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EDITOR IN CHIEF AND PUBLISHER
RICHARD LLOYD JONES NEWSPAPERS:
THE TULSA TRIBUNE
THE MINNEAPOLIS NEWS
JACKSONVILLE JOURNAL
THE PENNSACOLA JOURNAL
CHARLESTON AMERICAN
THE READING TIMES

The Minneapolis News,
Minneapolis, Minn.
April 2, 1923.

Miss Ida M. Tarbell,
No. 120 E. 19th St.
New York City.

Dear Ida Tarbell:

Of course, I am following your Lincoln articles. I am sorry that our paper, which we only acquired a little more than a month ago, is not the one that is carrying them in this city.

I am very pleased that you are knocking in the head the vicious propaganda that long ago was started to discredit the legitimacy of Lincoln's parentage. This work you are doing is clearing up a lot of stuff in the right way, and you, above all the biographers are doing it. Long ago all of us Lincoln lovers found you to be the most authentic student student of the facts in Lincoln's life.

I made a rather hasty survey at one time, spending only a week on it, in the card catalogues of the Congressional Library in Washington a few years ago, the figures of which are in some of my files that are not accessible at this time. I wish they were. Unless it has already occurred to you it may interest you to know that I found at that time, that there has been more literature written about Lincoln than any man that ever lived, Christ alone excepted. This is wonderful when you think of the nineteen centuries passed since the time of Christ and that Lincoln is little more than half a century away. The future literature of Lincoln is going to be monumental.

In my talks on Lincoln I always like to use the figure of a receding mountain range on the observation platform of a train. The low mountains soon slip below the horizon while the highest peaks in the perspective of distance seem to rise higher and higher. So as we recede from men who seemed great when we were in their immediate presence, soon fall below the horizon line when we get the perspective of time. It is only the great that defy the test of distance.

I look upon your work as one of tremendous importance. No one is so fitted as you by devotion to fact and sympathy of subject, intelligence and comprehension, to write the basis story which will be the foundation for a wealth of interpretative literature in the future on this most lofty mountain in the human range.

In reading the installment of your released for publication yesterday, naturally I was pleased to see the comment on the Lincoln birthplace memorial. I am very glad you like it. I have done nothing that has given me the permanent satisfaction that has come to me through having originated this idea and movement and engineering its fulfillment. Roosevelt once used these words to me in speaking of it, "No memorial I have ever seen has moved me as this." I have heard some such expression from perhaps hundreds of men of travel and experience. It is the silence of the scene, the isolation, the sense of "Here Began," that gets one. I never visit it myself, familiar as I am with it, that I am not possessed with a prayerful sense of emotion. I have taken pains to try to find copies of the idea but though there are markers and tablets where great men were born, so far as I have been able to learn this is the only monumental tribute of a people to the beginning of a great life. We build monuments to mark the place where great men rest and where great lives end but this is unique because it marks where a great life began. The only thing comparable to it is in the Argentina. There, in similar fashion, the people of that country have built about and over, to protect for all time, the crude little hut in which the government was born.

I wonder if it will bore you if I write a little longer letter than I intended and tell you how the idea came. As we grow older we grow more and more to respect facts and to not let our facts be modified by sentiment.

In my first story of the purchase of this farm, in Collier's in 1905, I gave the credit to my father whom I loved and was eager to please. This was more than was his due from the pure historical fact and I always a little regretted it because it was not quite right. If any one may have been said to have inspired the idea it was Henry Watterson. Dear old "Marse Henry" was a warm and genial friend of mine. I was boy enough to value the friendship of so venerable^a man and genius. He had spent his life in the trade I was following. I always saw him when I went to Louisville. From boyhood Lincoln had been my obsession. I have accumulated hundreds of books about him. Watterson as you know, was a great Lincoln scholar. One day, seated in his office, he said to me, "Have you ever been down to his birthplace?" I had not, and he said, "Well, go; you will find the spring broken down, the pigs and horses trampling upon sacred ground. You sit down on the bare knoll above the spring where the Lincoln cabin stood, the markers are still there. You sit there and there is something there that will move you." I went, and came back with the idea that something should be done and I told him about it. He said he had often thought of it, and I left him saying I was going to work out some plan.

My editorial errands at that time took me to Chicago. I told my father about my visit. He had never been there. I told him to go. I told him of my plan to make something of that place. This was in October 1903.

My father went to the farm in March, 1904 and in April in his little paper "Unity" appeared an editorial, "A Neglected Shrine" in which he said, as I had already said to him, that something should be done about it. My dream had already taken form in what the Lincoln Farm Association later came to be.

I went to Hodgenville and retained an attorney to advise me should this land ever be released by the Dennett estate, in which at the time it was hopelessly entangled. Mr. Dennett, the owner of the land was in the Insane Asylum. In August 1905 I received a wire that the land was to be sold at public auction. I took the matter up with Robert Collier and urged him to assist me in the matter and he very generously consented. I went to Hodgenville and succeeded in bidding in the farm for the small sum of \$3,600.00 against a scattering group of bidders. Parenthetically the story that I very cautiously tell to my intimate friends, is that I acquired this only by playing the Sherlock Holmes game. I spent the evening before the sale over in E-town, getting two men hopelessly drunk. I found there a fellow representing a Louisville distilling house. They wanted to buy the farm and put up there a Lincoln birthplace whiskey distillery. That sacrilegious notion offended me. The other fellow who was with him in the bar room of the hotel and both getting very convivial, turned to me in a confidential way, which he would not have done had he not been pretty drunk, and showed me a telegram to show how sure he was that he had his friend licked. The telegram was dated Philadelphia and it read, "Bid it in." It was signed "J. W." "J. W." from Philadelphia, with such unlimited authority suggested John Wannamaker and I learned later that this guess was right. That at least would prevent the farm from being a distillery site. I knew John Wannamaker was public-spirited but I was not sure just what plan he might have. I knew that the man, who, as Post Master General of the United States had offered to print all of the postage stamps free of cost to the government if the government would permit him to merely print "Wannamaker's Store, Philadelphia" on the mucilage side of the stamp, was not without commercial genius and resourcefulness.

To continue; that bar room was designed for the occasion. The bar ended at a window, it was summer and the window was open. I took the window end of the bar and invited my friends to drink. They were too drunk to observe that my drinks went out of the window and I only drank enough to be chummy with them, and at two in the morning the hotel proprietor and I put them to bed. The next day I went to Hodgenville and bought the farm.

Rob Collier had told me I could spend at least \$5000.00 of his money on the purchase. I was no capitalist myself. Few hired editors are but I had six or seven thousand dollars and I decided to spend \$5000.00 of my own if need be. I bought the farm in Rob's name because I wanted him to have all the credit possible and I wanted to cultivate his interest. He was delighted with the outcome and gave me wonderful and splendid support and co-operation, without which the enterprise would not have succeeded as it did.

However, we split fifty-fifty on the purchase of it and I put in about ten thousand dollars before I was through with the work. When I wired homethat I had bought the farm my mother wrote me that it would please my father very much if I would give him some credit for the idea I had in mind. Eager to please my father I referred to his Unity editorial "A Neglected Shrine" and gave there a credit which was not really due. It was Henry Watterson who induced me to first go and see the neglected shrine and it is where I got the idea.

I venture to tell you this story of personal narrative simply because I thought it might interest you.

May I suggest two unimportant changes for you to make in your text when you come to put your manuscript in book form. You say 20,000 people enrolled themselves in the Lincoln Farm Association. It was much more than that; the total was about 81,000. We raised \$300,000, every cent of which was put into the memorial and in collecting the fund over \$200,000 came in twenty-five cent pieces. It will be just the change of from about 20,000 to about 80,000.

The other change: You speak of the memorial being in marble. It is of granite. We got the hardest and most enduring stone we could get. There is nothing in the memorial but steel, granite, bronze, copper, glass and some plaster. There is no brick and no veneer. The walls are solid granite in blocks three feet and four inches thick.

In building this memorial I did not expect that there would be many who could go to see it though I felt it was the thing which should be done. I have been much surprised to find by our registration book that there is an average of over twenty thousand visitors each year. That twenty thousand people should come to that memorial in the foothills, sixty miles from Louisville, is an interesting fact in itself. I knew that the picture of the memorial and the fact that there was such a memorial at that place, would find its way into the school books of the country. My idea in building the memorial was simply this; that in building that shrine and bringing it before the people, the heart of every American would be impressed with the fact that so long as we keep this country a true republic and true to the democratic ideals of its makers, any child, no matter how humble may be its birth, may live to render his country its greatest service in its hour of need.

You are doing an imperishable service to an enduring ideal in this biographical work which you are now engaged in. I am one of your countless readers who wants to thank you from my heart for it.

Always faithfully your friend,

RLJ:Q

