

“Hello, Mr. Rubenstein?”

“Yes?”

“My name is Douglas Stiles and I have something that might interest you.”

Harry Rubenstein leaned back in his chair, holding the phone to his ear, listening intently. The man on the other end of the line seemed nervous, but Rubenstein waited. Taking this as a cue to start talking, Douglas Stiles spoke. “Mr. Rubenstein, I have a very peculiar object that has quite a fascinating history. I am the great-great-great Grandson of Jonathan Dillon, do you know him?” Mr. Rubenstein sat back, trying to recall the name from his memory, but he could not. “Who is he?” The man on the other end went on. “Jonathan Dillon was the watch cleaner that maintained Abraham Lincoln’s pocket watch.” Suddenly, Mr. Rubenstein’s eyes lit up. He looked around as his spacious office, adorned with books of every kind, every single one on American History. Harry Rubenstein was the Chair of the Division of Political History at the National Museum of American History, in Washington DC. He leaned back, eyeing his untidy stack of Lincoln books on the floor. “Go on” he said with an interested tone. Stiles continued. “Well, this man was cleaning Lincoln’s watch, because the Whale Oil had gummed up the gears, as it usually did. Watches during this time period needed to be well maintained. Dillon was cleaning the President’s watch when Fort Sumter was attacked in 1861.” He paused, breathing heavily. Rubenstein, fascinated, asked him to continue. “After the Fort was attacked, Dillion inscribed on the inside of the watch...something. I don’t know what. It’s just a legend, but I know it must be real....I have proof.” Rubenstein thought for a moment. Legend. One of the many words that he despised. He suspected that this was just another sighting of Bigfoot, or spotting of a UFO, but Rubenstein, being a respectful man, listened on for the next two minutes

as the man on the other end desperately tried to defend his claim. "What is this proof you have?" Rubenstein inquired. Stiles paused for a moment, then said "I have an article from 1906, sir. I could send it to you." Rubenstein, not wanting to sound rude, respectfully agreed, not intending to read the article at all.

Later that day, Rubenstein shifted through the many papers that littered his desk. His book draft lay open on the other side of the room. His hair disheveled from the wear of the day, and his glasses nearly sliding off his nose. He pushed them back up as he glanced at his calendar. He has lectures, conferences, and artefact transportation with Philip LoPiccolo. He could hear the faint sounds of the crowds downstairs in the main museum. His computer then lit up. He moved over to it, and proceeded to scroll through his many Emails. He spotted a new Email from Mr.Stiles, and deciding that he had nothing better to do, clicked on it. He read it for a first time, interested.

Over the next few days, the article intrigued Mr.Rubenstein more and more. He began debating in his head if it all really was a myth. He even decided to go down to collections to look at the watch. Nothing seemed peculiar. It was just a watch, well, on the outside. This watch had stayed in Abraham Lincoln's pocket during the war, and his assassination. It was a priceless piece of history, and that's why it was in the Smithsonian.

Harry Rubenstein finally fell through after another week of deliberating and debating. He decided that even if there was no inscription, it was worth trying. He was a historian, and his community loved this kind of thing. Besides, it would be another nice addition to his resume.

He paused for a moment, hands on his keyboard back in his office, writing an Email to Mr. Stiles. He thought. He began to type his Email, telling Mr. Stiles that he thought that it would be a good idea to finally open the watch. Two hours later, Mr. Stiles wrote back, asking what the next steps were. Harry Rubenstein thought as he leaned back. What to do next? He picked up his phone and called a few people, and Emailed even more. Over the next few days Rubenstein asked himself many times, what to do next? Finally he got a date and venue for the opening of the pocketwatch. He then Emailed Douglas Stiles and asked him if he was available for the date. He wrote that he was, and Rubenstein booked him a flight, courtesy of the United States government. Rubenstein worked for days on end with this. He Emailed Members of Congress, Senators, historians, and, of course the Media. He wrote to the Washington Post, then the New York Times, along with many others. CNN and NBC were invited as well. Journalists from all over the country were coming. He even booked a watchmaker to open the watch, because he certainly could not dismantle a one hundred fifty year old object. During this time, Mr. Rubenstein periodically asked himself, "What if this is a failure? What if there is no writing in the watch?" He persisted though, and he could not get out of it if he wanted too.

Mr. Stiles arrived at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport on March 8th, two days before the opening of the watch. Mr. Rubenstein greeted him in his office, and took him on a tour of their collection. Rubenstein, of course, made sure that they passed by the century and a half old pocket watch. It was solitary in its case, waiting. It was in perfect condition. Almost the exact same the day the sixteenth President was assassinated. They stood there for a while, staring at its gleaming gold, perfect shell, and beautiful face.

March 10th, 2009, a day which will live in infamy, at least for Harry Rubenstein. He woke up that morning, wanting to get to Washington to get this over with as fast as possible. He rushed out the door, nearly forgetting to kiss his wife goodbye. He arrived at the museum as early as possible, around five. Half awake, he walked through the staff entrance, nodding to the scowling security guard as he walked by. The media was already arriving. Seeing them gave him a jolt to the stomach. Many people were flooding into the museum, cameras and microphones, pens and papers all in hand. Rubenstein rushed to the theater, where the event would take place. He peeked in, only he was allowed in at the time. He then rushed downstairs to check on the watch. It was just getting settled into its perfectly designed case. The men handling it were in white gloves, and sweating profusely. Rubenstein traveled to the elevator with the watch and its' guard. Ten minutes later, he was back in the theater. The media was setting up their cameras and scribbling away on their clipboards. He turned around and nearly bumped into Douglas Stiles. He was sweating almost as much as Rubenstein was, his face ablaze with color. Rubenstein had grown to like Stiles. His mustache furrowed, looking almost like Uncle Vernon from Harry Potter, he said in a low tone "I hope this works out." Rubenstein, his glasses inching ever so slowly to the edge of his slick nose, said "I hope it does." His phone then vibrated in his pocket, nearly scaring Rubenstein to death. He picked up and it was the event manager. "We are ready now Mr. Rubenstein."

Rubenstein walked up the small desk where the watch was placed, and recalled the story of how this all happened to the cameras. He could hear the clicks and snaps of the many photographs that were being taken. He recalled the events of the past month to the many eyes of the reporters. "It was about a month ago, I got a call from Doug Stiles." gesturing to the man in the front row. "He basically said do you know anything about the story that's been in my family

for a while about my Great Great Grandfather? And I said no.” He paused, looking into the crowd. “Mr. Galt, the owner of the jewelry shop ran up into the room and said “The war, meaning the Civil War, has begun. At that moment, a jeweler in the shop by the name of Jonathan Dillon is holding Abraham Lincoln’s watch. Carried away at the moment, he unscrews the dial, and behind it writes something like “The first shots have been fired, slavery will end, at least we have a President who will try.”

Rubenstein introduced the watchmaker, George Thomas. Thomas sat down in front of the solitary watch on the solitary table in the middle of the stage. His Optivisor made him look like a character from Star Wars. He and Rubenstein, who was behind him, leaned into the watch. Rubenstein held his breath as the timepiece was picked up and examined. This was the moment of truth. He could hear Stile’s heavy breathing behind him as they both dared to breath, as if it would shatter the artefact into a million pieces. They watched. “So what we’ll do is take the dial off now.” The watchmaker removed the fingerprint free glass from the watch. “And we will see if there is a legend under the dial.” The watchmaker removed the perfectly white face. Thomas, smiling, said “The moment of truth has come. Well is there or is there not an inscription?” Many people laughed in the crowd, but Rubenstein didn't hear it. He was zoned in on only one thing. The watch. “I will let the Great Grandson of the watchmaker read it, there is an inscription.” Taking the wath out of the shaking hand of George Thomas, Douglas Stiles looked at the watch, in awe. He leaned towards the lamps on the table. Rubenstein, going crazy over what he may have just discovered, kept silent. “It is there!” he exclaimed. “April 13, 1861, Fort Sumter was attacked by the Rebels. On the above date, Thank God we have a government, Jonathan Dillon.” He went on. “This was inscribed by someone else! Jefferson Davis.” The crowd was stunned. Rubenstein was shocked.

The watch lay in its' case. Unaware of the people moving past it. Unaware of its' history. Unaware of who it had previously belonged to, and who and scratched into its' sleek surface, during the War of Rebellion.

Note: This story is a true story, told from the perspective of Harry Rubenstein, the Curator of the Political History Collection at the National Museum of American History, located in Washington DC.



Wm. H. Dillon
April 13, 1861

Fort Sumter was attacked
by the Rebels on the 13th
April 1861

Sept. 1861
Embarked

Sept. 1861
Embarked

Sept. 1861
Embarked

Sept. 1861
Embarked

Sept. 1861
Embarked

Sept. 1861
Embarked