



# Lincoln Lore

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## LOUIS AUSTIN WARREN (April 23, 1885 - June 22, 1983) (Cont.)

Beveridge was a seasoned politician as well as an award-winning writer, and he knew that the so-called community of scholars was in fact a competitive jungle — at least sometimes. Writing Warren in the middle of the summer of 1924, Beveridge assured him that his own book in no way threatened Warren's or Barton's because he would lay little stress on the period of Lincoln's life with which they were dealing. He scrawled in pen a hasty postscript, "I again advise you to hasten the publication of your book. If I can assist you in any way, pray command me."

When Beveridge asked for some more information later that summer, Warren started a very revealing letter which he never sent:

Somewhat against any better judgment I am releasing to you in this letter Lincoln data of which no person is advised except myself. Not that I feel that you will intentionally give publicity to the facts, but my experience in confiding in my friends to the extent of sharing with them the efforts of more than five years of intensive research has resulted rather disastrously. I now have in my library several small booklets



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

FIGURE 1. Louis A. Warren, honors graduate from the principles of life insurance class in 1929 (back row, third from right).



From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 2. Warren was obviously pleased to have acquired the extremely rare Reuben Vose 1860 Lincoln campaign biography.

which have drawn largely on my findings and which anticipate my volume. This material was released in an attempt to assist a gentleman in the publication of a book which should not antedate my publication.

I have also been advised by Mr. Mather that he has told you about my discovery about the ownership of the Lincoln Birthplace. I considered this the most valuable evidence of my entire effort, and cannot imagine how he should feel at liberty to release this data which he was holding in trust as my attorney in certain investigations which I am making. I am sure that you will treat his information as confidential although I first learned that you had learned of the Lincoln Farm ownership through a third party. I hope that you will not feel that I am unreasonable in my attempt to conserve the results of these years spent in dust, mold, bugs, and old records in every conceivable condition. The only reward I expect from these labors is the realization that I have made some permanent contribution to American History, but I do covet the honor of having discovered this data.

Warren sent the information finally with a less bluntly worded letter. Beveridge, for his part, continued "earnestly" to urge Warren to hurry his publication along. And Beveridge offered to give Warren contacts with other publishers if Bobbs-Merrill rejected the manuscript. Beveridge concluded his letter again with a handwritten postscript that contained sage advice:

Do you not think that you should also have in mind the fact that it is impossible for *anybody* to impound public records? You deserve much credit for your industry in research, but is it not probable that some of our young scholars will do the same thing one of these days?

Warren needed advice (that was why he clung to his friendship with Barton despite its obvious drawbacks). He replied to Beveridge, amazingly enough, this way: "It is dawning on me more and more that my work should be hurried to the publishers." He could say this despite his long experience with competing researchers. And there was great potential for trouble in what Warren next revealed to Beveridge, the "scope and detail" of the magnum opus:

The source book will contain eight hundred pages of closely printed pages. This is practically ready for the printer. The

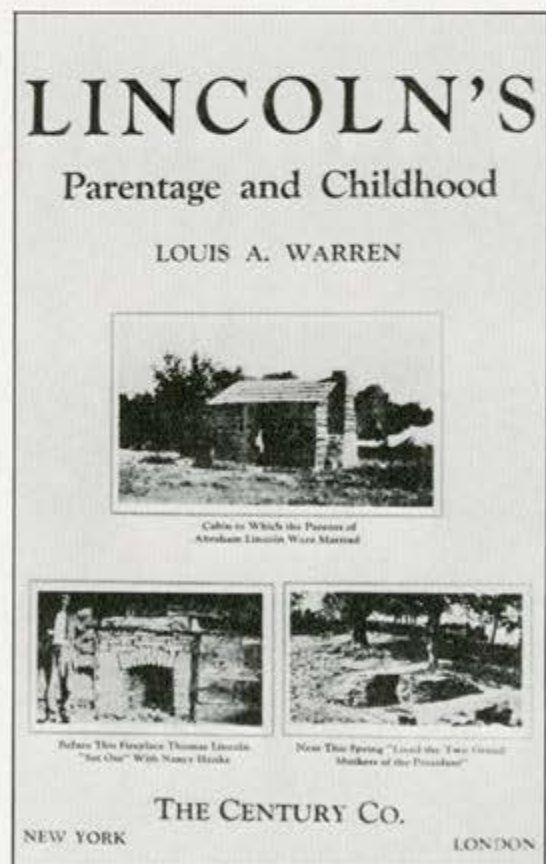
interpretation of these manuscripts will consist of a book as large as the source book arranged in four parts discussing Abraham Lincoln: His Genesis, His Parents, His Childhood Environment, and His Parents' Homes.

He was contemplating a book on Lincoln's early childhood which would exceed in length anything written about Lincoln up to that time except for Nicolay and Hay's monumental history.

Beveridge had no idea that the confidante to whom Warren had earlier referred was Barton. When Warren generously supplied Beveridge with some information about Thomas Lincoln's taxes, Beveridge hastened to write a long reply, marked "confidential," in which he explained that he had dined with Barton and Barton had the same tax information. Beveridge inferred that if Barton had it, others probably did too — not knowing that Warren shared all his findings with Barton. Again, Beveridge advised speed in preparing the manuscript.

Beveridge's work did not, as Barton's surely did, threaten Warren's. Moreover, the former senator took a kindly and genuinely helpful interest in Warren's work. Ultimately, however, the Warren-Beveridge relationship proved not to be as close as the Warren-Barton one. The reasons were two. First, Beveridge simply could not change his mind about Thomas Lincoln. He doggedly saw him as all previous Lincoln biographers had, as a shiftless ne'er-do-well, a hunter, and a rover. By now, Warren, though he still desired counsel from less isolated scholars than he, had complete confidence in his carefully worked-out revision of Lincoln's origins:

I realize that I am in direct contradiction with every Lincoln Biographer who has written on the Kentucky environment of Abraham Lincoln. I have on my side duly authorized public records while my opponents have the traditions of old men and women who never thought of the Lincolns for forty years after they left Kentucky. I was in hopes that I might have you as a colleague, in this attempt to give to the world a documentary background for the study of Abraham Lincoln. I still believe you are going to line up with me against the



From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 3. Warren's first book.



From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 4. Warren in the Lincoln National Life Foundation library in the 1930s.

majority, but I cannot take time to pour this enormous mass of information in to you, before the publishing of my work.

The second factor was the one which ultimately separated Warren from all the other Lincoln authors of his day. He was willing and able to go to the sources. Beveridge made a quick trip to Kentucky and could find nothing. He wrote county clerks asking for certified copies of documents which might prove what Warren was trying to tell him, but he received nothing. Warren knew exactly why:

You have had just enough experience in original research work in Kentucky to learn something of the difficulty in securing any help from county clerks. I think that in practically every approach you have made in Hardin County you have received a very unsatisfactory reply. Why? Because most of the material there, as in other court houses, is unindexed and unknown to the County Clerk. The tax lists in Hardin County to which you refer are filed in boxes marked "Old Miscellaneous Papers." I have purposely taken no clerk into my confidence as to the location of valuable records, and I doubt that in the twenty eight court houses where I have done work there are not a half dozen clerks that knew my mission. No clerk is going to spend half a day hunting through a bunch of old papers to find an unindexed item.

Warren was the real pioneer in this method. Barton and Beveridge made occasional visits to the sites, but ultimately they relied on the mails and, thus, the research of others. In Beveridge's case, it should perhaps be said, part of the problem was that these early years constituted a very small part of his overall project, and he could not realistically spend the time Warren had on what would be only the first of twenty long chapters. For his part, Barton made many trips to Kentucky, but he was always pressed for time because, as he put it, "I have always

had to get back for Sunday." But whatever the mitigating circumstances, Warren remained the only man who went out and found the records.

Warren's patience would be rewarded later. In the short run, it hurt him. Barton finished his *Life of Lincoln* before Warren did, and the younger scholar lost most of what he had hoped to gain by keeping Barton fully apprised of the results of his Kentucky archival work. There could now be no page references to Warren's book dotting Barton's early chapters. Warren received acknowledgment and thanks in a paragraph in the text and in a footnote. Barton also wrote a supportive letter to an editor at Bobbs-Merrill, which was considering publication of Warren's work.

When he addressed the Indiana Historical Society in December 1924, Warren dined with the Beveridges and Albert Beveridge introduced him before the speech. Like many Lincoln men, Warren and Beveridge could grow rather preoccupied with their subject, and Warren found himself afterward offering an apology: "I hope that Mrs. Beveridge did not feel that we were discourteous in bringing our discussion to the dinner hour, and I hope you will apologize to her on my behalf for persisting in carrying on the argument." Shortly thereafter, Beveridge dined with Mr. Bobbs, who said that Bobbs-Merrill had Warren's manuscript "under very serious consideration."

That winter, Bobbs-Merrill rejected Warren's manuscript. Beveridge thought their publication of Barton's *Life of Lincoln* that spring had something to do with it. Beveridge offered to write Houghton-Mifflin.

Meanwhile, Warren was moving to Zionsville, Indiana, where he had his family situated by March 1. His church had 650 members and he was only thirty minutes by interurban

from Indianapolis. He was dreaming of writing a sequel to his Kentucky book on Lincoln's Indiana years, but first he had to sell the Kentucky manuscript. Houghton-Mifflin considered it for three months and finally rejected it. The University of Chicago Press was next on Warren's list, but it was beginning to dawn on him, as he put it himself, that his "ambition to make it exhaustive has retarded its acceptance." It was 1600 pages long.

Warren spent his two-week summer vacation in 1925 in Kentucky, doing more research. He was aided by the gift of a Ford automobile from a friend — apparently his first car. Warren did all of the work for his first book without the use of an automobile.

The University of Chicago Press urged Warren to revise his work, probably so that it would be brought out as one volume without the bulky volume reprinting sources, for which, all the publishers agreed, there was but a limited market. His trip to Chicago to consult about the manuscript and to retrieve it was paid for by Dr. Otto L. Schmidt, then the president of both the Chicago Historical Society and the Illinois State Historical Society. Warren aptly described his financial status as "deplorable," and Schmidt also offered to pay the scholar's way to New York to see another publisher.

In the spring of 1926, Warren landed a publisher, The Century Company, and the book was to be ready in the autumn. In the summer, while he awaited page proofs, Warren took a ten-day research trip to Virginia in search of more genealogical information. Dr. Schmidt financed the trip. Warren left in quite an excited state, thinking he would surely uncover three unknown grandparents of Abraham Lincoln. The results of the trip proved not to be as good as he had hoped.

Before Warren's book appeared, he and Barton began to argue about the legitimacy of Nancy Hanks. Warren said that there were two schools of thought on that question, and he called them the "legitimates" and the "illegitimates." Barton objected to the rather unfavorable-sounding name for the school to which he adhered and wrote a sweepingly worded letter saying that there were not two schools. There was only one, and it was his.

The argument quickly focused on one document and one word on that document. The document concerned Lucy Hanks, reputedly the mother of Nancy Hanks, and the word was "day," as Barton claimed, or "widow (for "widow"), as Warren claimed, with the "wi" very faint. The conflict could not be easily resolved because Barton had, apparently in violation of the law, removed that document and others to have photostatic copies of them made. He gave them to a woman named Stephenson to return to the courthouse, and by 1926 the key document

was not there and the woman was on her deathbed. The photostats did not show the "wi," or at least not clearly. The language of the debate became very sharp indeed.

The difficulty was further complicated by the fact that Warren sided in the dispute over Nancy Hanks's legitimacy with Caroline Hanks Hitchcock. Mrs. Hitchcock had made numerous errors in her research, but the worst one she made was to write a letter to the Chicago GAR suggesting that they should remove one of Barton's books from their library and burn it. The recipient had shown the letter to Barton.

Barton then reviewed Warren's book for the *Christian Science Monitor*. In the past he had several times indicated that he would surely review the book favorably, but the intervening argument over the Hanks matter caused him to criticize at some length Warren's rather noncommittal chapter on that question. Warren was incensed that Barton focused so much

attention on what was obviously not "the feature of the book." Warren found Barton's many past promises of help, expressed in private letters, to be empty because Barton's words expressed at last in print were not helpful at all.

Warren's point was telling because Barton's voice was so out of tune with the general chorus of praise that greeted *Lincoln's Parentage and Childhood*. Reviewers in the *New York Herald Tribune* and the *New York Times* used telltale adjectives like "painstaking," "exhaustive," "careful and documentary." Particularly gratifying to Warren was the praise of professional historians like Milo M. Quaife, who wrote in the distinguished *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*:

We do not know whether Mr. Warren has ever belonged to a seminar in history, but he has produced a work which may profitably be conned by every neophyte of the art of historical research. In every chapter and on almost every page the handiwork of a keen and capable investigator is disclosed.

## Warren Heads New Lincoln Life Foundation

*The following announcement made in the press is one of major importance to LNL. Forth Men. The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company is to create a national foundation for the study of Abraham Lincoln. A famous Lincoln expert has already been selected to head the foundation, which will have its headquarters in the LNL home office building. Every effort will be made to link up the program closely with the work of each of you, to your great pleasure, satisfaction and profit. Following is the announcement:*

AMERICANS owe a debt to Abraham Lincoln that can never be repaid, except in veneration of his name and emulation of his character. The past few years have seen a great increase in interest in the study of his life, his work, his teaching. There has been many recent publications, and other evidence of this increased interest, the part of the American public in Lincoln and his message.

When The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company was named, it was because of the admiration of Lincoln lovers among the early leaders of the company, and a phrase which has been both a motto and a pledge has arisen among the executives of the company, namely: "Its name indicates its character."

The beautiful building of the company at Fort Wayne is evidence of a company with such ideals; before the entrance of its main building it is planned to erect a distinguished statue of the Great Emancipator, and even now a committee is at work, seeking a sculptor.

A recent announcement concerning a further program of the company in connection with its interest in Abraham Lincoln, is of major importance. The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company will establish and maintain a national center 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.

A director for the service has been appointed in the person of the notable student of Lincolnism, Louis A. Warren. Mr. Warren, who has illustrated hundreds of previously unknown Lincoln manuscripts and exhibits, who has been called the "Lincoln's life," who has written many books and pamph-



lets, and many magazine articles on Lincoln subjects, and who has studied Lincoln material in public and private libraries, in universities, and wherever important Lincoln collections are found, will head the personnel of the foundation.

The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company have donated his time for the period of their campaign in the Indiana Lincoln Union. After this is over he will return to Fort Wayne and make his headquarters in the Lincoln Life Building.

Mr. Warren began his serious study of Lincoln when editor of a newspaper at Hopkinsville, Kentucky, Lincoln's birthplace. He continued his research in the county seats of the counties in the Lincoln country, studying court records, documents, and original material as well as secondary material in Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois and elsewhere.

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 resources of the company will be used in clearing to the public the history of the foundation. The efforts of the great insurance organization have long been Lincoln collection.

LOUIS  
A.  
WARREN

and many interesting pamphlets, documents, art objects, etc. are already found in the home office of the organization. Through its far-flung agency organization it will have an avenue of distribution of Lincoln literature and material.

Further important announcement, concerning the definite plan and program of the foundation will have to be made later, after Mr. Warren concludes his part in the Indiana Lincoln Union Campaign, and possibly until after Arthur Fletcher Hall, President of The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company returns from a European trip. Work will be going quietly forward in the development of the plans long before the definite announcements go made.

This much, however, can safely be said: The new foundation will offer its services to the students and teachers of the land; it will have a message and a real contribution to those who love and honor Lincoln; it will do back original research and work of importance; 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 in generally conscious of the great character of Lincoln and the sterling qualities of his, that all should emulate.

From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 5. The life insurance company tells its agents about Warren's coming to the home office.

Albert Beveridge, frantically busy with research on his own book, died, apparently before reading Warren's.

Warren was now ready to give up the ministry for Lincoln. In one letter, he stated that he moved to Zionsville "for the purpose of collecting source material for my Indiana History of the Lincoln family." Indeed, he apparently chose Morganfield as a pastorate earlier because it was near Indiana. He extracted agreements from his church boards allowing him to spend mornings researching Lincoln's life. He had been choosing pastorates more for their usefulness for Lincoln research than by any other criterion. Warren wanted desperately to work full time on Lincoln, but how was he to do it?

To be continued next issue