

# LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor.  
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Number 441

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

September 20, 1937

## AN EXHAUSTIVE BIOGRAPHY OF LINCOLN

Librarians throughout the country often have been asked the question, "What is the best Lincoln biography?" Anyone of a dozen different books may have been named in answering the query and possibly the ten volume Nicolay and Hay work has usually been given the preference.

Beveridge may have been mentioned but the text only takes Lincoln through the debates. Lamon is also incomplete as it stops with Lincoln's election to the presidency. Most of the early biographies are fragmentary in light of new evidence which has been discovered since they were written.

The story of Lincoln has been studied with such detail that no individual may hope to become the leading authority on every phase of the subject. The "best life of Lincoln" cannot be written by any one author but it must be a compilation of volumes by several different writers who have given special attention to the limited fields of study which they have chosen to master.

Of course, continuity will be sacrificed by this plan and literary form will suffer by contributions from many different writers. But completeness is more to be desired than carefully planned transitions from one fragmentary episode to another, and accuracy is of greater importance than a conglomeration of historical data, legend and folk lore, no matter how well it is written.

It is needless to say that such a composite biography by different authors must necessarily be factual. Only confusion would result if biased interpreters and different schools of psychologists were to submit their conclusions about motives, urges, and the wisdom of Lincoln's behavior.

This major biography must always be accumulative and selective. The story of Lincoln will never be entirely complete, and a recognized authority today on a certain phase of Lincoln's life may be supplanted tomorrow by a more thorough student to whom there

has been made available, sources formerly obscure. This fact alone should defeat any attempt of a promoter to submit a series of monographs by different writers as the final and accepted exhaustive biography of Lincoln.

The question of emphasis is in the hands of time and some phases of Lincoln's life now seemingly unimportant may call for new chapters in the study of the Emancipator.

The size of the books will vary, the color and quality of the bindings may differ greatly and several publishing houses may be represented in the compilation but these are purely mechanical features which have little influence on the Lincoln story itself.

The whole subject of an exhaustive Lincoln biography is well illustrated by the appearance of a new Lincoln book "Lincoln's Rise To Power," by William E. Baringer. Here is an instance where a student of history has confined his efforts to a period of but two years. He begins with the Lincoln-Douglas debates and concludes with Lincoln's election. Even with this limited space the emphasis is placed upon the Chicago Convention and its preliminaries which gave Lincoln the Republican nomination.

The question Mr. Baringer raises in his book is, "How did Lincoln become president?" He then sets out to analyze every move made by Lincoln and his friends to pave the way for nomination at Chicago. Preliminary to this task he reviews how Lincoln had embraced every opportunity to make himself known by debates and oratory and succeeding in keeping his name before the members of his own party.

Mr. Baringer's book immediately qualifies for a place in the exhaustive Lincoln biography and might be said to add another chapter to the effort of Senator Beveridge whose work on the Illinois years of the President closed with the debates.

The Beveridge book is a fine illustration of how a specialist, better

qualified than almost anyone else to write on Lincoln's political achievements, fails completely when he steps out of his field to describe the early years of Abraham Lincoln in Kentucky and Indiana.

One could not possibly omit in any compilation of outstanding Lincoln biographies the Illinois years as presented by Beveridge. Yet, no one who has seriously studied the years of Lincoln in Kentucky and Indiana can accept the folk lore assembled by William Herndon and released by Beveridge as authentic.

It is conceivable then, that parts of some biographies might be accepted for an exhaustive Lincoln biography while other parts might be discarded.

It would be impossible to estimate how many books should appear in this exhaustive biography of Lincoln but following are some of the subjects which would be worthy of a monograph and which are arranged chronologically.

Childhood in Kentucky.

Later Childhood in Indiana.

Adolescence.

New Salem Years.

First Springfield Decade.

Congressman.

Second Springfield Decade.

Debates.

Nomination for Presidency.

Campaign of 1860.

President Elect and Cabinet.

Administration 1861.

Patronage.

Administration 1862

Emancipation Proclamation.

Administration 1863.

Gettysburg Address.

Administration 1864

Clemency.

Last Days 1865

Assassination.