

March 7, 1934

Dear Mr. Houser:

Forgive my delay in replying to your letter of February 24th. I have been very busy and neglecting all my correspondence.

And now for your question - the authority for my saying that Lincoln read, "Phoenixiana." Back in the late '90's - I have the exact address somewhere but cannot without taking too much time look it up - I spent some days in Bloomington, Illinois, interviewing men who had known Lincoln. Among others was a lawyer by the name of Capen. I think, but I am not sure, that Judge Walden referred me to him. Talking of Lincoln as a story teller Capen told me that older lawyers on the circuit had frequently spoken of Lincoln's liking for funny books and mentioned "Phoenixiana." He said that a Mr. Hodge of Bloomington had told him about Lincoln dropping into the office and reading from "Phoenixiana". One particular story that Mr. Capen told me was about Phoenix, himself, how when he was a Lieutenant in the Army Jefferson Davis, the Secretary of War, called for suggestions to modify the uniform which was considered bad. Phoenix sent a document suggesting that iron plates be fitted to the seat of trousers and suggested various ways such trousers might be useful. Davis was very angry about it and threatened to court-marshal Squibo, as Phoenix was called. Lincoln said, "You can court-marshal him but all the country will be laughing at you." Capen spoke of "Flush Times in Alabama" as another of the books which lawyers had told him that Lincoln had carried. 21-0

I am quite sure that Judge Walden in talking of Lincoln as a story teller corroborated this interest in "Phoenixiana" and "Flush Times." But I cannot put my hands on the note verifying it. If I should ever come across it I shall pass it on. 20

Lewis Can
+ then Secretary
of State

I do not know whether Mr. Capen is still living in Bloomington. I last saw him in 1922. He talked then, as he had thirty years before, of Lincoln's stories and their sources. His chief informer, I take it, was the Sheriff of the County, William H. Hodge. Hodge lived near Capen's home and he told me that he spent hours listening to him talk. It was Hodge who referred particularly to "Phoenixiana" seeing it in Lincoln's hands many times. He talked a good deal, too, about Lincoln's interest in a paper called, "Yankee Notions." Capen thought that Lincoln got many of his stories from this journal.

If Mr. Capen is still living, and you can more easily discover this than I can, it might interest you to verify the above. He will remember my calling when I went back in 1922; he remembered very well our talks in the late '90's.*

I should be most glad, my dear Mr. Houser, to know of anything that you turn up in your search for the books that Lincoln read.

Very sincerely

* I have notes of these tales made at the time.

Mr. M. L. Houser
Peoria, Illinois