

LINCOLN LORE

No. 62

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

June 16, 1930

LINCOLN LORE

BULLETIN OF
THE LINCOLN
HISTORICAL
RESEARCH
FOUNDATION



ENDOWED BY
THE LINCOLN
NATIONAL LIFE
INSURANCE
COMPANY

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RAMSAY'S LIFE OF WASHINGTON

The story of the borrowed book, which became damaged while in the possession of Abraham Lincoln and which he is said to have paid for by three days' labor, is one of the most familiar stories of his early life. It is accepted generally that the book was a life of Washington. Whether it was the work by Weems' or the biography by Ramsay is a question about which there is a difference of opinion.

The fact that one of these books was borrowed from Andrew Crawford, the school teacher, and the other from Josiah Crawford, a neighbor, has added to the confusion.

We imply from Lincoln's own words in his famous Trenton Speech that the Weems' book was read before the Ramsay publication. He said that: "During the earliest days of my being able to read I got hold of a small book . . . Weems' Life of Washington."

Since Josiah Crawford, the original owner of the damaged book, did not arrive in Indiana until 1826, when Abraham Lincoln was 17 years of age, it is not likely that Lincoln procured Weems' Washington from him at so late a date.

The Scripps biography published shortly after Lincoln's nomination in 1860 gives the most accurate account of the tradition it appears to me. It was undoubtedly based on Lincoln's own notes prepared for Scripps. The paragraph is as follows:

"When he (Abraham Lincoln) was 14 or 15 years of age he learned that one Mr. Crawford, a distant neighbor, had in his house Ramsay's Life of Washington — a book which he was told gave a fuller and better account of Washington and the Revolution than the volume (Weems') he had read with so much pleasure. He at once borrowed the book and devoured its contents. By some accident the volume was exposed to a shower and badly damaged. Young Lincoln had no money but he knew how to work. He went to Crawford and told him what had happened and expressed his readiness to work out the full value of the book. Crawford had a field of corn which had been stripped of the blades as high as the ear, preparatory to cutting off the top for winter fod-

der for his cattle. He expressed his willingness to square accounts if Lincoln would cut the tops from the field of corn. The offer was promptly accepted and after three days of hard labor the book was paid for and young Lincoln returned home, the proud possessor of another volume."

This story has been placed in several dramatic settings but it is not the purpose of this monograph to discuss the various phases in which it appears.

When Lincoln was advised that a neighbor had a book that gave a fuller and better account of Washington and

THE
L I F E
OF
GEORGE WASHINGTON
COMMANDER IN CHIEF
OF THE
ARMIES OF THE UNITED STATES OF
AMERICA THROUGHOUT THE
WAR WHICH ESTABLISHED
THEIR INDEPENDENCE
AND
FIRST PRESIDENT OF THE
UNITED STATES

BY DAVID RAMSAY, M.D.
AUTHOR OF THE HISTORY OF THE
AMERICAN REVOLUTION

SECOND EDITION
BOSTON
PUBLISHED BY D. MALLORY AND CO.

SOLD BY THEM AND B. B. HOPKINS AND CO.,
W. W. WOODWARD AND A. FINLAY & CO., PHILA-
DELPHIA; P. H. NICKLIN, BALTIMORE; D. W.
FARRAND & GREEN, ALBANY; BIERE AND HOWE AND
I. COOK AND CO., NEW HAVEN; O. D. COOK, HART-
FORD; A. LYMAN AND CO., PORTLAND; SWIFT AND
CHAPMAN, MIDDLEBURY, VERMONT.

1811

the Revolution than that presented by Weems, he was correctly advised. Nevertheless, Weems' highly colored story in the hands of a 10 or 12 year old boy would have a much deeper influence on him than Ramsay's more scholarly presentation. By the time Lincoln was seventeen and had come into possession of Ramsay's work he was able to appreciate more fully this very excellent biography.

The best way to bring this book before the reader in this limited space is to give a few excerpts from the table of contents.

Chapter 1. "Of George Washington's Birth, Family and Education. Of his Mission to the French Commandment on the Ohio in 1753. His Military Operations as an Officer of Virginia from 1754 to 1758."

Chapter 2. "Retrospect of the Origin of the American Revolutionary War. Of George Washington as Member of Congress in 1774 and 1775. As Commander in Chief of the Army of the United Colonies in 1775 and 1776. Of his Operations near Boston in these Years."

Chapter 3. "Campaign of 1776. Battles of Long Island, Trenton, and Princeton."

Chapter 4. "Campaign of 1777. The Battles of Brandywine and Germantown. The Distresses of the American Army, its Winter Quarters in Valley Forge."

Chapter 5. "Campaign of 1778. Surprises the British and Defeats Them at Monmouth."

Chapter 6. "Campaign of 1779. The Distresses of the American Army. Directs an Expedition against the Six Nations of Indians."

Chapter 7. "Campaign of 1780. Marquis de Lafayette Arrives and Gives Assurance that a French Army Might Soon be Expected."

Chapter 8. "Campaign of 1781. Extinguishes the Incipient Flames of Civil War. Takes Cornwallis and his Army Prisoners of War."

Chapter 9. "1782 and 1783. Washington Recommends Measures for the Preservation of Independence, Peace, Liberty and Happiness. Dismisses his Army. Retires to Mt. Vernon."

Chapter 10. "Favors Inland Navigation. Regrets the Defects of the Federal System and Recommends a Revision of It. Is Solicited to Accept the Presidency of the United States."

Chapter 11. "Washington Elected President. Builds up Public Offices wholly with a View to the Public's Good."

Chapter 12. "General Washington Attends to the Foreign Relations of the United States. Free Navigation of the Mississippi is Granted. His Treaty with Great Britain. Declines a Re-election and addresses the People. Recommends a Navy and Military Academy and other Public Institutions."

Chapter 13. "Pays Respect to his Successor, Mr. John Adams. Resumes Agricultural Pursuits. General Washington Dies. Is honored by Congress and by the Citizens. His Character."

The appendix contains an address and petition of the Officers of the Army of the United States to Congress then assembled, the farewell address of General Washington to the Armies of the United States and also the will of General Washington.