



# Lincoln Lore

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## Some Correspondence Between John Hay and Helen Nicolay about her father, the Sixteenth President, royalty payments, investments and the problems of authorship

### Part 2

(Continued from  
the January issue)

From the correspondence which is available, it appears that it was the concluding chapters that gave Miss Nicolay the most trouble. On December 4, 1901 Colonel Hay, who was no mean literary critic, made the following comments:

Dear Miss Nicolay:

I herewith return the copy you gave me, to which I have given the last three nights.

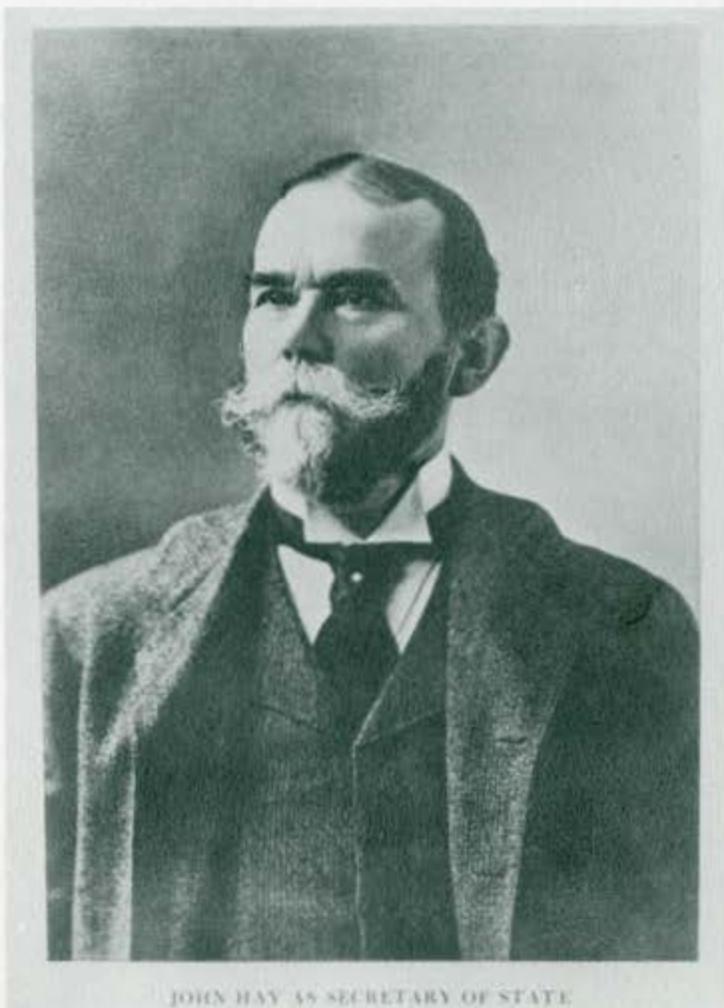
I congratulate you on the success with which you have done this last part of the work. I think you have made a remarkably clear, connected and vivid narrative of Chapter 37. In regard to the last chapter, "Lincoln's Fame," I read your father's address first, and thought that that would make an admirable ending by itself, but on reading your chapter, I see you have taken the greater part of mine and added to it your father's address. I think that is all right if you prefer it that way; but do you not think that taking so much verbatim from the History will necessitate calling your work on the title page, an abridgment of the original work? Still, this is only for your own consideration.

Sincerely Yours  
John Hay

In a letter dated "Thursday" Helen Nicolay thanked Colonel Hay for his comments concerning the manuscript:

Dear Colonel Hay:

I am afraid you "broke your neck" over those chapters, in order to send them back quickly.



JOHN HAY AS SECRETARY OF STATE.

From the John Hay Library of Brown University

### John Milton Hay — 1838-1905

American statesman, born in Salem, Indiana. Private secretary to Abraham Lincoln (1860-65). U. S. Assistant Secretary of State (1878). Emerged (in 1870-90) as an important literary figure, with publication of his *Pike County Ballads And Other Pieces* (1871), *Castilian Days* (1871), *The Bread-Winners* (pub. anon. 1884), *Poems* (1890), and with John Nicolay, *Abraham Lincoln, A History* (10 vols., 1890), *Abraham Lincoln — Complete Works* (2 vols., 1894 and expanded to 12 vols. in 1905). U. S. Ambassador to Great Britain (1897-98). U. S. Secretary of State (1898-1905); negotiated Hay-Pauncefote treaty (1901) providing for construction of Panama Canal and superseding Clayton-Bulwer treaty.

Thank you for the trouble you have taken, and the suggestions you made. I fear there must be some mistake however, there are so few of the latter.

I am glad you think the address will do for an ending. I would rather use it. Perhaps I can tuck in the two little paragraphs I most wanted from your chapter — the one about his literary rank and that about his command of military problems — at some other place. Anyway I will try, and if you do not approve, a blue pencil will remedy the trouble

Very sincerely yours  
Helen Nicolay

The P. O. D. sent me a polite note and the desired information—with additions. It is a great thing to know the Secretary of State.

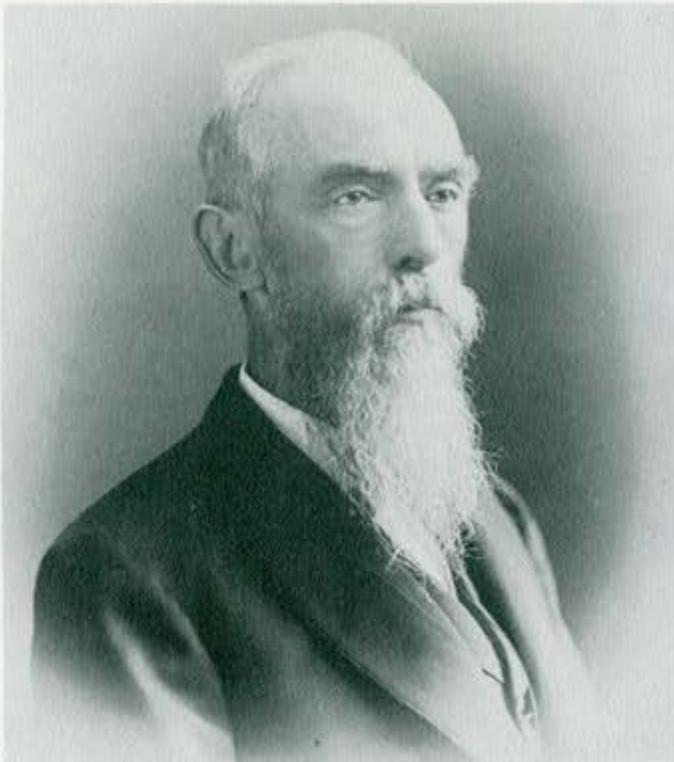
Still concerned with the details of her father's manuscript, Helen Nicolay wrote Colonel Hay about a quotation from Secretary of State William H. Seward. Hay answered the query on January 16, 1902 and inserted a paragraph about financial matters:

Dear Helen:

I am extremely sorry I cannot remember anything about the quotation from Seward. If I were you I would take it for granted that your father, who was one of the most accurate of men knew what he was saying.

I have arranged that matter of the draft, and given Mr. Brice a bond which will save the Riggs Bank from ruin in any contingency.

Yours Sincerely  
John Hay



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

John G. Nicolay

A photograph taken on September 16, 1891 in the studio of Charles Parker, 477 Penn. Ave., Washington, D.C.

While in New York City, on February 27, 1902, Helen Nicolay wrote Colonel Hay about her visit with her publisher:

Dear Colonel Hay

I saw the Century people yesterday, and had a little talk with Mr. Scott, who impresses me as not knowing exactly what he wants to do with the MS now that he has got it.

I gave my vote for one volume instead of two, on general principles, and incidentally was not enthusiastically over illustration. Remarked that I was very anxious to have a good index — and was invited to make it myself.

Mr. Scott suggested a title something like this:

A Short Life  
of  
Abraham Lincoln  
Condensed from Nicolay and Hay's  
Abraham Lincoln: A History  
by  
John G. Nicolay

He made quite a point of possible misconception on the part of the public if the longer work were not mentioned — said they might think you and my father had disagreed; and that as the History had become an Authority with a big A. it was well to utilize its standing in bringing out this shorter life.

I told him that I would be satisfied with any decision you and he reaches on the subject.

The weather has been abominable and New York streets are in a condition bordering in spots on impassibility

With love to Mrs. Hay and Alice  
Sincerely yours  
Helen Nicolay

Mr. Scott offered, in an apologetic way, the usual ten percent royalty, saying it was all that they ever paid on histories. I wonder why he took the trouble to explain since it is customary.

H N

Colonel Hay answered Miss Nicolay's February 27th letter (1902) with one dated February 28th:

My Dear Helen:

I have a letter from Mr. Scott mentioning the same

things you refer to, and I have written to him saying you have my full and unreserved authority to make any use of our title page that may seem good to you.

Sincerely Yours  
John Hay

The Century Company, following Mr. Scott's suggestions as to format including title page, illustrations and index, began to take the preliminary steps which would lead to the printing of the Nicolay manuscript. Meanwhile, Helen Nicolay, back home from New York City, wrote John Hay on March 13, 1902:

Dear Colonel Hay:

The Century people took it for granted that you meant the returns from the "Works" to come to me as well as from the "Life" — so they sent me their check for \$69.00 the years harvest. I received it as I was about to take the train for New York, and feeling sure that you were not at the moment pining for the \$23.00 which I herewith enclose, I left the whole matter until my return.

I reached home last night, and this morning received two copies of an "Agreement" concerning the shorter Life to look over and sign.

Will you run your eye over it before I send it back. I'll try to appear at your house tomorrow (Friday) about two o'clock, on the chance of finding you "at home" If a Dip (diplomat) or a Potentate gets ahead of me, I'll try again.

Greetings to Mrs. Hay.

Sincerely yours  
Helen Nicolay

In answer to Miss Nicolay's March 13th letter Colonel Hay replied:

Dear Helen:

It was settled ages ago. Both belong to you. The Century people know their affairs.

Yours Sincerely John Hay

The book *The Short Life of Abraham Lincoln* was the reason for additional correspondence between Helen Nicolay and John Hay. In a letter bearing only the date "Friday" Miss Nicolay wrote as follows:

Dear Colonel Hay:

Thank you for "Harpers." My attention had been called to the article by the little book-seller who has a shop across the street.

I answered the letter from Mr. Scott by stating the exact facts in the case — that you and my father had not gone over the condensation together — that he did much of the work at Holderness summer before last, since which time neither of you had leisure to go into details when you were together. I told him that after I had seen you, I would write him again.

When you have time and strength will you mind coming up and looking hastily at the MS? It is on pencil paper in my handwriting, of course, and makes a pile about four inches high.

There are some other things I shall want to ask you about too, if I may. If you could let me know what hour of the day you would be most likely to come I would make a point of being in the house at that time — not binding you to a day — but just being on hand at that hour until you found a day on which you could come. I shall go to see Mrs. Hay very soon. I passed the house the day you returned, but thought, a visit then would be a little too prompt.

Yours sincerely  
Helen Nicolay

The correspondence between Colonel Hay and Miss Nicolay does not give a clue to the date the Secretary of State visited the Nicolay home. However, on May 30, 1902, Miss Nicolay wrote Colonel Hay from 52 Trumbull Street, New Haven, Connecticut about the identification of a name for the index. Her letter follows:

Dear Colonel Hay:

Was the Browning who returned the thanks of Illinois and etc., at the time of Lincoln's first nomination for President, O. H. Browning?

I am getting along pretty well with the index, but occasionally wish myself next door to the Library of Congress.

Best greetings to Mrs. Hay.

Sincerely yours  
Helen Nicolay

The very next day John Hay replied to his correspondent:

Dear Miss Nicolay:

The Browning who returned thanks was our old friend O. H. Browning

Yours faithfully

John Hay

In October, when the Nicolay book came from the press, Miss Nicolay wrote to her good friend who was visiting in New Hampshire:

Dear Colonel Hay:

I mail you a copy of the Short Biography which has just reached me. Being smothered in the details of "moving" I had not wit enough to ask the Century people to send it to you direct.

I could get along without the astronomy and botany on the cover — but that is a small matter. Barring that don't you think the volume is just about what my father would have liked?

With love to Mrs. Hay, and endless thanks for your kindness and patience in helping me with the MS.

Sincerely yours

Helen Nicolay

Upon learning from a press release that the Secretary of State was back in Washington, Miss Nicolay wrote a second letter:

Dear Colonel Hay

I see by this morning's paper that you are back in town. Not knowing you were coming so soon I mailed a copy of the Short Biography to your New Hampshire address on Thursday. Will it be forwarded to you?

I am in the midst of getting the house empty to turn over on the 15th to the tenant. It is a terrible undertaking. I tear up papers all day long and never seem to make no impression on the mass to be examined.

I expect to go away for three weeks about Friday next. Mail sent here will be forwarded to me until my return.

Hoping that you have come home in good health and spirits

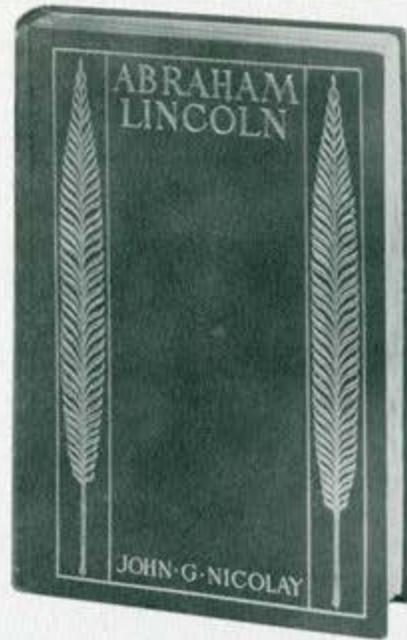
Sincerely yours

Helen Nicolay

Colonel Hay, it appears, would eventually get his copy of the "Short Life" because he wrote Miss Nicolay at her old address on October 6, 1902 as follows:

My dear Helen:

I have your note and Mrs. Hay tells me she has sent



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

The first edition of John G. Nicolay's book, *A Short Life of Abraham Lincoln* (M. 1376), published posthumously by The Century Co., New York, N.Y., in October, 1902. This book has appeared in nine different editions, the latest of which came from the press in 1942. The total sales of the book in 1915 amounted to 35,000 copies. Miss Nicolay wrote John Hay that "I could get along without the astronomy [13 stars appear on the spine] and botany on the cover. . . ."

back the book from Newbury. I have not received it, but shall in a day or so

Mrs. Hay is all alone, packing up things in the deserted house. The wedding [Alice Hay married James Wolcott Wadsworth, Jr., September 30, 1902] was a very pretty one in spite of the rain. We all regretted you could not come

Yours faithfully

John Hay

Upon receiving the "Short Life" and after giving some hours to the reading of the work, Colonel Hay wrote Miss Nicolay on October 21, 1901:

Dear Helen:

I gave most of the day yesterday to looking over your book. I find it remarkably well done. No work in existence has so much of the history of the time in so little space.

I send you as much of my work as I have been able to find. Several of the chapters are boiled down to a page but many are not even touched. I have not time to go over them. You are welcome to anything you can find in them.

I am writing the Century to send any balance coming to your father and me, to you, as usual. I make you a present of all my right and title in the History.

When you are done with these chapters of mine, I would like to have them back. Of course, I shall never look at them again — but I like to fool myself with the idea that I shall.

Yours faithfully

John Hay

Due to the receipt of royalty checks, a number of money transactions took place between the two authors. On October 28, 1903 Col. Hay wrote Miss Nicolay as follows:

Here my dear Helen, is your 500 Samoleons. Before another year rolls around I hope I may happen upon some security that will set still long enough to be bought.

Yours faithfully

John Hay

On different occasions Colonel Hay assisted Miss Nicolay in the purchase of stocks and bonds, and in October, 1901, he secured for her 100 shares of Western Union stock for \$9,150. Again, in 1904 he served as her financial advisor, and on January 22nd she received the



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

Helen Nicolay  
1866-1954

This photograph of Helen Nicolay made in the later years of her life, depicts her in her study, seated at her father's desk and in the studious and historic atmosphere of the Lincoln-Nicolay-Hay era.

following letter from a second vice president of the Trust Department of the Metropolitan Trust Company, 37 Wall Street, New York City:

Dear Miss Nicolay:

At the request of Hon. John Hay, we herewith hand you by registered mail certificate No. 16750 for 100 shares of Preferred Capital Stock of the Continental Tobacco Company standing in your name (also bank dividend order for your convenience.) Kindly advise Mr. Hay of the receipt of the Stock and also send acknowledgment of its receipt to this company, obliging,

Yours very truly  
(Unidentifiable signature)

On January 23, 1904 Colonel Hay wrote Miss Nicolay from Greenwood, Thomasville, Georgia:

Dear Helen:

I have, after much inquiry, concluded that "Continental Tobacco Preferred" is about as good an investment as there is at present in sight, and have therefore bought with your money One Hundred Shares of it at a cost of \$10,450. The little balance I beg you to accept as a "slight but sincere etc. Christmas and birthday present." I owe you, in various wages too numerous to mention, more than that — even so much more.

The stock pays 7% that is to say \$175 quarterly, beginning April next. It was bought at a bargain owing to the "slump." My friends think it is worth a much higher price.

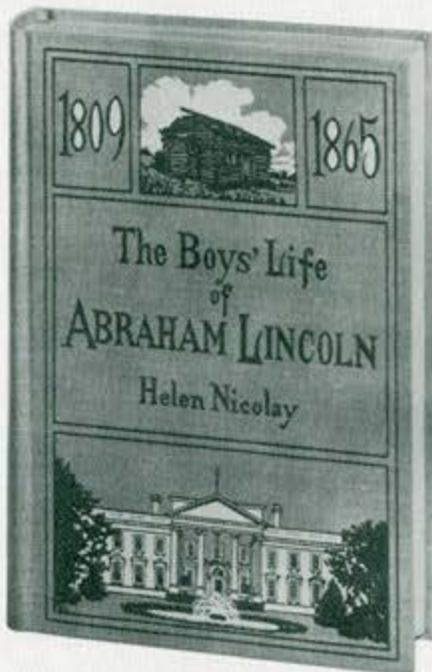
You can cancel my note when you receive the shares and return it to me at your convenience, preferably not for two weeks — as I shall be here for that time.

Yours sincerely  
John Hay

On the same day that Colonel Hay wrote Miss Nicolay she sent a letter of acknowledgment to the Metropolitan Trust Company, and on the following day she wrote her financial advisor:

Dear Colonel Hay:

Yesterday came a communication from the Metropolitan Trust Co. of New York enclosing a certificate for 100 shares of Preferred Stock of the Continental Tobacco Co. with the request that I inform you of its safe arrival.



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

Helen Nicolay's book, *The Boys' Life of Abraham Lincoln* (M. 1509), was published by The Century Co., New York, N.Y., in October, 1906. With numerous illustrations by Jay Hambidge and others, this book has appeared in nine different editions, the latest issue coming from the press in 1943. This work does not contain a preface, due to the fact that John Hay declined an invitation to write one.

I have never before used tobacco in any form, but foresee that I may become quite dependent on this. Thank you for hunting out a suitable investment for me.

I return two notes which belong to you rather than to me at this stage of the game, and also a check for the excess interest you paid me last autumn.

I hope you are growing strong rapidly. The papers said you "stepped briskly from the train" when you reached your journey's end. Did they expect you to ride out on a dromedary — or that your wings had sprouted?

Sincerely yours  
Helen Nicolay

Again on January 25, 1904 Miss Nicolay wrote Colonel Hay a business letter:

Dear Colonel Hay:

How very awkward it is to go off half cocked! Here I mailed your note this morning — and not only mailed it to you at Thomasville where you do not want it, but sent it uncancelled. If you'll bring it back I'll write things all over it.

As for the "Christmas and birthday present" you are just as good to me as you can be — but don't you see that if I should let you do that, I'd feel that I could never trouble you again about money matters? And that would cut me off from a vast deal of comfort.

So please don't ask me to accept it. Let me cling to my blessed privilege of bothering you about my small affairs whenever I see fit.

For sometime I've had \$500. that I mean to consult you about. I've put it off from day to day because you were sick and miserable. This providentially answers my question before it is asked, and greatly relieves my mind.

Thank you again — a thousand times  
Yours most sincerely  
Helen Nicolay

On January 27th Colonel Hay wrote Miss Nicolay from Thomasville:

Dear Helen:

Here is your check, which, as I explained in my last letter, does not belong to me. If such wealth impedes your travel through the needle eye, you have my condolences.

I am so well and hungry down here that I shall have to have two special cars to carry me home

Yours sincerely  
John Hay

The very next day Colonel Hay, upon receiving his correspondent's letter wrote Miss Nicolay again:

Dear Helen:

Our game of cross-purposes continues. I have your letter and check. You are incorrigible. I take your money, which now assumes the form of a present from you to me, and am very much obliged. I see now how stupid and awkward my letter was. "Sometimes, sometimes—"

Very sincerely  
John Hay

Another letter regarding finances, which is beyond explanation due to a lack of adequate information was written by one of the correspondents. On October 30, 1904 Miss Nicolay wrote Colonel Hay:

Dear Colonel Hay:

Your valuable letter reached me this morning. Somebody had directed it to The Greysboro, a prehistoric address of the Spofford's,<sup>9</sup> but it seems to have lost no time in finding me. The check is over-large as only \$7000 of the ten have been on your conscience since last autumn. The other three were added to the load in May.

This must not be allowed to escape you in the final adjustment.

Very sincerely yours  
Helen Nicolay

Miss Nicolay in the years following her father's death began a study of what was eventually to be called *The Boys' Life of Abraham Lincoln*. It was published in October 1906 by The Century Company. The book proved to be a successful publishing project as it appeared in nine different editions, one dated edition appearing as late as 1943.

<sup>9</sup>Miss Nicolay was friendly with the family of Ainsworth R. Spofford, the Librarian of Congress, an appointee of President Lincoln.

(Continued to the March issue)