

Digital Image, 2009. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelleter Library

Handwritten initials and signature: J.A. Miller for



LINCOLN THEATRE

STEVE BENNIS, OWNER AND MANAGER

MOTION PICTURES, VAUDEVILLE AND ROAD ATTRACTIONS

215 S. KICKAPOO STREET

LINCOLN, ILLINOIS, May 21, 1930

Mr. Chic Sales
229 West 46th St.
New York City

Dear Sir:

Some time ago Fox made a picture in which you took the part of Uncle Billy Miller. I wish you would inform me as to who the original Uncle Billy Miller was, if you know where his home was, or if he has any relatives.

My reason for asking you this is, the Mother of a friend of mine purchased a table quite a few years ago, which is now in my friend's possession. One day while repairing this table he split the leg, and in so doing, discovered that someone had placed a note inside saying that the table was given to Abraham Lincoln by an Uncle Billy Miller.

My friend would like to make a little history of this, and is anxious to know if you can give him any information or acknowledgment as to who this Uncle Billy Miller was. He knows of a man who saw this picture in Springfield in Feb. 1929, and you, Chic Sales represented Uncle Billy Miller. We are wondering whether this Uncle Billy Miller was real or a fictitious character.

I am enclosing a picture of the note that was found in the table leg, hoping that it will be of interest to you and that you will reply at once.

If you can remember, I would also like to know the name of the picture in which you took the above mentioned part, so that I may secure it for use at the Lincoln Theatre.

Thanking you in advance for a prompt reply, I am

Very truly yours,

Steve Bennis

SB/MK

A Voice From the Past

Springfield Ill
Nov 4 1857

Maybe dead
when this note is found
in the leg of this table
where I have placed it
but if it is ever found
you will know that the
table was given to
Abraham Lincoln
on his wedding
anniversary by one of
his best friends

Uncle Willie Miller
Springfield Ill
Nov 4 1857

This yellow, faded, time stained letter, believed to have been written by a close friend of Abraham Lincoln, was found this week by George Wunderle, of this city, hidden in a secret hole bored in the leg of an old walnut table believed to have been a gift to Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln on their fifteenth wedding anniversary in 1857.

Judge L. B. Stringer believes the note genuine, and has located the records of two William Millers who lived near Springfield in 1857. Both served in the Civil War, one of them dying at Vicksburg.

The faded letter was discovered by accident after 73 years, and was only found when Mr. Wunderle accidentally split the hollow leg in installing a new castor. The table was obtained years ago from a C. and A. railroad man in Bloomington, as of little value. During the Civil War it was owned by L. Tilton, Great Western railroad president, who rented the Lincoln home in Springfield and was believed to have bought the Lincoln household goods.

Under the table, carved with a jack-knife, are the initials "R. L." and the date "1857", believed cut there by Robert Todd Lincoln, son of the Lincolns, then 13 years old.

Believe Lincoln Sold Old Table in Feb. 1861

Evidence that Abraham Lincoln sold his household goods in Springfield before moving to Washington early in 1861, was discovered today by Judge L. B. Stringer, Lincoln historian, in the search for information concerning the old walnut table, owned by George Wunderle, of this city, in which a long hidden letter from Uncle Billy Miller, a friend of Lincoln, was discovered this week.

In Herndon's *Life of Lincoln*, written by William Herndon, Lincoln's law partner, it is stated that "Early in February (1861) the last preparations for the journey to Washington had been made. Mr. Lincoln had disposed of his household goods and furniture to a neighbor and had rented his house."

It was previously known that Mr. Lincoln rented his home to L. Tilton, president of the Great Western railroad, just before moving to Washington, and had moved into the Chenery hotel during his last week in Springfield while his house-

hold goods and home were being disposed of.

It is presumed that Tilton was the neighbor who acquired the furniture, including the walnut table, given the Lincolns by William Miller on their fifteenth wedding anniversary in 1857.

Nothing further has been learned concerning the early history of the two William Millers, whom early historians show to have lived in Sangamon county during the decade prior to the Civil War.

Had the old Miller letter in the hidden hole in the table leg been discovered a few years earlier, it is believed that Robert Todd Lincoln could have shed much light on the history of the table. Mr. Lincoln died but a few years ago. When a lad of thirteen it is believed he cut his initials on the under side of the table, and no doubt he would have remembered the boyhood occurrence as well as be acquainted with the anniversary table and his father's friend, Billy Miller.