



News Release

DonnerLincoln
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Newly discovered Lincoln document traveled with Donner Party to California

SACRAMENTO, CA – In one of the more unusual discoveries in recent years, researchers in Illinois, Utah, and California have confirmed that an original Abraham Lincoln document from the 1830s was carried by one of Lincoln’s military buddies on the ill-fated Donner Party expedition to California in the 1840s. That document, an 1832 list of the men in a company of Illinois volunteers during the Black Hawk War, is located in the California State Library in Sacramento, where experts recently determined it contains Lincoln’s original handwriting.

“We often find documents that detail fascinating stories about Abraham Lincoln’s life and times, but it is rare indeed for the document to have such an intriguing history after it was written,” said Daniel W. Stowell, director of the Papers of Abraham Lincoln. “That these documents detail part of Lincoln’s military service and that they accompanied the Donner Party to California makes them doubly significant.”

“Our interest in James Reed’s papers centers on the horrific ordeal of the Donner Party,” observed Gary Kurutz, the head of Special Collections at the California State Library in Sacramento, “but it is fascinating to learn of his pre-California life, the Black Hawk War, and his association not only with a future president but also with the other fascinating personalities recorded on the muster roll, including noted Western explorer and mountain man James Clyman.”

In February 2010, Donner Party expert Kristin Johnson, a librarian at Salt Lake Community College, contacted the Papers of Abraham Lincoln about documents from the Black Hawk War at the California State Library in Sacramento that might have been written by Abraham Lincoln. Pursuing this lead, Papers Director Daniel Stowell contacted Gary Kurutz at the California State Library, about the possibility that there were undiscovered documents written by Lincoln in their collections. Kurutz sent high-resolution scans of three 1830s militia

muster rolls (lists of volunteers) and one corresponding military inventory document to the Papers of Abraham Lincoln at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, Illinois.

The muster rolls were for Captain Jacob M. Early's company of mounted volunteers from June 20 and July 10, 1832. The inventory was also dated June 20, 1832. Each of the four documents had the name of Private Abraham Lincoln among the list of soldiers. Several experts on Lincoln's handwriting at the Papers of Abraham Lincoln and the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library examined the documents and determined that Abraham Lincoln had written the title for one of the July 10 muster rolls. The two-and-one-half lines read, "Muster Roll of Captain Jacob M. Earleys Company of Mounted Volunteers Mustered out of the service of the United States By order of Brigadier General Atkinson of the United States army on White Water Rivers of Rock River on the 10th day of July 1832." The remainder of the document is written in another hand, probably that of Captain Jacob Early, and is endorsed by Lieutenant Robert Anderson as Assistant Inspector General.

The documents are in the James Frazier Reed Collection at the California State Library. Reed was one of the organizing members of the Donner Party, a group of ill-fated pioneers that left Springfield, Illinois, in April 1846. Research by Kristin Johnson confirms that these documents accompanied the settlers as they endured a harsh winter in the Sierra Nevada and resorted to cannibalism to survive. Johnson also provided vital assistance in better understanding the document's history and contents.

James F. Reed's name appears on the muster rolls just beneath Abraham Lincoln's, but it is unlikely that he had the documents originally. Further research revealed that Captain Jacob M. Early died in March 1838, and James F. Reed was one of two men whom Early appointed to execute his will. It is likely that Reed acquired the muster rolls and inventory at that time because they were part of his personal history. Attorney Abraham Lincoln represented Reed and the other executor in a case to sell land from Early's estate to pay his debts.

When Reed left for California in the spring of 1846, he took his wife, stepdaughter, three children, and his personal belongings, including the Black Hawk War muster rolls and inventory. As the Donner Party traveled along the Humboldt River in northern Nevada in October, Reed quarreled with a teamster and stabbed him to death. Banished from the party without his family, Reed traveled on alone to Sutter's Fort in the Sacramento Valley. After gathering provisions, he tried to return to the Donner Party, but deep snows prevented him from rejoining his family. In February 1847, Reed was part of a rescue party that found his family, all still alive. Decades later, Reed's daughter Martha Jane "Patty" Reed, who was eight at the time of their transcontinental journey, remembered that when the Reeds abandoned two of their wagons in early September, her mother kept with her a small carpetbag containing the muster rolls and other treasured family heirlooms. When James Reed was expelled from the party, he left the papers with his wife, and "she brought them safely in her bosom to California when helped by the first relief party which went to their assistance."

Many people know that Abraham Lincoln was elected captain of a company of volunteers from Sangamon County, Illinois during the short-lived Black Hawk War of 1832 that

took place in Illinois and Wisconsin. Fewer people know that two days after Captain Lincoln's company was disbanded on May 27, he re-enlisted as a private in Captain Elijah Iles's company of mounted volunteers. Iles's company was disbanded on June 16, and on June 20 Lincoln again volunteered as a private in Captain Jacob Early's company.

The muster rolls provide a summary of Early's company at the beginning and the end of its brief, three-week service. They reveal that Private Abraham Lincoln had a horse worth \$85 and equipment valued at \$15. The inventory indicated that Lincoln received one tent that was United States property to be returned at the end of his service.

The muster roll of Captain Jacob Early's company contains the names of many who later became prominent or who were associated with Abraham Lincoln's life and career:

- John T. Stuart of Sangamon County, Illinois, Abraham Lincoln's first law partner. Stuart settled in Springfield, Illinois, in 1828 and served as a major in the Black Hawk War before, like Lincoln, reenlisting in Early's company as a private. Lincoln was his junior partner in their law practice from 1837 to 1841. Lincoln married Stuart's first cousin Mary in 1842. Stuart served in the United States House of Representatives as a Whig from 1839 to 1843 and later as a Democrat from 1863 to 1865.
- John D. Johnston of Coles County, Illinois, Abraham Lincoln's step-brother. Two years younger than Lincoln, Johnston accompanied Lincoln on a flatboat to New Orleans in the spring of 1831. In 1851, Lincoln wrote to Johnston: "you are destitute because you have idled away all your time. Your thousand pretences for not getting along better, are all nonsense; they deceive no body but yourself. Go to work is the only cure for your case."
- Gurdon S. Hubbard of Vermilion County, Illinois, a Chicago pioneer, fur trader, and meat packer. Hubbard first arrived in Chicago in 1818, but did not settle there until 1834. He lived in Danville, Illinois, for several years and once walked 75 miles in a single night to warn Danville of an impending raid by Indians, earning him the name "Swift-Walker." After settling in Chicago, he built a fortune in the fur trade, meat-packing, and insurance industries. He built Chicago's first stockyard and served in the Illinois General Assembly in the 1830s.
- James Clyman of Vermilion County, Illinois, mountain man and explorer. Clyman traveled with Jedidiah Smith in 1824, when their party rediscovered the South Pass through the Rocky Mountains that became a vital part of the Oregon Trail. He also explored the entirety of the Great Salt Lake in what later became the State of Utah. After serving in the Black Hawk War, Clyman returned west and crossed the Great Salt Lake Desert and the Sierra Nevada Mountains. On his return trip in 1846, he met the Donner Party at Fort Laramie. He advised James Reed to take the well-established California Trail rather than the Hastings Cutoff "shortcut," but Reed disregarded his advice. In 1871, Clyman recalled that Lincoln was in his company, but "we didn't think much then about his ever being President of the United States."
- Lieutenant Robert Anderson, Assistant Inspector General, United States Army. A graduate of the United States Military Academy, Anderson was a second lieutenant in the army but served as a colonel of Illinois volunteers during the Black Hawk War. He later

served in both the Second Seminole War and the Mexican War. By 1860, he had risen to the rank of Major and commanded the United States army garrison in Charleston, South Carolina. Anderson's decision to move his command to the more defensible Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor and the inability of Anderson's new Commander-in-Chief Abraham Lincoln to resupply or reinforce the fort led to the bombardment and surrender of the fort in April 1861, thus inaugurating the American Civil War.

The Papers of Abraham Lincoln is a project of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, Illinois whose goal is to identify, digitize, transcribe, and publish comprehensively all documents written by or to Abraham Lincoln during his lifetime, 1809 - 1865. The Center for State Policy and Leadership at the University of Illinois Springfield and the Abraham Lincoln Association serve as project co-sponsors. They have completed *The Papers of Abraham Lincoln: Legal Documents and Cases*, published in 2008 by the University of Virginia Press; and *The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln, Second Edition* published online in 2009. More information about the project can be found at <http://www.papersofabrahamlincoln.org>.

Founded in 1850, the California State Library in Sacramento serves the research needs of state government and the general public. Among its specialties is a significant collection of California history consisting of rare books, manuscript letters and diaries, prints and photographs, maps, newspapers, periodicals, and ephemera. The Library's California History Section documents the Golden State's history and its world-wide influence from pre-history to the present.

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