The Archival Record That Nearly Wasn’t

NYCHS presentation at Researching NY 2002
Friday, Nov. 22, 2002 University at Albany,
Campus Center, Session IV In the Archives (1:15 - 3 pm)

What this presentation calls The Archival Record That Nearly Wasn’t is a book, The Obsequies of Abraham Lincoln in the City of New York, published by the Common Council in 1866.

The 7.5” x 11” book has 254 pages with 7 detailed illustrations of Lincoln’s funeral rites April 24 - 25, 1865 and contains proclamations, notices, eulogies, resolutions, mourners lists, lines of march, and other details.

An intriguing footnote about this historical resource was found during research on a mayor with a correction connection who had coped with terrorists trying to incinerate Lower Manhattan, an attack that a mastermind financed and directed from a foreign base. During Mayor C. Godfrey Gunther’s term 137 years before the 9/11 attack, a Confederate team of American-born and bred terrorists – reputedly directed by Jacob Thompson — firebombed Lower Manhattan hotels, museums, and theatres filled with civilian men, women and children.

Less than a month after the one firebomber captured was hanged for it at a prison fort in NY Harbor, Abraham Lincoln was assassinated and the city conducted massive funeral rites for him. A little more than a month later, Mayor Gunther (whose duties had required him to preside at those rites) vetoed a Council plan to publish in book form the funeral arrangements committee’s full report on those observances. The presentation takes up the question of “why the veto?” (continued Page 2)
Why did NYC’s 77th mayor veto the Lincoln rites book?

(Continued from Page 1) The veto message -- citing cost and unnecessary content -- falls short of providing a full answer; thus the need to look at the forces in play then. They give a basis and context for solid surmises about the real reasons behind the book plan and the veto.

The story involves matters of governance between city and state as well as within the city, politics and Tammany Hall, key players’ biographical backgrounds, the Civil War, certain historical ironies and -- quite relevant to our own era -- terrorism.

A factor in the mix was Gunther’s own role as an anti-abolitionist Peace Democrat who had written Lincoln a personal letter asking him to expedite a cotton-for-blankets plan to save Confederates from freezing to death in the Elmira POW camp. Another factor was Gunther’s own background as a volunteer fireman and leader among fire “vols.” His beloved fire volunteers had performed well during the draft/race riot of 1863 and the terrorist firebombings of 1864. NYC volunteer fire companies organized the first volunteer Union regiment under Col. Elmer Ellsworth, the first Union officer killed in the war.

But Albany lawmakers in the President’s party saw the municipal fire companies as political clubs allied with the Democrats. Just two weeks before the assassination, the state legislature mandated the volunteer system be replaced by a paid department.

Mayoral politics figured in the Lincoln rites book plan and the veto. Boss Tweed and his War Democrat buddies on the rites arrangement committee wanted to promote themselves. Gunther’s veto delayed publication until after the election.

Who was the rites book hero and who the villain?

Gunther who vetoed the book or Tweed who helped override it?

Reputed top terrorist Jacob Thompson: a 6-term Congressman and U.S. Secretary of the Interior under Buchanan.
To His Excellency, Abraham Lincoln, President of the U.S.

About Elmira POWs

Mayor's Office
New York, ______, 186__

Unofficial and private

His Excellency, Abraham Lincoln, President of the U.S.

: 

It is stated in the newspapers that the United States has entered with favor the application of EX to leave for provide with the prisoners of war to Elmsira and elsewhere. It is further stated that in order to accelerate action so as to give relief to perishing thousands the severity of our climate has destroyed them, permission was solicited for the transport of a cargo of cotton to these prisoners to be converted to the use of blankets the prisoners of war confined to Elmira and elsewhere.

A number of citizens, impelled by motives of humanity, have pressed me to take such action. These citizens have pressed me to an early reply.

A number of citizens, impelled by motives of humanity, have pressed me to an early reply.

To the Honorable Common Council:

Mayor's Office
New York, April 15, 1865

To the Honorable Common Council:

With irrepressible horror I announce to you this event, coupled as it is with violence. Just at the moment when peace began its dawn over our afflicted land, this dreadful blow fell on him on whom whose destinies seemed to depend.

Your Honorable Body, I am sure, will take appropriate action, in view of this awful dispensation, to signify those sentiments of public respect and grief, due alike to the exalted station and fearful death of the Chief Magistrate of the United States, which now pervade our whole people, and have plunged them into universal distress and misery.

C. Godfrey Gunther, Mayor

New York Correction History Society newsletter The Key Autumn, 2002 Page 3
Mayor Gunther’s ‘Obsequies’ Veto Message

I approve your desire that those imposing ceremonies, with their lesson, shall not share the fate of pageants faded, but leave a permanent memorial.

In the mode proposed for the preparation, it is evident to any mind that an immense mass of rubbish will be included with what is really important and thus the object of the Common Council will be defeated, notwithstanding the lavish expenditure required to print 25,000 copies of this voluminous report.

I would suggest that the gentleman who delivered the eulogy on the deceased President be requested to prepare an historical memoir of them. Let the work be printed by contract, in accordance with the provisions of the charter, and the Common Council take 5,000 copies at the stipulated price for distribution, giving the privilege to the publisher to sell the balance, and pay the author his copy money.

In this manner there will be, not a “public document,” but a living book; not piles of printed lumber, never read, seldom consulted, and destined eventually for the paper-mill, but a volume that will hold its place in history.

C. Godfrey Gunther, Mayor

October 19, 1865

Whereas, the late imposing ceremonies incident to the sudden death of our much beloved and martyred President . . . Abraham Lincoln, deserves conspicuous mention in the annals of fame, and should be duly chronicled and preserved in tangible form for future reference and for the information of after generations . . .

Resolved, That 25,000 copies of the full and detailed report of the Committee, having in charge the obsequies of our late lamented President . . . with full descriptions . . . be printed and bound in neat and appropriate form, for the use of City Government, and for placing in the public libraries.

Adopted by the Board of Aldermen, May 15, 1865.

Adopted by the Board of Councilmen, May 22, 1865.

Board of Aldermen, June 3, 1865, received from his Honor the Mayor, with his objections thereto.

Board of Aldermen, June 29, 1865, taken up and adopted, notwithstanding the objections of his Honor the Mayor, two-thirds of all the members elected having voted therefor.

Board of Councilmen, October 19, 1865, taken up and with the above action of the Board of Aldermen concurred in, two-thirds of all the members elected having voted therefor; therefore under the provisions of the Amended Charter, the same became adopted.

www.correctionhistory.org
C. Municipal Archives and Reference Library, 31 Chambers St., NY, NY

Queens Borough Public Library, Microfilm Section, NY Times, June 1865 reel.

y of New York, Annual Reports of the Board of Governors of the Alms House, 1855-57.


ward Robb Ellis, The Epic of New York City, Danasha America, 1997.


stitutions, Asylums

l://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~bklyn/Dir.club.html#1859
r://rampages.onramp.net/~ekelton/OP.html
://nycdoit.ci.nyc.ny.us/om/omb/html/ory.html
://festypl.nyp.org/recordsh23575613
://www.archaeology.org/gazine.php?page=online/features/cityhall/almshouse

levue history from almshouse days
://jama.ama-assn.org/issues/v283n8/ffull/9223-2.html

les Byte Timelines
://www.home.eznet.net/~dminor/NY1861.html
://www.home.eznet.net/~dminor/NY1865.html

ground RR
://www.archaeology.org/gazine.php?page=online/features/cityhall/almshouse

Blackwell’s Island Penitentiary was an Alms House Department facility.

Charles Godfrey Gunther (1822-1885)
://www.picturehistory.com/find/p5723/mcns.html
://politicalgraveyard.com/bio/gundry-guthery.html

://moa.citr.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/ndpcoop/moa.html?title=oldg_vols.html
://http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/m/moajnl/moajnl-idx?notisid=AAG2687-OLDGUARD-97

://http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/m/moajnl/moajnl-idx?notisid=AAG2687-OLDGUARD-97

Street Cleaning in 19th Century NY
://www.columbia.edu/~ma820/privatization.nlf.html

Gunther and his railroad
://www.rapidtransit.com/net/thirdrail/9909/westend1.htm
://www.forgotten-ny.com/Alleys/utrecht/utrecht.html
://http://naid.sppsr.ucla.edu/coneyisland/articles/transportation.htm

Abraham Jacobi by German Info Center,
://www.virtualny.cuny.edu/archives/1864mar2.htm

Lenox Hill Hospital history
://www.lenoxhillhospital.org/about/history.html

New York Times Nov. 27, 1864 VOL. XIV.No. 4111 The Plot
://http://www.virtualny.cuny.edu/archives/1864past2.htm

Attacks on NY
://americanhistory.about.com/library/prm/blattackonnewyork1.htm
://http://chnm.gmu.edu/courses/magic/plot/57.html

(Continued on Page 6)
Lincoln’s funeral train departs from New York City about 4 p.m. April 25, 1865.

PoliticsAndPoliticians/lincolnsfuneral.html

The Place of Abraham Lincoln in History by George Bancroft [The Atlantic, 1865]
http://www.cooperativeindividualism.org/bancroft_george_on_abraham_lincoln.html

The Obsequies of Abraham Lincoln in the City of NY (described on rare book site)
http://www.joslinhall.com/gravef.htm

Buffalo staged two funerals for Abraham Lincoln by Ben Maryniak
http://bfn.org/preservationworks/hist/essays/linc/linc.html

Abraham Lincoln in Buffalo -- A Solemn Day
http://intotem.buffnet.net/bhw/linc/lincoln51.html

Lincoln's Funeral 1,700 miles of mourners
http://civilwar.bluegrass.net/

Official City of Elmira Site
http://www.ci.elmira.ny.us/history/john_jones.html

Rioters Burning and Sacking the Colored Orphan Asylum
http://blackhistory.harpweek.com/7Illustrations/CivilWar/ColoredOrphanAsylum.htm

Volunteer firemen fought draft rioters’ and Confederate terrorists’ blazes.

1865 -- the volunteers' last hurrah
http://www.pbs.org/wnet/heroes/history2.html

History of the New York Fire Departments, by Augustine E. Costello, March, 1887
Transcribed by Holice Young, Debbie Axtman
http://www.usgennet.org/usa/ny/state/fire/1-10/intro.html

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