

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 1190

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

JANUARY 28, 1952

BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS LINCOLN READ

Twenty years ago there were four well known students, Dr. W. E. Barton, H. E. Barker, R. R. Wilson and M. L. Houser who were specialists in the field of Lincolniana. They were attempting to gather the originals or facsimiles of every book and pamphlet Lincoln ever read and they called these publications Association Books. In late December M. L. Houser of Peoria, the last surviving member of the group, passed away and the Lincoln fraternity is left without any recognized authority in this important field of research. Mr. Houser's collection of Lincolniana including his Association Books had recently been presented to Bradley University.

Dr. W. E. Barton was one of the pioneers in this field and he brought from the press in 1920 under the title *Abraham Lincoln and his Books* what might be called the first compilation of Association Books. Many Lincoln students about this time seemed to recognize the value of such a library and H. E. Barker, formerly a book dealer in Springfield, Illinois, began to specialize in the sale of this type of literature and became our best early authority in the field. Many students were supplied by him with copies of the editions, the same as Lincoln used, long since out of print. Each book contained an authoritative statement as to when and where the book was read by Lincoln. Upon Barker's death interest in this class of literature subsided somewhat.

Contemporary with the efforts of Dr. Barton and Mr. Barker, M. L. Houser began gathering information in this field and soon started publishing the most extensive and comprehensive studies to be made about books Lincoln read. For many years and up to the time of his death, but a little more than a month ago, he was looked upon as the best posted student on the subject of Association Books.

One other well known Lincoln student, recently deceased, should be mentioned as a collaborator with these three other students. Rufus R. Wilson of Elmira, New York, whose publication *What Lincoln Read* was published in 1932 has given us the finest printed volume on the subject.

After the publications by Barton, Houser and Wilson were made available, Lincoln Lore published a check list of all titles located by these authors with some additional ones discovered by R. Gerald McMurtry, who was then librarian of the Foundation. All together there were 192 titles noted.

The value of learning what books Lincoln read, and especially those to which he is known to have had access in his formative years, need not be stressed. Lincoln Lore from its very earliest issues has tried to emphasize the importance of this source material and in the bulletin of March 17, 1930 used this introductory paragraph:

"There seems to be a lively interest in the books which came into Lincoln's hands in his early life. The editor of Lincoln Lore at certain intervals during the next few months will discuss the contents of these early publica-

tions which so vitally influenced this backwoods boy. These are books about which monographs were written during the following months: *Bible*, *Dilworth's Speller*, *Aesop's Fables*, *Weems' Life of Washington*, *Ramsay's Life of Washington*, *Pike's Arithmetic*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Murray's English Reader* and *The Kentucky Preceptor*."

About the time the aforesaid series was being released a list of the books loaned to the White House by the Library of Congress came to light. The list revealed the titles of 129 books which were made available to the Lincolns during the Washington residence. This was a significant discovery and was published in Lincoln Lore on Sept. 28, 1931.

It was nearly ten years later on Feb. 17, 1941 before a list of law books said to have been used by Lincoln was published in Lincoln Lore. There were 70 books in the list and possibly the number of volumes might be extended considerably, if we were positive about the legal volumes Lincoln consulted in the Illinois State Law Library at Springfield.

It was not until 1946 that a discovery of sufficient information warranted the publication of another list of Association Books. At that time the editor of Lincoln Lore came across a catalogue of books once in possession of John Nicolay, Lincoln's private secretary, many of which were presentation copies for the President which evidently Mr. Lincoln had turned over to Nicolay. In the issue of Lincoln Lore for Nov. 4, 1946 fifty-seven different titles are listed which were most likely perused by Lincoln.

While there may be some slight overlapping of titles in these various compilations a tabulation of them is presented: general list, 192; White House list, 129; Law list, 70; Nicolay list, 57; making a total of 448 books.

But this is not all. Interest in Association Books should have an upward surge with the knowledge that there are in the recently opened Lincoln Papers in the Library of Congress a large number of pamphlets, possibly exceeding 200.

As far as we can learn no attempt has yet been made to collate the titles and authors of these various and numerous pamphlets. That Lincoln preserved them and that they found a place in his permanent files indicates that he had some interest in them at least. Any list of Association Books which does not contain this latest contribution is fragmentary, indeed, and it is hoped some student will see the significance of preparing a list of titles to be found in the Lincoln Papers. Adding these new discoveries it would appear that we might finally compile a list of Association Books that would approach the 700 mark. The fact that Bradley University has possibly the finest nucleus of Association Books on which to build a great associate library, possibly such a project might be a challenge for the institution, which would be an appropriate memorial to M. L. Houser.