

LINCOLN LORE

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LINCOLNIANA AND THE MICROFILM

The historian of tomorrow will be able to find, almost at his door, documentary sources for which his predecessors traveled from coast to coast to examine. This new epoch in historical research will be achieved through the use of the microfilm. The libraries housing archives, containing valuable files of manuscripts and rare printed forms, will become, primarily, distributing centers which will make available to all, in an inexpensive form, photographic reproductions of original papers.

The necessity of journeying to Washington for the confirmation of historical facts, largely will be eliminated, and figuratively speaking, the Library of Congress will come to the author. While there may be some difficulties to overcome before the new system will function conveniently for all types of research work, there is no reason why the vast amount of historical information in the Nation's Capitol may not be placed before the student of history, regardless of the distance he may live from the central depository.

Five years ago the editor of *Lincoln Lore* had his first practical experience with the microfilm as a preserver of documents, when he spent one whole week in Kentucky courthouses, assisting in the making of a microfilm record of over four hundred original papers referring to the Lincoln family in Kentucky, and which established by public documents, the ownership of the tracts of land in possession of Abraham Lincoln's father. Until the photographic recording by microfilm of these documents, the United States Government had no means of tracing to its original owner, the Lincoln birthplace farm now in its possession.

There is now another Lincoln microfilm project under consideration which may illustrate the distribution value of this unparalleled information medium. Several weeks ago the director of the Lincoln National Life Foundation presented to the proper authorities at the Library of Congress the possibilities of more fully carrying out the bequest of Robert Todd Lincoln with respect to the disposition of his father's papers, now under lock and key in the Nation's archives.

When Robert Todd Lincoln left his father's papers to the Library of Congress, with the bequest that they "be deposited in the Library of Congress for the benefit of all the people," he could not have realized how fully his desires might be accomplished through the medium of the microfilm.

The Abraham Lincoln papers are eligible to be made public to "all the people" in 1947. This occasion, which has received and will demand universal attention, would be an opportune time to demonstrate to the Nation the greatly extended service of the manuscript division at Washington through the medium of the microfilm.

The bequest of Robert Todd Lincoln would come to its fullest realization if complete microfilm reproductions of all Lincoln papers to be made public, were released to research centers throughout the country simultaneously, so that, instead of a concentration of interest in

one place, several research centers might be created where copies of the records could be studied. The libraries willing to serve as research centers would be expected to purchase the microfilm through the regular channels of distribution already set up by the Photoduplication Service at Washington.

The distribution of these films would not introduce any new policy within the manuscript division, inasmuch as this same service is now in operation with respect to the Herndon and Weik papers. The only new feature in following through on such a program would be the mailing of the microfilm, which would involve little more than setting up a shipping schedule.

We have assurance that this plan is going to be given serious consideration, which, if successfully followed through, will allow hundreds of Lincoln students, who have never even anticipated such a favor, the privilege to examine the contents of these papers.

The microfilm distributing effort is not confined to Washington, but every center of research, where any considerable amount of information is gathered on one certain subject, will sense the value of this extended service. The entire collecting, organizing, and filing program of the Lincoln National Life Foundation is being planned with the utility of microfilm distribution in view.

The 3,500 Lincoln magazine articles in the Foundation library are so bound and arranged by subjects that a film may be made of the entire compilations dealing with Lincoln as a lawyer, a debater, a statesman, or any desired subject. This wealth of information should some day be available to Lincoln students everywhere.

The 65,000 newspaper clippings in the Foundation collection are mounted on separate sheets of paper convenient for microfilming. They are gathered under 3,000 different Lincoln subjects. In the file relating to one of these, Lincoln's assassination, there are more than 1,700 separate sheets of clippings developing the entire story of the tragedy in its many and varied ramifications. Another file contains the reminiscences of over a thousand people who saw or heard Lincoln, and still another classification of a thousand tributes to Lincoln by prominent men of the last seventy-five years.

More important still, the thousands of Lincoln's own letters and manuscripts, which for years the Foundation has been gathering in facsimile, and mounting for microfilm photography, will constitute the most valuable documentary source which one could acquire.

It is the ambition of the Foundation to some day make it possible for a center of Lincoln research in every section of the country to have microfilm copies of the vast amount of information about Lincoln, now assembled at Fort Wayne.

The time is not far distant when any historian may acquire inexpensive microfilms of valuable source material, and an equally inexpensive microfilm reader, so that a scholarly piece of research may be done in his own study.