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THE McLELLAN LINCOLN COLLECTION

One of the characteristics of Lincoln which more than anything else has contributed to his extraordinary appeal to all classes of people is his modest estimate of his own claims to distinction. While he must have been aware that he possessed certain abilities which warranted his political progress, he never rated these at their full value nor failed to disavow any pretensions to greatness. Could he have been told during his lifetime that one day interest in him as a personality and a statesman would become nation-wide and constantly cumulative through the years, he would probably have dismissed the statement with an amused smile as the figment of a fevered imagination. Yet today there are at least twenty-eight collections of printed and manuscript material relating to him in libraries throughout the United States, and many more than this in private ownership. It has been estimated that there are at least five hundred Lincoln collectors. To own one of the most outstanding collections in the country may therefore be considered a matter of good fortune and pride by Brown University.

The collection began with the presentation to Brown University in 1925 of Mr. Charles Woodberry McLellan's collection. This came through the generosity of Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. There was a peculiar fitness in one of the great Lincoln collections being the charge of a library named for John Hay, Lincoln's secretary who, in the years following the assassination, had done pioneer work in gathering and editing Lincoln's writings. The McLellan collection was one of the "big five." It had been begun at the turn of the century and continued through almost twenty years. During that period, through friendly rivalry and cooperation with the other great collectors, Fish, Oakleaf, Stewart, and Lambert, Mr. McLellan had acquired about forty-two hundred items. These became the core of the present collection. Since 1925 it has been constantly increasing in size until now it numbers over twenty-one thousand items. These include manuscripts, books, pamphlets, broad-

sides, sheet-music, periodicals, and newspapers, as well as much pictorial material. Over twelve hundred of the manuscripts are originals written or signed by Lincoln or his associates. More than twice this number are photoprints and microfilms, the development of these methods having made it possible to obtain much otherwise inaccessible material and greatly to enrich the collection as a source for research study. One of our ambitions is to locate, list, and acquire photographic copies of all the known Lincoln manuscripts which will supplement the originals and facsimiles in our own files.

Of necessity many of the manuscripts are formal documents, but in others an awareness of the very human side of the great man is brought home to one, as in the case of the page from his school-boy copy-book, the poem for a girl's autograph album, or the long telegram patiently expostulating with the headstrong Fremont.

Among the books in the collection there are all types ranging from "extra-illustrated" editions of the great biographies of Abraham Lincoln to fugitive pamphlets that are extremely rare. Each extra-illustrated edition, since it has inserted in its pages letters of Lincoln or his contemporaries, is unique. Nicolay and Hay's *Abraham Lincoln*, Ida Tarbell's *Life of Abraham Lincoln*, and William Barton's *Life of Abraham Lincoln* are in this form. Miss Tarbell's *Life* has four notes of Lincoln inserted. Dr. Barton's *Life*, as well as being extra-illustrated, was bound by notable craftsmen, Sangorski and Sutcliffe of London. There are many more books in special editions, autographed by the author, or having other elements which make them unusual. A list of singularities would be a very long one.

Editions in Greek, Russian, and Japanese appear with those in the Germanic and Romance languages.

As in every library devoted to a special subject, bibliographies are of especial importance. They are useful for checking present holdings and serve as suggestion lists for future purchases. We have now, among others, the four outstanding works of this kind, — bibliographies by Daniel Fish, Joseph Oakleaf, John Starr and James Monaghan. The McLellan collection has about ninety percent of the items listed in these and we gather considerable satisfaction from knowing that our catalog notes certain others not included in any of them.

Much newspaper material is available through the work of the Historical Records Survey of Illinois. Over 11,300 index entries to Illinois newspapers are furnished by this group. We also have the checklist, *Abraham Lincoln in Periodical Literature*, published in 1941. This is not exhaustive, but when we have an opportunity to check the several guides to periodical literature for titles which have been omitted,

it should be possible to have a complete listing of all periodical articles about Abraham Lincoln printed since 1860.

Among the pictorial works in the collection are a great number of prints, cartoons, and rare engravings, as well as most of the known photographs of the President. Of especial interest are three original portraits by his contemporaries, — Elizabeth Croasdale, William Cogswell and Peter Baumgras. The work of the latter is particularly fine, and by some of those who knew Lincoln well, was called a most satisfactory likeness. There are also two large group pictures of the "Last Hours of Lincoln." These were painted shortly after his death by Alonzo Chappel and by Alexander H. Ritchie. Crowded with portrait figures of Washington celebrities who visited the little room to which the President was carried from Ford's Theatre, they later served as a source of the many engravings which once furnished somber accompaniments to the haircloth furnishings of American parlors of the period.

Not all the types of material in the collection can be described in this brief article. No mention has been made of the 550 medals bearing Lincoln's profile and commemorating his spirit; nor of the many museum pieces, and the portrait busts and statues. These last appear in a variety of materials from "enduring bronze" to perishable wax, and differ as widely in feeling as the noble head by Volk and a small carved figure which is as wooden in its expression as in its substance.

Since the Lincoln collection is the depository of so much source material it follows naturally that it is frequently called upon to furnish information on Lincolniana and to assist in settling perplexing questions. One of the most knotty problems to which Lincoln enthusiasts have lately given their attention is the matter of the handwriting in the facsimiles of the Bixby letter, the original of which has disappeared. Much of the material on which the discussion is based may be found on our shelves, and some of the results of our study of the handwriting have been published in *Books at Brown*, Vol. 8, No. 3, March, 1946.

While emphasizing thus particularly the rich variety and content of the collection, it must not be forgotten that there is another side to the shield. Funds are seldom commensurate with ambitions and desires. New lists and dealers' catalogs are constantly bringing to our attention items which must be reluctantly turned down. With so many collectors in the field this may mean that the opportunity to make a purchase is irrevocably lost. Often we can look only to gifts to fill regrettable lacunae.

The Friends of the Library have been most generous in making it possible to obtain certain items which were especially coveted. Among these are the Croasdale painting, a rare trial issue of the Emancipation

Proclamation, a dozen original manuscripts, and a variety of other desiderata.

Since so much of the material relating to the great President is already in our collection here, we look forward to its completion and to becoming in increasing measure the center for information concerning Abraham Lincoln.

In a sense the John Hay Library will thus have succeeded John Hay as secretary to Lincoln.

— *Edith R. Blanchard*

Issued from John Hay Library, Providence, Rhode Island