



Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library And Museum Acquires Historic Letter

July 4 2021 7:20 AM

Springfield, Nov. 27. 1854

E. A. Powell Esq

My dear Sir:

Acting on your advice, and on my
own judgment, I have declined accepting the office
of Representative of this county. I was allowed to go
to the election, because it was supposed my going so
would help Yates.

Things look reasonably well; but I fear some will be
put on a platform, which I can not stand upon.

Please write me again when you discover any thing
worth writing about.

Yours as ever

Abraham Lincoln

P.S. How I venture to write directly to Dr. Arnold?

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SPRINGFIELD – Read Abraham Lincoln’s 1854 letter to a friend, and it seems mundane. Lincoln simply says he has decided not to serve as a state representative again. But what it meant was that the little-known prairie lawyer had set his sights on the U.S. Senate – and maybe more.

The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum is pleased to announce it has acquired this important letter, which a noted scholar once called “in a sense, the most interesting document Lincoln ever wrote.”

The letter is a gift to the ALPLM from Guy Fraker, a Bloomington attorney and Lincoln collector and author of “Lincoln's Ladder to the Presidency: The Eighth Judicial Circuit.”

“Those of us who have been lucky enough to serve as caretakers for Lincoln letters and artifacts have an obligation to ensure they will be shared with the public for generations to come,” Fraker said. “This letter belongs in Illinois at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.”

Fraker said a major factor in his decision to donate the letter to the ALPLM was the help that Acquisitions Chief Ian Hunt provided in tracking down a related letter at the Library of Congress. For the first time, Fraker could read both the letter to Lincoln and his response.

“We are honored that Mr. Fraker believes so strongly in the ALPLM’s mission that he is willing to donate this treasure,” said Christina Shutt, executive director of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum. “Lincoln wrote it at a pivotal time in his life. Would he focus on the law or make a return to politics? His decision changed history, so it’s appropriate for this letter to find a home at the library and museum dedicated to telling the story of Lincoln’s impact on the world.”

In November 1854, Lincoln was elected to the Illinois House, where he had served years earlier. Soon after, he got a note from his friend Elihu N. Powell, a Peoria attorney, reminding him that serving in the Illinois House would make him ineligible to run for a U.S. Senate seat in 1855.

Lincoln responded on Nov. 27, 1854: “Acting on your advice, and my own judgment, I have declined accepting the office of Representative of this county.” Lincoln added that he had run for the legislative seat only as a favor to a political ally.

The letter also indicates Lincoln was torn over whether to remain with the Whig Party or jump to the group that would become the Republican Party. He was concerned the party would adopt radical policies he could not support.

“I fear some will insist on a platform, which I can not stand upon,” Lincoln wrote.

Lincoln ran for the Senate the next year as a Whig but ended up withdrawing and throwing his support to another candidate who shared his views on restricting the spread of slavery. He ran again in 1858 as a Republican, losing to Stephen Douglas but raising his national profile and placing him on the path to the White House.

The letter's portrait of Lincoln in transition prompted historian Paul Angle's comment that this was Lincoln's "most interesting" document. Angle wrote extensively on Abraham Lincoln and was the historian of the Illinois State Historical Library from 1932 until 1945.

The letter will be displayed in the Museum's Treasures Gallery for one month starting July 7, when the display of the Emancipation Proclamation ends.

The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum uses a combination of rigorous scholarship and high-tech showmanship to immerse visitors in Lincoln's life and times. The library holds an unparalleled collection of Lincoln books, documents, photographs, artifacts and art, as well as some 12 million items pertaining to all aspects of Illinois history.

For more information, visit www.PresidentLincoln.Illinois.gov or follow the ALPLM on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

Text of Abraham Lincoln's Letter Elihu Powell

Springfield, Nov. 27- 1854

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Abraham Lincoln
PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM