

The Rambler Answers Mail for Presidents Jefferson and Lincoln

Series: FHWA Highway History Website Articles

April 3, 2015



U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

This PDF was downloaded from FHWA's Highway History website:
<https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/history.cfm>.

The Rambler Answers Mail for Presidents Jefferson and Lincoln

[Editor's Note: We tried to talk the Rambler out of this column because it seems a little presumptuous on the part of the usually self-described low-key, so-called "Man of Mystery" to answer mail addressed to two of the Presidents on Mount Rushmore. But when he sees an unanswered letter, he gets twitchy. We also pointed out that it seems a little contrived. He replied, "Life is contrived. Deal with it." So against our better judgment, here's his column.]

Part One: The Art of Letter Writing

In a long career with the Federal Highway Administration, The Rambler answered thousands of letters from Members of Congress, State officials, the public, and others. Of course, he didn't sign the replies; they were signed by higher level officials. The always-low-level Rambler preferred to think of himself as "below the radar."

That is why when The Rambler heard that Mark Twain was once a government letter writer, he took notice. In 1868, Twain, still known mainly as Samuel L. Clemens, worked for Senator James W. Nye of Nevada, and one of his duties (Twain later claimed) was to prepare replies to citizen inquiries. In those days, Members of Congress often handled their own mail, sitting at their desk on the Senate floor writing the replies (they didn't have offices), but they sometimes called on assistants for help, as Senator Nye did with Twain.

As it turned out, the young Twain, hard at work on his first great book, *The Innocents Abroad or the New Pilgrims' Progress* (1869), may not have had a clear understanding of the art of government letter writing, which includes:

1. Thank the constituent for his or her interest whether you share it or not.
2. Never tell anyone they're wrong even if they are, as they usually are.
3. Provide enough details that the recipient no longer cares about the subject.
4. If an answer of "no" can't be avoided, reversed, or fudged, say so on page 3 without using such words as "no," "not in this lifetime," "not my first rodeo," or "wasn't born yesterday."
5. Remember, it isn't your letter to be crafted with your own brilliant artistic frills, but belongs to the person who is going to sign it. He or she will get full credit for your spelling ability – live with it!

As Twain put it in the short article "My Late Senatorial Secretaryship," his problems as a letter writer began when "my bread began to return from over the water . . . that is to say, my works

came back and revealed themselves.” The Senator referred to several of the letters in chastising his young secretary. One was from the community of Baldwin’s Ranch in Nevada asking for a post office. The Senator asked Twain to reply that there was no real need for a post office in Baldwin’s Ranch. Twain did so:

Gentlemen: What the mischief do you suppose you want with a post-office at Baldwin’s Ranch? It would not do you any good. If any letters came there, you couldn’t read them, you know; and, besides, such letters as ought to pass through, with money in them, for other localities, would not be likely to *get* through, you must perceive at once; and that would make trouble for us all. No, don’t bother about a post-office in your camp. I have your best interests at heart, and feel that it would only be an ornamental folly. What you want is a nice jail, you know—a nice, substantial jail and a free school. These will be a lasting benefit to you. These will make you really contented and happy. I will move in the matter at once.

Very truly, etc.
 Mark Twain
 From James W. N____, U.S. Senator

When the Senator complained that the people of Baldwin’s Ranch wanted to hang him, Twain defended his later, saying, “I only wanted to convince them.” To which the Senator replied, “Ah. Well, you *did* convince them, I make no manner of doubt.”

Next up was a letter from Nevada residents who wanted Congress to pass a bill incorporating the Methodist Episcopal Church of the State of Nevada. The Senator wanted Twain to reply by indicating the State could best undertake the task of incorporation, although “in the present feebleness of the religious element in that new commonwealth,” such a bill was questionable.

Twain’s reply began:

Gentlemen: You will have to go to the state legislature about the speculation of yours . . .

This was a good start. The Rambler has written many similar letters indicating which agency, not including his own, could best address a problem. But Twain went downhill from there. The first sentence continued: “—Congress don’t know anything about religion.” What they were proposing not only “isn’t expedient—in fact, it is ridiculous.” He explained why:

Your religious people there are too feeble, in intellect, in morality, in piety—in everything, pretty much. You had better drop this—you can’t make it work.

He closed his letter:

You ought to be ashamed of yourselves—that is what *I* think about it. You close your petition with the words: “And we will ever pray.” I think you had better—you need to do it.

Very truly, etc.
 Mark Twain
 From James W. N____, U.S. Senator

According to Twain’s account, the Senator did not think this reply went over well with his constituents. “*That* luminous epistle,” the Senator told Twain, “finishes me with the religious element among my constituents.”

Despite his own “political murder” by Twain’s previous letters, the Senator handed Twain one last letter. In this final example, residents of Humboldt, Nevada, asked that the post route from Indian Gulch to Shakespeare Gap and intermediate points be changed partly to the old Mormon Trail. The Senator had been hesitant to turn the letter over to Twain, but figured, “As long as destruction must come now, let it be complete.” He warned Twain that this issue was a delicate one, so his letter should reply “dubiously, and leave them a little in the dark.” Twain replied:

Gentlemen: It is a delicate question about this Indian trail [Rambler’s note: again, off to a good start], but, handled with proper deftness and dubiousness, I doubt not we shall succeed in some measure or otherwise, because the place where the route leaves the Lassen Meadows, . . . this being the favorite direction to some, but others preferring something else in consequence of things, the Mormon trail leaving Mosby’s at three in the morning, and passing through Jawbone Flat to Blucher, and then down the Jug-Handle, the road passing to the right of it, and naturally leaving it on the right, too, and Dawson’s on the left of the trail where it passes to the left of said Dawson’s and onward thence to Tomahawk, thus making the route cheaper, easier of access to all who can get at it, and compassing all the desirable objects so considered by others, and, therefore, conferring the most good upon the greatest number, and, consequently, I am encouraged to hope we shall. However, I shall be ready, and happy, to afford you still further information upon the subject, from time to time, as you may desire it and the Post-Office Department be enabled to furnish it to me.

Very truly, etc.
 Mark Twain
 From James W. N____, U.S. Senator

The Rambler considers this reply to be the best of the examples Twain provided, filled as it is with irrelevant and incomprehensible details (see item #3 above), but it was the final straw for

his Senator. “I am a ruined man,” he told Twain, adding, “Leave the house! Leave it forever and forever, too.” Twain concluded his account:

I regard that as a sort of covert intimation that my service could be dispensed with, and so I resigned. I never will be a private secretary to a senator again. You can't please that kind of people. They don't know anything. They can't appreciate a party's efforts.

[“My Late Senatorial Secretaryship” can be found in many places, but the Rambler found it in: Neider, Charles, editor, *The Comic Mark Twain Reader*, Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1976, which he bought cheap in a used bookstore.]

The Rambler doesn't know if these letters and replies are real or fictional. Twain may have been exaggerating a bit, perhaps for comic effect – a fact that makes all his works somewhat unreliable for use as footnotes in scholarly works such as can be found elsewhere on the Highway History Web site written by the martinet who oversees these works.

The piece originally appeared in *Sketches New and Old* (1875), by which time Senator Nye had completed two terms in the Senate (December 16, 1864-March 4, 1873). It seems unlikely, at least to the Rambler, that Twain's possibly fictitious letters, “sent” in 1868, had anything to do with Senator's Nye's defeat in his bid for reelection in 1872. The Rambler has researched the point deeply, and thanks to Google, learned that a more likely explanation is that in an era when State legislatures picked Senators, Senator Nye's opponent was John P. Jones, a Comstock Lode millionaire. According to the *Online Nevada Encyclopedia*, Jones spent freely to buy legislators who would support him and was so successful that Senator Nye's name was not introduced, making it hard for him to win.

[Editor's note: The Rambler continued on in this vein for several more paragraphs, showing off lots more details he found via Google, before we could get him back on topic.]

Part Two: A Letter to President Thomas Jefferson

Every President receives mail. Until the 20th century, Presidents often answered their own mail, responding routinely to correspondence that today would be shipped out to the appropriate government agency for replies drafted by low-level types, such as the Rambler, to be signed by higher level types.

For example, a collection of letters to President Thomas Jefferson appeared in 1991. It included the following letter about a highway issue:

Baltimore Jail, 23d. March, 1808

To Thomas Jefferson Esquire,
President of the United States

Sir,

I could write my remonstrance with more confidence if I thought that, amidst the loud calls of publick, official duties, which now peculiarly demand your attention and claim your almost ceaseless care, the tale of individual private misery, could reach your ear. And, did I not recollect, that your philanthropic disposition induces you (as well as a regard for administering Justice in misery) to relieve distress, *when not produced by flagrant crime*—I would yet be silent.

I will in a few words Submit a true Statement of facts to your excellency: In the month of December last, I undertook to drive a wagon loaded with flour and leather, from Berkley County in the State of Virginia to this City. [Rambler's Note: Berkley County is now part of West Virginia, nestled in Maryland's western narrowing near Hagerstown.] On the 29th. Day of that Month, I was driving along, without accident on the Frederick Turnpike, near Ellicots Mills, when the mail Stage drove up. I was *ordered* to clear my wagon out of the driver's way and as it was done in a tone of menace, I do confess (for I will let you know the *worst* features of my case) I did not immediately obey him, but at length finding it to be the stage which carried the newspapers, letters &c. which *I did not know at first*, I turned my Horses aside for it. At the *utmost*, he could not have been detained above *six* or *eight* minutes.

How was I surprised, when for this slight offense, I was, on the 31st. day of the same month arrested in Baltimore, and carried before his Honour Judge Chase, who immediately committed me to Prison. [Judge Chase was Samuel Chase, Justice of the Supreme Court, in an era when Supreme Court Justices served in the lower courts when the Supreme Court was not in session.]

As I was taken by surprise, I had no time to reflect; nor could I, being an utter stranger to this City, have found bail. It was with difficulty I found a Waggoner, who agreed for an exorbitant Sum to convey the wagon and team back again to Berkley, where I fear my Father, Mother and Friends are obliged to hang down their heads, from malicious reports, that I am in Gaol for some heinous transgression.

I ought here to acquaint your Honour, that the charges in the commitment are as follows: "for that he did knowingly and willingly obstruct the Driver of the Mail Stage on the Frederick Town Turnpike road." Yet, the driver confessed at the same time that he sued

me to make me an example to others. The hardships of a man *closely* confined in an unsavory and crowded apartment, especially me, who had always been accustomed to an out-of-door business, you may readily conceive. I have been near three months in it, and *all my money is gone*: for I found it impossible to live on the Jail allowance alone. The court will not commence till the month of *May* next, and then I could only state the very same things I have done to your excellency, which however the driver of the Mail Stage cannot deny.

Now, Sir, I humbly submit it to your excellency, Wheather, for so small an offence, I have not been already Sufficiently punished. And, should it please you, to direct the district Attorney Mr. Stevens, to set me free by some means or other; *if, upon examination he find my story to be true*, your excellency will act as *mercifully as justly* for, Should I be fined or confined, at the court for this offence, I can not extricate myself in either case, after the sentence is complied with, as the Jail fees claimed here are enormous; and the Sheriff has a custom of *selling convicted persons for them!*

If I am so fortunate as to obtain your excellency's consent to my release from this hateful and irksome situation, I pledge myself by every particle of spirit and feeling that animates my frame, to show myself (*if war ensue,*) not unworthy of your excellency's bounty.

I remain your hble.Servt.
Edon Marchant

(The Rambler has attempted to reproduce the spelling as in the original, to the extent that Microsoft Word's automatic spellcheck will allow. In addition, the Rambler has put in some paragraph breaks to make the original five paragraph letter a little more readable.)

The editor of the Jefferson letter collection, Jack McLaughlin, stated that Marchant's letter "was accompanied by a note from the jailer, John H. Bentley, certifying that the facts of his sentencing and imprisonment were correct."

McLaughlin did not, unfortunately, indicate whether President Jefferson or one of his aides replied to the letter or what happened to Marchant. However, in introducing the letter, McLaughlin said:

He was undoubtedly prosecuted, as he claimed, as an example to other drivers to yield the road to the mail stage, but his case also reveals the deplorable condition of roads in the nation's federal period. On a major turnpike, it was often impossible for one vehicle to pass another on narrow, muddy, rutted roadbeds. Marchant was, however, stubborn in his refusal to allow the stage to pass immediately, and it cost him dearly. [McLaughlin, Jack, editor, *To His Excellency Thomas Jefferson: Letters to a President*, W. W. Norton and Company, 1991, pages 179-181, also purchased cheap at a used book store]

The Frederick turnpike was one of many established during the country's early years when the country needed improved transportation but lacked the public revenue to provide it. Then, as in later years, the States turned to tolls. The Maryland General Assembly chartered several turnpikes during its 1804-1805 session, including one from Baltimore to Frederick. President Jefferson's Secretary of the Treasury, Albert Gallatin, discussed the road in his 1808 report on internal improvements:

The capital of the "Fredericktown" turnpike company amounts to \$500,000, and the company is authorized to open the great western road as far as Boonsborough [today's Boonsboro, located to the south of Hagerstown], beyond the Blue Ridge, and sixty-two miles from Baltimore. The angle of ascent will not exceed four degrees; the road has a convexity of nine inches; and on a breadth of twenty-two feet is covered with a stratum ten inches thick of pounded stones not exceeding three inches in diameter, over which are spread two inches of gravel or coarse sand. The first twenty miles next to Baltimore have cost at the rate of \$9,000, and the next seventeen miles are contracted for at the rate of \$7,000 a mile.

Eventually the turnpike was extended to Cumberland, Maryland, the eastern termini of the National Road to Wheeling (then still in Virginia) that President Jefferson authorized by approving legislation in 1806. As such, the turnpike played a role in the growth of Baltimore and its port as a commercial hub. (For those who crave more information on this subject, The Rambler invites readers to enjoy his article "Maryland's Bank Road" on this very Web site at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/bankroad.cfm>.)

The Constitution had granted Congress the power "to establish Post Offices and post Roads." In the 19th century, Congress and Presidents debated for many years whether "establish" meant Congress had the power to authorize construction of roads or only to designate existing roads to carry the mail. The answer usually depended on whether the person considering the issue believed in a strong central government or strong States. The Rambler does not need to settle this dispute, once and for all, but anyone who can't stand the suspense can check out "A Vast System of Interconnected Highways" written by the showoff who claims to "edit" The Rambler's articles (<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/highwayhistory/vast.pdf>). If you like "A Vast System," don't let him know – it will only encourage him.

While not endorsing that same scribbler's "Clearly Vicious as a Matter of Policy: The Fight Against Federal-Aid" (<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/hwyhist01.cfm>), The Rambler found that it included a quote about post roads from a 1925 article by Thomas H. MacDonald and Herbert S. Fairbank on Federal-aid for highways. (If you don't know who MacDonald and Fairbank are, stop reading. Perhaps you would be better off using this time to read a mystery novel):

The fact that . . . the definition of "post roads" as roads which carry the mails or have anything whatever to do with the mails, was entirely foreign to the intentions of the framers of the Constitution seems to have completely escaped most people. That "post

roads” now means roads over which the mails are carried is the result of one of those curious inversions of the meaning of words which frequently occur over long periods as a consequence of changing habits and customs.

The original "post roads" were the highways over which journeys were made of such length as to necessitate accommodations for the changing of horses and the over-night lodging of travelers. To provide those accommodations post houses or inns were established at convenient intervals and the roads took their name from these posts By reason of the fact that the carriage of parcels and packets necessarily took place over the post roads, the public agency which performed that service became the postal service, and the stations already established for other purposes naturally became the post offices.

In short, the phrase in the Constitution about “post roads” did not mean its framers intended to limit the establishment clause to roads associated with delivery of the mail.

In a book about stagecoach operations in the eastern States, Oliver W. Holmes and Peter T. Rohrbach wrote, “During the first half of the nineteenth century, the stagecoach rolled supreme as the carrier of the United States mail on the nation’s leading post roads.” Even after the first railroad mail contracts were made in 1835, the stagecoach “surpassed its rival in mileage of annual mail transportation” for another 20 years.” The high point came in 1853, when stagecoach lines carried mail over 45,000 miles. The railroads, by then, carried increasing volumes of mail as stagecoach contracts declined.

Mail contracts “included a statement of how long the stage must wait at post offices,” which resulted in “petty friction between postmasters and stage drivers” when delays occurred. Although stagecoaches carried passengers, the mail contracts were essentially a subsidy that often assured the profitability of the lines. As mail increased, it sometimes had to be carried inside the coach, reducing the number of passengers. Stagecoaches carrying mail “were usually not charged a tariff when they traveled along the toll roads.” [Holmes, Oliver W., and Rohrbach, Peter T., *Stagecoach East: Stagecoach Days in the East from the Colonial Period to the Civil War*, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983, pages 111-123, bought at full price (\$17.50) in a moment of weakness while The Rambler perused the bookstore of the Smithsonian Museum of American History. He blames paying the full-price on “youthful exuberance.”]

In short, the stagecoach driver had right on his side as well as every incentive to meet his contracted schedule.

The Rambler would like to imagine that President Jefferson showed mercy and secured the release of Mr. Marchant. Unfortunately, that is hard to imagine. As Mr. Marchant mentioned, the President was experiencing the “loud calls of Publick, official duties.” During the same month, December 1807, that Mr. Marchant set out on his fateful trip to Baltimore, President Jefferson signed the Embargo Act, an attempt to stop England and France, then at war, from seizing American ships. Economic historian John Steele Gordon explained:

In hopes of forcing France and Britain to respect neutral rights, President Jefferson rammed through Congress the Embargo Act, which he signed on December 22, 1807. It was one of the most remarkable acts of statecraft in American history. Indeed it is nearly without precedent in the history of any country. The Embargo Act forbade American ships from dealing in foreign commerce, and the American navy was deployed to enforce it. In effect, to put pressure on Britain and France, the United States went to war with itself and blockaded its own shipping.

The act “devastated” New England, which was heavily dependent on maritime commerce, and prompted “an epidemic of smuggling along the Canadian border” that President Jefferson thought was little short of an insurrection:

The reaction against the Embargo Act in all the seaboard cities was so intense that it lasted only fourteen months, but the Nonintercourse Act, which replaced it, forbade commerce with both Britain and France, our largest trading partners, and American foreign commerce stayed in deep depression. [Gordon, John Steele, *An Empire of Wealth: The Epic History of American Economic Power*, HarperCollins, 2004, pages 94-95, another full-price purchase, minus the Amazon Prime discount]

The bitter naval rivalry was why Marchant offered to fight for his country if war broke out after President Jefferson theoretically showed clemency. (The rivalry eventually led to the War of 1812.)

In the final full year of his second term, President Jefferson was weakened by the near rebellion in New England and economic distress around the country. Under the circumstances, The Rambler can understand that President Jefferson might not have replied to Mr. Marchant’s letter.

Still, surely Mr. Marchant deserved a reply. Inspired by efforts to honor the long dead with stamps, commutations of sentences, application of their names to today’s buildings, and other recognition, the Rambler offers this posthumous reply to Mr. Marchant:

Dear Mr. Marchant,

Thank you for your letter to President Jefferson who, while trying to rescue the country from one of its worst economic catastrophes while avoiding a disastrous war with two of the most powerful countries in the world, was unable to reply to your concerns.

I understand your plight and can only imagine the distress your family and friends must be feeling. However, I notice that you admitted your guilt in this case, though with extenuating circumstances. That leaves you to the mercies of Associate Supreme Court Justice Chase. President George Washington appointed Chase to the Supreme Court in 1796, but he was well known to President Jefferson. Thanks to extensive research on Wikipedia, I can inform you that President Jefferson had taken steps to have the justice impeached as part of an effort to reduce judicial review of Federal laws after Justice

Chase said that repeal of the Judiciary Act of 1801, one of President Jefferson's first acts, would "take away all security for property and personal liberty, and our Republican constitution will sink into a mobocracy."

With your fellow Virginian, Representative John Randolph, leading the charge, the House of Representatives impeached Justice Chase in 1804 primarily for cases he handled on the circuit court. The details provided by Wikipedia are irrelevant to your plea, so suffice to say, that with Vice President Aaron Burr presiding and Representative Randolph prosecuting the case in the high-pitched childlike voice a childhood illness left him with, the Senate acquitted Justice Chase on all charges on March 1, 1805.

Wikipedia did not say whether Justice Chase was the sort of man who held a grudge, but the Rambler suggests that he probably would not have looked favorably on an appeal for mercy by President Jefferson on your behalf.

While you probably languished in jail at least until your trial before Justice Chase in May, the Rambler would like to think it is some consolation knowing that your name has survived into the 21st century to be cited on the Web site of the Federal Highway Administration, an agency that has done much to eliminate the sort of poor conditions you encountered on your ill-fated journey. That is something.

Your very hble srvt,
The Rambler

Part Three: A Letter to President Abraham Lincoln

President Abraham Lincoln also received letters. With the country breaking apart even before he took office, President Lincoln faced a mountain of mail when he reached Washington. This summary by author Chris DeRose is based on an 1895 memoir by one of President Lincoln's secretaries, William O. Stoddard:

The new administration was buried in work from the minute they opened their doors. Lincoln's secretaries would process two to three hundred letters in a given week, ranging from critical and time-sensitive missives to complete nonsense. There were two "big wicker waste-baskets[s]" on either side of a desk where half the mail went. The other half were given "more or less respectful treatment," generally sent to one department or another, perhaps with or without remarks. "It is lightning work, necessarily." The rest, however, were "wildest, the fiercest and the most obscene ravings of utter insanity." Many had advice for the president. One of his clerks remembered, "It is marvelous how they can, theoretically, swing troops back and forth around the country. It is plain that they all have played the game of checkers, and have learned how to 'jump' the Confederate forces and forts with their men." [DeRose, Chris, *The Presidents' War: Six*

American President and the Civil War That Divided Them, Lyons Press, 2014, page 151, found at a Barnes&Noble shortly after publication, if you must know; Stoddard's *Inside the White House in War: Memoirs and Reports of Lincoln's Secretary*, is available in several recent editions]

In 1993, Lincoln scholar Harold Holzer published a collection of letters to President Lincoln. A number of the published letters had transportation themes, as reflected in the headings Holzer provided:

- **A Faster Steam Ship** (“I am positive . . . that with my improvement & the same amount of steam, any Steam-ship now running upon the Atlantic can be propelled from New York to Liverpool in a week.”)
- **First Balloon Dispatch** (“I have pleasure in sending this first dispatch ever telegraphed from an aerial station”)
- **On Spreading News by Balloon** (“Would it not be a grand idea to strike off hundreds of copies of your noble message and let Mr. Lowe ascend in his balloon and scatter them in Southern camps and all over the South,” the letter read in reference to President Lincoln’s message to Congress on July 4, 1861, saying the current contest was “a struggle for maintaining in the world, that form, and substance of government, whose leading object is, to elevate the condition of men—to lift artificial weights from all shoulders—to clear the paths of laudable pursuit to all—to afford all, an unfettered start, and a fair chance, in the race of life.”)

Edward D. Tippet of Georgetown in Washington had several great ideas, such as one he conveyed to President Lincoln on January 27, 1862. Holzer headed it “A Navigation Balloon”:

Most Excellent Sir

Please read the within synopsis of my useful life [a printed letter to members of Congress] and say in your heart, if I do, or do not deserve your hug patronag.

I have told you, that war is of God to liberate the Slaves, but that you must have my balloon to put down all foreign foes. I again warn you against secret Enemies. Watch well, and you will find the golden wedge, and the acorn too [a reference to Joshua in the bible, according to Holzer,]

I say you cannot conquer without my navigating Balloon. Have it examined speedily, and do your duty to God, for 1864 is drawing nigh. Very Respectfully

Your Loyal friend
Edward D Tippet

Holzer explained that Tippet wrote the letter on the back of his “Synopsis of Reason,” which stated: “In 1816, three inventions were mysteriously put into my heart.” They included his navigation balloon and a cold-water steam engine for riverboats. For some reason, these “magnificent inventions” were ridiculed by “outside, ignorant, enemies” who “blow hot and cold with the same breath.” All he needed was \$10,000 to complete his experiments, but as Holzer put it, “Lincoln did not honor his request.” At least the letter did not end up in one of the “big wicker waste-baskets[s].”

Tippet was not discouraged since he had another idea that Holzer called “A Gravity-Powered Miracle Machine.” In a letter dated February 9, 1865, Tippet wrote:

To his Excellency President Lincoln.

Sir; Please allow me to demonstrate, the practicability; by a mathematical problem, easily to be understood; of the absolute existence, of a self-moving machine, yet to be developed for the glory of God, and the happiness of the human family.

Mr. President; I will not detain you forty minutes. I have been forty years, struggling to find the mechanical actions to the problem, and have, at last found them, and there is no dispute; I bid defiance.

This “discovery of great magnitude” came to Tippet “in a vision” along with a vision regarding the war. “As I understand in the vision, this war was not to close, until this invention was in operation.” He had begged southern Senators to oppose secession so this invention would not be delayed, “but they laughed at my vision, and treated it as nonsense.” Instead, they plunged the country into “the most horrid war ever known.”

With that background, he informed President Lincoln that according to the vision, the war “will not close until self moving power is out; this is my impression from the vision in connection with the signs of the times.”

Tippet explained:

Once more, if you please; allow me to say; if I can show all the mechanical actions, to the problem, as required, to constitute a perfect machine, which will run without any other aide but that of gravitation, when completed; would you now say, that it ought to be immediately tested in the best manner?

He had submitted his ideas to President John Tyler (1841-1845) who “got \$4,000, appropriated for my experiments, upon that and my safety steam engine; but I only received \$1000.” Tippet felt entitled to the balance, a small sum “to put this great invention in operation.” In a postscript, Tippet informed President Lincoln, “I will call tomorrow.”

Holzer offered this comment:

It is doubtful that Lincoln received “inventor” Tippet if he called at the White House the day after delivering this diatribe. Lincoln filed this letter after providing the following handwritten endorsement: “Tippet: Crazy-Man.” [Holzer, Harold, editor, *Dear Mr. Lincoln: Letters to the President*, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1993, pages 191-193, found at a used book store by the frugal Rambler]

The Rambler is not sure why Holzer thought that President Lincoln did not see Tippet at the White House. President Lincoln was in the White House on February 10 preparing a letter to Congress describing his recent meeting with Confederate representatives at Hampton Roads in Virginia. Surely, a few minutes with Tippet would have been a nice break from preparing the detailed report.

The Rambler would like to think that President Lincoln, with the war winding down and always in search of funny anecdotes to spice up his conversation and commentary, would have enjoyed meeting Tippet. Such a meeting might better explain the President’s succinct description: “Crazy-Man.”

One thing is certain: The Rambler is no Abraham Lincoln. The Rambler answers the mail, even if posthumously:

To Mr. Tippet

Thank you for your interesting letter to President Lincoln on February 9, 1865. Although the President was very busy during February 1865 and did not reply, I thought you would want to know, posthumously, that he did see your letter and commented on it thoughtfully.

Unfortunately, you took your gravity-powered miracle machine to the grave with you. Our loss, no doubt. No one, to our knowledge, has been given that vision since you received it in 1816. This is a shame because so many other sources of power have been tried, each with its own defects. Gravity, which is free on this planet at least, seems like a fine pollution-free power source, but sadly the great minds of the many generations since your death focused instead on other sources.

I do want you to know, however, that “a self-moving machine,” as you called it, emerged from all that deep thinking. We call them “automobiles” which could loosely be translated as “a self-moving machine.” (We borrowed the term from the French who

defined it as “We invented it, not the Americans.”) We also have “bicycles” which are powered by human muscles, as well as “walking,” also a muscle-based source of transportation. So in this respect, your vision of the future proved to be accurate.

You probably noticed that the Civil War ended in April 1865, before you had a chance to complete your wonderful invention. You may be saddened that at least in this one minor respect, your vision was incorrect since the war managed to end before a gravity powered machine was perfected. But take heart! All future generations are glad the Civil War ended, regardless of the fate of your vision.

I am certain that President Lincoln appreciated your unique ingenuity.

Yr Obdt Srvt

The Rambler

**Part Four:
Conclusion**

In all modesty, The Rambler says to Mark Twain: that’s how it’s done!

But now the time has come to return to the 21st century, whether The Rambler likes it or not.

(Editor’s Note: The Rambler made clear that the thing he likes least about the 21st century, aside from the “paleo diet,” is how his favorite television programs are canceled after cliffhanger final episodes. He listed “The Finder” and “Alphas” as “perfect examples.” The Rambler commented that in “The Closure Alternative” episode of “Big Bang Theory” (he pointed out it was episode 21 of season 6 for those who must know), Dr. Sheldon Cooper expressed The Rambler’s own views on the “Alphas” cliffhanger finale, so they need not be repeated here.)