorities, as they attempted to quash anti-Union sentiment throughout southern Illinois. In March 1863, for instance, the U.S. Congress passed the Enrollment Act to provide for a national system of conscription for the army. Assistant provost marshals were appointed in every state. Lt. Col. James Oakes of the 4<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry Regiment was appointed in Illinois. Every congressional district in Illinois also received a provost marshal, as well as deputy provost marshals, a clerical staff, and an enrollment board. In addition to enrolling all able-bodied men for the draft, the provost marshals were authorized to hire “special agents,” who were charged with tracking down army deserters, disrupting cells of copperhead activity, and hunting down members of the Knights of the Golden Circle. In southern Illinois, Isaac N. Phillips served as Provost Marshal of the 13<sup>th</sup> District in Illinois, the district encompassing Murphysboro. Unfortunately, the existing Provost Marshal records for the 13<sup>th</sup> district in Illinois in the National Archives facility in Chicago contain no references to Waller.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Smith, 3:1228. The biographical sketch claims George Hagler died at the Battle of Fort Donelson. However, subsequent research found he died of dysentery in Tennessee.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Elbert Waller, “Reminiscences of a Pedagogue,” unpublished manuscript, Elbert Waller Papers, Southern Illinois University Special Collections Research Center, 30.

<sup>76</sup> Yates Family Papers, 1789-1936, ALPLM; Richard Yates (Wabash College) Papers, ALPLM; Richard Yates Correspondence, Illinois State Archives (Springfield).

<sup>77</sup> Jasper William Cross, “Divided Loyalties in Southern Illinois during the Civil War,” M.A. Thesis, (University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, 1942).

<sup>78</sup> See Stephen E. Towne, *Surveillance and Spies in the Civil War: Exposing Confederate Conspiracies in America's Heartland* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2015), 89-115; “Register of Persons Employed by

Nonetheless, Waller fits the profile of someone who would be useful in Civil War espionage activities. He was a pre-war Democrat who remained loyal to the Union during the war. He remained close to home and out of the army. Men like Waller would have been aware of what was happening with their Democrat neighbors and perhaps privy to information about anti-Union activities in the area. Men in these positions reported what they knew to the authorities, oftentimes becoming informants to local military officers or provost marshals. Many times, such reports were made verbally, and authorities did not always write down the names of everyone who reported such activity. Perhaps that explains Waller's absence in official documents consulted thus far.<sup>79</sup>

It is also very possible that Waller may have worked with other military commands in Illinois. Though researchers have searched the Provost Marshal records of the 13<sup>th</sup> district in Illinois, other districts such as the adjoining 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> should also be examined, as well as the records of the 13<sup>th</sup> district in Missouri. Moreover, there was also a major command center at Cairo, Illinois during the Civil War, the records of which are held at the National Archives.

There is also the possibility that Waller did not work with the military, but instead worked with civil authorities. David L. Phillips, for instance, was a Republican who lived in Jonesboro, Illinois before the war. Phillips was one of only a handful of Republicans in southern Illinois before the war and enjoyed a good relationship with Lincoln. When Lincoln went to Jonesboro to debate Stephen Douglas in 1858, he stayed in Phillips's home. Similarly, Lincoln's incoming and outgoing correspondence includes several letters with Phillips.<sup>80</sup> When the war broke out, Lincoln rewarded Phillips for his support by appointing him U.S. Marshal of the southern district of Illinois. After Lincoln suspended the writ of habeas corpus, Phillips made several high-profile arrests of prominent individuals suspected of disloyal activity in southern Illinois, including in Murphysboro and Carbondale. On occasion, Phillips personally escorted prisoners by train to Washington, D.C., where they were jailed in the "Old Capitol Prison."<sup>81</sup> It is possible Phillips needed witnesses and/or guards to accompany these prisoners to the nation's capital. Though no evidence has yet emerged tying Waller to Phillips, there is a less organized, but still viable, trove of letters at the National Archives between Phillips and Secretary of State William Seward, as well as Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, that discuss his arrests in southern Illinois. These collections, and others pertaining to the U.S. Marshall's office, need to be consulted.

Though Clara Waller's claim that William Waller worked in a manner similar to the FBI agents of the 1950s is plausible, no evidence has yet been found to verify it.

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District Provost Marshals," entry 5427, RG 110: Records of the Provost Marshal General's Bureau, National Archives at Chicago; "Journal of Accounts Paid for Supplies Purchased and Services Rendered, 1863-1865," entry 5837 RG 110: Records of the Provost Marshal General's Bureau, National Archives at Chicago.

<sup>79</sup> Steven Towne email message to Samuel Wheeler, "RE: Civil War Spy in Southern Illinois," March 13, 2019.

<sup>80</sup> "David L. Phillips," in *History of Sangamon County, Illinois* (Chicago: Inter-State Publishing Company, 1881), 2019-20; See also: *Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress*, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/abraham-lincoln-papers/>, (accessed on 11/24/19).

<sup>81</sup> "State Prisoners," *National Republican* (Washington, D.C.), August 25, 1862. "Marshal D. L. Phillips of Illinois, arrived here on Saturday morning, having in charge twelve State prisoners from that State, who were taken before the Provost Marshal and sent to the Old Capitol."



However, it should also be noted that there are several things that detract from Clara Waller's story. For instance, the inability to thus far find any documentation from William or Elbert Waller that illustrates they believed the stovepipe hat once belonged to Lincoln is troubling. Elbert Waller's name, for instance, appears hundreds of times in newspapers throughout his life, but there is not a single mention that connects him with the stovepipe hat, nor is there any mention of the relic in the hundreds of pieces of incoming and outgoing correspondence in the Elbert Waller Papers at Southern Illinois University.<sup>82</sup> Elbert Waller was also a prolific writer who published more than a dozen editions of a book on Illinois history, as well as several other books of non-fiction, including a book on Lincoln. Yet there is nothing in his published writings about the stovepipe hat.

Similarly, a newspaper article appeared in the *Southern Illinoisan* newspaper on May 29, 1952, announcing that several women in Carbondale were decorating storefront windows with "keepsakes from a century ago" in celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the town. Clara Waller was among the ladies who prepared a window display. The newspaper made no mention of a stovepipe hat in her window. Instead, Clara's window reportedly featured "clocks from her collection along with very old books, [and] a sewing machine made in Trondheim, Norway in 1840."<sup>83</sup>

In addition, Clara Waller's decision to sell the stovepipe hat to a local antique store for just \$1 is concerning. If the stovepipe hat was indeed one of Elbert Waller's prized possessions and was a tangible link connecting the Waller family to Abraham Lincoln, why did Clara not give the hat to Elbert's surviving son Max or his grandson, who lived in Kansas?<sup>84</sup>

I was also able to track down multiple living descendants who had memories of Elbert and Clara Waller. Several individuals could recall specific conversations they had with the couple, as well as vivid descriptions of their house, which featured Elbert's large personal library. However, no one I spoke with recalled hearing anything from them about a stovepipe hat that once belonged to Abraham Lincoln.<sup>85</sup>

#### **D. RAISING THE HAT'S PROFILE**

After he acquired the stovepipe hat from the Tregoning Antique Shop in 1958 and received the signed affidavit from Clara Waller, James Hickey was apparently unable to locate any primary documents that definitively connected the object to Lincoln. Nonetheless, beginning in 1975, Hickey began seeking opportunities to raise the stovepipe hat's profile.

In the early 1970s, Ross Rowland, Jr. decided to celebrate the nation's bicentennial by staging a travelling exhibition of historical memorabilia that would tour the nation by train. The ensuing "American Freedom Train" traveled to all 48 contiguous states from April 1, 1975 to December 31, 1976 and featured twelve display cars filled with more than 500

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<sup>82</sup> Elbert Waller Papers, Southern Illinois University Special Collections Research Center (Carbondale).

<sup>83</sup> "Carbondale Centennial Weekend Opens Friday at 10 A.M.," *Southern Illinoisan* (Carbondale, IL), May 29, 1952.

<sup>84</sup> Max Waller died on August 27, 1974, while his son William lived until 2007. I have been unable to determine if William has any living children.

<sup>85</sup> I have not cited the individuals I spoke with to respect their privacy.

artifacts, including George Washington's copy of the constitution, the original Louisiana Purchase, and a rock from the moon. Car number 10 was titled, "Conflict and Resolution." Among the items in that car was Hickey's stovepipe hat, which was displayed alongside artifacts honoring the legacies of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Martin Luther King, Jr., and John F. Kennedy.<sup>86</sup>

Additionally, in 1981 Hickey offered the hat to Illinois officials as they tried to redraw the state's legislative map. The Illinois Constitution of 1970 requires the Illinois General Assembly to draw new congressional and state legislative district boundaries every ten years, following the completion of the U.S. Census, as congressional districts are required to have nearly equal populations and cannot discriminate on the basis of race or ethnicity. If the General Assembly fails to agree on a new legislative map, a commission made up of each party must draw the lines. If the commission cannot approve a plan, the Illinois Supreme Court must select two individuals as potential tiebreakers. The Secretary of State then appoints one of the individuals to break the tie.<sup>87</sup> This scenario occurred in Illinois in 1981. With the General Assembly and the commission unable to come to an agreement, the Illinois Supreme Court chose former Illinois Governor Richard Ogilvie, a Republican, and former Illinois Governor Sam Shapiro, a Democrat, as potential tiebreakers. After careful consideration, Secretary of State Jim Edgar decided to conduct a blind drawing to see if Ogilvie and the Republicans would get to redraw the map or Shapiro and the Democrats would prevail.

Hickey offered his stovepipe hat to help settle the stalemate. Ogilvie and Shapiro's names were written on a piece of paper and placed inside the stovepipe hat. Edgar drew the name of former Governor Shapiro, allowing the Democrats to redraw the map and the controversy ended without argument. "The secretary felt this was important to Illinois history," explained Mike Walters, a member of Edgar's staff who asked, "who's more associated with Illinois history than Abraham Lincoln?" Newspaper coverage identified Hickey as the owner of the hat, which was described as "a hat once worn in the 1860s by Abraham Lincoln."<sup>88</sup>

Through his longtime friendship and business relations with Ralph Newman, the owner of the Abraham Lincoln Book Shop, which buys and sells historical memorabilia, Hickey met Robert Todd Lincoln Beckwith, Abraham Lincoln's great-grandson and last living descendant. Beckwith invited Hickey to Robert Todd Lincoln's home, Hildene, in Manchester, Vermont, to sort through the large collection of Lincoln family material. Hickey and his wife Betty spent nearly a month at Hildene, searching the attic, dressers, closets, and trunks for pieces of history. It was during this trip he discovered, locked away in a bedroom closet, the "Insanity File" Robert kept, documenting his actions that resulted in his mother's insanity trial in 1875 and subsequent confinement.<sup>89</sup> While at Hildene, Beckwith allowed Hickey to take whatever materials he wanted to add to the collection of the Illinois State Historical Library and also asked him to take materials for the Lincoln Museum in Fort

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<sup>86</sup> "Car No. 10—Conflict and Resolution," photocopy in ALPLM Research File, "Stovepipe Hat, TLR 001"; See also newspaper advertisements, such as "It's Your Last Chance to Buy Advance Tickets for the American Freedom Train!" *Chicago Tribune*, July 28, 1975.

<sup>87</sup> Illinois Constitution (1970), article IV, section 3.

<sup>88</sup> "A historic drawing, with a tip of the hat to Abe," *State Journal-Register* (Springfield, IL), August 25, 1981.

<sup>89</sup> Mark E. Nelly, Jr. and R. Gerald McMurtry, *The Insanity File: The Case of Mary Todd Lincoln* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 131-133.

Wayne, Indiana. Hickey was also permitted to take material from Hildene for his own personal Lincoln collection.<sup>90</sup>

Trustees of the Illinois State Historical Library soon began raising ethical concerns with Hickey. They were troubled by his personal Lincoln collection, his close business relationships with manuscript dealers, and his habit of issuing appraisals on historical artifacts. On June 12, 1984, Hickey signed a “Conflict of Interest Statement,” in which he agreed to no longer, “accept any fee or commission, or engage in the purchase, trade, or sale on his own account or any other account, of any unique or rare printed, near-printed, iconographic, or manuscript materials relating to the history of Illinois in excess of \$100.” The agreement concluded by declaring it would be renewed annually and failure to comply would “result in reprimand or discharge.”<sup>91</sup> Five months later, Hickey retired as Lincoln Curator at ISHL.

### **E. THOMAS F. SCHWARTZ**

In April 1985, Thomas F. Schwartz, a graduate student at the University of Illinois, was hired to replace Hickey as Lincoln Curator of ISHL. He was made aware of Hickey’s past almost immediately, as officials told Schwartz he could not have a Lincoln collection of his own and could never appraise items.<sup>92</sup>

Schwartz was quickly overwhelmed by the disorganized collection, which lacked even a basic inventory. There were items in the collection he knew very little about and could not find adequate documentation to learn more. Though Hickey was now retired and not on good terms with some members of the board of trustees, he continued to pay frequent visits to the ISHL and befriended Schwartz. His visits allowed Schwartz the opportunity to ask him about the backstory of certain items in the collection. Hickey could always recount the story behind the object and told it with enthusiasm, humor, and believability. Through these interactions, Hickey became Schwartz’s mentor.<sup>93</sup>

In 1988, Illinois Governor Jim Thompson was interested in attracting Asian businesses to Illinois. As part of this effort, he asked Schwartz to curate an exhibit of Lincoln material from ISHL to go on display in Taiwan. Schwartz and ISHL officials spent weeks writing loan agreements and gathering material for the exhibit. Shortly before the exhibit was finalized, Governor Thompson reviewed the Lincoln material that would be included and told Schwartz the exhibit “needed more.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Thomas F. Schwartz, interview by Samuel Wheeler, West Branch, Iowa, October 12, 2018.

<sup>91</sup> Illinois State Historical Library, “Conflict of Interest Statement,” June 12, 1984, signed by James T. Hickey, Sally B. Schanbacher, and Olive S. Foster; See also: *A Code of Ethics for Curators*, American Association of Museums, 2009, 8. “Curators who become involved in establishing the monetary value of objects or authenticating objects expose themselves and their institution to conflicts of interest and legal risks. Therefore, curators must not prepare appraisals for any reason. Curators should refer all interested parties directly to professional appraisers’ societies or qualified appraisers. All referrals should be made without endorsement.”

<sup>92</sup> Thomas F. Schwartz, interview by Samuel Wheeler, West Branch, Iowa, October 12, 2018.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

Hickey offered to loan Schwartz several items from his personal collection, including objects he had acquired through his friendship with Robert Todd Lincoln Beckwith, such as Lincoln's wallet and eyeglasses. In addition, he offered to loan his stovepipe hat. Schwartz was eager to incorporate Hickey's material into the exhibit and when he sent word to the governor's office about the additional objects, the exhibit finally received the green light.<sup>95</sup>

While Schwartz presumably wrote most of the exhibit labels for the ISHL material, which included the inkwell Lincoln used to write his first inaugural address, one of the pens he purportedly used to sign the Emancipation Proclamation, and a model cannon that belonged to his son Tad, Hickey wrote the labels for the material from his collection.<sup>96</sup> As a result, Schwartz did not conduct his own research on any of the items Hickey provided. When asked why he neglected this critical step, Schwartz explained, "Jim was the expert, right? He had the institutional memory, I did not."<sup>97</sup>

Schwartz prepared the loan documents for the Hickey items. For the stovepipe hat, a February 16, 1988 appraisal had established the value as \$15,000.<sup>98</sup> Some thirty years later, Schwartz could not recall who appraised the item, supposing it was Hickey himself or perhaps Ralph Newman, the owner of the Abraham Lincoln Bookshop in Chicago, who often appraised items for the ISHL.<sup>99</sup>

The ensuing "Treasures from the Land of Lincoln" exhibit ran at the National Museum of History in Taipei, Taiwan, March 20-24, 1988. The effort received positive reviews in various newspapers in Illinois and may have played a role in the establishment of a Mitsubishi plant in Bloomington, Illinois.<sup>100</sup>

## F. LOUISE TAPER

Louise Taper's interest in Lincoln's life began when she read a fictional account of his relationship with Mary Todd in a book written by Irving Stone called, *Love is Eternal*. It inspired her to read everything she could about Lincoln, even consulting rare book stores for long out-of-print publications. At one point, she got a part-time job working for a rare-book dealer in Beverly Hills called the Scriptorium. In lieu of cash payments for her work, she was paid in books and manuscripts. She acquired her first Lincoln signature under this arrangement.<sup>101</sup>

In the early 1970s, Taper's friend introduced her to film producer David Wolper, who was making a six-part TV movie about Lincoln, based on Carl Sandburg's work. Taper was

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Doug Pokorski, "Cultural Mission to Include Abe Exhibit," *State Journal-Register* (Springfield, IL), March 1988.

<sup>97</sup> Schwartz, interview by Wheeler, October 12, 2018.

<sup>98</sup> Thomas F. Schwartz, "Loan Approval Request," Illinois State Historical Library, March 14, 1988.

<sup>99</sup> Schwartz, interview by Wheeler, October 12, 2018; There is some evidence to suggest Hickey was working with Newman to find a buyer for the stovepipe hat.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid; Doug Pokorski, "Cultural Mission to Include Abe Exhibit," *State Journal-Register* (Springfield, IL), March 1988.

<sup>101</sup> Charles Storch, "Lincoln trove heading to Springfield," *Chicago Tribune*, June 18, 2007; Andrew Ferguson, *Land of Lincoln: Adventures in Abe's America* (New York: Grove Press, 2007), 120-22; Schwartz, interview by Wheeler, October 12, 2018.

eventually hired as the film company's researcher. As part of her work for the project, Taper went to Springfield to conduct research at the ISHL, where she met then-Lincoln Curator James Hickey. "We became great buddies," Taper recalled. The two stayed in contact for years.<sup>102</sup>

In 1985, she married Barry Taper, the son of the wealthy California developer and philanthropist S. Mark Taper. After her marriage, Taper quickly became a fixture at auctions that offered Lincoln memorabilia, often relying on Hickey's advice on which manuscripts or objects to buy. "I'd say to my husband, 'You know, I don't really want that purse for my birthday. But you know there is this, um, book I'd really like to have—or this or that, a mourning silk, from Lincoln's funeral, some artifact, whatever,'" Taper recalled, adding, "for the next twenty years we just went crazy. Berserk. I mean, I really went to town."<sup>103</sup>

With Taper's emergence as a major Lincoln collector, the prices of Lincoln memorabilia quickly skyrocketed at auction. It was not uncommon for her to spend tens of thousands of dollars, or more, at a single auction, or to buy entire collections at a time.<sup>104</sup> Taper became well-known in Lincoln circles, eventually being courted to sit on various boards associated with Lincoln. Scholars reached out to her, asking to have access to her collection for research purposes. She even purchased a condominium in Springfield, to make her frequent trips to Lincoln's adopted hometown more comfortable.<sup>105</sup>

As the market for Lincoln objects was rapidly increasing, Hickey no longer simply offered Taper advice on which Lincoln objects to purchase from others. He now began offering to sell pieces of his own collection to her.<sup>106</sup> In 1990, Hickey sold Taper his stovepipe hat, acquired from the Tregoning Antique Store thirty-two years earlier. As Hickey's health steadily deteriorated throughout the 1990s, he sold Taper more items from his collection, including those pieces he received from Beckwith at Hildene. Taper viewed Hickey as a mentor and held his collection in high esteem.<sup>107</sup> Like many of the people who interacted with Hickey, she had little reason to doubt his word when he said an item was authentic.

Shortly after Schwartz was hired as Lincoln Curator at ISHL, he too became friends with Taper. His first interaction with her was a phone call "out of the blue." For the rest of his tenure at ISHL and ALPLM, he considered Taper a close friend. Like Hickey, Schwartz frequently gave Taper advice on which items to buy at auction.<sup>108</sup>

Shortly after acquiring the stovepipe hat, Taper approached Schwartz with an ambitious idea. She wanted him to curate an exhibit at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California that would be the largest collection of Lincoln memorabilia ever put on

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<sup>102</sup> Ferguson, 122-23.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 120-23; Schwartz, interview by Wheeler, October 12, 2018.

<sup>104</sup> Thomas Schwartz, "The Louise Taper Collection," December 2006, ALPLM Research File, "Stovepipe Hat, TLR 001."

<sup>105</sup> Ferguson, 123; Schwartz, interview by Wheeler, October 12, 2018.

<sup>106</sup> Schwartz, interview by Wheeler, October 12, 2018.

<sup>107</sup> Matthew Krasnowski, "Land of Lincoln...in California," in *Heartland Magazine*, February 13, 1998.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., Doug Moore, "The stovepipe hat that saw the Civil War," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 1, 2007.

display at one time.<sup>109</sup> Schwartz and Taper put together a plan that would feature items from the ISHL, Taper's personal collection, and the Huntington. The resulting exhibit, "The Last Best Hope of Earth: Abraham Lincoln and the Promise of America" ran from October 12, 1993 through November 12, 1994. An estimated 665,000 people viewed the exhibit, which prominently featured Taper's stovepipe hat. Encouraged by the success of the run in California, the exhibition moved to the Chicago Historical Society from February 12, 1996 through February 12, 1997. The stovepipe hat was again featured in the exhibit and in nearly every newspaper article about the show.<sup>110</sup> Throughout the 1990s, none of the articles questioned the provenance of the stovepipe hat.

## G. THE NEGOTIATION

Encouraged by the successful run of "The Last Best Hope of Earth," momentum began growing in Springfield for the creation of what would eventually become the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.<sup>111</sup> Illinois Governor George Ryan and First Lady Lura Lynn Ryan became enthusiastic supporters of the project and agreed to spearhead the fundraising efforts. Mrs. Ryan served as the first president of the ALPLF board, while her husband's political supporters became both board members and generous contributors to the new Foundation. In 2001, Louise Taper accepted an invitation to serve on the ALPLF board.<sup>112</sup>

As fundraising dollars materialized, and the dream of a world-class museum was becoming realized, Dr. Schwartz worried that ALPLM's permanent collection was not well-suited in the long-term for the kinds of exhibits that would be necessary for a high-profile museum. The core of the ISHL collection had been growing since 1889, but it mostly consisted of paper items. The library had never considered three-dimensional artifacts a priority. A world-class museum, however, would require regular artifact rotations and new items to put on display to encourage repeat visitation.<sup>113</sup>

To temporarily ease his concerns, Dr. Schwartz worked out a series of loan agreements with Taper to borrow some of her prized artifacts. When the museum greeted its first visitor in April 2005, the Treasures Gallery featured Taper's stovepipe hat, alongside the museum's copy of Lincoln's handwritten Gettysburg Address.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Thomas F. Schwartz to William A. Moffett, May 16, 1994, ALPLM. In this letter, Schwartz writes, "Louise Taper is a close professional colleague and personal friend. It was her prompting that began discussion between the Huntington and the Illinois State Historical Library"; Schwartz, interview by Wheeler, October 12, 2018.

<sup>110</sup> John H. Rhodehamel and Thomas F. Schwartz, *The Last Best Hope of Earth: Abraham Lincoln and the Promise of America: Catalogue of an Exhibition at the Huntington Library, October 1993-August 1994* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1993). The exhibit was extended an additional three months.; "Lincoln treasures converging on Chicago," *State Journal-Register* (Springfield, IL), January 1, 1996.

<sup>111</sup> Schwartz, interview by Wheeler, October 12, 2018.

<sup>112</sup> ALPLF, Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting, February 12, 2001; Louise Taper to Lura Lynn Ryan, April 2, 2001. In this letter, Taper accepts Ryan's invitation to become a charter member of the Board of Directors for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum Foundation. She acknowledges that "Tom Schwartz has been keeping me informed about all the wonderful things that have been going on there."

<sup>113</sup> Schwartz, interview by Wheeler, October 12, 2018.

<sup>114</sup> Susan Hazlett, "Lincoln Museum visit was family time well-spent," *The Pantagraph* (Bloomington, IL), April 23, 2005.

Six months later, Dr. Schwartz reported to the ALPLF board of directors that Taper was willing to sell her formidable Lincoln collection. He said she wanted to see it go to ALPLM, but he acknowledged she might also sell the collection through an auction house like Christy's. He estimated the collection was worth anywhere from \$12 to \$20 million, but said Taper was currently working with an appraiser to fully catalogue and assign a fair market value to the collection. He told ALPLF board members that securing Taper's collection would ensure ALPLM would remain one of the most important Lincoln repositories in the world. ALPLM Executive Director Richard Norton Smith concurred with Dr. Schwartz, telling the board that the acquisition would be the single most important contribution ALPLF could make for the upcoming bicentennial of Lincoln's birth in 2009. Board members voted to approve further efforts to acquire Taper's collection.<sup>115</sup>

Two weeks after the board meeting, Taper told ALPLF officials she would like to donate a portion of her collection to them and, in return, secure the naming rights to the Treasures Gallery in the museum. Officials responded enthusiastically, agreeing the gallery would "carry the Taper name in perpetuity," and added, "Your treasures and the Treasures Gallery are a perfect match."<sup>116</sup>

Following Smith's resignation in March 2006, Dr. Schwartz was named the Interim Director of ALPLM. He continued to serve until November when Rick Beard was hired as both ALPLM and ALPLF Executive Director. Later that month, Beard accompanied Dr. Schwartz and ALPLF board members Tolbert Chisum, Bob Campbell, and Craig Schermerhorn to California, where they spent two days at Taper's Beverly Hills home viewing her Lincoln collection.<sup>117</sup> During the visit, Taper told the group she recently had her collection appraised at \$25 million. She indicated she would be willing to donate \$2 million in artifacts and documents if ALPLF agreed to purchase her collection in a timely manner.

When the ALPLF board met on November 30, 2006, the members who viewed Taper's collection reported on their trip. Beard told the board that acquiring the Taper collection should be a "major priority" because the museum currently tells Lincoln's story without many artifacts. It is important for visitors to see "real things," Beard said, adding that Taper's collection would double or triple the amount of display-quality items in ALPLM's collection. However, prior to the meeting, Taper sent word that a second interested party had emerged who had the funds in hand to purchase her collection outright. She told the board time was of the essence and asked them to make a decision whether to purchase by the end of the meeting. ALPLF board members engaged in a lengthy discussion about their fundraising capabilities and formed an exploratory committee to study the issue. Gov. Edgar promised the board would have an answer for Taper in early 2007.<sup>118</sup>

Following the board meeting, Dr. Schwartz prepared a six-page document titled, "The Louise Taper Collection," in which he wrote a brief biography of Taper, praised her collection for including items from every period of Lincoln's life, and divided her collection into categories, including manuscripts, artifacts, prints/photographs, paintings/sculpture,

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<sup>115</sup> ALPLF, Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting, October 24, 2005, 7.

<sup>116</sup> Susan Mogerman and Estie Karpman to Louise Taper, November 7, 2005.

<sup>117</sup> ALPLF, Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting, November 30, 2006, 4. Several weeks before this trip, Doug Donenfeld toured the collection in Taper's home. See: ALPLF, Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting, February 6, 2007, 2.

<sup>118</sup> ALPLF, Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting, November 30, 2006, 4-6.

printed materials, and miscellaneous. He also listed specific pieces in her collection, including her stovepipe hat, which Dr. Schwartz described as “the only hat that is not questioned in private hands and only one of several in existence.”<sup>119</sup>

The appraisal Taper received was prepared by Charles Sachs, the owner of the Scriptorium in Beverly Hills, the same organization she had worked for more than 30 years earlier in exchange for rare books and her first Lincoln autograph. She refused to show the appraisal to the board, telling them they could not have access to it until an agreement to purchase was reached. As a result, board members contemplated hiring their own appraiser, but feared he would not have enough time to assess the collection and prepare an item-level appraisal, complete with comparable sales examples.

Dr. Schwartz proposed a solution. Seth Kaller was a recognized expert in acquiring, authenticating, and appraising historic documents and artifacts. He had served as the acquisition agent for the formidable Gilder Lehrman Collection and handled transactions in which signed copies of the Emancipation Proclamation and Thirteenth Amendment, as well as Lincoln’s “House Divided” manuscript changed hands.<sup>120</sup> In return for \$25,000 and travel expenses, Kaller agreed to travel to Taper’s home, examine the Sachs appraisal, as well as her collection, and produce a written report that indicated if he thought the appraisal was fair. He agreed to complete the work for ALPLF in time for the February 6, 2007 board meeting.<sup>121</sup>

By the end of January, Kaller wrote to Dr. Schwartz that he was wrapping up his assessment and would have “no problem supporting the collection at the agreed price.” As he was writing his report, he was trying to find the right words to describe several of the most significant pieces in the collection. When it came to the stovepipe hat, Kaller told Dr. Schwartz he wanted to refer to it as “the most iconic Lincoln artifact left in private hands, which would make it in my opinion the most important of all presidential artifacts left in private hands.”<sup>122</sup>

Kaller issued his report on February 1, 2007. He began the report by stating he had read the inventory and appraisal prepared by Charles Sachs and personally viewed most of the items in the collection. However, he carefully framed the next part of his report, making clear that he was instructed not to delve into the provenance issues of the items in the collection. In part, there was no time to do so, but also because Dr. Schwartz, having worked closely with Taper to assemble the collection, was satisfied with their authenticity. “The items in this collection have already been inspected and authenticated,” Kaller wrote. “The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum has indicated that, based on prior in-depth research, it is comfortable with the provenance and descriptions provided. I have therefore made my valuations based on accepting the provenance information provided to me

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<sup>119</sup> Schwartz, “The Louise Taper Collection,” December 2006, 4.

<sup>120</sup> Seth Kaller, Inc.: Historic Documents & Legacy Collections, “The Seth Kaller Distinction,” <https://www.sethkaller.com/about/>, (accessed 12/115/19).

<sup>121</sup> Tom Schwartz email message to Rick Beard and Tolbert Chisum, Second opinion for Taper Collection,” January 18, 2007; Rick Beard email message to Tom Schwartz, “RE: Second opinion for Taper Collection,” January 18, 2007; Tolbert Chisum email message to Rick Beard and Tom Schwartz, “Re: Re Review of Louise Taper Collection Appraisal,” January 18, 2007; Tolbert Chisum email message to Wayne Whalen, cc: Julie Cellini, “Fwd: FW: Re Review of Louise Taper Collection Appraisal,” January 18, 2007.

<sup>122</sup> Seth Kaller email message to Tom Schwartz, “Taper,” January 29, 2007.



at the start of this project,” he wrote. His report concluded that the appraised value of \$23 million was reasonable and reflected the fair market value of the collection.<sup>123</sup>

While describing the stovepipe hat in his report, Kaller refrained from attempting to authenticate the object and wrote instead:

The stovepipe hat is the most iconic symbol associated with Lincoln. We invariably think of Lincoln as a rugged-featured, bearded man, whose tall, lanky frame is further exaggerated by the oversize hat. Over the years, that image has come to symbolize not just Lincoln, but the very personification of America—“Uncle Sam.” The folksy American icon appeared clean-shaven in Antebellum days; after the Civil War, he bore a marked resemblance to the late president, beard, top hat and all. Lincoln’s hat figures in many humorous reminiscences about the president, including his habit of using it to store his papers.

Of the three documented Lincoln top hats, one is in the Smithsonian and another at Hildene, Robert Todd Lincoln’s former estate. This one in the Taper Collection, is generally accepted as the last remaining Lincoln top hat in private hands.

Value comments and comparables:

- The record price for an Abraham Lincoln manuscript is \$3,086,000 in March of 2002. I believe that the 12-page manuscript would bring approximately \$5 million today. But, in my opinion, more wealthy bidders would be attracted to bid on Lincoln’s hat.
- Revolutionary War battle flag, ca. 1779, estimated at \$1.5 to \$3.5 million (\$12,336,000, 2006).
- Molded copper weathervane depicting an Indian chief, ca. 1900, estimated at \$100,000 to \$150,000 (\$5,840,000, 2006).<sup>124</sup>

At the next ALPLF board meeting on February 6, 2007 members were informed that Kaller had concluded the \$23 million asking price for the Taper collection was fair. Beard made a passionate plea to board members to support the Taper acquisition. He said the ALPLM is “legitimately criticized for having a paucity of artifacts,” and in order to “tell a compelling narrative the institution needs to have iconic objects.”<sup>125</sup> The Taper Collection represented a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to add such objects to the collection.

Board members engaged in a lengthy discussion about financing options, but before the meeting was over, board member Tolbert Chisum revealed he had spoken with Taper earlier that morning. She told him she wanted ALPLF to purchase her collection and if they did so, she pledged to pass along her personal contacts to help the organization raise the money to pay off the debt. In addition, she said she had many other Lincoln items she was

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<sup>123</sup> Seth Kaller, “The Taper Collection Appraisal Review,” February 1, 2007, 2-3.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>125</sup> ALPLF, Minutes of Board of Directors Meeting, February 6, 2007, 3.

unwilling to part with during this sale, but upon her death, she would donate the rest of her collection to ALPLF. Chisum made a motion to pursue efforts to purchase the collection. It passed unanimously.<sup>126</sup>

Throughout the next three months, internal emails reveal how diligently members of ALPLM and ALPLF worked together to finalize the Taper acquisition. Beard sent several updates to keep key players apprised of new developments. On February 14, 2007, he said he was still unclear what items would be part of the \$2 million donation, but said Taper's signed copy of the Emancipation Proclamation would be included.<sup>127</sup> ALPLF board member Julie Cellini expressed frustration that Taper continued to refuse to share her appraisal with the board. Without access to the appraisal, Cellini said she still did not have a clear understanding of exactly what items were being offered for purchase and how the \$23 million number had been calculated.<sup>128</sup>

Dr. Schwartz attempted to calm such fears by assuring everyone that Taper would eventually allow the board to see her appraisal. In addition, he reminded everyone that ALPLF had indeed done their due diligence. Board members had personally examined the collection during their trip to Taper's house and they had hired Kaller, who concurred with the \$23 million appraisal. Dr. Schwartz also told the group that in addition to Kaller, he had also spoken with Kenneth Rendell, who could not do the appraisal review for ALPLF, but believed Taper's collection was "well worth the \$23 million." Rendell, Dr. Schwartz explained, was "the leading authority on manuscripts" and had represented Bill Gates at auctions. "We have two separate opinions supporting the \$23 million price: one we paid for and one that came unsolicited," Dr. Schwartz concluded. However, he prepared the group not to expect an item-level valuation when they eventually saw Taper's appraisal. Though the appraisal would likely show the major pieces broken down individually, "I am fairly certain many of the things are bundled. I doubt that each Edwin Booth letter is priced out separately but rather packaged as a whole and priced. This is not unusual for a collection this size and this complex," Dr. Schwartz explained.<sup>129</sup>

Dr. Schwartz's warning proved prophetic. When Taper released her appraisal to the ALPLF board at the end of March, it assigned values to large groups of items and did not offer comparable sales figures to illustrate how valuations were determined. After reviewing the 232-page document, Julie Cellini expressed frustration that some of the items she had been led to believe were included in the sale did not appear on the appraisal, such as Taper's signed copy of the Emancipation Proclamation. "I have a problem borrowing \$23 million but not buying all the must-have major artifacts that, from the onset, the Foundation was assured would be in the purchase." In early fundraising meetings, Cellini told prospective donors about the many treasures the Foundation was going to acquire, including the iconic

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>127</sup> Rick Beard email message to Carrie Hightman, Craig Schermerhorn, J. D. Donenfeld, Governor Edgar, Julie Cellini, Patrick Coburn, T. Tolbert Chisum, Wayne Whalen, Lisa Gustman, "Taper Purchase," February 14, 2007.

<sup>128</sup> Julie Cellini email message to Rick Beard, Tolbert Chisum, Craig Schermerhorn, cc: Susan Mogergerman, Tom Schwartz, Richard W. Astle, J. D. Donenfeld, "Re: Draft Sales and Gift Agreements for Taper Collection, March 4, 2007.

<sup>129</sup> Tom Schwartz email message to Tolbert Chisum, Julie Cellini, Rick Beard, Craig Schermerhorn, cc: Susan Mogergerman, Richard W. Astle and J. D. Donenfeld, "Re: Draft Sales and Gift Agreements for Taper Collection," March 5, 2007.

document. Cellini encouraged board members to pause and insist all of the items that were originally discussed would be part of the acquisition. “With the exception of Tom Schwartz, I don’t think anyone has wanted to acquire the Taper collection longer than I have,” Cellini wrote. “My heart has never left this undertaking, but my head tells me we need to not be emotionally driven.”<sup>130</sup>

Further complicating matters, Kaller reached out to Dr. Schwartz and Taper in the middle of March, some six weeks after he submitted his report that concurred with Taper’s appraisal. He had been doing some thinking since submitting his report and decided he should warn Dr. Schwartz and Taper that they should anticipate provenance-related questions from the media. In regard to the stovepipe hat, Kaller asked, “Of all the hats purported to have been owned by Lincoln, why is this one of the three accepted ones? How is this different from the Forbes hat, for instance. Who is William Waller, and why and when did Lincoln give him the hat? Or is the connection through a Lincoln family member?” Kaller concluded by telling Dr. Schwartz how highly he thought of his expertise. “I trust and rely on your confidence in the items,” he wrote. “Indeed, you are the first person I would call when looking into any Lincoln artifacts,” but Kaller pleaded with him to “consider including some of the provenance information” in the press release to “proactively answer questions that will most likely be asked when the acquisition is announced.”<sup>131</sup>

However, when the *Chicago Sun-Times* broke a story on April 12, 2007, announcing that ALPLF was negotiating with Taper to buy her collection, Beard acknowledged he now felt a sense of urgency “to get a sales agreement signed and sealed.”<sup>132</sup>

When the ALPLF board met on May 1, 2007, the major piece of business was whether to purchase the Taper collection. Beard gave another impassioned plea to board members at the start of the meeting, outlining the reasons why ALPLM desperately wanted the collection, while Dr. Schwartz was present to answer specific questions about pieces in the collection. ALPLF Treasurer Craig Schermerhorn gave a lengthy description of the proposed financing plan, should the board vote to acquire the collection. After discussion followed, but just before the final vote was taken, board member Chaz Ebert asked a practical question: could the ALPLF afford to take on a \$23 million debt? “I just want someone to say yes, we can, we are not worried about it, and we can afford it,” she said.

In response, Gov. Edgar said he had come around to the idea after initially being skeptical. He conceded the debt might mean ALPLF would have to focus its efforts almost entirely on retiring the debt and pull back on raising money for other initiatives in the interim. Tolbert Chisum concurred with the governor and added he was confident the fundraising plan ALPLF had outlined would raise the money. Craig Schermerhorn added that ALPLF was in an unusual position. “We are buying something that we nearly have the funds to write the check for. If we did that, we would be out of business, spending all we’ve got, but we can do it, which gives us a tremendous fallback position,” he said. Gov. Edgar

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<sup>130</sup> Julie Cellini email message to Rick Beard, cc: Wayne Whalen, Susan D. Grace, Craig Schermerhorn, J. D. Donenfeld, Tolbert Chisum, “Re:”, April 3, 2007.

<sup>131</sup> Seth Kaller email message to Tom Schwartz, cc; Louise Taper, “Preparation for Announcement,” March 15, 2007.

<sup>132</sup> Rick Beard email message to Rick Beard, Carrie Hightman, Chris Kersten, Craig Schermerhorn, Doug Donenfeld, Governor Jim Edgar, Julie Cellini, Lisa Gustman, Patrick Coburn, Susan Mogerman, Tolbert Chisum, Wayne Whalen, “Telephone Conference call,” April 13, 2007.

added that by spending \$23 million, the ALPLF was also acquiring an asset in the collection, which would be worth at least the amount that was being borrowed. At the end of the discussion, the ALPLF board of directors voted unanimously to purchase the Taper Collection for \$23,018,025, the appraised value Charles Sachs had originally assigned to it.<sup>133</sup>

The ALPLF board authorized Dr. Schwartz to go to Taper's home to inventory the collection and make sure it was packed appropriately. When his attention turned to the stovepipe hat, the centerpiece of the acquisition, Dr. Schwartz was shocked to learn its provenance was much more tenuous than he previously believed. He had always assumed Hickey had received the stovepipe hat from Robert Todd Lincoln Beckwith in the 1970s when he went to Hildene. Instead, Dr. Schwartz now saw the 1958 affidavit signed by Clara Waller for the first time, revealing the stovepipe hat's provenance was based entirely on circumstantial evidence. Instead of alerting ALPLF that the most valuable item in the collection would require much more research, Dr. Schwartz dismissed his concerns. Like Taper, Dr. Schwartz concluded the hat must be a genuine Lincoln artifact because Hickey believed it to be so. Moreover, Dr. Schwartz believed the hat, "Physically matched everything one would expect to find in a Lincoln hat."<sup>134</sup> He told ALPLF everything was in order and they wired the money to Taper, while Dr. Schwartz made arrangements to ship the 1,500-piece collection to Springfield aboard two semi-trucks.<sup>135</sup>

An internal email dated June 22, 2007, approximately three weeks after the collection arrived at ALPLM, further reveals that no meaningful research on the stovepipe hat had taken place prior to the purchase. Dr. James Cornelius, then-curator of the Lincoln Collection at ALPLM, wrote to several staff members of the Papers of Abraham Lincoln, a documentary editing project housed at the ALPLM, soliciting their research help. "According to the Taper inventory, Hildene has the 3<sup>rd</sup> hat (though their website conceals this fact). Ours was given by Lincoln to William Waller (1824-1891) of Jackson County, Ill., in whose family it stayed till Ms. Taper bought it. Any skinny on him? [*The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*] has a reb spy named Willie Waller, no other; and none in *Day by Day*," Dr. Cornelius wrote.<sup>136</sup> Twenty-three minutes later, one of the researchers responded to Dr. Cornelius with details from the 1850 census and suggested he look for further information in the published county histories of Jackson County, one of the first places a researcher might turn when looking to learn more about a figure from the nineteenth century.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> ALPLF, Transcript of Board of Directors Meeting, May 1, 2007, 1-16.

<sup>134</sup> Schwartz, interview by Wheeler, October 12, 2018.

<sup>135</sup> Craig Schermerhorn email message to Tolbert Chisum, "FW: Sachs donation letter and appraisal," May 22, 2007; Pete Sherman, "Vast collection of Lincoln items comes to library," *State Journal-Register* (Springfield, IL), June 18, 2007.

<sup>136</sup> James Cornelius email message to Erika Nunamaker, John Lupton, Kelley Boston, and Stacy McDermott, "stovepipe hat," June 22, 2007.

<sup>137</sup> John A. Lupton email message to James Cornelius, Erika Nunamaker, Kelley Boston, and Stacey McDermott, "RE: stovepipe hat," June 22, 2007.

### **PART III. PHYSICAL ANALYSIS**

The ALPLM's research file for "Stovepipe Hat, TLR 001" contains a document titled, "Lincoln Stovepipe Hat: The Facts," dated February 26, 2013.<sup>138</sup> Drafted by IHPA (then-parent agency of ALPLM), with the assistance of the curator of the Lincoln Collection, the document appears to have been written to quell any doubts about the stovepipe hat's provenance. The document was probably written to circulate to the media, but at least one ALPLM staff member recalls being shown the document and told never to deviate from the facts when talking or writing about the stovepipe hat. The document contains nine specific claims about the stovepipe hat. The first three claims refer to the hat's physical attributes:

#### **Lincoln Stovepipe Hat The Facts**

The hat comes from the Springfield store run by Josiah H. Adams, where Lincoln bought other hats and clothing. A check from Lincoln to Adams still exists.

The hat is the same size that Abraham Lincoln wore: 7 1/8

The interior of the hat shows evidence that someone stuck documents in it, as Lincoln frequently did.

The hat was owned for a century by the Waller family. William Waller was a prominent southern Illinois farmer who left the Democratic Party and became a Lincoln supporter, angering his Democratic neighbors.

Waller would have attended the 1858 Lincoln-Douglas debate in Jonesboro, a town just a few miles away from his home.

Waller's son Elbert, a state legislator and author of two books on Illinois history, said his father obtained the hat from Lincoln.

Elbert Waller's widow said in a sworn statement in 1958 that her father-in-law had gotten the hat from Lincoln. She said that her husband, when he inherited the hat, considered it a prized possession.

Southern Illinois historian John Allen said he had discussed the hat with Waller's son Elbert and gave "full credence" to the hat's authenticity.

Noted Lincoln collectors James Hickey and Louise Taper were each confident enough in the hat's origin to buy it in later years.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Chris Wills, Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, "Lincoln Stovepipe Hat: The Facts," February 26, 2013, ALPLM Research File, "Stovepipe Hat, TLR 001."

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

## **A. A SPRINGFIELD PURCHASE**

The first claim on the list states, “The hat comes from the Springfield store run by Josiah H. Adams, where Lincoln bought other hats and clothing. A check from Lincoln to Adams still exists.”

It is not clear how ALPLM concluded the stovepipe hat was purchased from J. H. Adams’ store in Springfield. Nothing on the inside of the stovepipe hat or the ALPLM’s research file on “Stovepipe Hat, TLR 001” substantiates the claim.

There is, however, a faded floral motif on the top of the inside crown of the stovepipe hat. If these markings were used to connect the hat to Josiah H. Adams in Springfield, Illinois, the research file would need to contain examples of similar markings inside other known hats made by Adams in Springfield for comparison.

Moreover, subsequent newspaper research has yielded a November 30, 1962 article in the *Times* of Carmi, Illinois, which reported on a relevant event at the White County Historical Society. Felix Visk of Chicago showed society members a stovepipe hat he believed once belonged to Abraham Lincoln. Visk claimed he had acquired the hat from a man in Princeton, Illinois, who had acquired the hat from Lincoln’s coachman, who received the hat from Lincoln himself. Most interestingly, the hat bore the maker’s name in gold letters: “J. H. Adams, Springfield, Illinois.”<sup>140</sup> A physical examination of the inside of the Taper hat does not reveal any such markings.

Similarly, the existence of a check written by Lincoln to J. H. Adams on February 4, 1860 merely demonstrates that Lincoln did business with the Springfield hatmaker, but does nothing to connect the Taper stovepipe hat with Adams. When asked if Hickey ever claimed his stovepipe hat came from the store of J. H. Adams in Springfield, Dr. Schwartz said he did not.<sup>141</sup>

Without further evidence to substantiate this claim, this fact should not be cited to illustrate the hat’s connection to Lincoln.

## **B. THE SIZE**

The second claim on the list states, “The hat is the same size that Abraham Lincoln wore: 7 1/8.”

Abraham Lincoln’s law partner William Herndon claimed Lincoln wore a size 7 1/8 hat.<sup>142</sup> The stovepipe hat in the Smithsonian collection, purportedly worn by Lincoln on the

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<sup>140</sup> “Lincoln’s Hat Now at Museum,” *Times* (Carmi, IL), November 30, 1962.

<sup>141</sup> Schwartz, interview by Wheeler, October 12, 2018.

<sup>142</sup> William Herndon and Jesse W. Weik, *Herndon’s Lincoln*, ed. By Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, Knox College Lincoln Studies Center Edition, (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 351.

night of the assassination is size 7 1/8.<sup>143</sup> The curatorial staff at Hildene also confirmed their stovepipe hat that once belonged to Lincoln is size 7 1/8.<sup>144</sup>

Though ALPLM insisted the Taper stovepipe hat was size 7 1/8, I wanted to confirm the measurement. With the help of the ALPLM Conservator and Registrar, I used a tailor's tape and tried to get an accurate measurement of the hat. I measured the hat at 7 1/4.<sup>145</sup> It is possible my measurement was inaccurate, as this was the first hat I have measured in this manner. I suppose it is also possible the hat expanded slightly over the last century-and-a-half.

I recommend bringing an expert in to measure the hat, preferably with a hatter's block. Until that is done, the size of the stovepipe hat should not be used to build a case for the object's authenticity.

### **C. A STRETCHED HATBAND**

The third claim on the list states, "The interior of the hat shows evidence that someone stuck documents in it, as Lincoln frequently did."

Abraham Lincoln was indeed known to place documents inside his hatband for safekeeping. For instance, in 1850, Lincoln was forced to apologize to a colleague for taking so long to reply to his letter. Lincoln explained that he had misplaced the man's letter because after he read it, "I put it in my old hat, and buying a new one the next day, the old one was set aside, and so, the letter lost sight of for a time."<sup>146</sup>

However, it is difficult to assess how ALPLM determined the Taper stovepipe hat showed evidence that someone stuck documents inside it. For instance, a 1992 condition report written by Cara L. Varnell for Louise Taper indicated, "The lining is very worn on the edges and the stitching holding the top of the lining to the sides of the lining is loose and missing."<sup>147</sup> Upon examination, the silk lining inside of the hat is indeed loose, but there is no opening in the lining where one might place a document for safekeeping. If the claim is that the hat band shows evidence of being stretched, the evidence needs to be clearly presented. Currently, the research file at ALPLM does not contain such evidence, nor was my visual examination of the object able to substantiate the claim.

### **D. FINGERPRINTS**

Though this physical characteristic did not appear on the list of nine items prepared by ALPLM in 2013, the Taper stovepipe hat has two seemingly perfect fingerprints worn on

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<sup>143</sup> Stephen L. Carter, "Abraham Lincoln's Top Hat: The Inside Story," *Smithsonian Magazine*, November 2013, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/abraham-lincolns-top-hat-the-inside-story-3764960/> (accessed on 11/24/19).

<sup>144</sup> Christian McWhirter, Memo to File, "Lincoln Hat at Hildene," March 11, 2019.

<sup>145</sup> Samuel Wheeler, Memo to File, "Measuring Stovepipe Hat, TLR 001," September 26, 2018.

<sup>146</sup> Abraham Lincoln to Richard S. Thomas, June 27, 1850, in Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 9 volumes (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 2:80.

<sup>147</sup> Cara L. Varnell, Conservation Report, August 3, 1992, 2, ALPLM Research File, "Stovepipe Hat, TLR 001."

the right side of the topside of the brim, as well as one fingerprint on the underside of the brim. ALPLM staffers often claimed these fingerprints were the result of Abraham Lincoln's habit of doffing his hat in recognition of passersby.<sup>148</sup> Similarly, the condition report prepared by Cara L. Varnell for Louise Taper in 1992 noted "two large braded circles on the front of the brim."<sup>149</sup>

Dr. Schwartz too noted these marks and concluded they were indeed the result of Lincoln's frequent doffing of his hat. Dr. Schwartz even explored the possibility of measuring the finger tip marks and comparing the measurements to other individuals who were 6'4" (Lincoln's height), in an attempt to strengthen the authenticity claim.<sup>150</sup>

However, there seems to be significant problems in the logic supporting this claim. What are the odds that every time the owner of the hat doffed it, his fingertips would land on exactly the same place? Instead of two perfectly formed fingerprints, it would seem more logical for a large, discolored, or even worn spot to appear on the right side of the brim, as the owner would hardly be expected to reach for and locate precisely the same spot every time he wanted to acknowledge a person on the street.

If the fingerprints were not left there by the owner of the hat, it then becomes possible they were placed there. I do not know enough about textiles to determine if there is evidence to indicate the fingerprints were manufactured, but a qualified textile expert might be able to make such a determination.

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<sup>148</sup> "Quintessentially Lincoln: The Hat That Defined the Man, 1856-1860," in James M. Cornelius and Carla Knorowski, *Under Lincoln's Hat: 100 Objects That Tell the Story of His Life and Legacy*, (Guilford, CT: Lyons Press, 2016), 194-95.

<sup>149</sup> Cara L. Varnell, Conservation Report, August 3, 1992, 2, ALPLM Research File, "Stovepipe Hat, TLR 001."

<sup>150</sup> Schwartz, interview by Wheeler, October 12, 2018.



## PART IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Though this report does not contain a final determination regarding the provenance of the stovepipe hat, it does point to several issues that deserve immediate attention. As a result, I offer several recommendations for the leadership of ALPLM and ALPLF to consider, discuss, and hopefully, implement.

First, further research into the stovepipe hat is abundantly warranted, but ALPLM and ALPLF should work collaboratively to outline next steps.

Should ALPLM and ALPLF agree to move forward with the research process, I recommend consulting three costume experts, who each specialize in nineteenth century men's headwear. Each specialist should separately examine the stovepipe hat and prepare a written report that addresses the following issues: the size of the hat; materials and methods of construction; whether documents could be stored inside the hat; an analysis of the fingerprints on the brim; a determination of when the hat was made. If the consensus among the specialists is that the hat does not date from Lincoln's era, then that would provide the strongest evidence yet that the hat did not belong to Lincoln. However, if the specialists determine that the hat does indeed date from Lincoln's era, then further historical research should proceed.

From a historical standpoint, the stovepipe hat's provenance hinges entirely on family lore. My research indicates the family lore is plausible, but I was not able to verify the claims in the time I had to conduct this research. There are, however, several repositories that may hold answers, including the National Archives, and should be consulted.

Second, ALPLM should improve its current acquisition process to ensure adequate research is completed prior to adding an item to its collection or advising ALPLF to acquire an item on its behalf.

No matter what the final determination proves to be on the stovepipe hat, it is clear that no one at ALPLM conducted any research on the object before it was acquired in 2007. Instead of relying on historical methodology to establish the object's provenance, Dr. Schwartz only relied on the word of his predecessor and mentor, James Hickey, who had a clear financial interest in claiming the stovepipe hat was Lincoln's. Even if evidence emerges in the future that definitively proves the stovepipe hat did belong to Lincoln, immense damage has already been done to the reputations of both ALPLM and ALPLF, as well as their relationship.

Therefore, ALPLM should immediately reorganize its acquisitions process. Even now, the acquisition process mostly occurs in a silo with the Chief of Acquisitions operating largely on his own initiative and expertise. In addition, the current Chief of Acquisitions is not a doctoral-level researcher and reports to the Director of Library Services, an individual with no historical training. It is recommended that ALPLM immediately form an Acquisitions Committee that mirrors the ALPLM's Loan Committee.<sup>151</sup> The Acquisitions

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<sup>151</sup> Angela Luning and Melissa Brandenburg, Case # 19-00300, Executive Ethics Commission of the State of Illinois in re: Alan Lowe and Michael Little, Office of the Executive Inspector General, September 3, 2019. This document outlines the basic structure of the committee.

Committee should be chaired by the Chief of Acquisitions, and consist of, at minimum, a staff historian, all collection curators, and the registrar. The Chief of Acquisitions should be required to bring all major acquisitions, including any item ALPLM is considering purchasing or asking ALPLF to purchase on its behalf, to this committee. Staff historians should conduct research into the provenance of such pieces and present the research to the committee. After weighing the evidence and considering ALPLM's collection scope, the committee should issue a recommendation to the Executive Director of ALPLM, who should concur or dissent from the recommendation. Should the Executive Director recommend the acquisition of the item, the potential acquisition should be brought to the ALPLM Board of Trustees for final approval before the item is acquired. By operating in this fashion, ALPLM will ensure all major acquisitions in the future will be conducted transparently, deliberately, and responsibly.

To facilitate this vision, ALPLM should devote itself to building a premier Research Division, composed of, at minimum, an additional doctoral-level staff historian with appropriate academic training and specialties, as well as a thorough knowledge of provenance-related issues.

In addition, if such a policy does not already exist, ALPLM should immediately adopt a strongly-worded policy, in line with professional ethical standards, that prohibits appropriate ALPLM employees from personally collecting museum-quality artifacts related to the life and legacy of Abraham Lincoln or Illinois History, as that practice presents a clear conflict of interest.

Third, ALPLF should reexamine its conflict of interest policy to ensure it conforms with national standards and engage its board members in regular conversations about the importance of putting the interests of the board ahead of their own.

The Taper acquisition raises several ethical considerations. First, it is rare for a non-profit board to make a multi-million-dollar transaction with a sitting board member. By doing so, the board invited criticism from those who would claim the transaction unfairly benefitted one of its members. Non-profit boards must avoid the appearance of impropriety at all costs. Second, Dr. Schwartz's twenty-year friendship with Taper posed a possible conflict of interest, as he was in a position to influence the board's decision to purchase her collection. Third, instead of obtaining written appraisals with item-level comparables from at least three organizations, ALPLF appears to have completed the transaction after having limited access to one appraisal, done by a company Taper had previously worked for and done business with for at least 35 years. Moreover, when ALPLF engaged the services of Seth Kaller to assess the appraisal, he was given specific instructions not to examine the provenance of the items, as he was told the provenance issues were already settled.

All of these issues are significant. I encourage ALPLF to reexamine its policies and bylaws to make sure they conform with national standards. In addition, it is healthy for boards to engage its members in a running dialogue about conflict of interest disclosures and their duty of loyalty, as issues like the ones outlined above are devastating to the long-term health of organizations.

Fourth, the weaponization of the stovepipe hat must end immediately and both the ALPLM and ALPLF must rededicate themselves to working collaboratively.

The Taper acquisition began as a joint effort in 2007 when ALPLM asked its partner, ALPLF, to make the acquisition on its behalf. In response, ALPLF agreed to assume the financial risk. Both parties moved forward together, aware of risks involved, yet it is clear they both believed they had accomplished something that would have a generational impact.

That spirit of cooperation quickly eroded with the introduction of a new administrative structure that established separate chief executives for the ALPLM and ALPLF. For the past seven years, there have been senior administrators at ALPLM who have courted criticism of the stovepipe hat's provenance and have been accused of working with members of the media to amplify such doubts. While the motives of ALPLM leaders are debatable, it seems that personal animosities, as well as a strong desire to reconsolidate power under a single chief executive, have been factors. Regardless, weaponizing the stovepipe hat has caused both ALPLM and ALPLF immeasurable harm.

Reconsolidating leadership of the ALPLM and ALPLF under one leader is not advisable, as The American Association of Museums (now the American Alliance of Museums) indicated in 2008.<sup>152</sup> However, at this moment in time, both institutions are searching for new chief executives. Some level of cooperation and communication during these searches will be critically important. ALPLM and ALPLF must identify new leaders who understand that the future depends on cooperation, not simply to retire the Taper debt and secure the collection, but also to outline an ambitious plan to share the Lincoln legacy with the world.

Fifth, ALPLM and ALPLF should rededicate themselves to truth, transparency, and strive to achieve "excellence."

Studies show that the public trusts information they learn at history museums more than information acquired through any other medium, including books written by history professors.<sup>153</sup> Similarly, ALPLM holds the entirety of its archival collection in public trust for the people of Illinois. These are major responsibilities and museums, as well as their supporting institutions, must adhere to high standards, not simply for their own well-being, but also because they are part of the larger community of museums, where the actions of one institution impacts the reputation of another.

In response to the provenance issues that were raised in 2012, ALPLM did not respond like a responsible museum. Instead of conducting an honest inquiry and perhaps seizing on the opportunity to educate the public about provenance-related issues, ALPLM assumed an overly defensive position. The 2013 document, "Lincoln Stovepipe Hat: The Facts," contains untruths and appears to have been issued solely to combat critics.<sup>154</sup>

Similarly, ALPLF's 2015 decision to engage the FBI in testing the stovepipe hat for DNA, as well as several related artifacts, may have been undertaken in hopes it would bring

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<sup>152</sup> Judith E. Endelman and Claudine Klose, "Institutional Assessment Report: Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library & Museum," June 7-8, 2010, American Association of Museums, 20.

<sup>153</sup> John Dichtl, "Most Trust Museums as Sources of Historical Information," February 20, 2018, *Funding, Audience, Advocacy*, <https://aaslh.org/most-trust-museums/> (accessed on 11/24/19).

<sup>154</sup> Chris Wills, Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, "Lincoln Stovepipe Hat: The Facts," February 26, 2013, ALPLM Research File, "Stovepipe Hat, TLR 001."

clarity to the stovepipe hat's provenance. However, by concealing those efforts from ALPLM leadership, while working clandestinely with one of ALPLM's employees to bring unauthorized individuals into the collection areas, ALPLF was not operating in a transparent or ethical manner.<sup>155</sup>

ALPLM and ALPLF should commit themselves to achieving "excellence" which, in the museum world, means fulfilling an institution's educational mission and operating according to accepted professional standards in seven broad categories: Public Trust and Accountability, Mission and Planning, Leadership and Organizational Structure, Collections Stewardship, Education and Interpretation, Financial Stability, and Facilities and Risk Management.<sup>156</sup> By undertaking this journey together, both institutions will demonstrate their commitment to being good stewards of resources and public trust. Furthermore, they will also lay the foundation for a new relationship with one another, which will be essential for their future success.

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<sup>155</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, "DNA Analysis of a Stovepipe Hat Believed to have Belonged to Abraham Lincoln," July 19, 2017; Dave McKinney, "Report: Existing Evidence 'Insufficient' to Prove Hat Belonged to Lincoln," WBEZ News (Chicago), September 19, 2018, <https://www.wbez.org/shows/wbez-news/report-existing-evidence-insufficient-to-prove-hat-belonged-to-lincoln/fba96bef-2012-4aed-884e-81d562d930c7> (accessed on 11/24/19); Julia Jacobs, "F.B.I and Expert Reports Cast Doubt that Celebrated Stovepipe Hat was Lincoln's," *New York Times*, September 23, 2018.

<sup>156</sup> "Ethics, Standards, and Professional Practices: Core Standards for Museums," American Alliance of Museums, <https://www.aam-us.org/programs/ethics-standards-and-professional-practices/core-standards-for-museums/>, (accessed 11/24/19).

## **APPENDICES**

## **A. TIMELINE**

### **1861-1865**

According to Clara Waller, Abraham Lincoln gave William Waller his stovepipe hat in Washington, D.C. during the Civil War.

### **December 26, 1891**

William Waller dies in Murphysboro, Illinois. According to Clara Waller, Elbert Waller's mother allows him to have his father's prized stovepipe hat that once belonged to Abraham Lincoln.

### **June 16, 1956**

Elbert Waller dies in Carbondale, Illinois. His widow, Clara Waller, inherits the stovepipe hat.

### **1956-1958**

Clara Waller sells the stovepipe hat to the Tregoning Antique store in Carterville, Illinois for \$1.

### **Summer 1958**

James T. Hickey buys the stovepipe hat from the Tregoning Antique store in Carterville, Illinois for an unknown sum.

### **July 22, 1958**

At Hickey's request, Clara Waller writes him a letter detailing what she knows about the stovepipe hat.

### **August 9, 1958**

Clara Waller signs her name to an affidavit prepared by Hickey which details what she knows about the stovepipe hat.

### **August 22, 1958**

John W. Allen writes a letter to James Hickey corroborating the facts in Clara Waller's affidavit, stating the facts were "the same as the one told to me by her late husband, Elbert Waller." He concluded, "I am inclined to give it full credence."

### **1975-1976**

Hickey's stovepipe hat is featured on The American Freedom Train's "Car No. 10: Conflict and Resolution," a travelling exhibition in celebration of the Bicentennial of U.S. History.

### **1981**

Illinois Secretary of State Jim Edgar uses the stovepipe hat to draw a winner during a partisan dispute over drawing new legislative districts.

### **March 20-24, 1988**

Hickey allows ISHL to borrow the stovepipe hat to include in an exhibition at the National Museum of History in Taipei, Taiwan. The loan document indicates the value of the hat is \$15,000.

**1990**

Hickey sells the stovepipe hat to collector Louise Taper.

**October 12, 1993-November 13, 1994**

Taper and Schwartz work together on the exhibit, “The Last Best Hope of Earth: Abraham Lincoln and the Promise of America” at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California. Th exhibition combines material from the ISHL, Taper’s collection, and the Huntington. The stovepipe hat is prominently featured in the exhibit, as well as promotional pieces.

**February 12, 1996-February 12, 1997**

“The Last Best Hope of Earth: Abraham Lincoln and the Promise of America” exhibit goes on display at the Chicago Historical Society. This time a new section on the Lincoln funeral is included. The stovepipe hat is again prominently featured in the exhibit, as well as promotional pieces. The successful exhibitions at the Huntington Library and Chicago Historical Society fuel early ideas for the creation of what will become the ALPLM.

**June 2000**

The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Foundation is created. First Lady of Illinois Lura Lynn Ryan is made president of the organization.

**April 2, 2001**

Louise Taper accepts Lura Lynn Ryan’s invitation to become an ALPLF board member.

**April 2005**

The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum opens. Dr. Schwartz works out loan agreements for several of Taper’s items to go on display inside the museum, including the stovepipe hat.

**October 24, 2005**

Dr. Schwartz informs the ALPLF board that Louise Taper is interested in selling her Lincoln collection to them.

**March 2006**

ALPLM/ALPLF Director Richard Norton Smith resigns and Dr. Schwartz is named Interim Director of ALPLM.

**November 2006**

Rick Beard is hired as Executive Director of ALPLM/ALPLF.

**November 30, 2006**

Taper informs ALPLF board members her collection has been appraised at \$25 million, though she refuses to share it with them. She is willing to donate \$2 million of it in exchange for naming rights to the museum’s Treasures Gallery. Taper says she has a second interested party in her collection who is willing to purchase her collection outright.

**February 1, 2007**

Frustrated by not being able to see the appraisal Taper received, ALPLF hires Seth Kaller for \$25,000, plus expenses, to evaluate the appraisal and her collection and make a determination if the appraisal represents fair market value. Kaller's written report indicates he complied with ALPLF's request not to assess the provenance of the items, but limited his analysis to assessing the fair market value of the collection. He concurs that \$23 million is a reasonable price for the collection.

**March 15, 2007**

Six weeks after submitting his report on the appraisal, Seth Kaller writes to Dr. Schwartz and Taper, warning them to expect questions from the media about the provenance of items in the collection, including the stovepipe hat.

**May 1, 2007**

The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Foundation purchases approximately 1,500 items from Louise Taper for \$23,018,025. The stovepipe hat, valued at \$6.5 million, is the centerpiece of the collection.

**December 3, 2010**

Eileen Mackevich is hired as the Executive Director of ALPLM.

**March 2011**

Dr. Carla Knorowski is hired as the CEO of the ALPLF.

**April 15, 2012**

Article published by Dave McKinney in the *Chicago-Sun Times* calling into question the authenticity of the stovepipe hat.

**November 1, 2012**

IHPA Director Amy Martin sends letter to ALPLF asking for a copy of the Taper Collection appraisal from 2007.

**February 13, 2013**

During a board meeting of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, ALPLM's parent agency, trustee Tony Leone calls for the stovepipe hat to undergo a DNA test.

**November 4, 2013**

Staff of the Smithsonian and Chicago History Museum assess the provenance claims of the stovepipe hat and issue a written report.

**October 16, 2015**

Eileen Mackevich resigns as ALPLM Executive Director.

**July 11, 2016**

Alan Lowe is hired as ALPLM Executive Director.

**August 23, 2018**



Director Lowe orders Dr. Samuel Wheeler to begin research into the provenance of the stovepipe hat.

**September 23, 2018**

A report appears in the *New York Times* that is critical of the provenance of the stovepipe hat, citing recent disclosures that the FBI conducted DNA testing on the hat and officials from the Smithsonian and Chicago History Museum assessed the hat. Director Lowe told the paper he was blindsided by the disclosures.

**October 2018**

The controversy over the stovepipe hat becomes a political campaign issue when Republican Congressman Rodney Davis's campaign debuts an attack ad tying his Democratic challenger Betsy Dirksen Londrigan to the hat because she once worked for ALPLF.

**November 13, 2018**

The Illinois General Assembly's "Tourism, Hospitality, and Craft Industries Committee" holds a public hearing to discuss whether it would recommend state funding to the ALPLF to retire the Taper debt. Issues regarding the provenance of the hat emerge. The rift between ALPLM Director Lowe and ALPLF is apparent throughout the hearing.

**May 21, 2019**

A spokesman for Illinois Governor J. B. Pritzker announces the state will not help the ALPLF retire the Taper debt.

**May 22, 2019**

ALPLM Director Lowe orders Dr. Wheeler to halt his research on the stovepipe hat.

**June 5, 2019**

ALPLM Director Lowe sends an email to Illinois Deputy Governor Jesse Ruiz, stating "It appears from my discussion with the state historian that he and his team have found no evidence confirming the hat belonged to President Lincoln."

**September 20, 2019**

ALPLM Executive Director Alan Lowe is fired by Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker upon the recommendation of the OEIG.

**October 31, 2019**

ALPLF CEO Dr. Carla Knorowski resigns to take a position as President of the U.S. Naval War College Foundation.

**B. STOVEPIPE HAT, TLR 001**



711 Carico,  
Carbondale. Ill.  
July 22-1958

Mr. James Hickey  
Elkhart. Ill.

Dear Mr. Hickey -

Today I received your letter saying you bought the high top hat from Mr. Tregoning in Carterville. This is the history of the hat. During ~~the~~ the Civil war Elbert's father held a position we would now call (F. B. I). His name was Wm. Waller of Murphysboro Ill. This position took Mr. Waller in contact with Abraham Lincoln and one evening finding they wore the same size hats they traded hats. He took Elbert's hat and Mr. Lincoln

took Mr. Wallers hat.  
at Mr. Wallers death  
Elbert asked his mother if  
he might lay claim to the  
stove pipe hat and she  
gave her permission and if  
you ever knew Elbert you  
know how it pleased him.  
Elbert was an antique  
collector and had many  
such things when he passed  
away. I hope I have given  
you all the information  
necessary.

Sincerely Clara D. Waller  
(Mrs. Elbert Waller)

D. CLARA WALLER, AFFIDAVIT, AUGUST 9, 1958

AFFIDAVIT

State of Illinois

Jackson County

I, Clara D. Waller, being duly sworn upon my oath, say that I am the widow of Elbert Waller.

I further solemnly swear that I was the owner of a certain stovepipe hat which had once belonged to Abraham Lincoln.

I further solemnly swear that this said hat had been given to William Waller by Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War in Washington. That on the death of said William Waller it passed to his son Elbert Waller.

I further solemnly swear that at the death of Elbert Waller the hat came to me as his widow.

I further solemnly swear that I disposed of the hat with other items to a Mr. and Mrs. Tregoning of 115 East Illinois Avenue, Carterville, Illinois and that they in turn sold the hat to James T. Hickey, Elkhart, Illinois.

I further solemnly swear that I believe the hat to have once belonged to Abraham Lincoln.

I further solemnly swear that it was one of my husband's (Elbert Waller) proud possessions during his lifetime because it had been given to his father by Abraham Lincoln.



Clara D. Waller.

Clara D. Waller  
(Mrs. Elbert Waller)  
711 Carico Street  
Carbondale, Illinois

Subscribed and sworn before me this 9th day of August, 1958.

Reva Frakes  
Notary Public

My commission expires Feb 27, 1960.

E. CLARA WALLER TO JAMES T. HICKEY, AUGUST 9, 1958

711 Carico  
Mr. James T. Hickey: Carbondale, Ill.  
Elkhart Ill. Aug. 9 - 1958

Dear Sir -

I have filled out the statement and hope it will solve a problem for you.

Of course Mr. Waller and I had been married only 10 years but he & I am sure had told me all he knew about all his antiques. I certainly did not know the value of antiques. I sold the hat to these people for \$1.00 as they told me they were getting ready to plan a nice museum for the old southern Ill. Relics. Any time I can be of service I will be glad to do it. I spend 6 months in Florida and Summer 6 mo. in Illinois. I will return to 2327 Woodlawn Circle East St. Petersburg, Florida Sept 1st.

Sincerely Clara D. Waller

F. JAMES W. ALLEN TO JAMES T. HICKEY, AUGUST 22, 1958

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
CARBONDALE, ILLINOIS

Aug. 22, 1958

Dear Jim:

The written story concerning the Lincoln hat, as written by Mrs. Waller, is the same as the one told to me by her late husband, Albert Waller. I am inclined to give it full credence.

I have spent two months wandering about in my camp trailer, here to Quebec, to Virginia and here again. I plan to be in Springfield for a week or so, beginning about Aug. 29 and will see you.

Sincerely,  
John

JOHN ALLEN