

**Brothers** – With permission of its author, Brother Reese, and of the Commander of the Department of Rhode Island, Jamie McGuire, I am distributing the message below as the February Patriotic Instruction for the entire Order. As I continue to familiarize myself with the duties of the National Patriotic Instructor following my appointment in August of last year, I am recruiting help from others, such as this input. Our Commander in Chief has authorized me to seek volunteers whom he will appoint to assist me upon my recommendation. To my great pleasure, brothers are stepping forward to take on assigned duties such as the production and dissemination of the patriotic instructions, administration of Memorial University, and maintenance of the email listing for distribution of materials. Please contact me at [patrioticinstructor@suvchw.org](mailto:patrioticinstructor@suvchw.org) if you want to lend a hand and we can discuss specifics.

A brief comment on what I have been able to discover about the commemoration of Lincoln's birthday under a name unique to the GAR and SUVCW, Union Defenders' Day. This was apparently established in 1889 since there was not any celebration as national recognition of the event. On line I found the following reference in the archives of the GAR:

*"The report of the Commander-in-Chief, George B. Abbott, 8th National Encampment, Patterson, NJ, Sept. 10 -13, 1889: In General Order No. 17, the request was made that the Camps throughout the Order generally hold appropriate services for the celebration of the birth of Abraham Lincoln, on 12th day of February...[and] that it may hereafter be known as "Sons of Veterans' Day."*

The name was changed, however, after the encampment: *Your Committee on Officers' Reports would respectfully submit the following: 1. That they approve the recommendation of the Commander-in-Chief in reference to a proper observance of the birthday of Abraham Lincoln, but would recommend that instead of denominating it is "Sons of Veterans' Day", that the same shall be known as "Union Defenders' Day", and that the Commander-in-Chief issue proper orders providing for its observance by the Order.* Over time, it seems the possessive apostrophe has migrated to the other side of the "s" without changing the significance of the title.

Finally, I call your attention to the closing section of Lincoln's first Inaugural Address where he admonishes all Americans in powerful and moving imagery: *"We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle-field, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."*

The initiative shown by the Department of Rhode Island in sending out this Patriotic Instruction and in organizing a "Lincoln Dinner" is an example of appropriate action that we would all do well to emulate.

In Fraternity, Charity, and Loyalty,  
William L. McKone, National Patriotic Instructor

**UNION DEFENDER'S DAY**  
FEBRUARY 12, 2019

Greetings to all Brothers of the Department of Rhode Island Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War.

Brothers, in obedience to the National Regulations, Chapter II, Article VIII, Section 1(b) as the Department Patriotic Instructor, I hereby prepare this letter of instruction for the observance of Union Defender's Day, 2019. The Department will commemorate a "Lincoln Dinner" at the residence of Brother Doug Dwyer, February 10, 2019. Camps may choose to observe the occasion as they deem proper independent of the Department event. We should all take care to remember the day of the Great Emancipator's birth, to reflect on his leadership, his legacy, and his lasting contributions to the Nation; and to honor all the Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines who presided with him to preserve, protect, and defend our Constitution and Sovereignty.

Oddly, there has never been a federally recognized holiday for the 16th president. As wikipedia points out, "the day is marked by traditional wreath-laying ceremonies at [Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site](#) in [Hodgenville, Kentucky](#), and at the [Lincoln Memorial](#) in [Washington, D.C.](#) The latter has been the site of a ceremony ever since the Memorial was dedicated." On the use of Union Defender's Day, there are scant references to be found from the current lexicon of digital resources in trying to place the genesis of this event. But as to the mind of Lincoln let us consider the following words of revelation during the president's first Inaugural Address. On March 4, 1861, Lincoln addressed an imploding societal milieu when he made one of the more prescient statements that would define his role as president when he declared

"I therefore consider that in view of the Constitution and the *laws*, the Union is unbroken; and to the extent of my ability I shall take care, as the Constitution itself expressly enjoins upon me, that the laws of the Union be faithfully executed in all the States. Doing this I deem to be only a simple duty on my part; ***and I shall perform it***, so far as practicable, unless my rightful masters, the American people, shall withhold the requisite means, or in some authoritative manner, direct the contrary. I trust this will not be regarded as a menace, but only as the declared purpose of the Union that will constitutionally defend and maintain itself."

And near the end of his speech, he stated

"In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the government, ***while I shall have the most solemn one to 'preserve, protect, and defend it'.***"

As we know, a month later, Fort Sumter was bombarded at Charleston, and the Civil War was on. And after over four years of struggle, the Union was preserved, albeit ever changed from what it was before the conflict.

And so in closing, pausing to reflect on what it must have taken Lincoln to hold a country together in a time of extreme avarice and strife, let us remember the final words he mustered on the need for a restored Union at his Second Inaugural Address : "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan---to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations."

In Fraternity, Charity, and Loyalty  
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