

Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library  
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*Bibliography Series*

**Bixby Letter**  
[Revised 1/26/10]

The “Bixby Letter” is one of the most controversial documents in the Lincoln canon. It was written on November 21, 1864, at the request of Massachusetts Governor John A. Andrew. Its authorship, however, has been the subject of dispute. William Schouler, the adjutant general of Massachusetts, delivered the letter to Lydia Bixby, a widowed mother of five sons killed in the Civil War. A Boston newspaper, the *Transcript*, published the text of the letter on November 25, 1864. The letter has received renewed attention in recent years since it was featured prominently in the Steven Spielberg movie *Saving Private Ryan*.

The original letter has apparently been lost or destroyed. “Reproductions”—apparently created by connecting tracings of Lincoln’s handwriting from other documents—have been commercially printed and widely sold and distributed since at least 1891.

A transcription of the letter as found in the Boston newspaper is in Roy P. Baslar, ed, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Vol. 8, pp. 116-17. On the internet, the same transcription can be found in the Abraham Lincoln Association’s *Collected Works Online* at:

[www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=lincoln;cc=lincoln;type=simple;rgn=div1;q1=Bixby;singlegenre=All;view=text;sbview=detail;sort=occur;idno=lincoln8;node=lincoln8%3A255](http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=lincoln;cc=lincoln;type=simple;rgn=div1;q1=Bixby;singlegenre=All;view=text;sbview=detail;sort=occur;idno=lincoln8;node=lincoln8%3A255) .

**For discussions of the Bixby letter see (listed in reverse chronological order by date of publication):**

Emerson, Jason. “America’s Most Famous Letter,” *American Heritage*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (February/March 2006). Also on the internet at [www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/ah/2006/1/2006\\_1\\_41.shtml](http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/ah/2006/1/2006_1_41.shtml)

Burlingame, Michael. “New Light on the Bixby Letter,” *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 16 (Winter 1995): 59-72. Also on the internet at [www.historycooperative.org/journals/jala/16.1/burlingame.html](http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jala/16.1/burlingame.html)

Wakefield, Sherman D. *Abraham Lincoln and the Bixby Letter* (New York: n.p., 1948).  
**L2 W147ab**

\_\_\_\_\_. *Abraham Lincoln and the Widow Bixby* (New York: n.p., 1947).  
**L2 W147a**

Bullard, F. Lauriston. *Abraham Lincoln and the Widow Bixby* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1946).

**L2 B935ab**

\_\_\_\_\_. "Again, the Bixby Letter," *Lincoln Herald*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (Summer 1951): 26-7, 37.

**L2 L7387L**

[www.lincolnerald.com/1950articlesBIXBY.htm](http://www.lincolnerald.com/1950articlesBIXBY.htm)

**Vertical File—"Facsimilies—Bixby Letter"**

[File contains numerous examples of "reproductions"]

**Other internet references:**

**Papers of Abraham Lincoln:**

[www.papersofabrahamlincoln.org/Bixby%20Letter.htm](http://www.papersofabrahamlincoln.org/Bixby%20Letter.htm)

**Abraham Lincoln Online:**

<http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/speeches/bixby.htm>

**Lincoln Home National Historic Site:**

[www.nps.gov/archive/liho/souvenir.htm](http://www.nps.gov/archive/liho/souvenir.htm)