

# Hayner Public Library To Display Abraham Lincoln Letter, Mary Todd Lincoln's China

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ALTON - The Hayner Public Library District will display an Abraham Lincoln Letter at the Genealogy & Local History Library at 401 State St. in Alton on Saturday, February 17, 2024, from 8:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Mary Todd Lincoln's China will also be on display and a lecture discussing Lincoln's Alton Connections will be delivered.

The letter written by Abraham Lincoln and owned by Hayner Library, will be displayed in the Hayner Genealogy & Local History Library. This letter, written before Lincoln became the sixteenth President of the United States, is addressed to Alton resident Simeon Ryder. Ryder was a sea captain and fisherman who moved to Alton in 1834 and opened a grocery, dry goods, and hardware business. He was also involved with developing the Terre Haute & Alton Railroad.

The Ryder Building, now housing My Just Desserts in downtown Alton, was built and owned by Simeon Ryder.

“We’re so happy to be able to share this document with our patrons,” says Mary Cordes, Executive Director of Hayner Library. “From what we can tell, it’s the first time the letter has been displayed for public viewing. Abraham Lincoln is still such a significant and important figure in American and world history — and to have a document that he wrote, especially with a local connection, is something we think many people will enjoy seeing,” says Cordes.

To give context to the Lincoln letter and Lincoln's ties to this area, at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, February 17, historian Tom Emery will present a lecture entitled "Abraham Lincoln in Alton" as part of Hayner Library’s Historic Preservation Lecture Series, co-sponsored by Alton Area Landmarks Association (AALA). No registration is needed to view the letter.

However, registration is required for the lecture. Patrons may call 1-800-613-3163 to register. Hayner Library has had ties to Abraham Lincoln since the library's 1852 founding.

In the mid-1850s, Lincoln's law partner, William Herndon, was a speaker in the Alton Library Association's lecture series. In addition to the Lincoln letter, several other Lincoln-related items in the library's collection, including a small china cup and saucer said to have belonged to former First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln, will also be displayed.

The seventh and final of the Lincoln-Douglas Debates was held in Alton in 1858, and this debate was the only one attended by Mary Todd Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglass traveled to Alton from Quincy by steamboat, but Mrs. Lincoln came by train from Springfield to support her husband with their eldest son, Robert.