

LINCOLN LORE

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THE LINCOLN SKETCH IN LANMAN'S BOOK

Charles Lanman might be called Abraham Lincoln's first biographer although the brief sketch which he prepared from Lincoln's still shorter autobiographical notes, contains but 55 words.

Charles Lanman was born in Monroe, Michigan, on June 14, 1819, and in 1845 returned to his native state to manage the Monroe Gazette. Later he became associated with the Cincinnati Chronicle and later with the New York Express. In 1849 he went to Washington where he became successively, Librarian of War Department, Librarian of Copyrights, Private Secretary to Daniel Webster, examiner of depositories for the southern states, librarian in the Interior Department all before 1858.

It was at this time that Lanman corresponded with Lincoln with respect to the Dictionary of Congress which was then in the process of preparation.

Twelve days after Lincoln's assassination Lanman wrote an article about his early correspondence with the lamented President and directed it to "The Editor of the New York Herald." It was published in that paper for April 29, 1865. The entire article copied verbatim follows:

THE LIFE OF LINCOLN, WRITTEN BY HIMSELF

To The Editor of the Herald,

Georgetown, D. C., April 27, 1865.

As everything connected with the history of our martyr President is of intense interest I send you a brief record which illustrates his singular modesty as a man. When, in 1858, I commenced my labors on the work known as the "Dictionary of Congress," I forwarded to every member of Congress whose residence I could ascertain a circular asking each person for information as to the date and place of his birth, the character of his education, his profession or occupation, and a list of any public positions he may have filled. Those simple facts were all I wanted, and in looking over the thousands of replies that have been sent me since, it is truly remarkable to find that men of the greatest ability have invariably told a direct and brief story, thereby preserving their innate modesty and writing nothing to compromise their dignity. The reply which I received from Mr. Lincoln was singularly brief, and yet comprehensive, and you may well imagine is now highly valued by me, with other friendly letters by the same hand, as a memento of one who possessed all the "degrees of sovereign honor," as elucidated by Lord Bacon; and who, like Regulus and the two Decii, sacrificed his life for the good of his country. The record in question is as follows:

Born February 12, 1809, in Hardin county, Kentucky.

Education defective.

Profession, a lawyer.

Have been a captain of volunteers in the Black Hawk war.

Postmaster at a very small office.

Four times a member of the Illinois Legislature.

And was a member of the lower House of Congress.

Yours, etc.,

A. LINCOLN.

Such is the story of his life down to 1858. What a wonderful contrast does it present to his subsequent career!

Yours, very respectfully,

CHARLES LANMAN.

The original copy of the Lincoln memorandum is not now known to be in existence. The above version might be considered the most authentic copy inasmuch as Lanman evidently had it before him at the time the story was prepared for the Tribune.

Nicolay and Hay in their two volume work under the date "June (15?) 1858" introduced the brief sketch with these words: "The compiler of the "Dictionary of

Congress" states that while preparing that work for publication in 1858 he sent Mr. Lincoln the usual request for a sketch of his life, and received the following reply: . . ." The copy used by Nicolay and Hay shows these variations from the Tribune text.

1st line, comma after Born, and county capitalized.

4th line, omits article "the" before Black Hawk war.

6th line, small letter "l" in Legislature and comma after Legislature instead of period.

7th line, made a part of above sentence and beginning with small "a." The word House also spelled with small "h."

When Lanman prepared copy for his 1859 Dictionary he edited Lincoln's sketch as follows:

"He was born in Hardin County, Kentucky, February 12, 1809; received a limited education; adopted the profession of law; was a captain of volunteers in the Black Hawk war; at one time Postmaster of a small village; four times elected to the Illinois Legislature; and a Representative in Congress, from Illinois, from 1847 to 1849."

Somewhere Lincoln acquired a copy of the first edition of the dictionary which we learn from an acknowledgment of a complimentary copy received from Lanman in 1861. This was Mr. Lincoln's reply to the letter which accompanied the gift.

Springfield, Ill., June 9, 1860.

CHARLES LANMAN ESQ.,

My Dear Sir: Yours of the 4th is duly received; and I shall gratefully accept the book when it arrives, as it has not yet done. I already have a copy which I purchased near a year ago, and which I have found both interesting and valuable.

I thank you for both your letter and the book, and shall be pleased to meet you at any time.

Yours respectfully,

A. LINCOLN.

Mr. Lanman in the Tribune article comments on "other friendly letters" from Lincoln but the above original sold in the Lambert sale is the only one known to Lincoln students.

An edition of the Dictionary of Congress which came out in 1864 was also presented to the President by Lanman and is now in the William H. Townsend collection at Lexington, Kentucky.

Lanman's third edition and so noted—published in 1866 has a somewhat extended biographical note of Lincoln stating that in his early days he "spent two years at school in Stafford County, Virginia" which of course is an error. The additional facts used for the Presidency are herewith submitted:

"In 1860 he was nominated by the Republican Party as their candidate for President of the United States, and was duly elected to that position for the term commencing the 4th of March, 1861. By the Baltimore Convention, held in 1864, he was nominated for re-election to the Presidency, and was triumphantly elected. In December, 1864, the degree of LL.D. was conferred upon him by Princeton College. On the 14th of April, 1865, while seated in a private box at the theatre, he was shot in the head by an assassin, named John Wilkes Booth, and died at seven o'clock on the following morning. The circumstances of his death filled the whole land with horror, and the demonstrations to his memory were heartfelt and universal. His name was everywhere mentioned, with rare kindness, as the Martyred President."

Lanman published in 1876 his exhaustive volume *Biographical Annals of the Civil Government of the United States during its First Century*. In the Lincoln sketch he deleted the erroneous sentence about Virginia schooling but retained the rest of it as it appeared in the third edition.