

# LINCOLN LORE

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## A PUBLIC MAN'S DIARY

Anderson, Frank Maloy. *The Mystery of "A Public Man,"* University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis. \$2.75.

The *North American Review*, a magazine of great respectability, published in August 1879 a contribution under the caption "The Diary of a Public Man." A book is now off the press entitled *The Mystery of "A Public Man,"* which asserts that the anonymous chronicler who for seventy years has baffled all attempts at identification is Samuel Ward, known as the "King of the Lobby."

Samuel Ward was born in New York in 1814. His lineage is traced through prominent economic, political and military leaders of colonial days. His own father was a banker and one of his sisters was Julia Ward Howe. He was graduated from Columbia College in 1831 and later over a period of four years studied in European universities, and received a Ph. D. at Tubingen. He married in 1838 Emily Astor, daughter of William B. Astor, America's richest man. Upon her death he married again but soon a separation took place. He made some literary contributions to New York papers, became a broker, wrote political pamphlets, and at the close of the Civil War entered on the career of a lobbyist at Washington. With William H. Hurlbert and Lord Rosenberry, he joined in forming what they called "The Mendacious Club."

The evaluation of the contents of the diary, however, seem to be more important from the viewpoint of the Lincoln student than the possible discovery of the elusive diarist. The author, Frank Maloy Anderson, is of the opinion that those portions of the diary which refer to Abraham Lincoln are "almost certainly sheer inventions."

Allen Thorndike Rice, the distinguished editor of the magazine publishing the alleged diary, emerges from the findings of Mr. Anderson in one of two rather uncomplimentary roles. He was either a greatly deluded critic who unwittingly broadcast a hoax, or he was a party to the circulation of a manuscript which he knew to be fraudulent. Mr. Anderson believes that "in all probability that Rice did know the real character of the Diary," which would place Rice in the latter category.

The editor of the *North American Review*, in his introductory words prefacing the publication of the diary, asserted that the contribution consisted of "extracts from the diary of a public man" recorded at intervals from December 28, 1860 to March 15, 1861 inclusive. He further implied that the data used was copied from the diary verbatim, with the exception of the omission of certain names appearing therein, and the supplying of "proper and expressive headings." The editor also stated that he had "a firm conviction that the author of it was actuated by a single desire to state things as they were" and that the notes were "recorded in this diary from day to day under the stress of each day's crowding story." This assurance of genuineness by Mr. Rice carried great weight and was largely responsible for its almost universal acceptance as an authoritative source, especially by many of our best known historians.

The question of whether or not there ever was an original diary such as the one described by Mr. Rice is answered by Mr. Anderson in this manner, "It is not a genuine diary actually kept in 1860-1861. . . . It includes

a core of a genuine diary probably rather meagre . . . attached to this genuine core there is a large amount of embellishment added at a later date." Who did the embellishing was the problem which next confronted Mr. Anderson. While acknowledging that the "core" was probably the creation of Samuel Ward, Mr. Anderson is of the opinion that William H. Hurlbert may have collaborated with Ward and that possibly Rice "may have assisted in the process to some extent." Anderson observes that "the three men were on intimate terms at the time the Diary was published." Respecting the completion of the manuscript, the author concludes that it was prepared but a short time before its publication.

Abraham Lincoln is undoubtedly the central figure of the diary, and the captions clearly indicate that the chronicle of events evolve about the President. It is accepted generally that the most important extracts from the diary are the records of the conversation at three meetings with the President said to have been arranged by the diarist. The first one is dated February 20, 1861, at New York, and the other two on February 28, and March 7, at Washington. Mr. Anderson's reaction to the authenticity of these interviews as reported in the diary follows: "The indications are overwhelmingly strong that none of the three interviews that the diarist claims to have had with Lincoln actually occurred."

Not only does Mr. Anderson believe that "indications are overwhelmingly strong that none of the three interviews" with Lincoln "actually occurred" but he also classes the three other Lincoln episodes, the opera story, the Seward opposition to Chase tradition, and the Douglas hat incident as "inventions" although he somewhat qualifies the last mentioned incident.

One of the author's further assumptions of very great importance is that most of the data appearing in the diary was not put down on paper contemporaneously with the event, but was recorded at as late as eighteen years after it happened. This conclusion would seem to invalidate the value of the accounts of such conferences with various individuals as may have occurred.

Probably it would have been more appropriate at the beginning of this review to have made some statement about the qualifications of Frank Maloy Anderson to write with authority, on the authenticity of the *Diary of a Public Man* and his identity, but the comments seem to fit in more conveniently just here. No testimonial could be more significant than the one which appears in F. Lauriston Bullard's edition of the diary where Mr. Bullard states with reference to the diary's authorship:

"It surely would be a pity for anybody other than Professor Frank Maloy Anderson, long connected with the Historical Department of Dartmouth College, to discover and demonstrate the authorship. He probably knows more about the 'Diary' than any other living man. This is the result of his long-continued studies of every detail in the 'Diary' itself, and of every conceivable outside source that might yield a clue."

Mr. Anderson concludes in the very last paragraph of his argument that *The Diary of a Public Man* "ought not to be regarded as a reliable source in any of its details" and in his last sentence warns one that, "It ought not to be regarded as history."