

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 706

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

October 19, 1942

JOHN MILTON HAY, 1838-1905

Among the ten persons selected for the Lincoln Recognition Roster, the name of John Hay stands out conspicuously, largely due to his prominence as a statesman. His selection for the honor Lincoln students have bestowed upon him, however, is due to his collaboration with John G. Nicolay in producing two of the most valuable contributions to *Lincolniana: Abraham Lincoln, A History and Works of Abraham Lincoln*.

There will be no attempt to present a sketch of John Hay's life. Such biographical notes which may appear will stress his contact with Abraham Lincoln, although his secretarial work during the Lincoln administration was not such as would invite special attention.

John Hay first came in contact with Lincoln in the spring of 1859. Having graduated from Brown University he began to study with the firm of Logan and Hay, who had rooms adjacent to the Lincoln and Herndon offices at Springfield. It was at this time that John Hay also renewed his acquaintance with John Nicolay whom he had known while both were residents of Pittsfield, Illinois.

It appears as if Hay first became connected with the Lincoln campaign personnel through the Nicolay contact. In his spare moments he assisted Secretary Nicolay with the Lincoln correspondence, preliminary to his starting for Washington. Although Hay is usually designated as one of Lincoln's secretaries he had no official commission as such. He was "appointed to a clerkship in the Department of the Interior and detailed to special service at the White House," where he became the assistant of Nicolay. His salary at first was \$1600 a year and later raised to \$1800. He was but twenty-two years old when he arrived in Washington.

Although Hay was not an actual member of the official family we find his name signed on correspondence with apparently the same authority as that of Nicolay. A printed envelope in the Foundation archives carried this line, "From the President of the United States," on the second line the written signature of John Hay appears and under his name the printed abbreviation "Priv. Secy."

The fact that Hay lived with Nicolay in the White House for some time caused him to be considered a member of the household and his personal observations which found expression in his contributions to "*Abraham Lincoln, A History*" are of much value.

On January 12, 1864 Hay was given a commission as Major and Assistant Adjutant General of Volunteers, but inasmuch as he was assigned to the White House, his actual status with relation to the President was changed but little, unless he might be considered an Adjutant and Aide-de-Camp. About the time of Lincoln's assassination, however, he was raised to a Lieutenant Colonel and later to a Colonel.

Between the time of Hay's connection with the Lincoln administration and the publishing of his Lincoln history he had served as Secretary of Legation at Paris, Charge de Affaires at Vienna, editorial writer for *New York Tribune*, and Assistant Secretary of State under Hays. A few of his literary contributions had been published at the time he started work on his most ambitious undertaking.

During Lincoln's administration Nicolay and Hay had talked about some day doing a Lincoln biography and both were continually making notes with the project in view. Hay started to work on the opening chapters of the book in 1875, but because of illness he did very little for several months and by August 9, 1877 he had completed the story only to the time when Lincoln left Indiana for Illinois.

On January 20, 1879 Hay wrote Nicolay "I have almost got to the Shields duel time," and then put this interesting question to his collaborator: "When does your work begin—that is, where is my work to join yours, *quoad* Lincoln? How far am I to write his biography before reaching your history of the g-r-r-eat conflict?" It is apparent that at this time no definite division of work had been agreed upon. In some later correspondence we find that by March 20 of the same year Hay had continued on to complete a total of 50,000 words.

In a letter written by Hay to Robert Lincoln on January 27, 1885 we discover the extent of Hay's contribution to what is apparently the first two of the ten volume work. He wrote: "Nicolay tells me he has laid before you or is about to do so, the first volumes of our history, containing the chapters in which I have described the first forty years of your father's life." It would appear from this information that Hay wrote the first 279 pages of the 455 pages in volume one, taking Lincoln through his term in Congress at which point Nicolay took over. It appears as if Nicolay wrote most of the copy for the remainder of the first volume and the entire second volume, covering the debates, nomination, campaign, election and inaugural.

The division of work during the war years is not so easily determined. On August 29, 1885 Hay wrote to Nicolay "I received the schedule this morning and have been studying it all day. With what subjects you gobbled for yourself the fifth volume is practically finished." One interesting observation by Hay is in respect to the Gettysburg Address. He wrote "You give the Gettysburg Oration a chapter. The oration itself fills half a page. I thought of tacking it on to the end of the battle chapter."

The publication of the story began in the *Century Magazine* in November 1886 and continued each month for more than four years. After the publication of the ten volume history in 1880, a two volume compilation of Lincoln's works, containing Lincoln's writings and speeches was published under the joint authorship of Nicolay and Hay. This two volume work was in some respects a more important contribution to *Lincolniana* than even the ten volume history. The combined twelve volumes have since then been widely accepted as the standard work on Lincoln.

The additional discussions on Lincoln which Hay contributed, appear in the *Century Magazine*, one for November 1890 under the caption "Life at the White House in Lincoln's Time," and another "Lincoln at the Helm" for February 1909.

Among those who have led students to a better understanding of Lincoln certainly there is no one who has become better known than John Hay. The contribution he has made, in conjunction with John Nicolay, to all future Lincoln students, is immeasurable.

Note: This is the third of a series of biographical sketches on the ten persons selected by the Foundation Advisory Group for enrollment on the Lincoln Recognition Roster.