

LINCOLN LORE

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EARLY NEWSPAPERS LINCOLN READ

A campaign biography which Abraham Lincoln annotated left without correction this statement about his earliest newspaper subscription: "The first publication for which he ever subscribed was the *Louisville Journal* which he paid for when he could secure the intellectual luxury only at the expense of physical comfort." This sacrificial attitude recalls an interesting bookplate which portrays a child in the nude reaching up into some library shelves and on the bookplate this quotation is inscribed, "and afterwards some clothes."

The *Journal* was edited by J. D. Prentice who was noted for his wit and repartee. It was originally a Whig paper which is likely the reason why Lincoln subscribed for it.

Apparently Lincoln first came in contact with newspapers while still a growing boy in Spencer County, Indiana. How early he began to read these sources of general information we do not know, but long before he had the inclination to read, newspapers were available in many homes in the community.

We know that William Jones living near Gentry's Store as early as 1825 was receiving the *Terre Haute Register*, as his name appears on the subscription list of the paper for that year. Lincoln was then sixteen years old and possibly this was one of the first papers he ever read with any consistency. J. W. Osborn, the publisher, carried at the masthead of the paper this slogan, "No dupe to party, tool, or power, no slave to minions of an hour." The editor of the paper, when it was established in 1823, was a Mr. Jones but his relationship to William Jones, if any, is not known.

Lamon says that Lincoln was "an eager reader of newspapers whenever he could get them, and Mr. Jones carefully put into his hands the kind he thought a raw youth should have." There can be no doubt but that the paper for which Jones subscribed was regularly made available to Lincoln who is said to have worked in a store for or with Mr. Jones.

One of the newspapers with a wide circulation which we are very sure Lincoln read over a period of years was the *Western Sun* published at Vincennes, Indiana. During 1825 and 1826 there were seventeen speeches of Henry Clay appearing in its columns. This is undoubtedly another paper taken by William Jones who was a great admirer of Clay, and we may feel sure Lincoln had access to it. On the migration of the Lincolns from Indiana to Illinois in 1830 Abraham is said to have visited the office of the *Western Sun* and observed the press printing this paper which was familiar to him.

The *Sangamo Journal* which later became the *Illinois State Journal* might be called Lincoln's favorite newspaper. While living at New Salem he was the paper's agent there. Upon moving to Springfield he became a regular contributor to its columns and the sheet became known as Lincoln's paper. No publication was read by him with more interest and for a longer period of years.

The Illinois paper which may have contributed more to Lincoln's political advancement than any other was the *Chicago Press and Tribune*. In a letter written June 15, 1859, he acknowledged the service this paper had rendered and stated he would probably take the paper "as long as it and I both live."

Lincoln undoubtedly subscribed for many country newspaper in Illinois during his active political life. Two which he is known to have received by reason of subscription paid were the *Paris Prairie Beacon*, for

which he sent Jacob Hardin the subscription price, and the Shawneetown paper for which he reimbursed his friend Samuel D. Marshall.

A biographer stated that "Mr. Lincoln's education was almost entirely a newspaper one," and then made this comment: "He was one of the most thorough newspaper readers in America and for fifteen years before his election to the Presidency subscribed regularly to the *Richmond Enquirer* and the *Charleston Mercury*."

Those who have left reminiscences about Abraham Lincoln's legal career state that he was noted for preparing arguments on both sides of a case, so that often the opponent's argument would be fully anticipated by Lincoln. Evidently he was anxious to keep in touch with the attitude of the far south on the slavery question and so subscribed to the *Charleston Mercury*.

Lincoln's loyalty to the Whig cause is well known, and the Whigs were especially strong in the South. During his term in Congress he associated with a group of Whigs who called themselves the Young Indians, and they were all from the South except one. This interest in the southern Whigs may have begun with his residence in Washington in 1847, 1848, and 1849, and the *Richmond Enquirer* was a welcome sheet in his home from that time.

It is not known generally that Lincoln was once the owner of a newspaper. It was published in Springfield, Illinois, by Theodore Canisius and was called the *Staats-Anzeiger*. It was a political news sheet especially prepared in the interest of the Republican party for the German population. It was acquired by Lincoln in May 1859 and did good service during the political campaign of 1860.

One paper received in the Lincoln home in which Mrs. Lincoln would find unusual interest was the *Lexington Observer*. The Lincolns were visited in the White House by Dr. L. B. Todd of Lexington, Kentucky, and Lincoln is said to have made this request of him: "Doctor, I wish you would see that the Lexington papers are sent here to the White House. The *Observer* has been coming to our home ever since Mary and I were married and I reckon there's no better weathercock for Kentucky politics just now."

Here are a few papers which Lincoln apparently received regularly at longer or shorter intervals preceding his election to the Presidency: *Anti-Slavery Standard*, *Charleston Mercury*, *Congressional Globe*, *Chicago Press and Tribune*, *Garrison's Liberator*, *Illinois State Register*, *Illinois Staats-Anzeiger*, *Kentucky Observer*, *Louisville Journal*, *National Era*, *National Intelligencer*, *Niles Weekly Register*, *Paris Prairie Beacon*, *Richmond Enquirer*, *Sangamo Journal*, *Southern Literary Messenger*, *Terre Haute Register*, *Western Citizen*, *Western Sun*.

The above list is not an attempt to compile those papers that he often read or any which he may have received after his nomination to the Presidency. To a large extent, however, they influenced his political philosophy and became the most exhaustive source of information which he stored away. It is no exaggeration to say that Lincoln was largely educated by the newspapers.

Lincoln wrote a letter to his friend E. B. Washburne on April 30, 1848, which might well have been the source of one of Will Rogers' familiar sayings. Lincoln commented, "Nothing else new, beyond what you see in the papers." Apparently he was still a close reader of the papers at this period in his life.

See Lincoln Lore No. 279.