

1898

Letter from William H. Herndon to John W. Keys, April 14, 1886.

William Henry Herndon

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LOUIS C. VANUXEM

ATTORNEY AT LAW

ROOMS 1203-4-5 GIRARD BUILDING

TELEPHONE 5428

PHILADELPHIA

March 25, 1898

Mr. William H. Lambert,
1001 Chestnut St. City.

My Dear Major:

I take pleasure in handing you herewith a copy of the letter of William A. Hern-
don to J. W. Keys, concerning the character of Abraham Lincoln, as per your request.

Yours sincerely,

L. C. VANUXEM

Springfield, Ill., April 14th, 1886.

Mr. John W. Keys,

My Dear Sir:—

You ask me for a short account of my acquaintance with Abraham Lincoln. I became acquainted with Mr. Lincoln in 1834, and from that time to the day of his death, I knew the man well—I may say, intimately. He moved to the city of Springfield in 1837: it was then but a small town or village—now quite a city. I studied law with Logan and Lincoln, two great lawyers—in 1842-3. In 1843 Mr. Lincoln and I became partners in the law business in Springfield, but did business in all the surrounding counties. Our partnership was never legally dissolved till the night of his assassination—his death. The good man, the noble man would take no money of my fees made in the law business after his election to the Presidency. Mr. Lincoln was a safe counselor, a good lawyer and an honest man in all the walks of life. Mr. Lincoln was not appreciated in this city, nor was he at all times the most popular man among us. The cause of his unpopularity, rather the want of popularity, here arose out of two grounds. First, he did his own thinking, and second, he had the courage of his convictions and boldly and fearlessly expressed them. I speak generally, and especially of his political life. Mr. Lincoln was a cool, cautious, conservative and long-headed man. Mr. Lincoln could be trusted by the people; they did trust him, and they were never

deceived. He was a pure man, a great man and a patriot.

In the practice of the law, he was simple, honest, fair and broad-minded; he was courteous to the bar and to the Court; he was open, candid and square in his profession, never practicing on the sharp nor the low. Mr. Lincoln met all questions fairly, squarely and openly, making no concealments of his ideas, nor intentions in any case; he took no snap judgments, nor used any tricks in his business. Every man knew exactly where Mr. Lincoln stood, and how he would act in a law case. Mr. Lincoln never deceived his brother lawyers in any case. What he told you was the exact truth.

Mr. Lincoln was a sad man, a gloomy man and an abstracted one; and hence he was not very social in his nature: he seems to me to be an unhappy man at times: he dearly loved his children, but he was not the happiest man domestically. As a friend, Mr. Lincoln was true, true as steel, he thought in his life and lived in his thoughts. In many things Mr. Lincoln was peculiar: He did not trust any man with the secret of his ambitious soul. I knew the man so well that I think I could read his secrets and ambitions. He was a wonderful man and his name will grow on the ages.

The desk made of walnut with four shelves in it, with two leaved doors belonged to Lincoln and myself in our early practice. The desk contained most of our books for years. The table is made

of walnut with two drawers; the desk and table were placed in our office on the same day, say as early as 1850, probably before. You now own the desk and table that Lincoln once owned: he gave me the desk and table, and what you have is genuine and true. They have never been out of my sight since they were delivered to Lincoln and myself. Please take good care of the sacred things, mementoes of the noble man Abraham Lincoln.

Most respectfully,

Signed, Wm. H. Herndon.

Acknowledged before me this 13th day
of April, A. D. 1886.

(SEAL)

Signed, Alfred A. North,
Notary Public.