

# LINCOLN LORE

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## LINCOLN'S THREE SECRETARIES

Lincoln's secretarial force for the greater part of his administration consisted of three men: John G. Nicolay, John Hay and W. O. Stoddard. The names of Nicolay and Hay are more often associated by Lincoln book collectors than any other names in Lincoln history, while the name of Stoddard is too little known, considering the important place he occupied in the routine of the White House.

Among all the writings relating to Lincoln's activities during the presidential years, none should be given more careful consideration than the many volumes published by these three secretaries of the President. The fact that for some time they lived day and night under the same roof with Mr. Lincoln, should have put them in a position to speak with authority on some questions where others have merely speculated.

All three secretaries were contemporaries with Lincoln in the Illinois country and known to him before his elevation to the Presidency. The executive as well as the domestic quarters at the White House were predominately influenced by an Illinois atmosphere.

### *John G. Nicolay*

Strictly speaking, John G. Nicolay, was the only private secretary of the President for whom a salary appropriation was available. He was born in Bavaria and was twenty-nine years old at the time of Lincoln's inauguration. His service to Mr. Lincoln, however, began back at Springfield, shortly after the Chicago Convention of 1860.

Nicolay had come to America when but six years of age and settled with his father in Cincinnati. At sixteen he entered the office of the Pike County Press and within five years was the proprietor and editor of the paper. He secured a position in the office of the Secretary of State at Springfield, Illinois in 1857 and was working there when Abraham Lincoln was nominated for the Presidency. When Lincoln secured the Governor's room in the Statehouse, for his campaign headquarters, he came in close contact with Nicolay who was soon engaged to take care of his secretarial work.

Nicolay was very dependable and as downright honest as Lincoln himself. Stoddard had occasion to refer to Nicolay in the following terms: "People who do not like him—because they cannot use him—say he is sour and crusty. The President showed his judgment of men when he put Mr. Nicolay just

where he is, with a kind — and amount — of authority which it is not easy to describe."

Nicolay collaborated with Hay in the best known publications bearing his name: "A History of Abraham Lincoln," 10 volumes, 1890. Following this came the "Complete Works of Abraham Lincoln," 2 volumes, 1894. The two-volume work appeared in a revised 12 volume "Gettysburg Edition" in 1905 and more recently in the "Lincoln Memorial University Edition" in 12 volumes.

A little known brochure "Abraham Lincoln," 1882, a reprint "Lincoln's Gettysburg Address," 1894, and "A Short Life of Abraham Lincoln," 1902, were all from the pen of Mr. Nicolay personally. His daughter is the author of "The Boy's Life of Abraham Lincoln," 1906 and "Personal Traits of Abraham Lincoln," 1912.

### *John Hay*

The youngest of Lincoln's three secretaries, John Hay, became the most famous of the trio. He was born in Salem, Indiana, October 8, 1838. After graduating from Brown University in 1858, he removed to Springfield, Illinois, where he studied law and was admitted to practice in the Supreme Court of Illinois in 1861.

John Hay received his preliminary training in the law office of Milton Hay, who was associated with Stephen Logan, a former partner of Lincoln's. The Logan and Hay offices occupied rooms adjacent to those of Lincoln and Herndon, so young Hay often came in contact with Abraham Lincoln in the months preceding Lincoln's nomination for the Presidency.

One of John Hay's close friends in Springfield was John G. Nicolay and when Mr. Lincoln's correspondence became so voluminous that some assistance was needed, Hay often helped him out. It is likely that Hay gradually made himself indispensable to Lincoln in very much the same way Nicolay had done. John Hay accompanied Lincoln to Washington in 1861. Technically he was never a secretary to the President. Although he served President Lincoln for more than three years, he was listed as a clerk under the jurisdiction of the Pension Office, assigned to special clerical work at the White House.

### *William Osborn Stoddard*

The assistant secretary of Mr. Lincoln, as he was sometimes called, was

W. O. Stoddard. He was born in Homer, Court County, New York, September 24, 1835. Stoddard was the son of a bookseller and publisher. He graduated from the University of Rochester in 1858 and soon moved to Illinois where he became editor of the Central Illinois Gazette at Champaign.

Although Stoddard's paper was not the first to mention Lincoln as presidential timber, it was his editorial written for the May 4, 1859 edition of his paper that did more than any other single writing, to call to the attention of the people Lincoln's availability as a candidate. Stoddard had a very large current exchange list for his paper but added two hundred more publications to his list, for this special edition containing the Lincoln editorial. A large majority of the papers copied the Stoddard editorial in full, which put Lincoln in the list of prospective candidates.

After Mr. Lincoln's election, Stoddard, along with hundreds of other citizens from nearby cities went to Springfield to congratulate the President-Elect upon his success. Mr. Lincoln asked Stoddard if he would accept a clerkship in Washington, and Stoddard replied that if he could be associated with Mr. Lincoln's own department he would accept it. Thus Stoddard was appointed as Secretary to sign Land Patents. His office was moved to the White House and soon he was assigned to special duties which caused him to be known as one of Mr. Lincoln's confidential secretaries. His chief task was to open and classify President Lincoln's voluminous correspondence.

In 1869, Mr. Stoddard brought out his first book and became a well known writer of juvenile stories. Among the more than 100 titles credited to his pen are the following Lincoln publications:

"Abraham Lincoln, The True Story of a Great Life," 1884; "The Lives of the Presidents, Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson," 1888; "Inside The White House in War Times," 1890; "The Table Talk of Abraham Lincoln," 1894; "Abraham Lincoln, The True Story of A Great Life," Revised Edition, 1896; "Lincoln At Work," 1900; "The Boy Lincoln," 1905.