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NEWS FROM THE NEW HAMPSHIRE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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PHOTOGRAPHS AVAILABLE

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HAPPY BIRTHDAY ABRAHAM LINCOLN!

Public Invited to Celebrate 200th Anniversary of President's Birth

Concord, NH—On Thursday, February 12, 2009, the New Hampshire Historical Society will host a birthday party to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's (1809–1865) birth and the opening of its new exhibition *Abraham Lincoln and New Hampshire*. The public is invited to stop by the Society's library, located at 30 Park Street, Concord, from 12 noon to 3 p.m. to see the exhibition and enjoy a piece of birthday cake. Admission is free.

After delivering his now famous antislavery address on February 27, 1860, at the Cooper Union in New York City, Lincoln became a national celebrity. He followed the address with a 12-day speaking tour of New England starting the next day. New Hampshire became the centerpiece of the tour, as the future president delivered speeches in Concord, Manchester, Dover, and Exeter. His speeches helped galvanize the growing state Republican Party behind his candidacy for president, and gave Lincoln an opportunity to visit his son, Robert, who was attending Phillips Exeter Academy. During the whirlwind visit, "Honest Abe" won new friends with his talents as a public speaker, storyteller, and political leader, and made a lasting impression on the people he met.

While researching the exhibition, the Society uncovered some fascinating stories of New Hampshire people and events that intersected with the life of one of the nation's greatest presidents. These memorable stories are told through the Society's collection of Lincoln-related documents, photographs, and objects.

One of the many items in the exhibition is a fragment of the coat Lincoln was wearing when he was assassinated on April 14, 1865. Dr. Ezra W. Abbott of Concord was one of six men who carried the wounded president from Ford's Theatre. He preserved a section of the sleeve from Lincoln's coat, cut away in search of the fatal bullet wound. Years later, Abbott recalled the event. "During the entire night I kept the record, and the only one, of the president's respiration and pulsation, noting them every half hour. At 3 a.m. I went to the office of the National Intelligencer and left a copy of my memoranda up to that time. I resumed my position at the foot of the sufferer's bed, and remained there until he breathed his last, at 7:22 a.m. Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton immediately exclaimed, 'He now belongs to the ages.'"

Remarkably, this was not Abbott's first experience with presidential sorrow. He was also present at the death of Benjamin Pierce, the son of Franklin and Jane Pierce, who was killed in a train accident just days before his father's inauguration. Abbott's moving personal accounts of both tragedies are included in the exhibition.

Also on display in the exhibition is a penknife Lincoln was carrying the night of his assassination. Charles Forbes, Lincoln's footman and messenger, who had accompanied the president to Ford's Theatre the night he was assassinated, was witness to the gruesome event. Shortly after Lincoln's death, when Mrs. Lincoln was packing to leave the White House, she gave Forbes some clothing and personal belongings of the martyred president. According to a sworn affidavit, on June 9, 1866, Forbes presented "the Pen Knife used by the late President of the U. States, Abraham Lincoln, and which he had in his possession the night of his assassination," to C. E. Creecy, a United States Treasury Department staff member. William E. Chandler of New Hampshire acquired the penknife from Creecy the same day. Chandler had been appointed Solicitor and Judge Advocate General of the Navy Department by Lincoln in early 1865. Later that year, he was appointed First Assistant Secretary of the Treasury. In 1880, long after returning to Concord, Chandler presented the penknife to the New Hampshire Historical Society.

The exhibition *Abraham Lincoln and New Hampshire* is presented in cooperation with the state and national Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commissions, and is sponsored by Lincoln Financial Group and Rath, Young and Pignatelli. The exhibition will remain on view at the Society's library, 30 Park Street, Concord, through December 31, 2009. Hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Founded in 1823, the New Hampshire Historical Society is the independent nonprofit that saves, preserves, and shares New Hampshire history. The Society serves thousands of children and adults each year through its museum, library, educational programs, publications, and outreach programs. For more information about the Society and the benefits of membership, visit nhhistory.org or call 603-228-6688.

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Calendar listing

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