

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLN—PRODUCT OF THE PRESS

The press was the chief source of information which contributed to Abraham Lincoln's early grasp of public affairs. Throughout his life he was a constant reader of the newspaper, and it was the chief medium through which he learned the conclusions of changing public opinion.

He was first a reader of borrowed newspapers, then a subscriber to several different publications, later a contributor to one journal in particular, and eventually a publisher himself. Finally he became, as president of the nation, a true patron of the press.

READER

By the time Lincoln was old enough to take an interest in the contents of a newspaper there were several in circulation in the community where he lived. The *Western Sun* was published at Vincennes as early as 1819. The *Terre Haute Register* was available to Lincoln, as William Jones, for whom Lincoln clerked the last year in Indiana, was on the mailing list as early as 1825. The *Corydon Sentinel* and the *Louisville (Kentucky) Public Advertiser* were also circulated through the Lincoln community. By the time Lincoln left the Indiana country for Illinois he had a fine elementary training in citizenship gained through the medium of the newspaper.

One of Lincoln's contemporaries refers to Lincoln's great joy on being appointed postmaster at New Salem, Illinois, not because of the meager pecuniary benefits but because "He foresaw unlimited opportunity for reading newspapers."

One of his biographers states that "His education was almost entirely a newspaper one, he was one of the most thorough newspaper readers in America." This fact suggests that very early in life he began to subscribe for newspapers from different sections of the country.

SUBSCRIBER

Howell is the authority for the statement that "The first publication for which he (Lincoln) ever subscribed, was the *Louisville Journal* which he paid for when he could secure the intellectual luxury only at the expense of physical comfort."

The *Louisville Journal* was established in 1831 and edited by J. D. Prentice "a man for whose wit and repartee perhaps never had his superior among the editors of the United States," according to one biographer. It was originally a Whig paper, and supported the Union in the war between the states.

Lincoln, in correspondence with his

friend, Samuel D. Marshall of Shawneetown, Illinois, in 1842, suggested that part of a fee be applied on a two-years' subscription to Marshall's paper. To Jacob Harding at Danville, Illinois, Lincoln wrote in 1855, "I have been reading your paper for three or four years and have paid you nothing for it." He enclosed ten dollars.

Lincoln and Herndon subscribed to the following newspapers:

New York Tribune
Chicago Press and Tribune
Western Citizen
Garrison's Liberator
Anti-Slavery Standard
National Era
Richmond Inquirer
Charleston Mercury
Southern Literary Messenger

One of these newspapers which came to Lincoln with regularity was the *Chicago Press and Tribune*, and the letter which follows must be a source of great satisfaction to the publishers of the *Chicago Tribune* today:

Springfield, June 15, 1859.

Press & Tribune Co.
Gentlemen:

Herewith is a little draft to pay for your Daily another year from to-day—I suppose I shall take the Press & Tribune so long as it, and I both live, unless I become unable to pay for it—In its devotion to our cause always, and to me personally last year, I owe it a debt of gratitude, which I fear I shall never be able to pay.

Yours very truly

A. Lincoln.

CONTRIBUTOR

From the time Lincoln's first political announcement appeared in the *Illinois State Journal* in 1832 until he left for Washington in 1861, he contributed articles regularly to the publication. In fact the paper became known as "Lincoln's paper." As late as December 12, 1860, an editorial evidently from his pen appeared in the *Journal*.

One of his most important weapons during the debates with Douglas was a scrap book of newspaper clippings; and, after the debates were over, he used the newspaper reports of the debates as the text for the only book which he ever published. (See "The Different Editions of the Debates of Lincoln and Douglas," by R. Gerald McMurtry.)

Lincoln paid a very high compliment in one of his speeches in 1852 to the *National Intelligencer* which he said was "a paper that is not often misled and never intentionally misleads others."

He wrote many letters of appreciation to those who had been willing to publish his arguments, and he realized the value of the press as practically the only medium which opened a way to the masses whom he desired to reach.

PUBLISHER

A great many German families migrated to Illinois during the fifties, and a German paper, the *Illinois Staats-Anzeiger*, was published at Springfield by Theodore Canisius. Financial difficulties arose which allowed Lincoln to purchase controlling interest in the paper and the contract which he made with Canisius is on record. The introductory statement follows: "This instrument witnesseth that the Printing-press, German types &c purchased of John Burkhardt, belong to Abraham Lincoln; that Theodore Canisius is to have immediate possession of them, and is to commence publishing in Springfield, Illinois, a Republican newspaper." This endorsement in Lincoln's handwriting appears on one of the contracts: "May 30, 1859, Jacob Bunn, bought the press, types &c of John Burkhardt, for me, with my money. A. Lincoln." The contract stated that after the presidential election of 1860 the paper would become the property of Canisius if he abided by the contract.

PATRON

During the period between his nomination and his election Lincoln was especially interested in the reaction of the press towards his candidacy. On July 20, 1860, in the very heat of the presidential campaign Lincoln wrote a letter to Cassius M. Clay in which he used this introductory clause, "I see by the papers . . ." After his election and during his entire term as president, he was constantly in touch with the editors of the large city dailies.

In 1863 General Burnside suspended the printing of a Chicago paper. Lincoln wrote to a friend about the suspension, "I was embarrassed with the question between what was due to the military service on the one hand and the Liberty of the Press on the other." It is interesting to note that he revoked the order of suspension.

There were times, however, when Lincoln found it necessary to take severe measures with certain papers who "wickedly and traitorously printed and published" what in one instance he termed to be "a false and spurious proclamation purporting to be signed by the President" and he immediately ordered the arrest of the publishers,