

Abraham Lincoln: The East Tennessee Connection

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on September 29, 2014)

Jamie Cotton has spoken in Oak Ridge at least four times in the recent past. He spoke at the Oak Ridge Rotary Club, the Oak Ridge Breakfast Rotary Club, and the Oak Ridge Heritage & Preservation Association. And now Carolyn Krause writes about his recent talk at Roane State Community College in the new Goff Health Sciences & Technology building.

The following is taken from the History Publishing Company's web site:

<http://historypublishingco.com/authors/cotton/index.php>

"James (Jamie) L. Cotton, Jr. and his family reside in a small community in the Appalachian Mountains. Mr. Cotton is an honors graduate of Tennessee Technological University (Political Science, 1976) and the University of Memphis School of Law (J.D., 1980).

"During the past 23 years of his 33 year law career, he has presided as Judge over the General Sessions Court for Scott County, where he has jurisdiction over family law, civil litigation, criminal and juvenile cases; he also presides as drug court judge. He has served on the Adjunct Faculty of Roane State Community College for more than two decades. Judge Cotton is the author of a school program for prevention of child substance abuse, known as STAND (Schools Together Allowing No Drugs), which is being used as a model program across the country and was recognized in Washington, D.C. in 2008 for its excellence.

"He is also author of *How to Get Loose from a Snapping Turtle . . . Before It Thunders* (2002), a light compilation of homespun Appalachian 'remedies, cures and fixes.'

Here is Carolyn's comments about his most recent book, which was the subject of his most recent talk in Oak Ridge:

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Before Judge James L. Cotton Jr., of Scott County wrote his book, *The Greatest Speech, Ever: The Remarkable Story of Abraham Lincoln and His Gettysburg Address*, some 17,000 books had already been published about the 16th president of the United States. Lincoln ranks third, after Jesus Christ and William Shakespeare, as the subject of the most books.

Cotton has sold thousands of copies of his own book. He donates the profits to CASA (Court-Appointed Special Advocates for children, based in Oak Ridge) and the Scott Christian Care Center that the judge and his wife Lisa run in Scott County, which has the highest unemployment rate in Tennessee.

The judge was the first speaker in the new Roane State Community College–Oak Ridge Institute for Continued Learning Intergenerational Lecture Series. The 128-seat large lecture room in the new Goff Health Sciences & Technology building was filled to capacity earlier this month for Cotton's talk.

Judge Cotton described Lincoln as "mysterious, incomprehensible, brilliant, flawed, complex, and ambitious." He noted that Lincoln had sharp doubts about himself, longed for relationships with women, held deep beliefs but was always searching, told many stories and jokes, had dark bouts of depression yet kept a clear head in the nation's worst crisis.

"He is the first president of the United States who brought to that office the overarching qualities of kindness, decency and honesty," the judge said. "He was the most accessible and the hardest-working president in U.S. history. He was the only president in American history whose entire presidency was mired in war."

Lincoln engaged in more political patronage than any other president since Andrew Jackson. Cotton told the story about a member of Lincoln's staff who died. An acquaintance said, "Please, Mr. President, may I have his job?" The dead man had yet to be buried. The persistent man

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returned the next day, asking, "Can't I take his place?" Lincoln replied, "Well, if it's all right with the undertaker, it's all right with me."

Asked what Lincoln would do if he were the president today, Cotton said, "He probably would seek compromise over conflict to produce legislation that's good for everybody. Lincoln's greatest skill was building bridges with political rivals. In his own cabinet he had political enemies. He had the ability to absorb criticism and reach across the table and build a consensus. If you can handle the Civil War, you can handle today's crises."

Although Lincoln and many others considered his Emancipation Proclamation his best speech, Cotton argues in his book that Lincoln's Gettysburg Address was the best. "His DNA is in every word of the address," he said. The judge called Lincoln's writing "clear, cogent and direct. He knew his audience. He spoke the language of the people. He sharpened his writing on the whetstone of revision."

The judge read every book that Lincoln read and many books about Lincoln, including the multi-volume biography that Lincoln's aides John Hay and John Nicolay wrote after the president was assassinated in 1865.

Lincoln dealt with considerable tragedy in his life. His mother Nancy Hanks, who taught him to be kind, died when he was nine. He had a strained relationship with his father Thomas Lincoln, who hired him out to work for other people and then collected the money Abe brought home. No wonder he was dedicated to ending slavery, as well as preserving the union!

Three of his four sons died while Lincoln was alive. The president did not have a good relationship with his oldest son Robert, who later had his mother Mary Todd Lincoln institutionalized and censured the Hay-Nicolay biography, denying the world valuable insights into the president.

Cotton noted that the last piece that the former Senator Howard H. Baker Jr. of Tennessee wrote before his death was the foreword in the judge's book. Baker wrote:

"President Lincoln carried a great concern and fondness for the people of East Tennessee. Likewise, we have always carried a great respect and affection for Mr. Lincoln. The distinguished university and repository of Lincolnia, Lincoln Memorial University in Harrogate, Tennessee, is a manifestation and living legacy of that mutual respect and admiration that East Tennesseans and President Lincoln held for each other."

In his talk Cotton said, "LMU exists in East Tennessee indirectly because of Lincoln's influence." He explained that Lincoln summoned Union General Oliver Otis Howard to the White House, pointed to a map, placed his finger on Cumberland Gap and said, "General, those people are loyal. Do something for them."

The Christian General, as Howard was called, later donated a building to East Tennessee that became LMU in 1897. "The general had a good sense of humor," Cotton noted. "He got his right arm blown off in the Civil War. Another general got his left arm blown off. Howard said to the other general, 'Now, we can go buy a pair of gloves together.'"

Out of every four East Tennesseans, three were loyal to the Union. Only half of the Knoxville population was loyal to the Confederacy. Subsistence farmers in the mountains of East Tennessee hated the Confederate soldiers who waged guerrilla warfare there.

"The Confederate soldiers slaughtered your cows for meat so you didn't have milk for your children," the judge said. "They took your guns away so you couldn't hunt animals for food. They took your seed corn. What you grew is what you lived on."

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While East Tennessee was poor, money flowed in the rest of the state, which supported the Confederacy when Lincoln was elected in 1860. Middle Tennessee was a good source of iron ore and West Tennessee, along with the Deep South, was an aristocracy consisting of plantation owners who depended on slaves to raise cotton.

Before the Civil War broke out in 1861, the judge said, "The South had the largest concentration of millionaires on the face of the earth. The South had seven-eighths of the world's cotton business."

The rich plantation owners had four million slaves who provided unpaid labor, as well as technology in the form of the cotton gin. This American invention quickly separated cotton fibers from their seeds, enabling greater productivity than manual separation. "What the microchip did for Silicon Valley, the cotton gin did for the South," Cotton said.

The differences in the economies of the North and South helped dictate the Civil War's outcome.

The North had most of the nation's banks, railroads, telegraphs and other parts of an industrial infrastructure. The paid labor in the North consisted of many immigrants who learned manufacturing skills. "The move of the North toward industrialization and the South's inability to recognize the limits of an agrarian society brought the war to an end," Cotton said.

To learn more about Lincoln, visit the Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historical Park in Hodgenville, Ky.; the Abraham Lincoln Museum at LMU in Harrogate and Lincoln's tomb at Oak Ridge Cemetery – in Springfield, Illinois.

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Thanks Carolyn for yet another exceptional effort that brings Abraham Lincoln to light regarding East Tennessee and gives us insight into Jamie Cotton's great book.

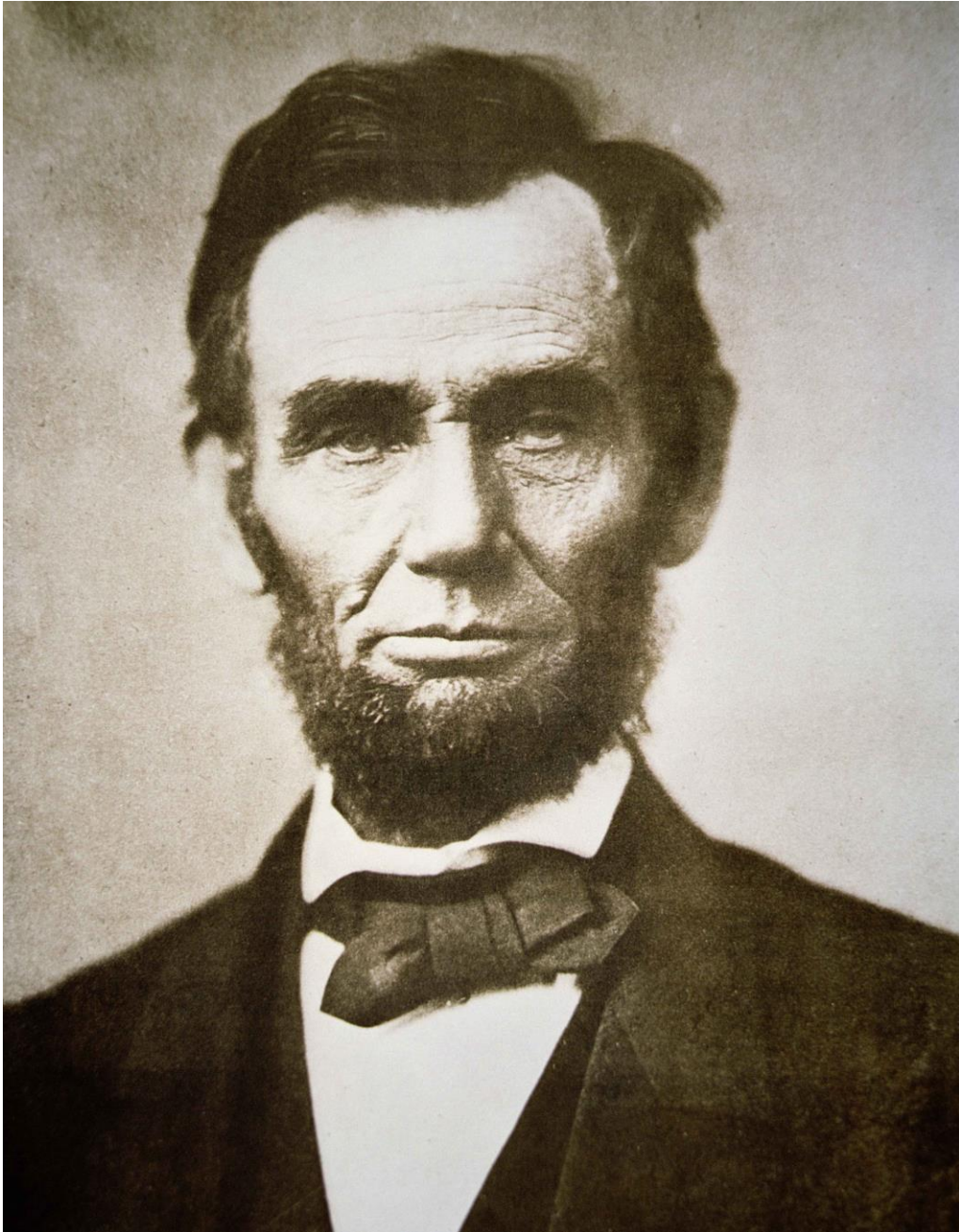
I am pleased to tell you that there is a relationship between Oak Ridge and LMU of which many of you may not be aware. Pete Debusk of DeRoyal Industries who is Chairman of the Board of Trustees for LMU contacted me in 2012 to help create a display honoring Oak Ridge's contribution to East Tennessee through the employment of thousands, including graduates of LMU.

This turned into an amazing interaction that I thoroughly enjoyed. Pete wanted to create a display of scientists who "changed the world" using photographs and a description of the nuclear timeline for Oak Ridge.

I was surprised when along with the framed portraits of the seven key scientists (provided by the Oak Ridge National Laboratory) who helped bring about the Nuclear Age and also the creation of the Oak Ridge National Laboratory that he also framed the "Nuclear Timeline for Oak Ridge" that I compiled at his request as part of the display. What a treat to be included in such an auspicious array!

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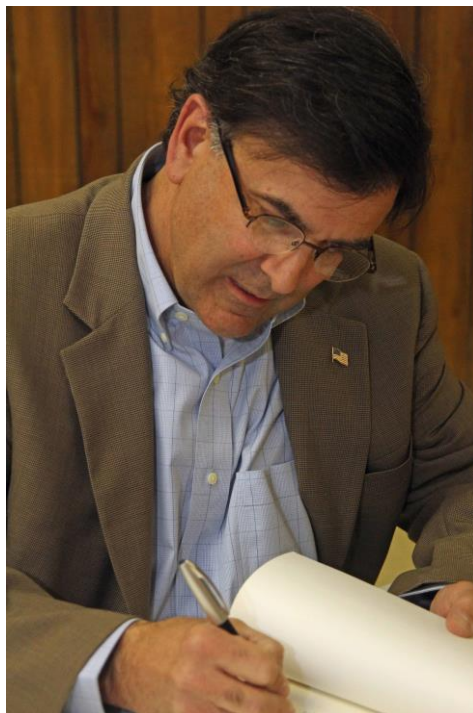
The photograph of Abraham Lincoln used in Jamie Cotton's book on the Gettysburg Address

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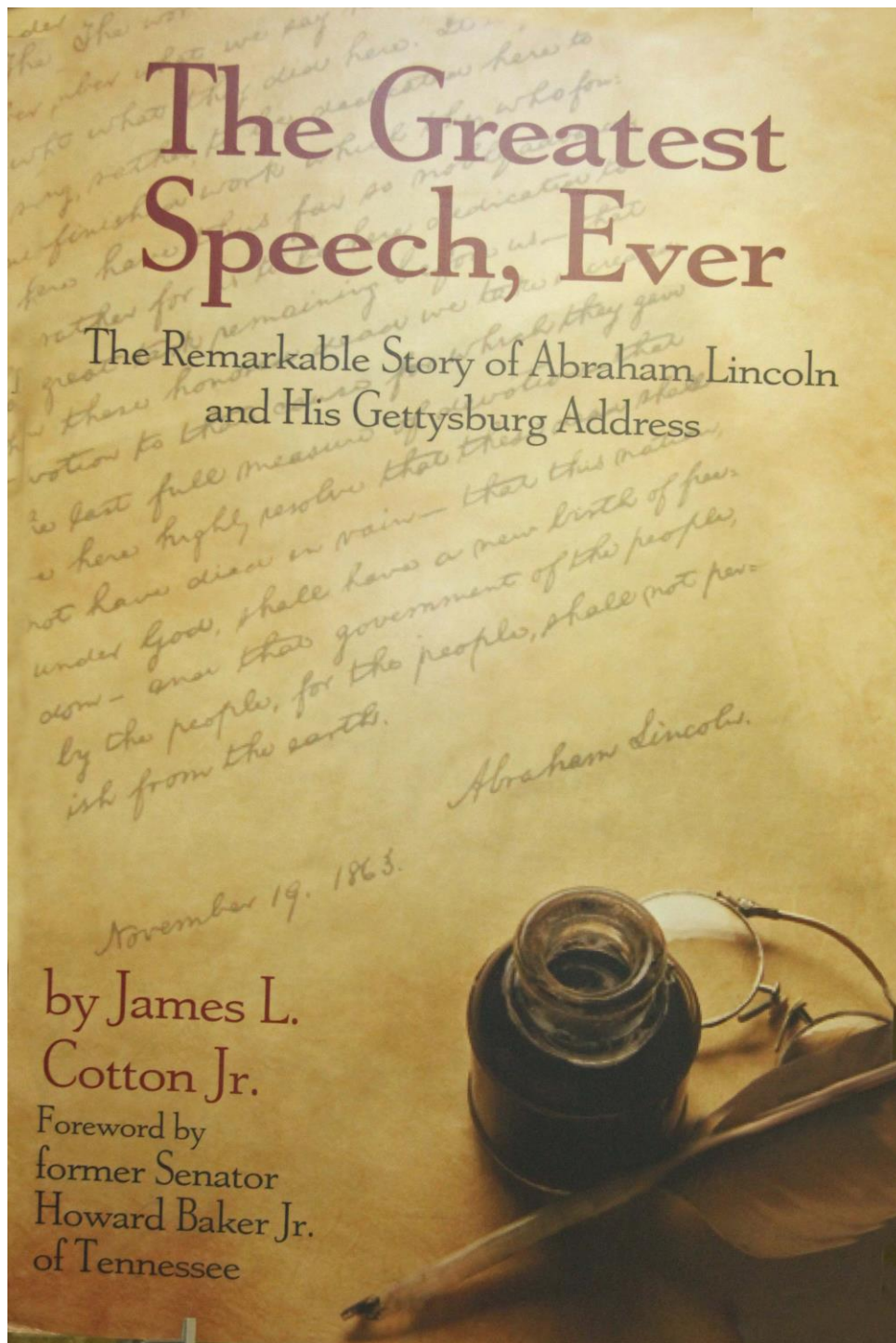
The Oak Ridge display in the Lincoln Memorial University's most recent new building celebrating the Oak Ridge contribution by providing thousands of jobs for East Tennesseans including LMU graduates



Judge "Jamie" Cotton signs his books at a recent talk he gave on his latest book, *The Greatest Speech Ever...*

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The Greatest Speech, Ever: The Remarkable Story of Abraham Lincoln and His Gettysburg Address, by Judge James "Jamie" Cotton