



Abraham Lincoln's Pocket Knife Presented at the 1864 Great Central Fair

Date
1864

Primary Maker
Abraham Lincoln

Medium

Pearl; Wood; Metal

Description

A pocket knife gifted to President Abraham Lincoln at the 1864 Philadelphia Great Central Fair. The knife features a large, elegantly re-curved handle, paneled in white mother-of-pearl with small inlaid gold plaque engraved "ABRAHAM LINCOLN", fitted with polished steel scissors, file, and five assorted blades, two of which bear elaborate decorative damascened inscriptions: Primary blade: "Liberty, July 4th 1776. Abraham Lincoln, Jany. 1st, EQUALITY. 1864. Secondary blade: "Presented to the Philadelphia Sanitary Fair by A.B. Justice, June 1864." Each blade bears maker's mark "J. Ward & Co., Bronxville, New York." The custom-made pocket knife was presented with an oak presentation box (2022.009.0002), and was later acknowledged by President Lincoln with a signed letter (2022.009.0003) to the Organizers of the Great Central Sanitary Fair held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania from June, 7-28 1864. The Great Central Fair was a sanitary fair held in Philadelphia, PA in June 1864. Sanitary fairs were fundraising events held throughout the United States to help raise money and gather supplies for the Union Army during the U.S. Civil War. The United States Sanitary Commission oversaw the fairs, which were organized with the help of local communities. Fairs were held in New York City, Indianapolis, Chicago, and Philadelphia, with the Philadelphia fair raising over \$1,000,000. President Abraham Lincoln and his family were in attendance in Philadelphia. Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) was an American lawyer and politician who served as the 16th President of the United States. Lincoln is best remembered for leading the nation through the American Civil War from 1861 until his assassination in 1865. Abraham Lincoln was born on February 12, 1809, in Larue County, Kentucky. Lincoln was born in a log cabin and raised in Kentucky and Indiana where his frontier upbringing was later to craft his political identity as a "Railsplitter.". He moved to Illinois with his family, before striking out on his own in New Salem, Illinois. In New Salem, Lincoln worked at a general store and later served as postmaster and a land surveyor for Menard County. In 1834, Lincoln successfully ran for the Illinois state legislature, where he served until 1842 as a member of the Whig Party. In 1836, Lincoln was admitted to the Illinois bar and moved to Springfield to practice law. In 1843, Lincoln sought the Whig nomination for the Illinois 7th district seat in the United States House of Representatives. He lost to John J. Hardin but ran again in 1846 and defeated the incumbent. Lincoln served one term in the U.S. House of Representatives, where he worked on an unsuccessful bill to abolish slavery in Washington, D.C.

Upon leaving the U.S. House of Representatives, Lincoln returned to his Springfield, Illinois legal practice. He represented large organizations, including the Illinois Central Railroad, and earned the nickname "Honest Abe" for his upstanding legal practice. Lincoln remained active in politics during this time and became a member of the newly formed Republican Party. In 1858, Lincoln ran for the Illinois seat in the U. S. Senate, and his series of debates against incumbent Senator Stephen Douglas helped raise his national profile. The debates focused on the issue of slavery, specifically related to the expansion of slavery into newly formed territories. Although Lincoln won the popular vote, the Illinois electoral vote had been drawn in Douglas's favor - leading to his victory. Lincoln's national political profile was on the rise, and he became a contender for the 1860 Republican presidential nomination. Lincoln won the nomination at the Republican National Convention in Chicago, and he ultimately defeated Southern Democrat John C. Breckinridge in the election. Lincoln assumed the presidency in March 1861, with the country in disarray. South Carolina had already declared their secession from the United States in December 1860. Six total states left the Union before his inauguration (later 11 total), declaring themselves as the Confederate States of America. On April 12, 1861, one month after Lincoln's inauguration, Confederate forces attacked Union soldiers at Fort Sumner near Charleston, South Carolina. The United States Civil War had begun, and Lincoln took control over the Union's military strategy. He expanded his presidential war powers as commander-in-chief. He imposed a blockade on Confederate ports and quickly gained the support of northerners for his decisive actions. As the Civil War continued into 1863, Lincoln expanded his war powers, and in January 1863 he issued an executive order known as Proclamation 95, and later as the Emancipation Proclamation, that changed the legal status of enslaved African Americans in Confederate states from enslaved to free. The Emancipation Proclamation was a key contributing factor to the end of slavery in the United States. In November 1863, Lincoln spoke at the dedication for the Gettysburg battle cemetery, and his Gettysburg Address became one of the most famous orations given in American history. Amid the Civil War, Lincoln was reelected as president in 1864. He delivered his second inaugural address on March 4, 1865, where he spoke of what may come after the war's end. On April 14, 1865, only a month into his new term, Lincoln was assassinated by actor and Confederate sympathizer John Wilkes Booth while attending a production of the play *Our American Cousin* at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C. Lincoln survived through the night but died the following morning at the Petersen House near the theater. Lincoln was the first United States president to be assassinated. His death led to an extended period of national mourning. Confederate General Robert E. Lee had surrendered at Appomattox Court House, Virginia on April 9, 1865. Confederate forces continued to fight into May 1865, with the final land battle occurring in Texas. Although Lincoln did not live to see the end of the war, his leadership was key in maintaining the support of Union states and the Union victory. Lincoln's assassination led to his status as a national martyr, dying for the cause of ending slavery and reunifying the country. Lincoln is often remembered as one of the most important political figures and presidents in U.S. history. His legacy has reached that of sacred status, where he is seen as a lasting symbol of moral good and upstanding values – a status that has continued into the 21st century.

Dimensions

Overall: 4 1/2 in. (11.4 cm)