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NEWS FROM THE NEW HAMPSHIRE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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PHOTOGRAPHS AVAILABLE

CONTACT: Wesley Balla, Director of Collections and Exhibitions (603-856-0605; wballa@nhhistory.org), and Elizabeth Dubrulle, Director of Education and Public Programs (603-856-0604; edubrulle@nhhistory.org)

Historic Lincoln Banner on View for a Limited Time

CONCORD, NH—For a short time only, the New Hampshire Historical Society is displaying a historic banner made to promote Abraham Lincoln’s presidential bid in 1860. The banner was created by New Hampshire artist Edward L. Custer (1837–81) and was most likely carried in processions and parades. It symbolized the hopes of a growing number of New Hampshire voters in 1860, who increasingly saw Lincoln as the only honorable choice for president as the United States unraveled over the slavery issue.

Lincoln had developed a strong connection to New Hampshire, which was the centerpiece of a twelve-day speaking tour of the Northeast he conducted in February and March 1860. He and other Republican leaders in the state such as Amos Tuck wanted to test the waters for a possible presidential run that fall, and Lincoln saw the speaking tour as a way to introduce himself to New Englanders. Speeches delivered in Concord, Manchester, Dover, and Exeter in early March became the highlight of the tour, as large, enthusiastic crowds turned out to hear Honest Abe. The response of New Hampshire voters helped convince Lincoln to launch a serious bid for the presidency and confirmed to Republican leaders like Tuck and Senator John P. Hale that Lincoln was their candidate.

Custer, working as an ornamental painter at the time, most likely created the Lincoln banner during the fall of 1860, and it is rich in political symbolism. For example, Lincoln appears in military uniform astride a horse, which were unconventional depictions for the lawyer from Illinois. Custer's intent was to situate Lincoln within the country's political heritage, showing him as a natural successor to military leaders like George Washington and Andrew Jackson.

The Lincoln banner probably came to the New Hampshire Historical Society in the late 19th century showing years of wear. The Society recently contracted with the prestigious Williamstown Art Conservation Center to bring it back to its former glory, efforts that included reconstructing sections of the banner that had worn away, such as part of Lincoln's face. Through a painstaking, months-long process, conservators cleaned the delicate surface of dirt, water stains, and damage from moisture, restored the disintegrating fringe border, and reapplied paint to crumbling surfaces. The result brings back the color and vibrancy the banner had when it was first created. To limit damage from exposure to light, the banner may only be displayed for brief periods, which is why the Society is exhibiting it for such a short period of time.

The banner will be on display to the public at the Society's 30 Park St. headquarters in Concord, New Hampshire, from May 10 to June 11, 2016. The Society is open Tuesdays to Saturdays, 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission includes the Lincoln banner and two current exhibitions, *Discovering New Hampshire* and *Remembrance and Reality: Landscape Paintings of New Hampshire*. Cost is \$7 per person. Active duty military personnel, full-time students, and children under the age of 18 are admitted for free. Members of the New Hampshire Historical Society are admitted at no charge. Members who attend the Society's annual meeting on Saturday, May 7, will receive an advanced viewing of the banner.

Founded in 1823 the New Hampshire Historical Society is an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to saving, preserving, and sharing New Hampshire history. The Society serves thousands of children and adults each year through its exhibitions, research library, educational programs, and award-winning publications. The Society is not a state-funded agency. All of its programs and services are made possible by membership dues and contributions. For more information about the Society and the benefits of membership, visit www.nhhistory.org or call 603-228-6688.

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