



Lincoln Lore

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Ruth E. Cook, Editorial Assistant. Published each month by the
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LOUIS AUSTIN WARREN (April 23, 1885 — June 22, 1983) (Cont.)

Early in 1927 he agreed to lecture on behalf of the Indiana Lincoln Union, an organization which was attempting to raise a million dollars for a memorial for Nancy Hanks Lincoln's grave in southern Indiana. The Zionsville church board agreed to let him lecture three days a week for the union, but in truth Warren was facing a serious crisis of vocation. He had "a beautiful home" in Zionsville, but his \$3000 salary ("including rental credit on parsonage and other fees") merely, as Warren put it, "allows us to get along." He had renewed his contract with the church for 1927 only after asking Dr. Schmidt whether the University of Chicago or the Chicago Historical Society could fund a year's leave of absence from the church for historical work. When that failed and he agreed to stay at Zionsville, Warren essentially gave up any chance for serious research until his summer vacation.

Reviews and notices poured in, along with questions and invitations to lecture on Lincoln. In February, always the busiest time for Lincoln experts, Warren admitted, "I fear that I may be giving to[o] much time to my Lincoln interests and try to stay on the job here at my church as much as possible." He could make little progress on his Indiana book, although he was "convinced it will be a more valuable work than the Kentucky work if I am able to develop it as I have now planned." The problem was this:

My duty to my family... will not allow me to make any more sacrifices in my profession, and I have been sorely tempted to accept a larger church where the salary will be more remunerating. This would of course mean less time for my historical interests.

Warren went to Hodgenville in the summer to see about acquiring the LaRue County *Herald*. The editor of Warren's old newspaper was running for political office and would not be able to continue in his present position if he won. Warren had trouble making a direct approach in regard to purchasing the paper because he was a Republican and the paper was and always had been (except for the two years Warren was editor) Democratic. Dr. Schmidt was still sending Warren money and apparently Schmidt would have helped bankroll the newspaper's purchase. Warren's principal financial hope in the scheme, however, was a man named Mumford from Morganfield. While Warren was pastor there, he was also president of the Kiwanis Club and persuaded Mumford to establish what proved to be a successful newspaper in the little town. Apparently Mumford was willing to get into the newspaper business in Hodgenville too.

All the while, Warren was still lecturing all over Indiana for the Indiana Lincoln Union. The newspaper negotiations dragged on but finally failed in February of 1928, at which time, approximately, one of Warren's lectures changed his circum-

stances dramatically. He spoke in Fort Wayne, and there a man named Arthur F. Hall heard him. Warren explained to Dr. Schmidt on February 6, 1928, the remarkable crossroads the middle-aged minister now faced:

With the closing of my present contract with the Indiana Lincoln Union, it looks as if I should be obliged to lay aside my Lincoln efforts and settle down to making a living for my family. I have quite an attractive offer from the firm now conducting the financial campaign for the Lincoln Union and it is very likely that I will tie up with them.

Mr. Arthur Hall, president of the Lincoln Life Insurance Company of Fort Wayne, has a Lincoln project under consideration which may make an opening for me there. If this fails I expect I will have to bid goodbye to Lincolniana until such time as my family shall have been properly cared for, and this will require the better part of the next two decades.

I had hoped to have finished my documentary history... on the Indiana Lincolns, and publish some further findings on the Lincoln ancestry but these possibly will wait.

I do not know how I can thank you for the encouragement and financial assistance which you have given me and also the offer to see me through with the newspaper deal, and I trust that you will feel that I am not betraying any interest taken in my historical efforts by turning aside to care more properly for those who are dependent on me.

Within just sixteen days of the writing of this despondent farewell to Lincolniana, everything changed. "The very thing that I have longed for most is now realized," Warren told Schmidt on February 22. The reason for the turn-around was Arthur F. Hall and his corporation.

The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company had been founded in 1905. The company had struggled to make it through the avalanche of death claims from the 1918 influenza epidemic, claims which in one year nearly equaled all the previous death claims from twelve years of business put together. Once past that trial, however, the corporation prospered, and Hall was feeling increasingly that the company should somehow pay the debt it owed Abraham Lincoln for the use of his name. Hall, the son of a disabled Union veteran, had a keen interest in Lincoln's life and served on the committee to organize the meetings of the Indiana Lincoln Union in the northern part of the state.

When he heard Warren speak, Hall decided very quickly to invite him to work for the Lincoln National Life Insurance Company and to establish something to pay the company's debt to Lincoln. He had nothing more specific in
FIGURE 1. Louis A. Warren in 1932.



mind than that vague idea. Everything that followed — the research library, publishing a monthly bulletin, and going around the country lecturing on Lincoln — was Warren's idea.

Warren moved to Fort Wayne in February 1928. His salary was \$5000 a year. He brought with him to the office two sectional bookcases containing his own meager Lincoln library and a little book of clippings. Fortunately, he also brought with him a nearly religious zeal to make the most of Arthur F. Hall's desire to do something for Abraham Lincoln. The company's original announcement of Warren's addition to the staff revealed the shadowy outlines of the idea as it had taken shape by February 1928. The company was to "establish and maintain a national service for the study of the martyred president, which will take the form of a Lincoln Foundation to be established in the Lincoln National Life Building." Warren, the announcement stated, had already been hired, but the company would donate his time to the Indiana Lincoln Union until April 1. When the new director returned, he would establish a "service" described thus:

The new foundation will serve the nation as a clearing house of Lincoln information, as a research seminar in Lincoln history, and by making technical matter clear to the average reader. There will be a publishing program, through which the findings of the foundation will be cleared to the people. There will be a speakers' bureau, through which Dr. Warren and other speakers will be made available to the people; there will be a Lincoln Library and collection and other features not yet determined in detail.

... The new foundation will offer its services to the schools and teachers of the land; it will have a message and a real contribution to those who love and honor Lincoln; it will do both original research and work of popularization; it will be a service institution co-operating with others that can help in the work it plans to do. It will aim to make Americans increasingly conscious of the great story of Lincoln, and the sterling qualities of his, that all should emulate.

Energy was a Warren trademark his life long, but at no time more so than in the almost frenetically productive years from 1928 to 1932. He was determined to make the Lincoln Historical Research Foundation "the world's Lincoln information bureau," and that goal when coupled with his commitments for the Indiana Lincoln Union led him to work sixteen to eighteen hours a day. Breakdown was certain, and at the end of June 1928 the company's officers advised him to "seek some place of quiet and rest." He had, by his own admission, worked himself "into a condition of nervous exhaustion." From July 3 to August 15 he stayed at Clear Lake, Indiana, "trying to repair my shattered nerves."

The rest cure worked, apparently. Warren was still unable to cut down his activities to "about eight hours a day," but by the end of November he was feeling "very much like my old self again." He began to renew commitments for considerable public speaking.

In the spring of 1929 the former newspaperman began publishing a weekly bulletin called *Lincoln Lore*, a single sheet with no printing on the back so that editors could clip it for interesting fillers in their newspapers and then throw it away. Warren mailed the first issue, dated April 15, 1929, free of charge to about 500 persons. He spent about one day each week "gathering material, composing, and attending to [the] mailing list." Excluding the cost of his own labor, he found that the sheet cost the company \$16.20 a week or 3.2¢ per subscriber. Stamps cost only a penny apiece, and the labor of printing, addressing, and mailing cost 75¢ per hour.

Warren's natural New England frugality was deeply ingrained after his impecunious years as a teenager, and *Lincoln Lore*, like all of his operations, was an economical one. Nevertheless, the bulletin did come from a life insurance company not accustomed to giving things away. Four days before the stock market crash that autumn, Arthur Hall sent this personal letter to every subscriber:

October 19, 1929

Lincoln Lore, the broadside issued each week by The Lincoln Historical Research Foundation, has just completed the first six months of its existence.

My interest in the future of this publication, sponsored by our organization, makes me anxious to get some reaction from those in a position to judge, as to whether or not the bulletin is worth-while.

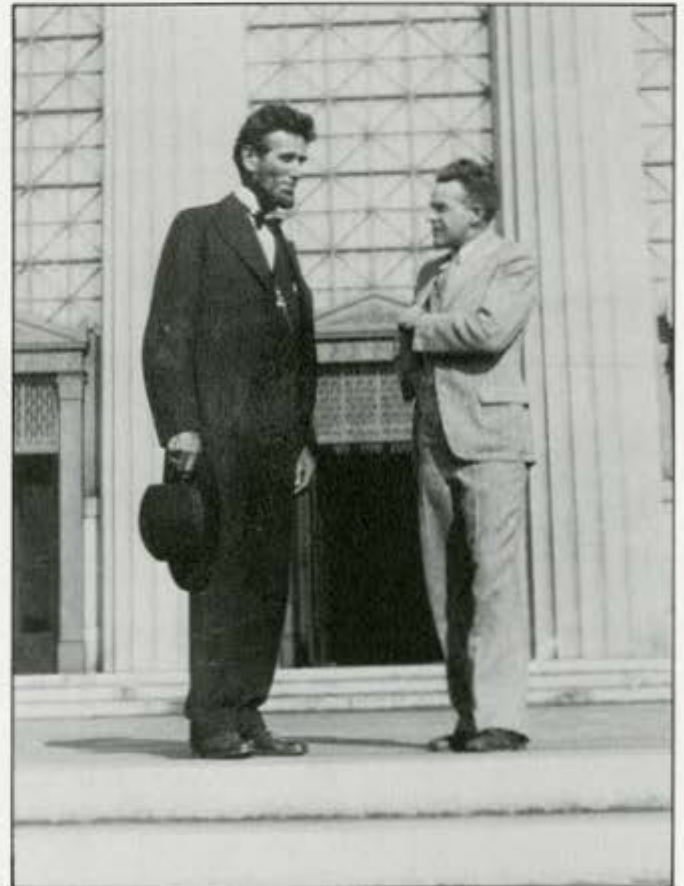
It has been a pleasure to make available this information relating to Abraham Lincoln. Any comment which you might feel free to make with reference to this service would help to determine the future policy of the paper.

Assuring you of my continued interest in Lincolniana, I am

Respectfully yours,
A. F. Hall
President

The response was thunderous. At least 191 replies poured into Hall's office. Lincoln students will immediately recognize the names of many of the Lincoln authors and collectors who testified that Warren's little broadside was indeed worthwhile: William Abbott, James W. Bollinger, Claude G. Bowers, F. Lauriston Bullard, Herbert Wells Fay, Logan Hay, Emanuel Hertz, John Wesley Hill, Henry Horner, M.L. Houser, Stuart W. Jackson, Ross F. Lockridge, J. Friend Lodge, Helen Nicolay, J.B. Oakleaf, Osborn H. Oldroyd, J. Henri Ripstra, Otto L. Schmidt, Milton H. Shutes, John W. Starr, Ida M. Tarbell, and William H. Townsend. Even Paul M. Angle, then the Secretary of the Abraham Lincoln Association and not destined to become an admirer of Warren's later work, sent a letter saying the bulletin met "a real need" and complimenting the editor for having "done his work very well." Smith Stimmel, a onetime body-guard for Abraham Lincoln, sounded one of only three sour notes in the chorus of praise. Stimmel said that the bulletin did "not appeal to me very much." Having written a book on Lincoln himself, Stimmel found "the matters in 'Lincoln Lore,' ... rather insignificant."

Along with most of the Lincoln writers and collectors, the Congressmen, governors, businessmen, editors, book dealers, and educators who answered Hall's letter liked *Lincoln Lore* very much. It was clear that most of the writers did not clip them or throw them away. On the contrary, they made a point of saving them. Many of the persons who answered Hall's letter, after commending Warren's works, asked for copies of the issues they had missed so that their sets would be complete. James Bollinger, a lawyer and notable Lincoln collector, even looked



From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 2. Warren and Lincoln impersonator Charles E. Bull.



From the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 3. The first issue of *Lincoln Lore*.

forward to the time when the accumulated issues of *Lincoln Lore* would constitute a veritable encyclopedia (and got in a little dig at Warren as well):

... Most present day Lincoln publications are lowly commercial. Nothing more. Brought out because anything printed about Lincoln will sell. So the presses grind away and bring forth ever the same. *Lincoln Lore* is different. No two issues are alike.

Your favor of the 19th seems to foretell discontinuance. I hope this misgiving is purely imaginary. Keep *Lincoln Lore* coming by all means. In a few years its complete file will be an encyclopedia, a store house, a treasure.

The very design of the thing is "new, novel and useful" as they say in patent law. This means it is worth something. Its cost must be considerable. If you get enough letters like this, charge for it and make it pay. But please do not stop sending it.

Some day Warren will see the light about Lucy Hanks and then *Lincoln Lore* will be perfect.

The manager of the LeClaire Book Exchange, in Moline, Illinois, told Hall, "We frame your broadside, 'Lincoln Lore' ... as they come in and hang them at our Lincoln shelves and we find our customers are pleased to take the time to read them through and make notes." And the proprietor of the Lytle Motor Company, a Willys-Knight automobile distributorship in Davenport, Iowa, described the publication's importance this way:

We, in our business have what is known as the Saturday Night Report coming to us from each dealer under our jurisdiction, once each week. This report gives us each dealer's car condition by models and types as it relates to stock on hand, unfilled orders, actual deliveries, total number of used cars in stock, total number sold the preceding week, money received for the cars sold, total inventory of stock of used cars on hand and the number of salesmen employed. This gives us quite an intimate knowledge of that dealer's operation and a thorough cross-section of all the dealers in our territory. "*Lincoln Lore*" fills exactly the same position in my Lincoln collection and of my study of his life.

William Abbott, a publisher of rare Americana himself, found *Lincoln Lore* admirable. His only complaint was that his own publications on Lincoln had not been purchased for the Founda-

tion's library — "is the librarian a dry codfish," he asked, "or a shallow 'flapper'? Any other ought to be interested." Forest Case Middleton, of the Mouse-Around Gift Shop in Madison, Wisconsin, loved the "queer, quaint and quizzical information about Lincoln, not generally known and not readily available" elsewhere, and ended his letter with this testimonial:

Why *Lincoln Lore* is so popular that people steal it! I have had to write to Mr. Warren at least six times for copies that failed to reach me when mailed out under your permit stamp. Some mail clerk must find them interesting.

Thanks to this barrage of endorsements, *Lincoln Lore* survived Hall's test. Warren continued his intricate mailing system, confining weekly service to "Editors of newspapers and magazines; managers of Broadcasting stations; outstanding collectors of Lincolniana; and government, state and municipal officials." The rest of the subscribers received their issues monthly, Warren accumulating four weekly issues until the monthly mailing date.

In 1930 the mailing list more than quintupled, mainly because Warren added the Lincoln National Life Insurance agents to the mailing list and the agents, in turn, added various clients, libraries, and schools. The 2681 subscribers at the end of 1930 were about equally divided between life insurance agents and the traditional subscribers to *Lincoln Lore*. Probably because of economic hard times, some consideration was given to charging for subscriptions, but the idea was dropped. Circulation reached 3000 by 1935, and that included fewer than 400 life insurance company employees and agents. *Lincoln Lore* had found its audience — but not, as usual, without some effort on Warren's part.

He prided himself on writing timely *Lincoln Lore*s, either on subjects suggested by modern headlines (say, when a politician quoted from Lincoln) or on anniversaries of events in Lincoln's life. On the anniversary of Lincoln's first election to public office, he sent a copy of the issue on that subject to various officeholders in the country to determine whether they would like to receive the bulletins regularly. On the anniversary of Lincoln's admission to the bar, he wrote lawyers in a similar vein.

Though not established until 1929, *Lincoln Lore* preceded the establishment of the library. Warren began to explore the possibility of purchasing a major collection of Lincoln materials in the spring of 1929, but he did not make a trip to survey the available collections until December. The collection of Judge Daniel Fish, of Minneapolis, one of the "Big Five" Lincoln collectors, had been for sale for \$40,000 since 1921. Fish himself died suddenly in 1924, but his widow still had the collection on hand when Warren began prospecting for major lodges of Lincolniana in 1929.

Even were he able to acquire it, the Fish collection could not solve Warren's problem of acquiring a library to make the Lincoln Historical Research Foundation a center of Lincoln information overnight. Nothing had been added to Fish's holdings in five years, and Warren needed recent literature as well. Albert Griffith, of Fisk, Wisconsin, was an active collector in 1929, but he decided, because of "poor health and other reasons," to sell his Lincoln collection and his general historical collections. He thought the lot worth \$20,000, and he hoped to sell them to a college or historical society or to a wealthy benefactor of such an institution.

The correspondence concerning the negotiations for the Fish collection has not been located, but the documents on the Griffith collection are instructive and seem to be fairly typical of such transactions. Griffith accumulated a substantial number of letters and affidavits attesting to quality and size of his collection. Warren expressed some interest in it in March 1929. Griffith wanted to sell all his collections together, approximately 10,000 items, for \$20,000; "an average price of two dollars per item would certainly not be exorbitant," he thought. He realized, however, that he might have to sell the Lincolniana separately, and he sent Warren a brief description of his holdings.

The list, though a little vague, must have made the man who saw his first Lincoln collection of any size on a trip to Columbus, Ohio, just seven years earlier quite hungry. There were "very numerous" funeral sermons on Lincoln "by clergymen of all denominations." The number of addresses on Lincoln "by men of all professions and classes, in all parts of the United States" was "legion." Griffith claimed to have "ninety percent of all the Lincoln magazine articles listed in Poole's Index and the Reader's Guide" complete and in their original covers.

Warren expressed interest but said that he would have to

survey the collection himself if he were to "interest the company here in reference to this purchase." Moreover, he needed to know the price of the Lincoln collection alone. He was not interested in the general history. Griffith replied with a figure of \$15,000. "I should not be surprised," he added, "if I had about a thousand dollars in postage alone, to say nothing of stationery," expended in the acquisition of the collection. "I know I shall greatly miss my collections," Griffith intoned, "but sickness and the passing years, warn me that it is wise to place these collections where they shall be permanently prized and preserved."

Endorsements of Griffith's collection continued to pour into Warren's office. Herbert Wells Fay, custodian of Lincoln's tomb, supplied one of the more colorful ones:

Someone must make sacrifices,
Someone must burn midnight oil,
Someone must assemble the things of today,

If we will enjoy them tomorrow. Every community should have its collectors. If one tenth of what the thousands who visit Lincoln's tomb say about your collection is true, you have one of the outstanding Lincoln collections of the world.

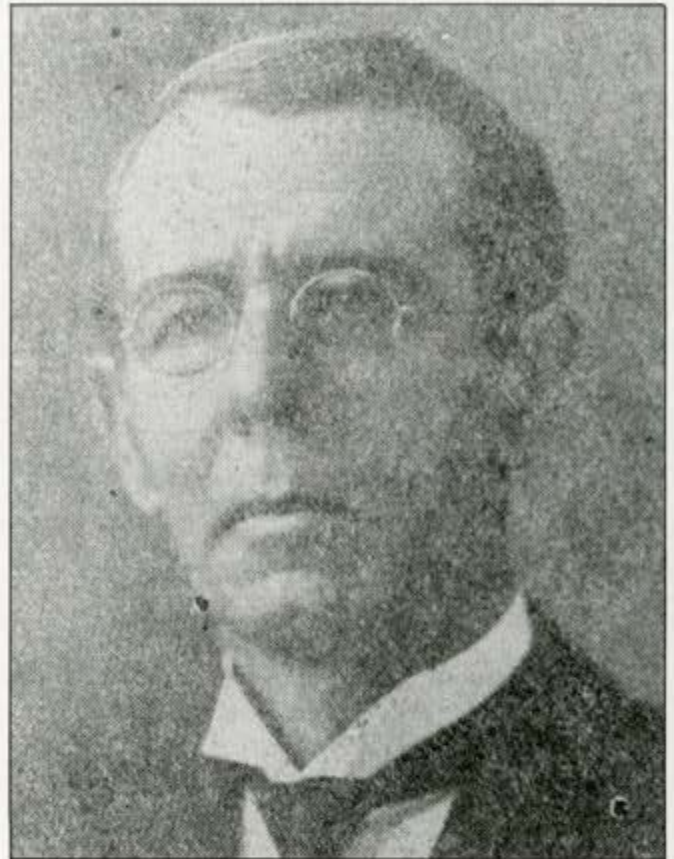
If the effort you have made had been expended in making money, you would be a millionaire.

Your collections cannot be measured in dollars and cents, and they will double in value and desirability every fifty years.

As a collector of a million historical pictures, I congratulate you.

Warren, as it turned out, was not altogether impressed — at least not by the magazine articles:

Of course, if your magazine articles are still in the original bindings, there may be some value as to determining the source, but it would appear to me that you must have an immense amount of waste material that has no connection



*From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum*

FIGURE 5. Albert H. Griffith.



*From the Louis A. Warren
Lincoln Library and Museum*

FIGURE 4. Warren's official portrait for Lincoln National Life.

with Lincolniana and would be a detriment rather than a help in determining the real value of a collection.

Griffith was cleverly resourceful, and he replied thus:

What you say about the Lincoln magazine articles reminds me of what is told concerning Henry Ward Beecher. Like most busy preachers, he did much of his reading on the train. It was his habit to tear out from books the pages in which he was especially interested and throw the rest of the books out of the car window. So that the saying arose that you could trace Henry Ward across the states by the mutilated books along the railroad.

I suppose this is a matter of taste, as to excerpting articles. But I have always greatly preferred to have my Lincoln and other articles left in the original magazines, with the original covers on the magazines. I note that magazine articles that are first editions of notable authors are usually listed as being in the original magazines and practically all Lincoln magazine articles are first editions.

Griffith did not convince Warren on the magazine question (he always disassembled magazines with Lincoln articles in them), but Warren remained interested in acquiring the Griffith collection.

Negotiations were at a standstill. In July Griffith asked for the addresses of two wealthy Hoosiers named Ball and Studebaker, heirs of famous fortunes. Warren supplied what information he could and expressed some doubt as to their particular interest in Lincolniana. Griffith was no doubt thinking of contacting them about his collection or of stampeding Warren into purchasing his collection by making him fear possible competitors for it.

Existing documents do not make entirely clear just how perilous Warren's position was, but the new foundation must have been in some danger of being unable to acquire a library. After all, it was funded by the Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, and private corporations were not doing well.

To be continued next issue