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Lincoliana Collection Discovered

Papers, Photos Were in Effects Of Obscure Clerk

By Phil Casey
Staff Reporter

An obscure Washington bookkeeper and clerk was revealed yesterday to have left an estate containing "the largest Lincoln find in recent years."

Illinois State Historian Clyde Walton said the collection of 29 letters, notes and other papers written by Lincoln were donated to the State Historical Society by a well-known collector of Americana, Phillip D. Sang, vice president of the Goldenrod Ice Cream Co., Chicago.

The collection, along with numerous documents and photographs from other famous 19th-century Americans, was discovered in the belongings of Oscar Kershner, who died last March in Greenville, Ill., at the age of 70.

Kershner, who had returned to Illinois upon his retirement from Federal service several years ago, had worked in Washington more than 30 years, Walton said.

Sang refused to say how he came by the documents, explaining that collectors don't talk about such things. Neither he nor Walton, nor employees of the Thomas Hotel in Greenville, where Kershner lived, knew anything about the retired bookkeeper.

"It's just my guess," said Walton, reached yesterday at his Springfield home, "but I'd say the man had a passion for obscurity. He was apparently obscure, with no important job, yet he left a substantial estate. He had invested well in American Telephone and Telegraph and General Motors, and he had a good Lincoln collection.

"Yet he wasn't known as a collector. He didn't attend Lincoln meetings, didn't correspond with other collectors. It's my guess he collected for a time, probably in the depression days, and then stopped."

Most of the Lincoln papers Kershner collected are such documents as pardons, endorsements and commissions. One is an appeal for a "deserted friend," addressed to Postmaster General Montgomery Blair on July 29, 1863. It read:

"I am told our unfortunate friend, Henry Charles De Ahna, with his family, is destitute and that he now wants a clerkship. Suppose we try to get one for him."

Kershner also left about 1500 photos, including autographed pictures of all members of Lincoln's cabinet and a series of seven photos of Mrs. Lincoln, numbered and signed by famed Civil War photographer Mathew B. Brady.

