



THE COTTAGE COURIER

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Fall 2012

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From the Director



Dear Friends,

Between Steven Spielberg's new Lincoln movie and the upcoming Emancipation Proclamation anniversary, we are buzzing with anticipation. As part of the celebration, we invite you to join us for a very special New Year's Eve event, "Freedom's Eve," to mark the 150th anniversary of Lincoln enacting the Emancipation Proclamation. Find out more on page four. To truly immerse yourself in the anniversary, consider taking our special Emancipation tour of the Cottage and viewing the magnificent, signed copy of the Emancipation Proclamation on loan from David M. Rubenstein through February 2013. If you cannot make it here to experience the Proclamation in person, experience it online as it tweets @Emancipation150.

I want to thank everyone who came out for our first annual Family Day in September, co-sponsored by the Armed Forces Retirement Home. Hundreds enjoyed a performance by the Washington Revels, demonstrations by the Pennsylvania Bucktail reenactors, local food vendors, and a petting zoo with a pony, goats, peacocks, and other pets Tad had here. Last month we were also honored to partner with area tribes to host a weekend of reflection on Lincoln and the Dakota, a topic covered in our summer 2012 issue of *The Cottage Courier*.

In this issue, we are featuring exclusive interviews with Catherine Clinton, Lincoln Scholar and film consultant, and Joanna Johnston, costume designer for Spielberg's Lincoln. Clinton and Johnston give us an insider's look at the unique challenges of blending Hollywood and history – including how to keep Lincoln from looking like a caricature. I hope you enjoy reading it. And before you go see Lincoln, read our movie review on page three, courtesy of President Lincoln's Cottage staff who attended a special screening in DC. Let us know what you thought of the movie by joining the conversation on our Facebook page or our twitter feed.

Best wishes for a joyous and peaceful holiday season!

Erin Mast

EMast@savingplaces.org



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THE EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION

Returns Home to President Lincoln's Cottage

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Through February 2013*

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*What will be your
legacy?*

As a private non-profit, President Lincoln's Cottage depends on donations and bequests. You can help ensure this powerful place is here for generations to come by leaving a bequest in your will.

For more information about using your will to protect President Lincoln's Cottage and the big ideas of freedom and equality that live here, please contact:

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202-829-0436 x31225
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MODERN SLAVERY & HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE UNITED STATES



OPEN THROUGH AUGUST 2013



Courtesy of Disney/Dreamworks.

Several Cottage staff members were treated to an early screening of Steven Spielberg's *Lincoln*. Though a couple staff had a limited consulting role on the film, those of us who attended the screening had no prior knowledge of the script. Alternately funny and serious, educational and entertaining – *Lincoln* is an inspiring exploration of the last four months of the President's life and his quest to get the 13th Amendment passed.

Daniel Day-Lewis masterfully captures the complexity of the 16th President. His convincing performance reveals the depth of Lincoln's character – his humor, his burdens, and his political genius. As our visitors learn on the Cottage tour, Lincoln used storytelling as a political persuasion tool, often to amusing effect. This trait certainly came through in film, as several key scenes included folksy stories that drew laughter from the audience. Yet the film also made it clear that the strain of the war viscerally took a toll on Lincoln's relationships with his family, most dramatically in the captivating scenes with his wife Mary, portrayed by Sally Field. Notably, the gripping scenes of Lincoln tangling with his cabinet captured the President's determination and resolve to secure passage of the 13th amendment.

Though Day-Lewis shines, his performance is only one of many outstanding turns by experienced Hollywood veterans. David Strathairn, as the shrewd Secretary of State William Seward, excellently portrays one of Lincoln's closest rival-turned-confidante. Tommy Lee Jones brought lots of energy to his role as Thaddeus Stevens, the Radical Republican wrestling with an undying passion and the necessity for compromise. James Spader and Gloria Reuben, who portray William Bilboe and Elizabeth Keckley respectively, add intrigue and drama to the plot. The film brought Lincoln's world to life and resonated with our staff, which focuses each day on bringing the true Lincoln to life here at President Lincoln's Cottage.

Adapted from the original review published on Facebook. Join the conversation at www.facebook.com/LincolnsCottage.



*Celebrate
"Freedom's Eve" at
President Lincoln's
Cottage*

*Join us as we ring in the new year!
Details to come.*

Save the Date

December 13th - Cottage Conversation with Louis Masur

December 18th - Partner Program with the Jewish Historical Society

December 31st - Freedom's Eve! Celebrate 150 years since Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation

January 3rd - Emancipation Proclamation Symposium, co-sponsored by the United States Commission on Civil Rights

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Our two special themed tours - *The Emancipation Tour* and *Running for Re-election* - are available by special request. Call 202.829.0436 and schedule yours today.



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Designing Spielberg's Lincoln

Professor Catherine Clinton interviews Joanna Johnston, costume designer for *Lincoln* (2012). Then we turn the tables and interview Professor Clinton, *Lincoln* author and film consultant.

About the Interviewees

Catherine Clinton is the American History chair professor at Queens University Belfast, author of *Mrs. Lincoln: A Life*, and President Lincoln's Cottage Scholarly Advisor. Clinton served as a consultant on Steven Spielberg's new film *Lincoln*, in theaters now.

Joanna Johnston is an English costume designer who has worked extensively in films. In particular, she has served as the costume designer for over 25 films, including several major Spielberg projects and *Forrest Gump* with Sally Field.



Joanna Johnston (left) and Catherine Clinton.

Courtesy of Catherine Clinton.

CATHERINE CLINTON: Joanna, you have worked with Steven Spielberg for many years on several films, including *Saving Private Ryan*, *War of the Worlds*, *Munich*, and *War Horse*, but for this project, you were looking at one of the most significant U.S. historical figures, Abraham Lincoln, who has been depicted in over a dozen films as well as on stage and television. Did any of these previous works — or any other past work you did — influence your costuming choices?

JOANNA JOHNSTON: The great thing is, I haven't seen any of these previous productions, and therefore, basically I was going only from the photographic material.

It's such an advantage that *Lincoln* was so prolifically photographed. I studied the photographs because they gave me the texture of the man, and the clothing in those beautiful plate photographs. I was especially taken with a volume, James Mellon's *The Face of Lincoln*.

I returned again and again to those portraits by Matthew Brady, who was such an artist. In his own time, Lincoln was taken with the idea of projecting himself through the photographic image. Photography had become commonplace by then. He must have been very aware of the strength of the image through the power of photography.

CLINTON: Which costume design was

the most challenging?

JOHNSTON: [laughing] Everyone! But I suppose, primarily Mary and Abraham were my greatest challenges. Abraham Lincoln requires small moves, very subtle — to add up to this iconic look. The small moves are about proportion, detail, and the form on the body. At the same time, I was recreating a capsule of time which is primarily in the political arena — and also capturing the essence of the Civil War going on through the story. It's my task to help present the look which makes you believe that you're there. Most people aren't aware of the volume it takes. We had 140 actors with speaking parts — and hundreds of extras, often on a daily basis. And we are only dealing

with the end of Lincoln's life, over a few months in 1865.

CLINTON: I was stunned and amazed at the way in which you would create a look from fragments — for example finding a way to demonstrate Seward through a dressing gown. All the attention to detail and putting things into the costumes that make them authentic and allow the actors to inhabit a role.

JOHNSTON: Yes, I found a piece of 18th century Chinese silk, constructed into a Moroccan robe — so this piece allows us to imagine someone who took this material from China to North Africa — and Seward went to both — and it suited him.

CLINTON: Lets him be a peacock, in contrast to Lincoln.

JOHNSTON: But interestingly, Lincoln who was not interested in clothes and was understated has such a remarkable projection. So for the film, you need to underplay it rather than overplay it, because it could become too much of a caricature.

CLINTON: President Lincoln was known for a more low-key look, even to the point of having unkempt hair, whereas Mary Lincoln appreciated the latest fashions and stylish hairdos for big events. What are your thoughts on their style?

JOHNSTON: I think the person as a whole requires a marriage with the unkempt hair and the scruffiness to the clothing—if there is not a harmony, then it won't look balanced.

CLINTON: How did you see their style translate into the clothing worn by their children?

JOHNSTON: It seems Mary Lincoln had control over what the children wore — so they were well turned out...

CLINTON: Her little mannequins....

JOHNSTON: Because Mary as well was acutely aware and involved with the projection of image and style. She was clearly fascinated by clothing and fashion, and did her own particular interpretation of the fashions of the day. Perhaps over-the-top excessiveness was a compensation to project an image forward against her lack of a more traditional, formal beauty.

CLINTON: Which piece of costuming was the most gratifying to see through from conception to completion?

JOHNSTON: When you and I first met in July 2011, you brought me a pile of images — this was just the beginning of all your inspiration for me on this film. I could not have done it without you — you showed me a book of Mary's dresses. When you opened up a book to a color

photo of this wrapper, I was very struck by the design of a dress. You told me this would be something Mary definitely wore. The fact that it existed in its complete entirety at Chicago Historical Society prompted me to contact them to see if I could access to it, with the possibility of doing a reproduction. The curator, Megan Smith, and I interacted via email and she sent me absolutely brilliant photographs (*pictured below*). And when I needed scale, she gave me all the measurements.

I even knew exactly Mary Lincoln's waist size — 30 inches — and that was our goal to get Sally Field's weight up to fit the size of the wrapper dress. This particular original dress was a woven check and basically what we did was print the weave on comparable wool from the north of England. The waist might have been thirty inches, but the skirt hem was a whopping 150 inches, with panels inserted. The dress was just absolutely amazing and seeing the brilliant and handstitched detail inside — the binding was black but the actual check color was a dark forest green, which gives a slight



Details on Mary Lincoln's dress.

Courtesy of the Chicago Historical Society.



*Mary wore this partridge
feather cloak at the House of
Representatives.*

Courtesy of Catherine Clinton.

softness rather than hard black.

I loved it, Sally loved it, and we reproduced a dress as close as it could be to the original and it looked fabulous on [her]. I personally felt it had a real modernity to it for the 1860s, we all loved it. It has an Issey Miyake quality to it. The process of doing this dress helped me get into Mary's persona, a closer capturing of her.

The example of this reproduction was purely that, because it never made it on camera.

CLINTON: That seems like the heartbreak and drama of design work, to do a perfect reproduction, and to have it end up on the cutting room floor.

I was fascinated to find out some of the complex dynamics of costuming, like that example, from you.

JOHNSTON: In each film, every actor is logged through the story as regards to day changes and occasion changes. In the film *Lincoln* we had such an enormous cast, with the majority of the principal characters being mostly men, so the way

that I executed the project is that I gave most of them a single costume change.

With the women there was a chance to pepper through the period in their changes and in particular with Mary, I wanted to show that she had an extensive wardrobe, by giving her a different look in every scene she's in.

CLINTON: And the meticulous detail work—like when you showed me the incredible cloak you found.

JOHNSTON: I had just found it and wondered if it would be suitable—

CLINTON: A gorgeous Victorian cloak out of partridge feathers....it took my breath away when I saw it (*pictured above*)!

JOHNSTON:which Mary wears during a scene in the House of Representatives....when we only catch a glimpse of it.

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*In addition to the conversation between Joanna and Catherine, Professor Clinton discussed her role in the planning of the movie with President Lincoln's Cottage Director Erin Mast.*

ERIN MAST: Catherine, as a well-known Lincoln scholar, American History chair professor at Queens University Belfast, and author of *Mrs. Lincoln: A Life*, how did your academic background influence you as you consulted for this film?

CLINTON: I think of myself as a film buff, as much as an historian. I grew up with a deep reverence for films as cultural icons. I was aware of the significance of this project when I read that Steven Spielberg had bought the screen rights to Doris Goodwin's forthcoming project [*Team of Rivals*]. I saw it as an incredible opportunity to characterize the 16th President, this historical actor, and I became even more absorbed when I began my own work on *Mrs. Lincoln*, shortly thereafter.

MAST: Describe the line between making a historically accurate film and an entertaining piece of art, and your feelings on that as a Lincoln scholar.

CLINTON: I don't think most historians recognize film as a collaborative art form—as most sit writing their books in a fairly isolated manner — while with a film there are literally hundreds if not thousands of components fitting together to make the film work.

As for the problems of dealing with accuracy v. authenticity, this issue continues to be hotly contested. I am not talking about a wristwatch on a Roman soldier in *Spartacus* or a gas cylinder on a chariot in *Gladiator*, but the way in which the opening of *Gone with the Wind* has slaves picking cotton allegedly in April in Georgia, and in *Glory*, Robert Gould Shaw is in Massachusetts using watermelons for bayonet practice in April (when they are out of season). Both of these inaccuracies sent a subliminal signal to their viewers —

more important than the integrity of American agricultural seasons — so these sacrifices are made, and no matter how much we debate objectivity and accuracy, we are all struggling with the same issues of trying to provide convincing material to our audience. But I will confess that I have a much more populist approach to these matters [than other historians].

MAST: Did Steven Spielberg's view of Lincoln differ much from your own? And if so, how?

CLINTON: It would be presumptive for me to discuss "views," but I can say Steven Spielberg is a great observer and student of American history. I teach his historical films in our introductory courses at Queen's University Belfast; I respect him as an auteur. So it was with a sense of great privilege to be invited, along with several other scholars, to share my ideas about Lincoln, when I was writing my Mary Lincoln biography in 2005, and what an experience that was to share ideas with fellow scholars. It was the usual Lincolnista battleground, with lively exchanges. But it was really exciting to be in the room with Tony Kushner, who is one of the most compelling voices in American drama, someone with a ferocity and intensity, whose historical sensibilities are daunting. Just as vivid, to hear Spielberg speak with such passion,

with curiosity and creativity. It was really great for me to give my two sons a sense that writing history allows us to have some small measure of impact.

MAST: Were you surprised by the perspectives that any of the actors or crew had on Lincoln?

CLINTON: I was thrilled when Joanna shared with me that Sally Field was reading my biography, and even more excited when I visited Richmond during filming and Joanna invited me to have dinner with her and Sally. It was so exciting talking to the actress playing this part — playing the person with whom I had wrestled for so many years. It was such a fantastic evening, and we talked and talked, about Mary's dilemma in the White House — watching her husband pulled in so many directions but definitely away from her, her isolation and frustrations, her attachment to her sons, her conflicts and fears for Robert when he enlisted in the army.

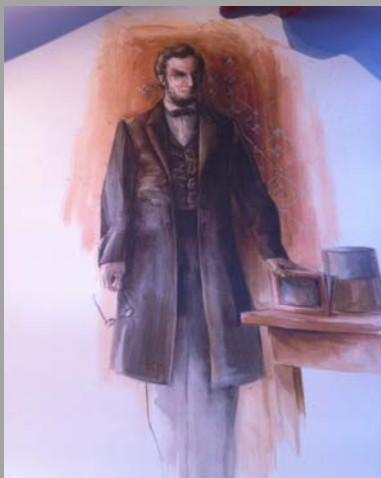
MAST: Which piece of costume research was the most challenging?

CLINTON: I looked over my 96 emails and thought that one of the strangest queries I got was "Lincoln's handkerchief." Could I provide references for Lincoln & handkerchiefs...

and I was afraid my Fortenbaugh Lecture [at Gettysburg College] on "the Tears of a President" was being taken too literally — as Lincoln was known to weep publicly — and certainly privately. So, it was safe to suggest that he always had a pocket kerchief on hand, and one was found among his belongings on the night he died.

MAST: You are trying to develop an exhibit about the Lincolns for Spielberg's movie. What do you hope to accomplish with this exhibit?

CLINTON: I hope that by doing something tentatively titled "Recreating the Lincolns: Costume and Design in Spielberg's Lincoln" the magic and craft of Joanna Johnston's amazing designs can be put on display. The dress she created for Gloria Reuben, playing Elizabeth Keckly, for example, is stunning — and its beauty and historical integrity deserve recognition, as does the role of African Americans within this screen portrait of the 16th president. Plus, with the educational aspects of looking at popular entertainment, going behind the scenes to see how historical characters are created from the stuff of historians and the incredible craft of costuming... we are trying to get this project off the ground.



*Two of Joanna Johnston's sketches of costumes for Abraham Lincoln (Daniel Day-Lewis) and Mary Lincoln (Sally Field).*

*Courtesy of Catherine Clinton, from the collection of Joanna Johnston.*

