

January 31, 1929

Mr. Worthington C. Ford
Massachusetts Historical Society
Fenway, Boston, Mass.

My dear Mr. Ford:

Your letter of January 24, sent to me at Knox College, reached me yesterday, and at the same time I received the printed matter. Thank you for the trouble you took in sending me the material. May I not ask that if you make any further comments you will let me have a copy of what you say?

I was much interested in your article on the Lincoln-Stephens letter of January, 1860, printed by Judd Stewart and by Tracy. I always had a queer feeling about that letter but never attempted to follow it up. I accepted it because of the source from which it came to me. You seem, however, to make out a complete case against its authenticity.

As to Henry Whitney Cleveland, what I know of him is soon told. I came across him in Louisville, Ky. in 1895 when I was collecting material on the life of Lincoln. Col. R. T. Durrett, who had at that time the largest collection of Kentucky documents and printed matter that I had seen, suggested that I employ Henry Whitney Cleveland to copy certain documents that I wanted. My recollection now is that Thomas Speed of the Filson Club, the author of the first study, so far as I know, of the Wilderness Road, vouched for Cleveland. At all events, he was a person that Col. Durrett was willing to allow in his library.

As it was necessary for me, under the circumstances in which I was working, to have at each point of interest a correspondent to collect material, the McClure's Magazine arranged with Cleveland to carry out any investigations that I might think advisable. We wanted fac similes of the marriage bond and marriage returns which were in the court house at Springfield, Washington County, and I asked Cleveland to make tracings of them. This he did.

He also made a tracing of various other documents, such as the appointment of Thomas Lincoln as road surveyor (p. 42 of my "Early Life.") This I had unearthed in Elizabethtown, and was particularly

interested in this because it was the first intimation that I had had that Thomas Lincoln had any standing in the community.

Now, it was necessary for us in the journalistic treatment we were giving to the material gathered, to have the documents clear enough for the general reader to understand what they were all about. Take the marriage bond which is reproduced in Barton's first volume, facing p. 16, and you can see that that would mean little or nothing to the average magazine reader. We wanted it to stand out in such a way that it would mean something, and Cleveland's tracing was photographed. I have no doubt that some one in the art department went over this photograph carefully, strengthening the lines. That was one necessary step to get the result that we wanted in our reproduction of documents. Of course it made something different from the tracing, something different from the original document; the bond, marriage return and the little appointment as road surveyor are all carefully authenticated documents.

Now, as to the marriage certificate of Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks. I had no reason to suppose that Cleveland was not an honest man, backed as he was by Col. Durrett and members of the Filson Club. I accepted the certificate in good faith. But where or how he got it I do not know. For all I know he may have manufactured it - Barton thinks he did, but I doubt if he, any more than I, could prove that he did or that he did not manufacture it.

There must have been correspondence about the document at the time; but if so it has all been destroyed. I was carrying on the work for McClure's Magazine and letters and documents belonged to them. That magazine changed hands nearly twenty years ago, and I tried at that time to get hold of the Lincoln correspondence and the originals of our illustrations, such as the Cleveland tracings, I was told, however, that they had all been destroyed.

There is a bare possibility that I may have somewhere in my Lincoln papers one of Cleveland's tracings. These are packed away, many of them in the country, and it is quite impossible for me now to make a search for it.

You ask if Cleveland is still alive. I think not. He was an elderly man, as I remember, when I met him in Louisville. My impression is that at that time he was hard up. Indeed, if I do not mistake, Col. Durrett told me that he needed work. I am writing today

to an acquaintance of mine in Louisville, who may be able to tell me something of the man. If I get any information I shall be glad to pass it on to you.

I shall be glad, too, to know what you learn, for I take it you propose to follow him up. I should like particularly to know whether or not the marriage certificate was a bogus document.

Sincerely yours