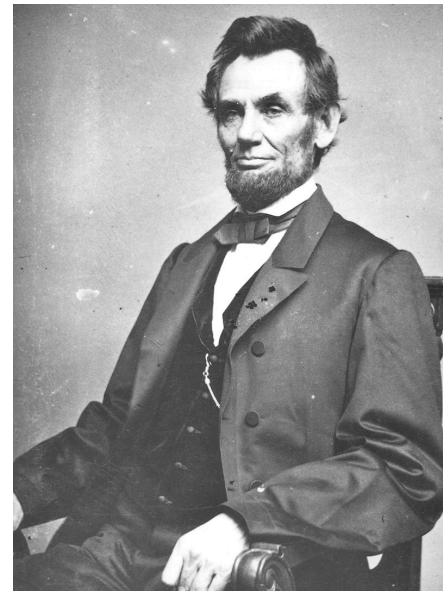


“PRES. LINCOLN’S ALARM CLOCK”



That intriguing pencilled inscription is on the back of a 7”x9” photographic print I recently purchased from Historic Images, an online seller of vintage press photos. It was offered among 902 images that appeared when I entered “clock” in the search box.

Also typed on the back of the undated print was “LINCOLN, ABRAHAM * PERSONAL” along with a sticker “acv 00329.” Neither the photographer nor the smiling young woman modeling the little clock was identified.

The online image was low-resolution, but my own scanner later allowed me to sharpen and enlarge the dial on which I could then see that LENZKIRCH was clearly marked. This quickly led me to a few online images of similar but relatively rare Lenzkirch models.

My next step was emailing my friend Dr. Johannes Graf, the longtime curator at the Deutsches Uhrenmuseum in Furtwangen. He kindly provided the following information:

The Aktiengesellschaft für Uhrenfabrikation in Lenzkirch (AGUL) did not start to build alarm clocks like shown on the photo earlier than 1886. Lincoln could not have owned one of that Lenzkirch alarm clocks with that typical octagonal shape. There is a nearly complete series of all Lenzkirch sales catalogues from the beginnings up to 1908 in the archives of Villingen-Schwenningen. That series belonged to Oskar Spiegelhalder who was the most famous collector of Black Forest clocks and who earned his money by working as head of the Lenzkirch sales department. Alarm clocks like that appeared as No. 78 in the “Nachtrag zur Preisliste vom April 1886” (Addendum to the price list [for 1885], published in April 1886) for the first time.... It is not clear when the brandmark [trademark] on the dial has been introduced. I can trace it back to 1879 when it has been shown on the front page of a price list. There have been at least two earlier brandmarks. I take it for true that that specific one on the dial has not been used when Lincoln was still alive.

Johannes also attached photos of the museum’s example. In the rear view of the movement, we can see the stamped serial number and the short pendulum of the tic-tac escapement.



So, unfortunately, we can be sure that President Lincoln did not awaken to the jangling of this little German clock. It was not manufactured until many years after his assassination, and he probably would not have seen or owned a clock made in the Black Forest. Connecticut clocks fitted with alarm movements were common and affordable, although the known large shelf clock from his Illinois law office did not have the optional wake-up feature.

How Abe Lincoln was awakened each morning remains a mystery, as does how that Lenzkirch alarm clock came to be associated with him. It joins countless other antique artifacts with claims to celebrity connections that are unwittingly or purposefully false.



Dr. Johannes Graf at the clock museum in Germany's Black Forest.