

McMurtry History at LMU

1937-1956

Dr. R. Gerald McMurtry was director of *Lincolniana* at Lincoln Memorial University, director emeritus of the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum and a renowned Lincoln scholar. Dr. McMurtry also served as the editor of the *Lincoln Herald* for 19 years, taking the publication to the forefront of scholarly quarterlies devoted to Abraham Lincoln.

He is also remembered by the thousands of students who came to the Lincoln Room on the campus of Lincoln Memorial University and found a man of great kindness and scholarship, who was able to guide them in their search for the story of Abraham Lincoln.

For 17 years, Dr. McMurtry was the Department of *Lincolniana*. Many students attended his classes, heard his lectures or simply went to the Lincoln Room in Duke Hall to seek out the man who knew so much about Abraham Lincoln. Under his guidance, the collection grew at an impressive rate, increasing not only in quantity but in quality, all due to the aid and interest of many people. “We had administration approval,” Dr. McMurtry recalled, “both from the college officials and the Board of Trustees, and we had a host of enthusiastic donors.” The enthusiasm was generated in large part by Dr. McMurtry, the keeper of the Lincoln Room, who made every effort to collect more and better pieces of *Lincolniana* and represented LMU at countless celebrations, meetings and conferences. Other nationally-known Lincoln scholars and historians could be counted as his friends, and many traveled to Lincoln Memorial University to make use of the superb collection of *Lincolniana* that he was helping to build. It seemed a prerequisite for those with an interest in Abraham Lincoln to come to the school in the shadow of Cumberland Gap and talk with the soft-spoken man in the Lincoln Room.

Dr. McMurtry served to strengthen the collection’s scope and direction. Thanks in part to his work, the Abraham Lincoln Library and Museum has a wonderful collection of pamphlets and addresses of the period; seven score Lincoln letters and documents; countless rare books dealing with the 16th President; the John Worden and Cassius Clay Papers; one of the finest collections of 19th century sheet music in the country; dozens of fine paintings; pieces of sculpture; and hundreds of broadsides and newspapers of the period. Working first with LMU President Stewart McClelland and then with President Robert Kincaid, Dr. McMurtry continued a process of building and improvement of a collection that remains to this day as one of the most complete resources of *Lincolniana* in the world. He did this because it was his nature. It was his nature to contribute, aid, understand, educate and share with everyone the story of a remarkable man: Abraham Lincoln.

It was his selfless actions and acts and his quiet competence in his pursuit of Lincoln that marked him as a man of quality and stature and a Lincoln scholar of the first rank.

Dr. McMurtry was so much a part of LMU that it is impossible to think of the Lincoln Room without thinking of R. Gerald McMurtry; it is impossible to think of the Lincoln collection without thinking of R. Gerald McMurtry; and it is impossible to look at any number of the thousands of artifacts on exhibit in The Abraham Lincoln Library and Museum without thinking of R. Gerald McMurtry. We must consider that Dr. McMurtry accomplished in his life what few men do. He did it well, and he did it in the company of friends. What many men yearn for, he accomplished and what he left behind was the legacy of a learned man and a true scholar.