

LINCOLN LORE

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DRAMATIZING THE ILLINOIS YEARS OF LINCOLN

Abe Lincoln Players for the past three years have been presenting Sherwood's play "Abe Lincoln in Illinois" under the auspices of Illinois Department of Public Works and Buildings. A Chicago newspaper made the announcement last week that "a documentary movie, in color, of Abe Lincoln in Illinois will be produced by Kling Studios here under a \$30,000 contract let by the state." The play is to be completed by October 1 and colleges, schools, and organizations will be able to use the film "at no cost." A misgiving one might entertain about the making of an acceptable picture is the limited contract price. It seems very inadequate when compared with the cost of producing other Lincoln movies.

The press account also made known that the personnel will be provided by the same Abe Lincoln Players who have heretofore appeared in the annual production. Without any reflection whatever on the fine work done by the Abe Lincoln Players, the leading parts of Abraham and Mary Lincoln might well be played by such artists as Henry Fonda in *Young Mr. Lincoln*, and Muriel Kirkland, in *Abe Lincoln of Illinois*. From the viewpoint of the editor they have best interpreted Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln of the Illinois days.

The announcement stresses the observation that the Lincoln pictures made at Hollywood have either "fictionized or distorted facts" which approach has prompted the state to sponsor a "documentary movie." The report that James Monaghan had Paul Angle have been retained as historical consultants should guarantee authenticity for the episodes portrayed. We hope that they will remonstrate against any departure from the announced purpose to produce an objective story of Lincoln in Illinois.

Students of Abraham Lincoln will receive the news with great satisfaction that at last we are to have a cinema of Lincoln based on historical data. They will look forward to the day when they may view a moving picture of Lincoln without having to worry through a fictitious Ann Rutledge love scene, without hearing Mary Lincoln cursed by her husband, who never used profanity, without observing the President groomed for posterity by William Herndon, and without hearing Lincoln's Farewell Address garbled and its finer and nobler sentiments expurgated.

We trust that Mr. Monaghan and Mr. Angle may not only be invited to pass on the authenticity of certain lines in the play, but that they may also be consulted about the scenes to be portrayed. This would result in the really important phases of Lincoln's life in Illinois receiving the proper emphasis.

The Lincoln drama as it is now presented by the Abe Lincoln Players consists of twelve scenes arranged in three acts. The first act is oriented at New Salem, two scenes in the home of Mentor Graham, and one in the Rutledge tavern. The time element extends from 1831 to 1837. If the film is to be fundamentally historical it looks as if Mary Owen would have to replace Ann Rutledge, and the Mentor Graham influence whittled down to some extent. Such tremendously important influences as the New Salem store experience, Black Hawk War, and the Vandalia environment, should be given their proper place in the events of this period. The excellent new book "Lincoln in Vandalia" by William E. Baringer would offer sufficient source material for an interesting scene depicting Lincoln in this early state capitol town. A month at Vandalia meant more to Lincoln's early advancement than a year at New Salem.

The second act of the drama provided by the Lincoln Players contains five scenes which fall within the period 1837-1858, two in Stuart's and Lincoln's law office, and two are in the home of Ninian Edwards, at Springfield. For some strange dramatic urge, one setting is out on the prairies near New Salem, which the author of the play admits is entirely fictitious, so it would have no place in a documentary picture. One scene in both the Edwards' home, and the law office leads up to the ridiculous conclusion that Lincoln ran away from the wedding ceremonies when he was supposed to marry Mary Todd.

What a hilarious and entirely humorous scene the proposed Lincoln-Shields duel would make, after the tension of the breaking of the Lincoln-Todd engagement and Lincoln's subsequent mental collapse. The concluding scene, the shortest in the entire play, with but four pages of script, deals with the most important domestic event in Lincoln's Illinois years—his marriage to Mary Todd.

The last act of *Abraham Lincoln in Illinois*, as now presented contains four scenes, and the time element extends from 1858 to 1861. There are two outdoor episodes, one on a Lincoln-Douglas debate platform, and the closing one at the railroad depot. Another series of events takes place in the state house where Lincoln had his post-election office. One unexplainable interior scene, unless it be to save excessive properties, is laid in the Edwards' home to the exclusion of the environment of Lincoln's own home, where he lived with his family for fifteen years. Certainly Mr. Monaghan and Mr. Angle will see to it that Lincoln in Illinois will not appear as a man without a home.

The cast of fifteen historical characters used in the original production of *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* included Mentor Graham, Abe Lincoln, Ann Rutledge, Judge Bowling Green, Ninian Edwards, Joshua Speed, Jack Armstrong, Nancy Green, William Herndon, Elizabeth Edwards, Mary Todd, Stephen A. Douglas, Willie Lincoln, Tad Lincoln, and Robert Lincoln. There were also seventeen fictitious characters not including twenty who took the parts of soldiers, railroad men and townspeople. The Abe Lincoln Players cut down the cast to twenty with half of the number fictitious.

It is difficult to visualize a non-historical character participating in a documentary movie. There seems to be plenty of candidates for a place in the picture among those who actually came in contact with Lincoln and more or less influenced him. Here are a few names in addition to those already mentioned which are recalled in the order in which they might make their appearance.

William F. Berry, Mary Owen and her sister Mrs. Burnett Abel, James Short, John T. Stuart, Governor Joseph Duncan, Orvill Hickman Browning, Simeon Francis, Mrs. Simeon Francis, James Shields, John Davis Whiteside, Elias H. Merryman, Rev. Charles Dresser, Thomas C. Brown, James Matheney, Stephen T. Logan, Mrs. Francis Wallace, Richard Yates, Lyman Trumbull, Richard Oglesby, David Davis, Norman Judd, Leonard Swett, John Wentworth, Joseph Medell, Ward Hill Lamon, and John Nicolay.

When the preview of this documentary movie takes place the community where it is presented may look forward to the largest gathering of Lincoln students brought together since the opening of the Lincoln Papers in the Library of Congress. Every one of them will attend the performance as a critic.