

**THE FIRST  
PUBLISHED LIFE OF  
ABRAHAM LINCOLN**

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The first published life of Abraham Lincoln by John L. Scripps

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**JOHN L. SCRIPPS**

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*J. L. Scipps*

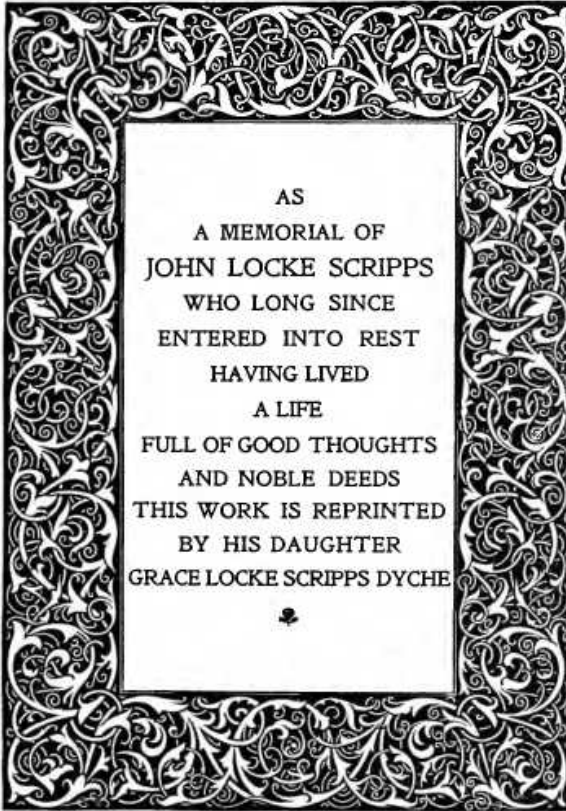
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*SOMETIME* in 1894 I received a letter from the late Joseph P. Smith, Librarian of the Ohio State Library, asking for information about, or copies of, a pamphlet *Life of Abraham Lincoln* written in 1860 by John Locke Scripps of the Chicago Tribune. In his letter he wrote: "It, the pamphlet, was published in 1860 immediately prior to or shortly after Mr. Lincoln's nomination. Passages are quoted from it by Holland, Thayer, and other early biographers of Lincoln, and there is no doubt but that most of the biography, if not all, passed under Mr. Lincoln's immediate personal revision, and hence its value."

\* This letter revealed to me the fact that this publication, which at that time I had never seen, would possess rare value in collections pertaining to the history of this great man, and at once led me to make search for a copy, or for information in regard to it. Old family letters, yellowed and dimmed with age, were searched, but almost without success.

\* Finally after hours and days of research, in which members of the family now widely scattered over the United States joined me, the following portion of a letter was discovered by my father's brother, the late George W. Scripps of Detroit:

*I have been getting out a campaign Life of Lincoln for the million which is published simultaneously by us and by the New York Tribune establishment. I presume a very large edition will be sold. I will send you a copy by this day's mail. We sell them at the very low rate of \$20.00 per thousand. I do not believe that any combination can defeat Lincoln. Will the running of the Bell-Everett ticket in this State lose us any votes in Schuyler?*

*Affectionately,*

*J. L. SCRIPPS.*



✦ In a letter received from my father's sister, Mrs. M. A. Bagby, wife of the late Judge J. C. Bagby of Rushville, Ill., she says: "I remember very well when Brother John was in Springfield, at the time he wrote Lincoln's Life, and I heard him talk a great deal about it, and of the great, noble nature of that wonderful man."

✦ A cousin, James E. Scripps of Detroit, adds the following testimony: "In regard to the authorship of the pioneer Life of Lincoln I have no documentary evidence, but distinctly recollect his — J. L. Scripps — telling me that he had just finished writing such a work, and that most of the writing he did in the office of the New York Tribune. I inferred that the pamphlet was published jointly by the New York Tribune and the Chicago Tribune, and that your father undertook the labor of its publication. It was as he passed through Detroit, on his way home from New York, that he told me this, in explanation of his visit there."

✦ The late Joseph Medill, a former partner of my father in the Chicago Tribune, wrote me in 1895: "I remember the pamphlet very well, as I both furnished considerable material worked into it by your father, and circulated it throughout the United States. I have not seen a copy of it since the great fire of 1871 in Chicago. All the copies we had in The Tribune were consumed in the fire of '71. Your father was never satisfied with the pamphlet, because Lincoln insisted on pruning out of it many of its most readable and interesting passages in regard to Lincoln's early life and other matters."

✦ My efforts to find some copies of this pamphlet — no doubt the first authentic Life of Abraham Lincoln published — led me to write, north, south, east and west, but always with the same discouraging result. During my five years of untiring research, I have been able to locate but four perfect copies, and it is through the courtesy of the Honorable John G. Nicolay of Washington, D. C., that I received from his pamphlet a manuscript copy of the missing parts of my own mutilated copy, and that I was enabled to go on with my undertaking. Since I received this copy from Mr. Nicolay the other three pamphlets have come to light.

✦ In a letter received from Mr. Nicolay in June, 1898, he says: "I have one copy, bound in a volume with other pamphlets, of the

pamphlet *Life of Lincoln* edited by your father, and published by the Chicago Press & Tribune Co., in 1860. It has the simple title '*Life of Abraham Lincoln.*' It is very well written, contains 32 pages, printed in the size and type usual to campaign documents. I am satisfied he had the same manuscript material which Mr. Lincoln furnished to W. D. Howells, D. B. Bartlett, and perhaps others who wrote campaign lives."

✧ Hon. Robert T. Lincoln wrote: "I am very sorry to tell you that I do not possess even a single copy of your father's pamphlet *Life of my father.* When it was published I was myself in the East at school, and while I have no doubt that my father had some copies of it, none came to me among the books he left."

✧ W. H. Milburn, the blind chaplain of Congress, a great admirer of my father and an intimate friend of the family, wrote: "I suppose your father's influence did more to secure Mr. Lincoln's nomination for the Presidency than that of any other man."

✧ Hoping still to find some of the original pamphlets in the office of the *New York Tribune*, I wrote to the Hon. Whitelaw Reid, who, in a very courteous way, replied as follows: "Answering your recent inquiry concerning the pamphlet *Life of Lincoln* by your father, I regret to say that no trace of it can be found here. The fact that forty years have elapsed, and that the *Tribune* counting room has undergone two removals, during the construction of the new building, one riot and some small fires in the interval, will serve to explain why papers that have served their purpose are not apt to be found now on file. Collections of matter about Mr. Lincoln have been made so carefully, and in so many different quarters, that a search for the pamphlet itself ought not to be unsuccessful."

✧ At the time this publication was circulated Lincoln's fame was only beginning to dawn, and, while his name was in everybody's mouth, and his story well known, yet, campaign literature was then, as it still is, read, laid aside, forgotten and finally lost, and it was not until long years had passed away that its absence began to be felt in the collections of *Lincolniana.*

✧ That my father visited Mr. Lincoln for the incidents of the narrative is an undoubted fact, as is seen by the letters from Mrs.

*Bagby and Mr. Medill; also from the letters written to Mr. Herndon by my father, of which, through the kindness of Mr. Jesse Weik of Greencastle, Ind., I have become the appreciative owner, and which I give here in full:*

Chicago, May 9th, 1865.

My Dear Herndon:

I am glad you design giving us something about Lincoln. Your long acquaintance and close association with him must have given you a clearer insight into his character than other men obtained. I appreciate your compliment to the poor effort I made in 1860. I do not think it a great stretch of modesty to say that if it were to be done over, I could improve upon it. It is gratifying to me, however, to see that the same qualities in Lincoln to which I then gave greatest prominence are those on which his fame ever chiefly rests. Is it not true that this is the leading lesson of Lincoln's life—that true and enduring greatness, the greatness that will survive the corrosion and abrasion of time, change and progress, must rest upon character? In certain showy, and what is understood to be most desirable endowments, how many Americans have surpassed him! Yet, how he looms above them now! Not eloquence, nor logic, nor grasp of thought; not statesmanship, nor power of command, nor courage—not any or all of these have made him what he is—but these, in the degree in which he possessed them, conjoined to those certain qualities composed in the term character, have given him his fame—have made him for all time to come the great American man—the grand central figure in American, perhaps the world's, history. ✽ Send me whatever you may publish on the subject. The plates on which the campaign life was printed were not preserved, and I have not been able to get a copy of it for you.

Very truly yours,

J. L. SCRIPPS.

Chicago, June 20th, 1865.

My Dear Herndon:

The campaign *Life of Lincoln*, to which you refer in your note of the 17th inst., was written by me, with the exception of a small portion of the chapter devoted to the campaign between Lincoln and Douglas in 1858. The statements therein contained, as respects the facts and incidents of the early life of Lincoln, are substantially as communicated by him to me—some of them in written memoranda, others orally, in answer to my queries. You can place the fullest reliance in the accuracy of the narrative.

Very truly yours,

Hon. W. H. Herndon.

J. L. SCRIPPS.

✽ Another letter in possession of Mr. Weik, from my father to Mr. Herndon, written after the death of Mr. Lincoln, stated that in his book he mentioned the fact that Lincoln in his youth read Plutarch's *Lives*. This he did simply because, as a rule, almost every boy in the West, in the early days, did read Plutarch. When the advance sheets of the book reached Mr. Lincoln he sent for the author and said gravely, "That paragraph wherein you state I read Plutarch's *Lives* was not true when you wrote it, for up to that moment in my life I had never seen that early contribution to human history, but I want your book, even if it is nothing more than a campaign sketch, to be faithful to the facts, and in order that that statement