April 20, 1922

Mr. Ernest R. Clark,
East High School,
Rochester, N.Y.

My dear Mr. Clark:

I hope you will pardon the delay in replying to your letter of April 6. I have been away from New York almost continuously since my visit to Rochester in February. I came back this week to a pile of accumulated mail and have only just reached your letter.

I am glad to have it. I am always glad when anybody raises a point in connection with Lincoln's life.

As to his having written compositions on the back of a shovel, I think that is doubtful. That he used the shovel for figuring is certain. Lamon, who had a chance at Dennis Hanks as well as at Lincoln's Indiana neighbors when their recollections were still sufficiently fresh to be trustworthy, speaks of this habit. Lincoln's step-mother said that he used to copy extracts from books on the shovel or on boards when he had no paper. It is not unlikely that he may have, in the same way, put down some idea of his own, some sentence that he had constructed that he wanted to save. There is no record that I remember of his having written compositions in school, that is, in the sense that we use that term now. I doubt if they had any such instruction. That he did write a large amount of doggeral and make some attempts at essays, we of course know.

You will find the most trustworthy record of this early literary work in Lamon and Herndon. If he were in the throes of composition and had no paper, he of course might have put down what he wanted to say on a board until paper could be found. There is no absolute proof either for or against. He was always trying to express himself. There is a record of his having written an essay which made an impression on "Cruelty to Animals" and another on "The American Government"; but that these were compositions in the sense in which I take it you are using the word, is doubtful. I incline to the view that they were written entirely outside of school, because of Lincoln's desire to express something that was in his mind.

I hope this is satisfactory. If not I shall be glad to hear from you again.

Sincerely yours,

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