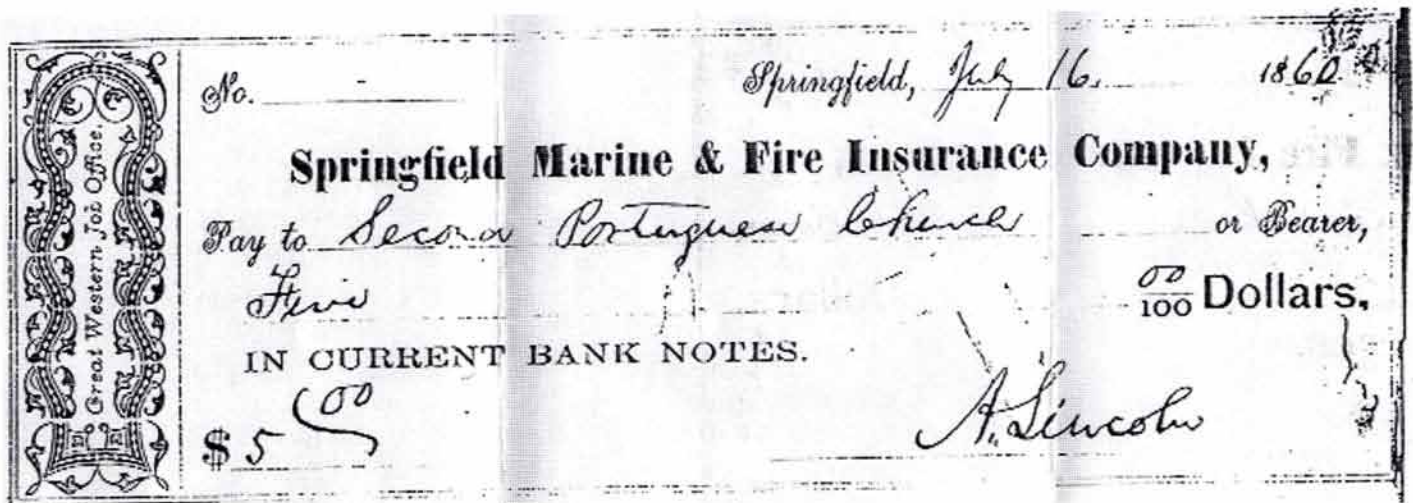


# Abraham Lincoln and the Second Portuguese Church

By Sanford J. Mock



PICTURED HERE is a check for \$5 payable to the Second Portuguese Church, written and signed by Abraham Lincoln on July 16, 1860. The Second Portuguese Church? Abraham Lincoln? What could have been the connection?

The saga unfolds in Madeira, the Portuguese islands off the coast of Africa, in 1838. Doctor Robert Reid Kalley, a wealthy physician and minister of the Free Church of Scotland, en route to missionary work in China, stopped at Funchal, Madeira, when his wife became ill.

As she convalesced, the couple decided that this lovely island would be a fine place to dispense free medical care, plus the Scotch Presbyterian interpretation of the scriptures. As a

man of means, Dr. Kalley was able not only to maintain his free dispensary and hospital, but to establish schools and hire teachers so the natives could learn English (and he, Portuguese).

The predominant religious authority in the Portuguese islands was the Roman Catholic Church. For a couple of years, Kalley avoided their displeasure. But when his church began attracting to open-air Sunday Calvinist services some 1,000 to 3,000 people, the Catholic powers, represented by the Bishop of Madeira, intervened.

Arrests and ex-communications began. Kalley protested to the archbishop in Lisbon, and orders were sent from there to halt the persecution. That did not deter the local clergy and courts. They persisted with arrests and imprisonment. Kalley himself spent five months in jail in 1845.

That prompted his return to Scotland, but other missionaries arrived.

The religious conflict intensified, culminating in riots in 1846. With this unrest came a worsening economy. The combination drove 1,000 Portuguese to leave Madeira on English ships. They stopped in Trinidad, where they worked on sugar and cocoa plantations. The women became housemaids and seamstresses. But as a group they were not happy with the climate and overall environment.

To the rescue came an organized Christian coalition. The American Protestant Society took an interest and made plans to bring the displaced people to America. The American Hemp Company agreed to settle 131 families between Jacksonville and Springfield, Illinois, each family with 10 acres of land. The Missionary Society raised the money and transported the immigrants from Trinidad to New York and then Illinois.

At the critical moment, when it

*Check for \$5 payable to the Second Portuguese Church, signed by Abraham Lincoln.*



President Abraham Lincoln.

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Portuguese girl, came to the house sometime between Lincoln's defeat for the U.S. Senate in 1858 and his presidential nomination. She is reported to have declared simply, "I wash clothes, Mrs. Lincum."

The girl's conscientious work and good nature made a favorable impression on Mary Lincoln, who was known to be hard on household help. Frances, as laundress, was junior in the household to Mariah Vance, a pipe-smoking black woman, 10 years older than Lincoln, who served the family from 1850, first as laundress, maid, then general housekeeper. Mariah did not live with the Lincolns—she had 12 children and a husband in the town. Her son Billie became a close friend of Robert Todd, who taught him to read and write.

It is from Mariah that we learn most about the private lives of the Lincolns, for her remembrances were written in *Black English* by Adah Sutton. About Abe, Mariah said, "Dat man was a man of Gawd and he was crucified every day of his life." And about Mary, "Honey chile, ef ah wah good 'nough fah dah Missy Lincolumn, ah shuh and be good 'nough fah mose anyone. Dat woman wah shuh 'ticklah."

May of 1860 was a time of great excitement for the Lincoln household. The Republican nominating convention began in Chicago on May 16. One hundred and fifty railroad trains a day brought 40,000 curious strangers and 500 delegates to the city. The old Sauganash Hotel at the corner of Lake and Market streets had been torn down and replaced with a barn-like wooden structure called The Wigwam.

Ten thousand people crowded into a vast interior, festooned with flags and streamers of red, white, and blue. Norman Judd, a railroad lawyer, stood before the huge assemblage and delivered one brief line. "I desire, on behalf of the delegation from Illinois, to put in nomination, as a candidate

for president of the United States, Abraham Lincoln of Illinois."

"Five thousand people leaped from their seats, women not wanting," a Lincoln supporter reported, "and the wild yell made vesper breathings of all that had preceded. A thousand steam whistles, 10 acres of hotel gongs, a tribe of Comanches might have mingled in the scene unnoticed."

"Old Abe," "Honest Abe," "The Backwoodsman," "The Rail Splitter" defeated the favored William Seward for the nomination. (Horace Greeley had wired his *New York Tribune* that Seward seemed sure to win).

Two months after the nomination, Lincoln made his \$5 contribution to the Second Portuguese Church...at the request of Frances Affonsa? Mary? A congregant who dutifully came to the door seeking donations? Or was it just Old Abe's kindly charitable inspiration?

On November 6, Lincoln won the presidency, polling 1.8 million votes to 1.3 for Democrat Stephen Douglas. Amidst the jubilation, back in Springfield, the president-elect received a stately black silk hat as a gift. He said simply to Mary, "Well, wife, if nothing else comes of this scrape, we're going to have some new clothes."

*Sanford J. Mock is a retired stock broker and document collector.*

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was time to settle the families on the farms, American Hemp was unable or unwilling to proceed. Now another rescue effort was organized. All the Protestant churches in Jacksonville and Springfield joined forces. With great generosity, they provided the essentials to launch the newcomers. The grateful Portuguese became model residents, integrating with the business and professional life of the community.

By 1855, there were 350 Portuguese in Springfield, and for several years they continued to arrive from Trinidad and Madeira. In the first generation, socially, they maintained their ethnic culture. They formed three Portuguese Presbyterian churches in Jacksonville and two in Springfield. Some 17 Madeirans later saw service for the North in the Vicksburg campaign and the siege of Atlanta.

Lincoln's awareness of the Second Portuguese Church could have originated from Portuguese clients of the law firm of Lincoln and Herndon, but his more personal interest probably stemmed from the family's employment of young Frances Affonsa. Frances, a dark-skinned, black-eyed