

As I was saying



Jack Hilsher

Our 16th President's birthday, two days before Valentine's Day, has once again slipped by almost unnoticed, with hardly a ripple. But you were promised some new material - at least I can't remember any of it in history books - so here 'tis.

From the time Abraham Lincoln was 23 until his death, with the exception of one five-year period, he either held a political office or campaigned for one. His law partner Bill Herndon said, "It was in the world of politics that he lived. Politics were his life, newspapers his food, and his great ambition his motive power."

It was natural then that he was romantically attracted to Mary Todd, plump but pretty, a flirt and a political groupie. When she entertained there were always a few elected officials among her suitors, including Stephen A. Douglas, later an Illinois senator who was to become Lincoln's rival.

Mary and Abe soon became engaged, but he broke off fearing

Little know Lincoln facts - seances, gloves and knives

his ability to earn enough money to support her. This move caused his health to deteriorate and improved only after their marriage. They had one son in less than a year and three others in the next decade.

Mary Lincoln was given to violent outbursts of temper, and once chased Lincoln with a butcher knife. Their neighbor in Springfield said, "Whenever Mrs. L. got the devil in her, Lincoln would laugh, pay no earthly attention, pick up one of the children and walk off."

Mary and Abe lost one child at the age of four, and after they moved to the White House she began having problems. Criticized for her expensive clothing and entertaining, she was accused of being a Confederate spy because her brother, three half-brothers and three brothers-in-law were all in Confederate uniform.

Another son died and she reported nightly visitations from him. She ran up bills of \$27,000 for clothes - including more than 300 pairs of gloves - and accused Lincoln of alleged attentions to other women.

After the assassination she was hysterical for months, and finally son Robert arranged for a sanity hearing and she was placed in an

institution. She was released after four months and died at age 63 in 1882.

Only one of their four sons survived adolescence: Robert Todd Lincoln, who served as Secretary of War under President Garfield.

During their White House stay, Mary Lincoln had persuaded the President to participate in several seances; he was deeply interested in psychic phenomena and wanted to communicate with a dead son.

Once Lincoln reported that he had attended a seance in which a piano was raised and moved around the room. Professional mediums who had worked with him were convinced he definitely had extraordinary psychic powers. He did take dreams seriously and would report them at cabinet meetings.

He once said, "I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me." Mary Lincoln for her part once said, "Do you mean to say that she saw the President alone? Do you know that I never allow the President to see any woman alone?"

The next quotes will have to be from the man who ended all the quotes, John Wilkes Booth: "Our country owes all her troubles to him, and God simply made me the instrument of His punishment."

A Case for conservation



Alene N. Case

During the past 40 years, we have been living through an agricultural era known as the Green Revolution. The production of food in almost all parts of the world has become more and more dependent on machinery and chemicals and less and less on local knowledge and hard work. The obvious result has been an increase in the amount of food produced. But, now we have reached a point at which this increase in production is slowing dramatically, and people are beginning to ask serious questions about the real costs of highly mechanized agriculture.

Some of these costs have received a lot of press - water pollution due to pesticides and herbicides, erosion of land which has been stripped of all native vegetation, and loss of jobs in the farm economy. However, there are other, more subtle, costs. These relate to the loss of diversity in the types of plants grown for food. Equal opportunity in the garden is not a luxury - our continued health and well-being may depend on it. Let me explain.

The variety of fruits and vegetables grown in this country and around the world has been steadily decreasing. Most of the corn grown in the United States now comes from only six varieties. India used to grow 30,000 types of rice; most of the rice there now comes from only 10 varieties. Look at the selection of apples in your supermarket and you will not need further convincing that our choices are limited. This is not simply a matter of choices for our dinner tables. The commonly grown varieties of food are chosen for reasons other than taste and nutri-

Let's promote equal opportunity in the garden

tion. They are grown because they store and ship well, because they do not bruise easily, because they all ripen at the same time so that machines can harvest them, because modern pesticides keep them blemish free, and because they have a high yield per unit area.

Many of the most popular vegetables and grains are hybrids. That means that the first generation has the high yield and disease resistance of the two parent varieties, but that vigor is not passed on to most of the plants grown in future years. Therefore, seed for hybrids must be purchased each year no matter how poor the farmer. Obviously, seed companies are interested in making money this way instead of selling seed for plants that are truly adapted for high yield and disease resistance. Farmers could save seed from such plants each year and enjoy the benefits year after year. In fact, such plants would become even better adapted to the local growing conditions as the years passed, and the farmer could select seed from the best plants to save for next year's planting.

The number of wild, semi-wild and ancient cultivars has been decreasing also. One research station in the western U.S. rescued a wild perennial type of corn from Mexico just before "development" destroyed its native habitat. They are now working hard to see if this corn can be grown for food in other places. It would be wonderful if we could save soil, petroleum and water by planting such corn together with a nitrogen fixer such as alfalfa and simply harvest the grain. Other research on wild or ancient varieties of crops may give us "new" beans that have exceptionally high protein content, sunflowers that provide their own herbicides and tomatoes that actually taste good in winter.

But, how can we help with this

effort if we are not researchers or farmers? We can start to grow heirloom plants in our own gardens, save the seed and share it with others. There are some very interesting seed companies and membership organizations that are helping ordinary gardeners preserve the genetic diversity of our food crops. I will only have room to list a few here. If you want further information, please contact me through this newspaper; the Heritage Seed Program is a rather unique organization: They do not sell seeds; they merely ask that those who become members, and take seed to grow share their saved seed with other gardeners. Membership is \$18 a year (\$15 to those on a fixed income.) The address is The Heritage Seed Program, RR3, Uxbridge Ontario, L9R 1R3, CANADA.

One of my favorite seed catalogs comes from Seeds of Change, P.O. Box 15700, Santa Fe NM 87506-5700. They not only sell organically grown seeds of familiar and unfamiliar plants, but they also include educational articles and sell books to help all of us become more in tune with the natural world as we garden.

If you are interested in more local varieties, you might want to send a dollar to Heirloom Seeds, P.O. Box 245, West Elizabeth PA 15088 and they will send you a catalog. Or perhaps you would like to learn more about such activities and organizations by tracking down a book on the subject. The Garden Seed Inventory is published by the Seed Savers Exchange, 3076 North Winn RD, Decorah IA 52101, which has a membership fee of \$25. This book may also be available in libraries.

Our efforts should be rewarded with greater variety, more savory food and higher nutrition. And, who knows? The varieties we save today may be really important in the agriculture of the future. Happy gardening!

J.W.J.



John W. Johnson

First of a three-part series

Despite a fading away of health care reform rhetoric (and that's as much a politically necessary fading away of Hillary Rodham Clinton as it is the issue itself) there remain many persons concerned about, and committed to, changing this country's health care mind.

It all boils down to dollars and cents; to purchase goods, services, luxuries and the time to enjoy them, versus who has more of the former, so as to be able to acquire more of the latter. This endless financial game which is the lifeblood of capitalism can be seen in headlines, and heard in soundbites daily.

And at the heart (no pun intended) of those who want health care reform is the cost of that service, vis a vis lack of access to it. That's why the rich are nervous. They own companies which provide health care. And no matter how you slice it, the rich are going to be subsidizing the poor, and all of us will then have a mediocre health care, as opposed to the quality health care for most, and no health care for some, that we have now.

Health care reform has been on the citizen collective mind for some time now with pollsters finding that health care was at the top of

Health care reform won't cure all the system's ills

citizens concerns, saying changes were needed in the method, payment for, and accessibility to health care.

Of course, what the pollsters didn't discriminate between were those persons who responded by saying a primary concern was losing health care if they became unemployed.

The issue then is not health care; rather, the basic economy. But the Clinton Administration seized upon the (I believe) deliberately misinterpreted polls, as an excuse to promote the real left-wing agenda. Like the social reformers of the 1960's and the Great Society's attempt to redistribute income, the health care reformers of today want to redistribute government spending.

"We in America suffer from a great delusion," the late (and made by Watergate famous) U.S. Senator Sam Ervin once said. "We think we can pass a law and everything will be cured..." again, no pun intended.

The attitude noted by Ervin includes just about everyone: laborers, government employees, electronics technicians, florists...the list includes virtually all of us, and could go on forever. And of immeasurable length seems to be the list of special benefits wanted by virtually everyone from the 'government.'

Everytime we ask the government for help instead of doing it ourselves we lose self respect and gain more governmental control

over lives.

Instead of self respect, the predominant character traits in America today are, to name a few: —demanding more money for less work.

—putting immediate security above self respect.

—generations of welfare recipients now with no grasp of the notion of taking care of one's self, that idea having been supplanted by the myth of 'entitlements.'

It is true that in an age (New York City excepted) where survival is not paramount, self respect becomes more an idealistic symbol than a realistic response. But what better symbol to pass along and insure future generations?

To be sure, access to health care by Americans, at something less than a \$10 per aspirin cost, is long overdue.

But turning the entire mess over to yet another bureaucracy would be, indeed, throwing the baby out with the bath water. Next week: Part two.

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