

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 727

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

March 15, 1943

JOHN LOCKE SCRIPPS, 1818-1866

The one name that is outstanding among the early biographers of Abraham Lincoln is John Locke Scripps. Two very valuable contributions to Lincolniana are available, due to his efforts. The most important autobiographical writing which Abraham Lincoln ever prepared was written at the request of Mr. Scripps and preserved by him. Also the most authentic campaign biography written about the presidential nominee was the work of his pen, and the book immediately became the most valuable source for all of the subsequent biographies of that early day. If it could be said that Mr. Lincoln had a duly appointed personal biographer, Mr. Scripps was that person. It is no wonder that he was one of the ten men selected to be nominated for the Lincoln Recognition Roster.

John Locke Scripps was born in 1818, near Cape Girardeau, Missouri. When he was eighteen years of age the family moved to Rushville, Illinois. Young John had the privilege of attending McKendree College at Lebanon, from which institution he graduated with the highest honors in his class. He later became professor of mathematics and natural philosophy in this same school of higher learning. Later, after studying law, Mr. Scripps returned to Rushville where he practiced this profession until 1847, when he moved to Chicago. A year after taking up his residence there, he married Mary Elizabeth Blanchard, of Greenville, Illinois.

In Chicago, Mr. Scripps, after a brief law partnership with Paul Cornell, found employment with a publishing house and soon advanced to the position of chief editor of *The Chicago Tribune*. Five years after arriving in Chicago, he sold out his interest in the *Tribune* and with a partner started a Free Soil newspaper, both papers for which Editor Scripps had written were soon consolidated, and he became the managing editor of the new publication, then called *The Press and Tribune*.

During the Lincoln and Douglas debates, Abraham Lincoln had the warm support of Scripps, who in conjunction with another editor, Horace Greeley, later helped to pave the way for Lincoln's nomination at Chicago in 1860. It was the unanimous opinion of the party leaders that Scripps was the man to get out the campaign biography, because of his personal acquaintance with Lincoln and his influential position as editor of the *Chicago Press and Tribune*.

Autobiography Prepared for Scripps

It is to be regretted that students of Lincolniana have often confused the two separate Lincoln manuscripts associated with Scripps. The Lincoln Autobiography written by Lincoln in the third person was prepared for Scripps, and the Scripps campaign biography, which incorporated much that was in the autobiography, was in reality Scripps' own work. This manuscript also, however, bore the stamp of Lincoln's personal endorsement.

About the first of June 1860, Scripps solicited from Lincoln some written facts with respect to his early life. The traditional reply Lincoln is said to have made about "the short and simple annals of the poor," embodying all that could be made out of his life, has been much more widely circulated than the valuable sketch which Lincoln did prepare. The fact that Lincoln wrote the sketch in the third person had also added to the confusion, the implication being, that Scripps, instead of Lincoln, wrote it. Still another source of confusion is the popular acceptance of another autobiographical sketch which Lincoln prepared for Jesse Fell. The shorter one for Fell has been given the preeminence over the longer one for Scripps.

Scripps' Campaign Biography

The fact that Mr. Scripps died in 1866, the year after the President's death, is probably responsible for the fact

that the Scripps' biography of Lincoln suffered about the same fate as the autobiography. Until a daughter of Mr. Scripps, Grace Locke Scripps Dyke, brought out in 1900, a beautifully printed volume, containing a reprint of the original Scripps' pamphlet, comparatively little attention had been given to this tremendously important work. Mr. Scripps wrote most of the Lincoln pamphlet in New York where he had the advice of Horace Greeley, of the New York Tribune. The identity of the pamphlet was further obscured because it bore the sub-title "Tribune Tracts—No. 6" preceding the caption "Life of Abraham Lincoln." The name of Mr. Scripps does not appear on the pamphlet. *The Chicago Press and Tribune* for July 4, 1860 made this statement with reference to the publication:

"We have issued a campaign Biography of the Republican standard bearer, in style so compact, and cheap, that with suitable effort on the part of clubs, canvassers, and local committees, it may reach every voter in the Northwest before the campaign is on. It is a pamphlet of 32 pages of class type, double columns, and in the style and shape of the campaign life of Colonel Fremont issued in 1856. It has been prepared with great care, and may be considered a reliable and authentic narrative of the life of Abraham Lincoln, embracing also the substance of his debates with Mr. Douglas in 1858, and a complete history of that remarkable campaign."

The pamphlet consisted of thirty-two pages and was published almost simultaneously by "The Chicago Press and Tribune Co." and the "Horace Greeley Co." in Chicago and New York, respectively. There was apparently a second edition of the Chicago imprint which is identified by a single column of advertising on the last page, instead of two columns of advertising which appears on the last page of the first edition.

Scripps Correspondence

A short letter Scripps wrote to Herndon on June 20, 1865, mentions the origin and dependability of the biography. The letter is printed in full:

Chicago, June 20th, 1865.

My Dear Herndon:

The campaign Life of Lincoln, to which you refer in your note of the 17th inst., was written by me, with the exception of a small portion of the chapter devoted to the campaign between Lincoln and Douglas in 1858. The statements therein contained, as respects the facts and incidents of the early life of Lincoln, are substantially as communicated by him to me—some of them in written memoranda, others orally, in answer to my queries. You can place the fullest reliance in the accuracy of the narrative.

Very truly yours,

J. L. Scripps.

By far the most interesting letter Scripps records, reveals how anxious Mr. Lincoln was to have the biography correct. When Lincoln received the preliminary sheets of the booklet, according to Scripps, he reacted to one statement in the book in this manner:

"That paragraph wherein you state I read Plutarch's Lives was not true when you wrote it, for up to that moment in my life I had never seen that early contribution to human history, but I want your book, even if it is nothing more than a campaign sketch, to be faithful to the facts, and in order that that statement might be literally true, I secured the book a few days ago and have just read it through."

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