



# THE COTTAGE COURIER

Vol. 12

www.lincolncottage.org

Winter 2011



First snow of the season, December 2010

## From the Director...

Dear Friends,

February 18th marked the start of our fourth year open to the public. Over the past three years we welcomed over 70,000 visitors, launched half a dozen unique exhibits, have been featured in national news and radio, and won several national awards for our work to save the Cottage and share the story of what Lincoln accomplished here. Thank you for being part of our success.

President Lincoln's Cottage has accomplished a great deal in a short period, but we believe we can have an even bigger impact with the communities we serve. There is also a real need to plan for the future of this national monument so that we can continue to preserve this inspiring place. In fall 2010, President Lincoln's Cottage was awarded a grant for strategic planning to address those very issues. Our team is enthusiastically engaged in the strategic process at present and hopeful about this historic site's future.

While we are working toward the future at the Cottage, we study and commemorate its



past. In this issue we are presenting a third and final article "from the vault," a piece on the history of the Soldiers' Home by Matthew Pinsker. This article gives an overview of the remarkable place Lincoln chose to call home for a quarter of his presidency. We felt it was fitting to publish this article just prior to March 7, 2011, the 150th anniversary of Lincoln's first visit to the Soldiers' Home.

Sincerely,

*Erin Mast*

Director

ErinCarlsonMast@nthp.org

## UPCOMING PROGRAMS *Cottage Conversations*

April 14, 2011  
with James Swanson  
is

**SOLD OUT!**

Stay tuned for the release of our 2011-2012 Season schedule.

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## Cottage Welcomes New Director of Development

Ann Colgrove brings to President Lincoln's Cottage extensive nonprofit development expertise and policy and communications experience. As Director of Communications and Legislative Affairs at the U.S. Equal Employment

Opportunity Commission, she directed lobbying efforts, government relations, and communications activities as well as planned and supervised hearings and commission meetings. Later, as the EEOC's Chief of Staff, she directed the agency's policy development, strategic planning and organizational management.

Ms. Colgrove's nonprofit development experience includes working on and with boards of trustees to set fundraising goals and deadlines, increase donor bases, and organize events. She has written and directed marketing videos and newsletters and supervised productive prospecting and cultivation efforts aimed at foundations and major donors. Ms. Colgrove's federal service includes her appointment as Director of the Office of Policy, Planning and Research at the National Endowment for the Arts. She began her career as a legislative staff member in the U.S. Senate.

The Cottage was thrilled to welcome her to the staff in January 2011. "Ann has the depth and range of experience we were looking for in our new Director of Development," says Director Erin Carlson Mast, "and we're excited to have her on our team."

Ms. Colgrove welcomes emails from our members and friends - [ann\\_colgrove@nthp.org](mailto:ann_colgrove@nthp.org)

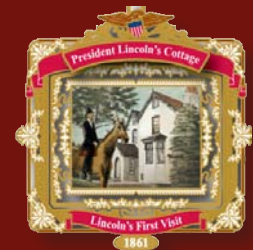
## Commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the Civil War where Lincoln lived it.

For information on our event rental program and group tours, please visit [www.lincolncottage.org](http://www.lincolncottage.org) or contact Shira Gladstone, Events Coordinator, at (202) 829-0436 ext. 31232 or [shira\\_gladstone@nthp.org](mailto:shira_gladstone@nthp.org)



GROUP TOURS, SPECIALTY TOURS, AND PRIVATE EVENTS

## Lincoln's First Visit Ornament Now Available!



The first in the series of Christmas ornaments to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the Civil War, this ornament remembers 1861 and depicts Lincoln's first ride to the Cottage.

*Click here to purchase*

## Attention Teachers!



Join the Civil War Washington Museum Consortium  
for the

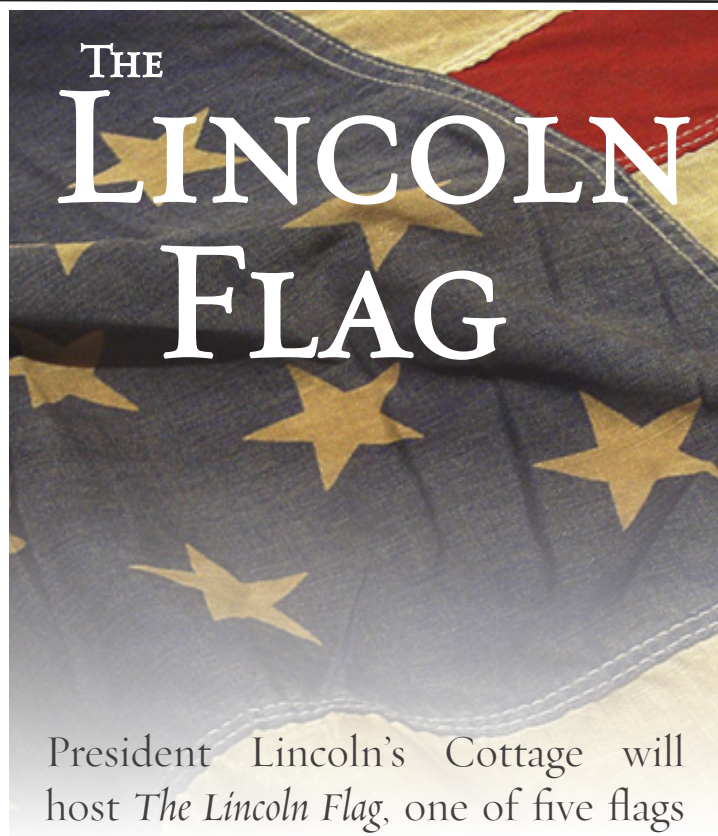
### TEACHER FELLOWS PROGRAM

A week-long summer institute in  
Washington, DC

You will come away from your week in Washington with:  
an array of virtual tours; the oratory skills to get your  
students on their feet performing speeches by Lincoln and  
Douglass; comfort in taking students on content-driven  
experiential learning adventures; and excitement about  
using classroom drama to help historic characters come  
alive!

**CLICK HERE** for more information

## THE LINCOLN FLAG



President Lincoln's Cottage will  
host *The Lincoln Flag*, one of five flags  
hanging in Ford's Theatre on the night  
President Lincoln was assassinated.  
The Flag, on temporary loan from  
the Pike County Historical Society in  
Pennsylvania, will be on display in the  
Robert H. Smith Visitor Education  
Center April 11-April 17, 2011.



## Lincoln Yourself Now Online!

Click here to discover what it is to  
*be like Lincoln*

*Lincoln Yourself is part of the Being Lincoln  
exhibit in the Robert H. Smith Visitor Center at  
President Lincoln's Cottage.*

Excerpt from...

# THE SOLDIERS' HOME

## *A Long Road to Sanctuary*

By Matthew Pinsker

### *Man Proposes...*

There is a wonderfully embarrassing note in Abraham Lincoln's papers from a Methodist minister who had failed to show up for an appointment at the president's summer residence. "Man proposes," John McClintock began nervously, "but God disposes." He proceeded to assure the president that he had left Willard's Hotel in the city with plenty of time to arrive for an eight o'clock "engagement" at the nearby Soldiers' Home, a Washington area retirement compound for military veterans where the president and his family were then staying for the season, but the driver, "it seems," either "did not know the way, or else was drunk." "He brought us up at Fort Stevens, & when the guard there showed us the need of retreating," McClintock wrote, "his next move was on Fort Slocum!" The minister concluded that once it had reached ten o'clock, he simply could not "intrude" upon the president. He asked if he could come out to the Soldiers' Home at eight o'clock that

The record remains silent on whether McClintock, a prominent anti-slavery Methodist and former Dickinson College professor, ever made it out to the presidential retreat, but the mix up illustrates something quite familiar about the Soldiers' Home. It was, and remains, an elusive place to find. Several of Lincoln's friends and visitors commented

were quite bad and often full of undesirable figures. White House aide John Hay noted in his diary that he was once forced to ride home from the retreat "in the dark amid a party of drunken gamblers & harlots." When Mary Lincoln suffered a carriage accident in the summer of 1863, her husband finally complained that the roads near the Soldiers'

Home "ought to be repaired."<sup>2</sup> Today, the rural character of the area has been utterly transformed into an urban maze, but the surrounding streets remain in a state of uneven repair and visitors continue to complain about their



Lithograph by Charles Mangus

on their difficulties en route to the destination. "Our driver missed the way," recalled Leonard Swett, an old colleague from Illinois, "passing by the Home into the forest below." Swett claimed that his entourage didn't make it out of the "labyrinth" until nearly two o'clock in the morning. Only about three and a half miles from the White House, the Soldiers' Home grounds were then in an isolated and rural part of the District of Columbia. The roads

difficulties in finding the place now known as the Armed Forces Retirement Home.

Yet once inside, visitors find the grounds of the nation's oldest continually operated veterans' facility to be almost luxuriously tranquil. Despite nearly a thousand current residents, pockets of perpetual construction, and the nearby sights and sounds of an overcrowded Washington, D.C. neighborhood,

there is an unexpected stillness that has the power to transport the modern observer back to an older, quieter era. The nearly three hundred acres contain some arresting surprises. There is the cottage that once housed Abraham Lincoln and his family, remarkably well preserved and looking practically the same as it did in the 1860s. There are other homes and imposing buildings from the nineteenth century and a somber national military cemetery just across the fence line that was the precursor to Arlington. Visitors can walk from the Lincoln Cottage along one of the District's highest and most beautiful elevations. Here is the place where the wartime president himself once strolled. On this bucolic hillside, the Great Emancipator contemplated the future of the war while glimpsing what was then the sadly unfinished Capitol Dome in the hazy distance. The Capitol is still visible, but now thankfully complete. The connection to the nation's past could scarcely seem more alive. The impact on a person's civic faith rarely goes any deeper.

Nonetheless, this profound sense of discovery only deepens as one learns more about the rich and complicated history of the place. The Soldiers' Home was decades in the making and then very nearly abandoned before the Lincolns arrived.

Their presence enriched the place but didn't actually save it. That solemn honor belongs to the Civil War itself, which created enough disabled veterans not only to fill the Home in Washington, but also, sadly, to create the need for a vast network of national and state-sponsored soldiers' homes across the country. Still,

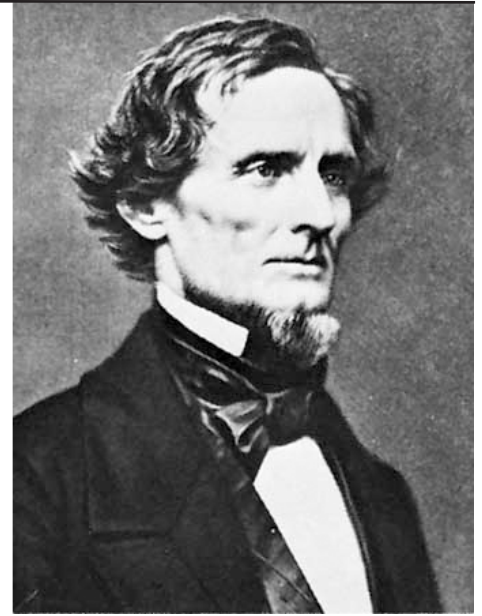
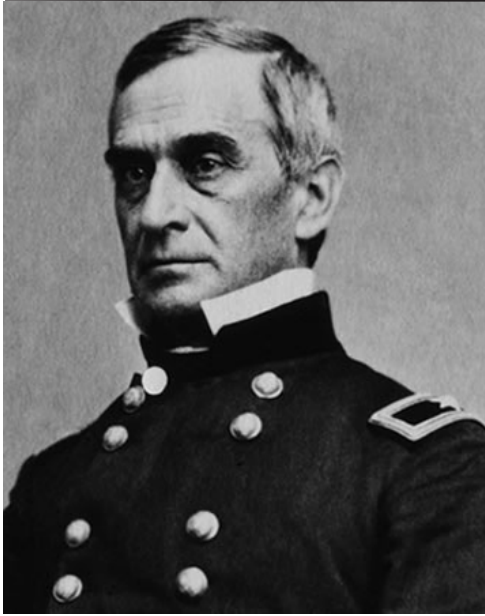
despite the hard sacrifices of the men (and later women) that populated this distinguished retirement community, the future of the institution has almost always seemed to be in jeopardy. Perpetual management problems, an ever-growing city, and fluctuations in the demographics of the nation's veterans have placed near continuous challenges on the aging community. As President Lincoln once did, veterans have found a sense of peace at the former Soldiers' Home, but their road to sanctuary has been longer and more difficult than most visitors could possibly imagine.

### *Struggles to launch a "Military Asylum"*

Government-supported care for crippled or handicapped veterans was painfully inadequate during the years before the Civil War. The Continental Congress had authorized pensions for Revolutionary War soldiers, though actual payments frequently proved unreliable. Disabled Continental Army veterans were supposed to receive \$5 per month. Later, the crippled survivors of the War of 1812 were allowed to petition for half-pay, but otherwise there were no special disability services for army veterans during the first half of the nineteenth century and certainly no extra provisions made for those who became disabled after their terms of enlistment. In general, there were remarkably few attempts to provide any special services for struggling ex-soldiers. In 1811, the federal government approved plans for the construction of a Naval Home for Disabled and Decrepit Officers in Philadelphia, but

that institution (which was the first in the nation to offer direct medical care for veterans) did not open its doors until 1833. That same year the government tried belatedly to improve its services to ex-soldiers by consolidating authority for handling veteran's matters in the Bureau of Pensions (a forerunner of the current Department of Veterans Affairs). Still, even after these innovations of the 1830s, unlucky army veterans, no matter how great their sacrifice for the nation, were nonetheless compelled to rely largely on the goodwill of their extended families and local communities if they proved unable to care for themselves.

This uneven system of support provoked complaints from professional nineteenth-century American soldiers, who compared their government's scattershot programs unfavorably to the more comprehensive efforts of various European countries. There was the famous Hotel des Invalides in Paris, a pioneering institution built by Louis XIV for his crippled veterans in 1670 and expanded significantly during the Napoleonic era. The English, under Charles II, had originally followed the Invalides example with the construction of the Royal Hospital at Chelsea beginning in 1682. Both the Hotel des Invalides and Chelsea Hospital were frequently cited as role models by U.S. army officers and Department of War officials who sought institutional support and better medical care for veterans. Yet traditional American disdain for standing armies and their needy veterans compelled most legislators to resist such developments for the United States.



From Left to Right: Robert Anderson, General Winfield Scott, and Senator Jefferson Davis

In November 1827, Secretary of War James Barbour made the first official recommendation for the creation of an “Army Asylum” in his annual message to the president. He invoked the various European models and warned that surviving veterans of the American Revolution often faced “distressing” conditions. His report encouraged a response from Pennsylvania congressman William Ramsey, who shortly afterwards introduced a resolution that called for the creation of just such an asylum—naturally, within his own district. Ramsey’s idea was to convert the old (and then essentially abandoned) Army barracks at Carlisle into a suitable veterans’ retirement facility. After some debate over how to fund the endeavor and where best to construct it, the Committee on Military Affairs approved the idea of establishing a fund, but subsequently tabled the proposal and nothing further developed.<sup>3</sup>

For practically the next twenty-five years, this cycle of War Department proposal and Congressional obstruction continued intermittently and without any resolution. There

were proposals, internal reports and various types of deliberations on the matter in 1833, 1837, 1840, 1841, 1844, 1845, 1846, 1848 (twice) and 1849 before Congress finally approved the creation of a “Military Asylum” in 1851. During that extended period, the level of frustration from the professional military and their supporters was palpable. Secretary of War Lewis Cass warned Congress in 1833 that they were essentially allowing a lost generation of veterans to haunt the young republic. “In our service as presently organized,” he wrote:

*a soldier can be retained only as long as his physical powers are sufficient to enable him to perform the duties required of him. When his constitution fails, unless it is the result of disabilities incurred in the line of his duty, he is discharged without any provision for his support, and generally, from the habits of his life, without the disposition and too often, the power to labor, and without means of support. He is then thrown on the charity of the community after devoting the best of his life to the service of his country.*<sup>4</sup>

In 1840, the Kentucky-born Army officer Robert Anderson (later of Fort Sumter fame), a son of a Revolutionary war veteran himself, suddenly became a fierce advocate for what he termed the “Soldiers’ Retreat.” He had become appalled by the condition of the veterans he had encountered. “The soldier now knows,” he wrote in a sharp letter addressed to John Reynolds, the former governor of Illinois and a friend, “that, when he is worn out in service, destroyed in constitution, and unfitted, by his habits, for embarking in a new pursuit, he must be discharged, and thrown, an outcast, upon society.” Anderson warned bitterly that the veteran who “has no home” only “resorts to the bottle, and dies a drunkard, or becomes a burden on the parish where he may be.”<sup>5</sup> He convinced Representative James Monroe, a first-time New York congressman, fellow veteran of the Black Hawk War, and nephew of the former president by the same name, to introduce one of the several failed Soldiers’ Home bills of the subsequent decade.

[Click Here to read the full essay.](#)