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Letter: Mildred Emery Jones to Ida M. Tarbell, January 30, 1939

Jones, Mildred Emery

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921 George Street
Pen Argyl, Pa.
January 30, 1939

Miss Ida M. Tarbell
c/o Department of English
Allegheny College
Meadville, Pa.

Dear Miss Tarbell:

I learn with interest that you are to conduct a special course in the writing of biography at Allegheny College in the near future. Knowing that you are an authority on Lincoln, I thought perhaps you could help me to obtain additional information concerning a little-known incident in his life - that of his appointment of a substitute for himself in the 2 Reg. D. C. Vol's during the Civil War.

There is near here, in Stroudsburg, Pa., a simple slab in an old burying ground bearing the following inscription:

J. SUMMERFIELD STAPLES

A Private of
Co. C, 176 Reg. P.V.

Also a member of the
2 Reg. D. C. Vol's, as a
Substitute for
Abraham Lincoln.

Died
Jan. 11, 1888.
Aged 43 Yrs. 4 Mos. and
27 Days

It is amost impossible to learn more of this incident in the life of Lincoln and Staples in the whole borough of Stroudsburg. Staples was apparently 16 at the outbreak of the Civil

War, old enough to enlist presently in the Pa. Volunteers. His father was a wheelwright, following his trade until he was 77 and dying at 84; he was also a local preacher in the Wyoming (Pa.) Conference and was appointed a navy chaplain in 1861.

Sometime in 1864, Lincoln heard that Chaplain Staples had a 19-year-old son who wanted to join the ranks. Perhaps young Staples' own Pa. regiment had been wiped out or he had been mustered out from a brief enlistment. Where Lincoln interviewed Staples is unknown as well as his reason for selecting him as his substitute.

Lincoln may have recalled his own brief experience in the Black Hawk War and yearned to take his place alongside the humblest soldier in the ranks, instead of serving as the worried commander-in-chief of the Northern army.

If you remember coming across any papers or references to Staples during your researches, I shall appreciate learning about them from you. If convenient, I shall especially appreciate hearing from you before Lincoln's birthday, as I am planning a short newspaper article on the subject to be published locally.

In referring to the Appendix of your book, "The Life of Abraham Lincoln," and reading through Lincoln's letters and telegrams of 1864, I chanced to note, on pages 198 and 199, your reference to the inscription found in that year on the window of a room in a Meadville hotel, a room that had been occupied by J. Wilkes Booth. This struck me as interesting in view of the fact that you were Allegheny College's first woman graduate. May I ask whether that inscription influenced you in any way to study the life of Lincoln?

May I wish you success in your course of teaching at Allegheny College and look forward to an early reply?

Yours very truly,

(Miss) Mildred Emery Jones

P.S. I am inclosing a self-addressed envelope.