

BENJAMIN LINCOLN AT 40 ACRES



Engraved by T. H. Brown.

MAJOR GENERAL  
BENJAMIN LINCOLN.

*B. Lincoln*

An Exhibit to Commemorate the Bicentennial of

THE SHAYS REBELLION

Exhibit and Booklet Designed, Researched,  
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Benjamin Lincoln was born on January 24, 1733, the son of Colonel Benjamin Lincoln and his wife Elizabeth. He spent most of his life in Hingham, MA and it was there that he married Mary Cushing in 1756. After a brief stint as Town Clerk he joined his father's regiment, the Third Suffolk, and eventually succeeded the Colonel as regiment commander.

Lincoln's strong Whig tendencies made him an early advocate of independence and brought him appointment to several important posts, including representative to the General Court. Lincoln took up arms at the outbreak of hostilities, and aided Artemis Ward in breaking the British blockade of Boston. He was commissioned a Major General on February 19, 1777 and was ordered to Bound Brook, NJ where he fended off an attack by General Cornwallis.

On October 7, 1777 a rifle ball shattered Lincoln's ankle during the Second Battle of Saratoga. This was the first of many medical problems from which he would suffer. Part of the bone was removed which made his right leg two inches shorter than the right. The wound festered for years afterward with bone fragments frequently working their way to the surface. As he grew more lame, he became more obese, and the 5'9" Lincoln was called "uncommonly broad." He also suffered from somnolence, and would occasionally fall asleep between sentences while dictating dispatches.

Despite his medical shortcomings, Lincoln was sent to Charleston in September 1778 to command the Southern army. From the start, he was plagued by difficulties such as the incompetence of General Ashe which led to loss of one-third of his forces, and the plan of supposed French ally General D'Estaing to claim Georgia for the King of France! In September, 1779 Lincoln had to raze his unsuccessful siege of British-controlled Savannah. A planned assault was betrayed and he was forced to return to Charleston where he tried, in vain, to convince the South Carolinians to allow him to fill his thinned troop ranks through conscription and the enlistment of negroes. Charleston itself was laid siege to by Sir Henry Clinton and, on May 10, 1780, Lincoln was forced to surrender the city.

Lincoln was quickly paroled and arrived in Philadelphia on June 23, 1780. In June of 1781 he rejoined General Washington. Benjamin Lincoln was present at Yorktown when Cornwallis surrendered on November 19, 1781 and it was into Lincoln's hands that Cornwallis presented his sword, a gesture which symbolically ended the Revolutionary War.

During the heady days following victory Lincoln served as Secretary at War in the committee system which masqueraded as central government under the weak Articles of Confederation. In that post Lincoln also showed great concern for retiring officers, the plight of debtors, and the poor. He also counselled leniency for ex-loyalists. Lincoln resigned his post in October, 1783 to return to Hingham.

His retirement was a brief one. When Shay's Rebellion broke out in 1786, the intransigent Governor James Bowdoin appointed Lincoln as commander of the Massachusetts militia. Lincoln relieved the harried General Shepherd at Springfield on January 20, 1787. Evidence suggests that Lincoln, perhaps guided by his experiences at Secretary at War, was not totally unsympathetic to the plight of Shays and his followers. He made numerous overtures to Daniel Shays, but each was countered by proposals which went beyond Lincoln's authority to grant. Thus, on January 27, 1787 Lincoln's forces drove a wedge between the insurgents and separated the two halves. Moving his troops to Hadley on January 30, Lincoln made one last attempt to convince Shays to disengage. Rebuked, Lincoln struck at Shays' headquarters at Petersham on February 3 and 4, 1787. After this, Lincoln had only to mop up in engagements near Pittsfield.

On June 10, 1787 Benjamin Lincoln resigned his commission. As Lt. Governor of Massachusetts that same year he urged considerably more leniency for the insurgents than Bowdoin had shown. The Shays Rebellion was one of several factors which led to the passage of the United States Constitution. After it went into effect, Lincoln was made the first Collector for the Port of Boston. He was also called upon by President Washington to help negotiate several Indian treaties. Lincoln retired as Collector in 1809 after being harassed by Jeffersonians, and retired to Hingham where he died on May 9, 1810.

#### LINCOLN AND 40 ACRES

Hannah Dane Sargent (1822-1910) married the Rev. Frederic Dan Huntington on September 3, 1843. As the great granddaughter of Benjamin Lincoln, this union brought numerous objects and documents relating to the General and his family to 40 Acres.

Both Lincoln and the Shays' Rebellion were noted in the diary of Elizabeth Porter Phelps (1748-1817) since her husband Charles, as a selectman and justice of the peace, figured prominently in what Elizabeth called the "Disturbance." Phelps made several trips to Springfield carrying supplies to the regiment during the critical month of January, 1787. January 28, Elizabeth notes, was "a confused day. The Mob in a large body at Northampton another

party at Amherst. Just as the meeting was done, the Northampton Body came into the lower end of Hadley [and] marched through to Amherst. What will be the event none can tell." The next day Lincoln arrived in Hadley "with about three thousand men" and on Tuesday, "Mr. Phelps carried the children into town to see 'em." Phelps was there when the fateful attack on Petersham took place, having "set out with some loadings belonging to the Army."

Elizabeth's diary notes the sad event of February 21, 1787 when she "went to Hatfield to the funeral of one Walker killed by the insurgents- he was buried with the Honours of War," as well as the happier occasions in which she and Charles welcomed officers for tea at 40 Acres.

#### OBJECTS ON DISPLAY

1. Oil painting of granddaughter Mary Otis Lincoln
2. Crayon sketch of great granddaughter Hannah Sargent
3. Ladderback chair belonging to Lincoln
4. Porcelaine bowl belonging to Lincoln's daughter-in-law (Chinese exportware)
5. Engraving of Washington and generals, inc. Lincoln
6. Mezzo tint of Lincoln
7. presentation setting from MA Society of Cincinnati presented to Lincoln as first President of the chapter
8. Tea caddy used by Lincoln on campaigns
9. Rolling pin used by Lincoln's mother
10. 1776 order signed by Lincoln to Col. Simons
11. 1779 letter discussing prisoner exchange with Brit.
12. 1782 commission of James Tisdale signed by Lincoln on velum
13. 1783 letter to Gen. Greene
14. mezzo tint of James Bowdoin
15. 1787 letter from Hadley to Col. Price from Lincoln
16. bill of lading signed by Lincoln as Collector
17. 1790 letter to Sec. of Treasury