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Pierpont Papers

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# The Lincoln Reminiscence Manuscript in the Francis Harrison Pierpont Papers

*Transcribed and Edited by Michael R. Ridderbusch*

Of the many collections in the holdings of Special Collections of West Virginia University Libraries, the papers of Francis Harrison Pierpont (1814-1899)<sup>1</sup> hold a special place, for they not only document the story of how the “Grand Old Man” and “Father of West Virginia” fostered the creation of the Mountain State, but they also bear witness to the dramatic events of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Examination of Pierpont’s manuscripts regarding his role in these events makes apparent his awareness of his place in history and his desire to make a record of his activities for posterity. His extensive writings allow the researcher not only an opportunity to delve into historical narratives regarding secession, the Civil War, the Restored Government of Virginia, statehood, and Reconstruction, but they also provide evidence of Pierpont’s opinions regarding slavery, emancipation, and states’ rights. A manuscript of particular interest among these writings is his reminiscence of President Abraham Lincoln. As wartime governor of the Restored Government of Virginia, Pierpont had the opportunity to work with Lincoln, and it was from these experiences that Pierpont produced his reminiscence. Although excerpts from the reminiscence were used throughout Charles Ambler’s biography of Pierpont, it is difficult to determine whether this document has ever been published in its entirety, given the extensive body of *Lincolniana*. This article presents a faithful transcription of the original manuscript with commentary.

The Lincoln reminiscence manuscript exists in four drafts which can be arranged into the order in which they were created on evidence of the text’s successive revisions, and by the physical formats of the documents, including sizes and types of paper and types of writing instruments used (pencil and ink). The first two drafts are in pencil, and are cataloged as “pencil draft 1” and “pencil draft 2”; both of these drafts are fragments, consisting of 11 pages on 10 leaves and 17 pages on 12 leaves respectively. The second two drafts are in ink and are cataloged as “ink draft” and “final draft”; the ink draft is complete (25 pages on 25 leaves) and the final draft

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is nearly complete (22 pages on 22 leaves, missing pages 15 and 23). The final draft's date of "August 25, 1882," is plausibly corroborated by the "United States Internal Revenue" stationery that pencil draft 1 is recorded to, since Pierpont was appointed collector of internal revenue for the Second West Virginia District by the administration of President Garfield after the presidential election of 1880.<sup>2</sup>

In the transcription that follows, the final draft is used as the source. Since the final draft is missing pages 15 and 23, the corresponding sections in the ink draft are quoted to fill in the gaps. The codes [fd] and [id] with page numbers are used in the transcription to distinguish these two sources of the text. This strategy is an appropriate solution to derive the missing text since the final draft is primarily a stylistic edit of the ink draft. Of much greater interest is the difference between pencil draft 2 and the ink draft, which is often one of content. Much material had been removed or altered when pencil draft 2 was committed to ink, and many of these edits will be presented with comments following the transcription.

#### Transcription of Francis Pierpont's Lincoln Reminiscence:

[fd 1] My personal acquaintance, with President Lincoln, began in the winter of 1861-2. Civil War was raging from the Atlantic to the Missouri. Everything, about Washington, bore a military aspect.

Mr. Lincoln's manner was cheerful and affable. He put on no mysterious airs of official dignity, nor dealt in cabalistic phrases. His frank open manner put everyone at ease in his presence. Like a skillful judge seeking after the truth of the case before him, his object seemed to be to ascertain the state of feeling among the people, in the section whence his visitors came, in regard to the union and the rebellion. He possessed, in a remarkable degree, the art of impressing his visitors with the idea that he had told them all they wanted to know about public matters. But while doing this, he entirely concealed, with great art, those things about which it would be imprudent for him to talk. I have heard many gentlemen remark after conversing with him, "Mr. Lincoln seems to have no state secrets."

At this time, though apparently cheerful, he was in trouble. [fd 2] There were two classes of political prophets at Washington—the one prophesying a speedy termination of the Rebellion and the downfall of the Confederacy; the other predicting a long war. The prospective expense, of the war, was alarming the politicians. Where was the money to come from? An order had been issued, from the War department, to the Governors of States, ordering

My personal acquaintance, with President Lincoln, began in the winter of 1861. The Civil war was raging from the Atlantic to the Mississippi. Every thing about Washington, bore a military aspect. Mr. Lincoln's manner was cheerful and affable. He put, no mysterious air of official dignity, nor dealt in Cabalistic phrases. His frank open manner put every one at ease in his presence. Like a skillful judge seeking after the truth of the case before him, his object seemed to be to ascertain the state of feeling among the people, in the section whence his visitors came, in regard to the union and the rebellion. He possessed, in a remarkable degree, the art of impressing his visitors with the idea that he had told them all they wanted to know about public matters. But while doing this, he outwardly concealed, with great art, those things about which it would be imprudent for him to talk. I have heard many gentlemen remark, after conversing with him, "Mr. Lincoln seems to have no state secrets."

that no more volunteer regiments should be raised, and to disband those commenced and not completed.

I had placed several regiments of loyal Virginia troops in the field and I think had three regiments partly recruited, and my object in calling on Mr. Lincoln was to get the order suspended so far as it related to loyal Virginia troops. After discussing the subject the President directed me to complete the regiments partly raised and said he would order them mustered in.

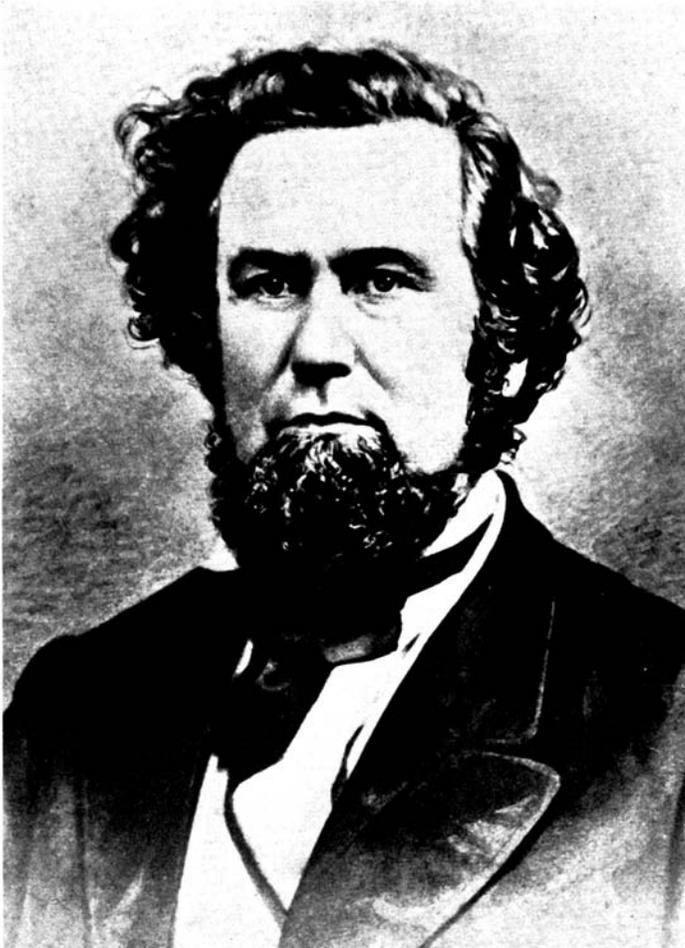
Another subject gave him great trouble, it was the division of the country into military departments, and the appointment of departmental commanders. There were several elements in the Union party that had to be satisfied as far as possible in these appointments. The German citizens, the Irish soldiers, the Union Democrats, the original Abolitionists, the Republicans and the West Point men—all [fd 3] had partisan friends pressing their favorites for official recognition. It was by no means certain whether the rising man was to be a civilian or one from the regular army. Public sentiment was at fever heat and there was great danger of faction. Mr. Lincoln asked me whom we wanted in the department of West Va. I replied “Gen. [George B.] McClellan is popular, so is Gen. Rosecrans [William Starke Rosecrans], who is there now; but the Union people of western Virginia are loyal and they will leave that question to you.”

It may be thought these questions ought not to have troubled Mr. Lincoln; but that is a mistake. The people at that time knew nothing of Civil War, and but little about war of any kind. There was revolution and rebellion in the South, with a vast number of sympathisers in the North, who were ready to take advantage of any mistake, on the part of the government, and with a man of less conservative skill than Mr. Lincoln the most disastrous consequences were liable to have occurred.

In the latter part of the Summer of 1862 there was great gloom over the Union cause. The campaign of the Peninsula had settled [fd 4] nothing. Manassas had not brightened the prospect.

At the suggestion of Gov. [Andrew Gregg] Curtin of Pa., Gov. Todd [David Tod] of Ohio and I called a meeting of all the Union Governors of the states to meet on a fixed day in September at Altoona Pa. The object was general consultation as to what encouragement could be given the President concerning volunteer troops and other matters. Fourteen Union states were represented.

Between the time of the call, and the meeting, the battle of Antietam was fought. The result of that battle greatly brightened the Union cause. In the mean time the President had issued his emancipation proclamation. A



Francis H. Pierpont in the prime of life

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vote was taken on the endorsement, proclaiming a resolution endorsing the proclamation which was adopted with but one dissenting vote. This resolution, with some others, was written out to be presented to the President. Other matters were discussed that were not put in the report.

The meeting adjourned to proceed to Washington; and the next day the Governors in a body called on the President at the White House. The reception on the part of Mr. Lincoln was very cordial. The action of the convention was presented by Gov. Andrews [John Albion Andrew], and the resolutions were read; but no formal speech was made. Mr. Lincoln engaged in a free and animated conversation. He soon [fd 5] spoke of the Emancipation Proclamation, and gave us a full history of why regarding the advice of his cabinet he had not issued it sooner. On that subject his statement was about as follows. He said,

“There is a little history connected with that Proclamation. I wrote it last spring and folded it up and placed it in my drawer. It was written and lying there, when Mr. Greely<sup>3</sup> made that strong demand for a proclamation of emancipation, to which I replied. I suppose you have all seen both papers. One day when there was a full cabinet meeting, after the business was over, I requested the gentlemen to remain a few minutes, remarking that I had a paper I wanted to read them. I then read the paper. When I was through, Mr. [Salmon P.] Chase said I approve of that. There was not much of any thing said by the other members, except by Mr. [William H.] Seward who remarked, ‘I don’t think it would be wise to issue that proclamation now. In the face of the bad fortune we have had in the field it will sound like a Spanish pronunciamiento. I would advise you to wait until we have some military success.’ So I put it back in the drawer and it staid there until after the battle of Antietam. Then I issued it.”

At the Altoona conference dissatisfaction was expressed with some of the members of Mr. Lincoln’s cabinet. The subject was delicate, and it was decided not to mention it in the [fd 6] short paper to be presented to him. Govs. Andrew of Mass., Todd [Tod] of Ohio and myself were requested to bring the matter to the President’s attention by calling on him separately during our stay in Washington. Having learned from Govs. Todd [Tod] and Andrew that they had called, I also went and after a short conversation I asked Mr. Lincoln if he were satisfied that all the members of his cabinet were the best men he could select, and if he had assurances that the union sentiment of the country fully approved of all of them. He seemed to catch at the drift of my remark and at once replied about as follows.

“Mr. Seward and Mr. Chase are gentlemen of national reputation

and of acknowledged ability. Mr. [Montgomery] Blair was appointed on account of his being a Republican and for his geographical position. Mr. [Edwin M.] Stanton was chosen because he is a man of action. In the War Department we need a man of prompt action to accomplish any thing. I think Mr. Stanton would admit that he sometimes commits errors, but he is willing to correct them if he can. Any man in the War Department, who at this time, keeps any thing like up with the business is apt to commit more or less errors. Mr. [Edward] Bates comes from the South-west.<sup>4</sup> He is an excellent Christian gentleman. I do not know of any layman [fd 7] whose chances for the kingdom of heaven I would as soon take as those of Mr. Bates; and I know of no lawyer who seems to be so familiar with my Lord Coke<sup>5</sup> as Mr. Bates, though he may not be as well posted on current events as some others.<sup>6</sup> Mr. Wells [Giddeon Welles] is the Sec. of the Navy. You know it is not expected to find any landsman sufficiently familiar with naval operations to manage them especially in time of war. All we can do is to select some intelligent, patriotic gentleman for Secretary, in whom the country has confidence. Admiral Dahlgreen [John A. Dahlgren] or some other experienced Admiral with other skilled naval officers and clerks will in fact run the Navy Department.” He continued.

“I will tell you an amusing incident that occurred sometime since. Nothing has happened since I came to Washington that has afforded me as much amusement. You must not say any thing about this, as coming from me, that the reporters can get hold of; if Mr. Wells [Welles] should hear that I was laughing at his expense he might think hard of it. There was a wag, among the army correspondents, who wrote letters for some paper which he addressed to ‘My son.’ Some person sent me a paper with the letter marked. It was about like this, ‘My [fd 8] son,’ there was a great battle down in Virginia the other day, a great many were killed and wounded. After the battle I went to the hospital where there were many wounded men. Well, my son, I came across a young man badly injured, in whom I took a deep interest. It was not long until the surgeon told him he must die, and if he had any requests to make or wanted to see any body, he had better make his wishes known. He said he desired to see his grandmother. They asked him where she lived, he replied, ‘in Michigan.’ They told him it was impossible to get her there before he died, and asked him if there was any other person who would do in the place of his grandmother.

“He studied a moment and said, ‘yes there was; he would just as leave see the Secretary of the Navy.’ Well, my son, I was at once dispatched to fetch the Secretary. I had about eight miles to ride. I rode as fast as my horse

could carry me, and when I arrived at Washington, I went directly to the Navy department, hitched my horse and went to the office of the Secretary. A man met me at the door and asked me who I wanted to see, I told him, and he invited me into a room. I said I was in a great hurry. He went out into another room but soon returned and said the Secretary was [fd 9] very busy, but would see me in one hour. There was a clock before me, so I noted the time, and when the hour was up, I told the man it was very important for me to see the Secretary soon, so he went again to the Secretary's room, and returned, and said the Secretary was not quite through, but would see me in twenty minutes.

"I noted the time and at the end of twenty minutes again told the man the time was up, so he showed me into the Secretary's room, he opened the door and 'my boy,' what do you think I saw? There sat the Secretary of the Navy, in profound contemplation, studying the last and most improved model of Noah's Ark!"

President Lincoln laughed again most heartily over the story. I don't recollect that he said any thing about the Secretary of the Interior [Caleb Smith].

In the winter of 1863 news came to Wheeling Virginia that Gen. [Nathaniel P.] Banks, who was then in command of the army of the James, with headquarters at Fort Monroe, was to be sent with his army to New Orleans. I was much surprised at the information and started on the next train for Washington, and went early to the White House. Mr. Lincoln was alone. After a few minutes conversation, I remarked, "Mr. President, I have never [fd 10] obtruded any views upon you as to the conduct of the war, but I learn that Gen. Banks, with the army of the James, is about being ordered to New Orleans. I came to put in a modest protest against this movement, and to give you my opinion as to the conduct of the war. He replied.

"Well Governor, if I were to follow all the views and instructions I receive on that subject, I don't know that I would do any thing. They are so different; but I will be glad to hear your views on the question." I answered. "I am willing you should take all the troops out of West Va. except the guard for the rail road bridges. Then I would advise that the whole of the army from the south-west, with all the other troops you can command, be withdrawn and centered upon Richmond. The Rebels then will be bound to concentrate all their army there. Let the out posts take care of themselves. The rebels have had their capitol now for nearly two years almost within one hundred miles, air measure, of the Capitol of the United States. This gives them prestige at home and in Europe. If you will take Richmond [fd 11]

their government will become migratory; it will break their prestige and in my opinion will end the war." Mr. Lincoln said,

"Governor I believe if I were going to give my own opinion on the mode for the speedy termination of this war, I don't know in what particular I should differ from your views."

Then he seemed to warm up and spoke with more than his usual emphasis.

"If you, no not you, for you know, but if an intelligent angel from heaven, would drop down in one corner of this room and sit there for two weeks hearing all that is said to me, I think he would come to the conclusion that this war was being prosecuted to obtain cotton from the South for the Northern cotton mills! So Gen. Banks has to go to Louisiana to get the cotton. My situation is such that I am not free to resist this demand. I am so dependant on New England and those using cotton, for money, men and supplies, that I cannot do as I wish under the circumstances."

He soon resumed a cheerful mood. I told him I would press the matter no further, he told some anecdotes illustrating his situation. Anecdotes were to him, what tears are to a [fd 12] child or woman in trouble.

In the summer of 1863 some gentlemen called on me in Washington and asked me to assist them in getting Gen. \_\_\_\_\_ appointed to a certain military department. I told them I could be of no assistance. They then asked me to go to the White House and aid them in obtaining an interview with the President. I went. We found Mr. Lincoln alone, with his door open. I went to the door, asked him to let them come in and then took a seat in the lobby. As soon as they broached the subject of their business, the President spoke to me and requested me to come in, saying there were no secrets there. I entered and heard their statement with the petition they presented. The President replied.

"Gentlemen, I will take your papers and submit them to Gen. [Henry W.] Halleck and Mr. Stanton, but can give you no encouragement. Gen. \_\_\_\_\_ may be an honest man—yes, I have to believe him an honest man—his honesty is proven to me by witnesses under oath—but he has the greatest faculty of surrounding himself with rascals of any honest man I ever knew."

In the summer of 1864 a handsome girl, just budding into womanhood, very modest and of lady like manner, came to me in Alexandria Va. and introduced herself [fd 13] saying, "I was recommended to come to you and ask you to please assist me to get my young brother out of the penitentiary at Albany." She told me her story, and I asked her if she could find

any loyal person to vouch for its truth. She said there was a school teacher from the north, a good Union woman who had lived in their neighborhood for four years before the war, who knew all about it. I told her to bring the lady and I would go with her to see the President. I satisfied myself of the reliability of the school mistress, and in a day or two the young woman returned with her friend. We went to see the President, I told him our business and that the young lady would state her case. He wrote the name of the party on a card and said

“No, Gov. it will save time if you will take this card to Judge Hoult and ask him to send by you the papers in this case.”

I returned in a few minutes, when he laid aside the business he had in hand, opened the papers, and looked at the record. It was short. He read it and said,

“Well sissie, what have you to say why I should pardon your brother?”

She seemed to summon all her courage and in a subdued and distinct voice said,

“Brother and I are orphans. Mother died when [fd 14] brother was two and I was four years old, and before brother was four years old father died; and two maiden Aunts took us to bring up. Brother is now fourteen and I am sixteen years old. Our Aunts lived on a little farm eight or nine miles from Alexandria. When the war broke out our Aunts said they had not money enough to go to the city to live, and would have to stay on the farm and we would be neutral. Our house had three roads leading from it, and we were right on the line where Mosby’s<sup>7</sup> men and the Union troops were scouting back and forward every few days. Aunts told us children that we must not give any information to either party, no matter what they asked us. One day brother was out in the road, and some Union troops came by and took one road, not long afterwards some of Mosby’s men also came up, and one of them said, [‘]My boy, which road did those Yankees take? [‘] and brother, before he thought, answered, ‘that road.’

“He came right to the house and told our Aunts what he had done. Aunts told him it was wrong, he said he knew it was a moment after he answered, but the man spoke to him so sharply and quick, he had no time to think. Aunts told him they feared he would get into trouble, but if he did he must tell the truth. [fd 15 missing] [id 16] So in a few days when some soldiers came to arrest him, he told them all about it and they took him off and tried him and he was convicted on his own testimony, and sent to the penitentiary for two years. We think brother spoke before he

thought and did not intend to give information and we want you to please pardon him.”

The President asked the lady friend if she knew anything about the case. She said she knew the family. The Aunts were truthful reliable people, and she had full confidence in the truthfulness of the children. The President folded up the papers and pushed them down the table towards me saying “Gov. will you recommend the pardon of this boy if so endorse the recommendation on the back and sign your name to it. I replied “certainly.” At this both women broke down and gave vent to their feelings in low but audible sobs. I was not long in making the recommendation and signature, but when I turned [id 17] to give him the papers I shall never forget the President’s appearance. He seemed to have forgotten all his surroundings, his eyes were turned to the ceiling, and large tears were coursing down his cheeks and falling on his beard. My motion in handing him [fd 16] the papers appeared to arouse him. He put his handkerchief to his eyes, before he endorsed the papers, and then asked me to take the documents to Mr. Stanton and to say to him, “I desire the pardon to be issued at once and sent to me.” The young girl wiped away her tears and said to me, “I have here twenty dollars and I want to send it to brother to pay his expenses home.”

Mr. Lincoln interposed at once and said,

“Sissie give me the money and I will send it with the papers to Col. \_\_\_\_\_ at Albany, he is the commander there, and your brother will be sure to receive it.” There was a kindness and gentleness in his manner and in the tones of his voice that was endearing. It seemed to say, “Oh, the cruelty of this cruel war!” There was no calling of clerks or orderlies to attend to the business. His heart was touched and he attended to it himself.

A few days afterward a young lad approached me in Alexandria and said, “Is this Gov. Pierpont?” I replied, “yes.” Taking off his hat very gracefully he said, “I came to thank you for your kindness in assisting sister to get me out of the Penitentiary.” I remarked, “Oh yes, you are the boy are you! Did your papers get to you all right?” “Yes indeed[,]” he replied [“and the money too and some one gave me transportation and paid all my expenses home.”

[fd 17] Mr. Lincoln was subject to periods of mental depression. I called on him one day about the first of Sept. 1864. The conversation soon turned upon the election then pending. I referred to the activity of the Democrats, and the false representations they were making in the country. He replied,

“Yes, they have declared the war a failure, and by false representations

they are not only doing great mischief in the country, but they are creating dissatisfaction among the soldiers in the army. We must have military success if we succeed this fall in the elections. If the elections," he continued, "had come off two or three weeks after I was nominated at Baltimore, I think I should have carried every state in the Union lines. Should it take place to day, I hardly know what states I could carry. All looks to me like uncertainty without military success."

The tones of his voice were sad that day.

Mr. Lincoln had been at the front on the James River some two or three weeks before the fall of Richmond. He arrived at home by steamer on the morning of the 9th or 10th of April. I think the 9th. I received a telegram a little after 7 o'clock AM to come to the White House as early as possible. I arrived [fd 18] there about half past 9 o'clock. He soon came in and I congratulated him on his brilliant achievements as commander of the army in capturing Richmond and the Confederate army.

He said, "I want you to stop those congratulations right here. About every gentleman I have met this morning has congratulated me in this way, and I want it distinctly understood that I claim no part nor lot in the honor of the military a[chieve]ments in front of Richmond. All the honor belongs to the military. After I went to the front, I made two or three suggestions to Gen. Grant about military movements, and he knocked the sand from under me so quick that I concluded I knew nothing about it and offered no more advice."

He then stated that he had spent two or three days in Richmond, that he had met Judge [John Archibald] Campbell there, late of the U.S. court. The Judge was anxious the war should cease and said there was a power in Virginia, that could put an end to it at once. That according to their construction of the Confederate Constitution, the legislature of a state had the authority to put troops into the army and to take them out, that all the members of the legislature of Virginia were close by, as they had assembled [fd 19] in extra session, but a few days before the evacuation, and he believed if that body had the privilege of meeting at the capital, they would pass an act to take the Virginia troops in the Confederacy, out of the army.

"This," said Mr. Lincoln, "was a new phase of the case to me, so I issued that proclamation, which you have seen, authorizing the assembling of the so called Confederate Legislature of Virginia. My object was to limit them to a single act. I thought if they had the power to put the army in the field, they might exercise that power to take them out.

"The draughting of that order, though so short, gave me more perplex-

ity than any paper I ever drew up. My object was so to draw the paper as to give no authority to do any thing except to take the rebel soldiers out of the field, and at the same time in no way to compromise your position as Governor of the Restored Government of Virginia.

“I went to my room about half after eight in the evening and worked at that order until one o’clock that night, before I made it satisfactory to myself. I directed General [Godfrey] Weitzel to disperse them if they assembled and attempted to do any other business than that named in the order.” “But,” he continued, “if I had known that Gen. Lee would have surrendered so soon I would not have issued the order, [fd 20] and shall now countermand it.”

He also said,

“I directed U.S. officers to visit every point accessible in the state, and to let the people know that they were there to administer the oath of allegiance to every man who would take it; to keep a strict list, and let them know that if they continued in rebellion I would confiscate their estates to pay the additional expense of the war.”

He then stated that he had sent for me that morning to talk about reconstruction; that he found I had thought more about it than any gentleman he had met. He said,

“I confess I have thought very little on the subject. The war has come to a close sooner than I expected, and my mind has been engaged with other and immediate pressing matters. I found Mr. Stanton thinking about this subject when I came home.”

He then enquired particularly the details of my plan for restoring the government of Virginia so as to bring it under the constitution and laws of the U.S. I explained fully.

“Well,” said he, “that is entirely satisfactory to me, but there is yet one question on which I would like to have information. I tried to get some in Richmond, but it was all a sealed book. I could get no information [fd 21] as to the feeling of the people. How will they receive you who have antagonised them from the beginning of the war? Will they refuse to have anything to do with the Federal government? Will they sulk and do nothing?”

He then discussed the character of the Southern people in all its aspects and phases, as if to satisfy himself how such a people would act under the circumstances. The lines of communication between the two sections had been so completely closed to each other, and the collapse of the Confederacy so sudden and doubtless unexpected on the Confederate side; the former relation of the slave and his master so entirely broken off, and the

uncertainty of the course the Federal government would pursue toward those lately in rebellion, that in view of all these things, in my opinion, there was very little settled sentiment among the people, and would not be until their railroad connections were restored and they had opportunity to exchange opinions and discuss the matter under the new order of affairs, and that much would depend upon the manner in which the people were treated by those in authority.

In this he concurred and enjoined me to “be industrious in finding out all I could” concerning [fd 22] the sentiment of the people of Virginia in the interior and to “communicate it” to him “if it were every day.” At this time Mr. Lincoln had no plan of reconstruction of the Southern states lately in rebellion, simply because he knew nothing about the views and temper of the people he had to deal with, and he distinctly remarked, more than once, that Congress reserved the privilege of judging when a state was reconstructed.

Our interview ended about half past one o'clock that day.<sup>8</sup> During the conversation he remarked that he believed he had never told me the turning point with him in signing the bill and admitting West Virginia as a new state in the Union. He said, “Do you recollect that telegram you sent me the day before the time expired for my signing or returning the bill?” I told him I did perfectly. The telegram was about as follows.

“President Lincoln, I am greatly in hopes you will sign the bill to make West Virginia a new state. The Union people in its bounds have their hearts set upon it, and the soldiers in the field from the same, also have their hearts set upon it. If it fails God only knows the result. I fear general demoralization, and I must not be held [fd 23 missing] [id 24] responsible. F.H. Pierpont, Gov. Va.[”]

Said he, “On the receipt of that telegram I said to myself, this is not a constitutional question, it is a political question. The government [Restored Government of Virginia] has been struggling for its existence for nearly two years, the friends of this measure think it will strengthen its friends and weaken its enemy, it is a step towards the suppression of the rebellion and I will take it.” He then spoke of the division of the cabinet, and the constitutional [id 25] arguments that had been submitted to him on the subject.

During that conversation he expressed his profound thankfulness that the war was at an end. He spoke of his trials and perplexities but declared “amid them all I have been angry but once since I came to the White House then if I had encountered the man who caused my anger I certainly would

have hurt him.” He alluded to the only physical encounter he ever had in the West and remarked “when I had measured my strength with other reputed strong men, I found I had great power in my arms.”

I will here remark, that I had good opportunities of forming an estimate of the mental ability of Mr. Lincoln and of each member of [fd 24] his cabinet, and of many members of Congress and the Senate. His mental operations differed from all of them, and in my estimation for clearness, directness and strength of statement he certainly excelled them all.

F.H. Pierpont  
Fairmont W.Va.  
Aug. 25, 1882

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The most striking difference between pencil draft 2 and the final draft is in connection with Lincoln’s efforts to have the Confederate legislature convene in order to pass a measure that would withdraw Virginia troops from the field. In the pencil draft, Pierpont reports that Lincoln outlined consequences more severe than those in the final draft for legislators who failed to act, and for those who would continue in rebellion:

He determined to give them opportunity to act and if they failed, he then intended to confiscate their property to pay for the continuance of the War—that he had directed military officers to visit all accessible points and administer the oath of fidelity [to] the Constitution to all the leading citizens who would take [it], and if they continued the rebellion they would continue with a rope around their neck. But said he, “I did not know that the Confederacy would collapse so soon, and I will withdraw the permission for the legislature to assemble.”<sup>9</sup>

In some places the pencil drafts contain illuminating detail left out of the final draft. For example, pencil draft 2 clarifies why Lincoln pressed Pierpont to ascertain the “sentiment of the people of Virginia” at the end of the war. We learn that “he thought that the action of the people of Virginia would have great influence over the other states as to reorganization.”<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the pencil draft narrative regarding Pierpont’s meeting with Lincoln about the raising of troops in western Virginia includes Lincoln’s remarks regarding these soldiers, and why he exempted Pierpont from the War Department order to disband partially raised units:

The object of my visit was to obtain permission to complete two or three regiments partly raised [though] not yet full: six or seven loyal regiments from the Western part of Virginia had been mustered. He was evidently pleased with the idea of loyal Virginia regiments, he said they were reported to be earnest, brave men, and as I had not started organizing regiments until the last of June he consented that I should complete the regiments. But not to commence any new ones until further orders.<sup>11</sup> He concluded that as the restored government of Va. had got a late start, I might fill up and commission the regiments not yet full.<sup>12</sup>

Some omissions resulting from Pierpont's editing rob the narrative of detail that is revelatory of Lincoln's personality, and perhaps reflect Pierpont's desire to tone down the language in order to "enhance" Lincoln's image. For example, in reference to the story involving the Secretary of the Navy and Noah's Ark, in pencil draft 2 Pierpont quotes Lincoln saying that he "laughed more heartily at it at the time than any thing that has occurred since I came to Washington and I believe I have laughed at it nearly every time I thought about [it]."<sup>13</sup> The corresponding passage in the final draft simply reads: "Nothing has happened since I came to Washington that has afforded me as much amusement." Similarly, after telling the Noah's Ark story, Pierpont reports Lincoln saying that he "laughed at that inordinately. I have not seen any during the war at which I laughed so heartily."<sup>14</sup> The corresponding final draft text reads: "President Lincoln laughed again most heartily over the story."

There are also episodes recorded in the pencil drafts that were dropped from the final draft, such as the following:

He remarked that he had read a letter from William Smith<sup>15</sup> who claimed to be the Gov. of Va. asking that he be permitted to return to Richmond and continue the government of his people or that I give him a passport to go to Europe. I Informed him that I could not grant either request but I felt as to the latter proposition like the Irishman in Illinois who had been a true member of the Temperance Society for a year, he asked the Dr. for a glass of soda water and while it was being drawn he said Doctor can't you put a wee drop in it and let me know nothing about it. I would be perfectly willing for Gov. Smith to go to Europe if he would let me know nothing about it.<sup>16</sup>

Another omitted episode regards martial law in Alexandria:

In the summer of 1864 I called on him and informed him that Gen. \_\_\_\_\_[,] commander of the post in Alexandria[,] was encouraging a petition to him self asking him to declare martial law in the County of Alexandria Va. He [Lincoln] said that is extraordinary proceeding. "I will write him a letter and will thank you see that he gets [it]." He read me the letter. It was about as follows. ["Gen. [\_\_\_\_\_] martial law is declared on account of supposed military necessity, not on petition of the people. If in your opinion there is a military necessity for martial law in Alexandria Va. you will report that necessity to me. I propose to be the judge in this case."]17

In his final years, Pierpont chronicled his role in events of historic significance, such as the Restored Government of Virginia, West Virginia statehood, the Civil War, and Reconstruction. Although some of his writings were published, such as a series of articles that appeared in the *Southern Intelligencer* (Richmond) in 1879, and various newspaper pieces in the 1880s, there is still much additional manuscript material that could be mined from the Pierpont collection.<sup>18</sup>

## Notes

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1. For a book-length biography, consult: Charles H. Ambler, *Francis H. Pierpont: Union War Governor of Virginia and Father of West Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937).
2. Ambler, *Francis H. Pierpont*, 352.
3. Horace Greeley (1811-1872) was an American newspaper editor known for his "vigorous articulation of the North's antislavery sentiments during the 1850s." During the Civil War, Greeley advocated early emancipation of the slaves. *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, s.v. "Greeley, Horace," <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9037933> (accessed December 9, 2006).
4. "South-west" here refers to Missouri, where Edward Bates had a long political career. *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, s.v. "Bates, Edward," <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9013726> (accessed December 13, 2006).

5. Sir Edward Coke (1552-1634) was a “British jurist and politician whose defense of the supremacy of the common law against Stuart claims of royal prerogative had a profound influence on the development of English law and the English constitution.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, s.v. “Coke, Sir Edward,” <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9024704> (accessed December 9, 2006).
6. According to Lincoln, he “never met a lawyer who had so thorough a knowledge of My Lord Coke as Mr. Bates has, and he quotes him on nearly all occasions.” Lincoln Reminiscence Manuscript [Pencil Draft 2], 1882, Francis Harrison Pierpont Papers (A&M 9), Writings and Speeches Series, Special Collections, West Virginia University Libraries, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV, 6 (b) (hereafter cited as Lincoln MS., PD 1 or 2).
7. John Singleton Mosby, Confederate colonel, was commander of a guerrilla band known as “Mosby’s Rangers” that operated in northern Virginia and Maryland from 1863 to the last days of the Civil War. See Jeffrey D. Wert, *Mosby’s Rangers* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990).
8. Pierpont reports that “this was the last time I saw him alive.” Lincoln MS., PD 2, 15 (b).
9. Lincoln MS., PD 2, 14 (b-c).
10. Lincoln MS., PD 2, 14 (d).
11. Lincoln MS., PD 2, 2-3.
12. Lincoln MS., PD 1, 3.
13. Lincoln MS., PD 2, 6 (b).
14. Lincoln MS., PD 2, 8 (b).
15. William Smith served two terms as governor of Virginia: 1846-1849 and 1864-1865. Margaret Vowell Smith, *Virginia, 1492-1892: A Brief Review of the Discovery of the Continent of North America, with a History of the Executives of the Colony and of the Commonwealth of Virginia* (Washington: W.H. Lowdermilk & Co., 1893), 360-62, 379-80.
16. Lincoln MS., PD 2, 14 (b).
17. Lincoln MS., PD 1, 8.
18. Ambler, *Francis H. Pierpont*, 358.