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Lincolniana and the Electoral College

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Lincolniana and the Electoral College

Abstract

Contextual essay about the Penn collection of Lincolniana donated by Gordon Block - including a set of rare Electoral College ballots.

Keywords

Abraham Lincoln, Electoral College, Manuscripts, Photographs

Disciplines

History | United States History

Comments

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21
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Lincolniana and the Electoral College

POSTED BY MITCH FRAAS IN POSTS

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As this week marks the 150th anniversary of the Gettysburg Address it's only fitting to highlight a collection here at Penn which is full of material relating to Abraham Lincoln for which we just completed a new online guide.

The [Gordon Block Collection of Lincolniana \(Ms. Coll. 941\)](#) was compiled by the Philadelphia lawyer and Penn alum Gordon Block (1885-1964) who bequeathed it to the university in his will. The collection includes over twenty documents signed by Lincoln or in his hand. Many of these date to his presidency, including a variety of notes with instructions to cabinet officials made on the back of petitions and orders. On the right is one of my favorites, written on the reverse of a petition by a group of citizens from Jeansville, Pa. asking that a 57 year-old man from their community be pardoned from his conviction by a military commission of obstructing the draft. Lincoln writes here a note passing along the document to Edwin Stanton, the Secretary of War, in which he notes that the prosecutor in the case also recommends a pardon and agrees that the man in question should be pardoned for the remainder of his sentence.

On the representation and petition of all the bright and disinterested, who prosecute in this case, and those, W. D. Kelley's incarceration of them as every way reliable, John Paul names written is presented for the unremitted part of his sentence.

Abraham Lincoln
June 15, 1864.
(3 Enclosures)

- Petition dated May 28, 1864; signed by Lincoln June 15, 1864. [UPenn Ms. Coll. 941 Box 1, folder 17.](#)

WELCOME

Welcome to Unique at Penn, part of the family of University of Pennsylvania Libraries blogs. Every week this space will feature descriptions and contextualization of items from the collections of the University of Pennsylvania Libraries. The site focuses on those materials held by Penn which are in some sense "unique" - drawn from both our special and circulating collections, whether a one-of-a-kind medieval manuscript or a twentieth-century popular novel with generations of student notes penciled inside.

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- Printed mourning invitation, April 19, 1865. [UPenn Ms. Coll. 941 box 1 folder 49.](#)

Researchers may also be interested in the large collection of visual materials depicting Lincoln made both during Lincoln's life and as commemorative items later. Among these are several carte de visite photographs of Lincoln. The one on the right is exceptionally rare and was made by Alexander Kientzle of Philadelphia. Block's gift also included a [substantial number of printed books and pamphlets](#) relating to Lincoln, several of which are in foreign languages (including [Hawaiian](#), [Dakota](#), and [Chinese](#)). In addition, Block also donated [three volumes from the president's own library](#) including one law text used when he was an attorney in Illinois.

Beyond the documents signed or written by Lincoln, one of the really remarkable parts of the collection is a [series of documents relating to the presidential elections of 1860 and 1864](#). Most of us are familiar with the concept of the Electoral College but its actual workings I think remain much more mysterious. The documents in the Block collection shed some light onto how the process worked in 1860s Pennsylvania. The story of how the documents came to Block is almost as interesting as the items themselves. In 1930, the old Post Office in Philadelphia needed to be cleared out and the postal service hired a paper scrap dealer to haul tons of miscellaneous paper out of its cavernous halls. Amongst these papers were a set of envelopes containing documents from the Pennsylvania Electoral College, addressed to the Eastern District Court in Philadelphia. Block later acquired the items and included them in his bequest to Penn. In essence these documents record the *de jure* election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860 and 1864. In 1860, for

The Block collection is also notable for its wide array of material related to Lincoln's assassination and death including pieces of mourning ephemera like the pass on the left which admits the bearer to the White House four days after the president's death.



- Carte de visite of Lincoln "Photographed by A. Kientzle no. 155 North Sixth Street, Philadelphia" [UPenn Ms. Coll. 941 box 4 folder 10.](#)

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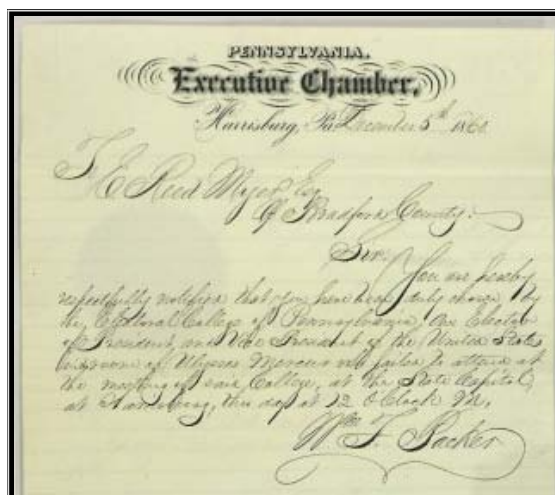
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□  **LATEST FROM PENNRARE**

instance, the 27 men chosen by voters in November to elect the next president met in Harrisburg on December 5th. Below is a letter addressed that very day notifying **E. Reed Myer** of Bradford County, Pa. that he should report immediately to serve as an elector as another man failed to show up!



- Letter notifying E. Reed Myer that he has been called to serve as a presidential elector. December 5, 1860. **UPenn Ms. Coll. 941 box 1 folder 34.**

Myer obviously made it in time to cast his vote as that same day he was among the Pennsylvania electors to sign a set of documents affirming that they had deliberated and voted for Abraham Lincoln as president and Andrew Johnson as Vice-President. Below is the signed certification by the electors announcing that "it appeared that Abraham Lincoln of Illinois had twenty seven votes."

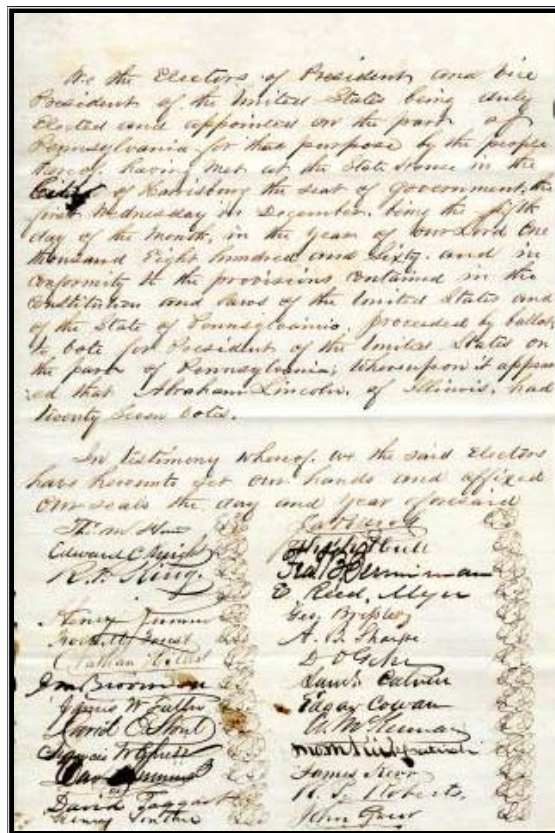
Leonard B. Meyer papers,
1935-2008 May 6, 2014

■ The Joseph G. Rosengarten
collection April 30, 2014

■ Old Friends Reunited April
24, 2014

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– Certificate signed by 27 Pennsylvania electors on choosing Abraham Lincoln as president. December 5, 1860. [UPenn Ms. Coll. 941 box 1, folder 35.](#)

This material text reminds us that in the eyes of the U.S. Constitution the votes cast by the men above were those which counted in electing Lincoln to the presidency.* Documents like this and the stories behind them are what make working in libraries so exciting and here at Penn we're committed to providing as much context and information about our materials as possible in order to connect researchers and the public with resources like the Block Collection.

*Remarkably Penn also holds [two pre-printed ballots from the 1956 Electoral College](#) in its collection!

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About Mitch Fraas

Mitch Fraas is the Scholar in Residence at the Kislak Center for Special Collections, Rare Books and Manuscripts at the University of Pennsylvania Libraries. He is also the interim director of the Penn digital humanities forum. At Penn, Mitch works on a variety of projects cutting across general and special collections, with a special focus on digital humanities. He holds doctoral and master's degrees in history from Duke University and earned his bachelor's degree at Boston College. His doctoral dissertation examined the legal culture of British India in the 17th and 18th centuries, arguing for the existence of a unified early modern British imperial legal culture whether in Philadelphia, Bombay, or London.

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