



LINCOLN LIBRARY

Lincoln Financial Collection at Allen County Public Library

NICOLAY COLLECTION
6 boxes; 3.8 cubic feet

*For additional material on Helen and John G. Nicolay, see the manuscript collection **Lincoln's Secretaries—Hay, Nicolay, Stoddard**; 1 box, 0.5 cubic feet.*

Biographical Notes

Helen Nicolay (1866-1954)

Helen Nicolay was born in 1866 to John G. Nicolay and Therena Bates Nicolay in Paris, where her father served as American Consul. In 1869, the Nicolay family returned to the United States. Helen's academic training was overseen by her father as well as private tutors. Little is known about Helen Nicolay as a young woman, other than that she helped her father and John Hay write their 10-volume Lincoln biography by taking dictation. She began writing her own books after her father's death in 1901 and had a summer retreat studio in New Hampshire she used for painting and writing. Her best known work is *Lincoln's Secretary: A Biography of John G. Nicolay*. In all, she wrote more than 20 books, mostly history and biography, many of which were intended for children. She described her reason for writing in a letter to a young fan—she wrote books to make “history seem alive and interesting to young people.”

Helen Nicolay was also a recognized artist. The Lincoln Museum Collection includes two oil paintings of John G. Nicolay painted by Helen Nicolay.

Helen Nicolay died in Washington, D.C., in 1954.

John G. Nicolay (1832-1901)

John G. Nicolay was born in Bavaria in 1832 and immigrated to the United States as child. In 1848, Nicolay became a printer's devil at the Pittsfield, Illinois, Whig newspaper, the *Free Press*. He eventually owned the paper and ran it successfully until he sold it in 1856. In 1857, having become a staunch Republican, he took a position as a clerk for Ozais Hatch, the Illinois Secretary of the State, in Springfield. It was there that Nicolay met Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln chose Nicolay to be his secretary immediately after Lincoln's nomination for presidency.¹

Nicolay's relationship with John Hay developed while in Lincoln's employ. Nicolay had met the young Hay while Hay was at school in Pittsfield, and when mail became too much for Nicolay to handle at the White House, he requested Hay's assistance. Also while in Pittsfield, Nicolay met his future wife, Therena Bates.²

Lincoln entrusted Nicolay with more than secretarial duties, sending him to assist with Native American treaty negotiations. Nicolay, in turn, admired the president and zealously protected his reputation. In 1864, Nicolay went to Baltimore to oversee Lincoln's campaign for reelection.³

¹ Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Abraham Lincoln Encyclopedia*, (New York: De Capo Press, 1982), 224.

² Neely, Jr., 224.

³ Neely, Jr., 224.

Due to an uncomfortable relationship with Mary Todd Lincoln, who did not trust him, Nicolay requested a foreign position after Lincoln's reelection. Nicolay was preparing for his post as American consul in Paris when Lincoln was assassinated in April 1865. He remained in Washington to put the president's papers in order before assuming his duties in Paris. President Grant removed Nicolay from his foreign post in 1869 but appointed him Marshal to the United States Supreme Court in 1872.⁴

In 1874, with the permission of Robert Todd Lincoln, Nicolay and Hay began work on their monumental *Abraham Lincoln, a History*. Parts of the work were serialized in *Century Magazine* from 1886 to 1890, when the entire work was published in 10 volumes. Nicolay and Hay also published a 2-volume set of Lincoln's writings, and Nicolay was at work on a 1-volume version of *Abraham Lincoln, a History* when he died in 1901.⁵

Scope and Content

The manuscript portion of the Nicolay Collection consists of six series. The *Addresses* series includes notes on addresses Helen Nicolay prepared and gave. Notes on speeches given at Springfield in 1922 and Boston in 1928 as well as notes on a speech given about John Hay are included in this series.

The *Correspondence* series contains Helen Nicolay's correspondence related to her work and other activities. Correspondence also includes letters received from professionals seeking information on topics related to Lincoln.

The *Biographical* series includes early recollections by Helen Nicolay as well as 3 photographs and certificates awarded to her by various organizations.

The *Research* series includes Helen Nicolay's extensive notes on topics such as biographical information on her father and Lincoln's children. This research is reflected in her writings. Among her research materials are the Thomas B. Osborne family correspondence for 1839 through 1843, some in manuscript and some in typescript, and a Helen Nicolay draft incorporating some of those letters. (Osborne was a Representative from Connecticut serving in Congress; the letters were written by Osborne, his wife, and other family members.) Articles about Hay, Lincoln, and John G. Nicolay featured in *Lincoln Lore* and *The Rhode Islander* are also in this series.

The *Writings* series contains Helen Nicolay's written works, including unpublished works and published articles and books. The books section contains early drafts of chapters of *Lincoln's Secretary* as well as revised versions. Reviews and letters about each of her books were kept in these files by Helen Nicolay. Letters filed here consist mainly of letters written by school children telling her why they read her books and discussing why they enjoyed them. Helen Nicolay often included a copy of her reply with these letters. Writings also includes published and unpublished articles.

The *John G. Nicolay Collection* series consists of copies of papers kept by his daughter. The series includes research on his patent for a folding chair, notes on *Personal Traits of Abraham Lincoln* and *Abraham Lincoln, a History*, as well as copies of his personal correspondence from December 21, 1859, to June 1, 1868.

In addition to the manuscript materials, the *John G. Nicolay Collection* series also includes:

⁴ Neely, Jr., 224.

⁵ Neely, Jr., 224-225.

The book, *The Outbreak of Rebellion*, by John G. Nicolay. This copy, presented to Nicolay by the publisher, was printed in New York by the Charles Scribner Sons Company in 1881. It is a specially bound edition, octavo, in full red morocco.

A long, charcoal and white, Scotch-weave blanket shawl given to John G. Nicolay by Abraham Lincoln, who used it during his presidency. Nicolay had his initials, J.G.N., embroidered in red thread at each corner of the shawl.

Three ambrotypes, 3 ferrotypes, 5 cartes-de-visite, a small calendar book, and a small photograph album containing 20 photographs of John G. Nicolay's trip to Ute territory.

Container List

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>
1	Addresses Addresses of Helen Nicolay Speech on John Hay Speech at Springfield, Feb. 11, 1922 Speech at Boston, Feb. 12, 1928 Notes for talk at Jewish Center, Feb. 1947 Obituary and notes on Bertha Perrie Obituary and notes on Jean Margaret Lander Biography Early recollections by Helen Nicolay Helen Nicolay photographs Certificates awarded to Helen Nicolay Correspondence Letters regarding Helen Nicolay's books Letters regarding <i>Lincoln's Secretary</i> Letters on Edward Bates
2	Correspondence, continued Letters regarding <i>Lincoln Bible</i> Letters regarding Bixby letters Miscellaneous letters Alphabetized list of correspondence received in regards to Lincoln Correspondence A – D Correspondence E – A. Griffith Correspondence H – M Correspondence O – S Correspondence T – W Research Biographical material on John G. Nicolay <i>Lincoln Lore</i> and <i>The Rhode Islander</i> articles regarding Hay, Lincoln, and Nicolay Thomas B. Osborne family letters, manuscript letters, 1841-1842 Thomas B. Osborne family letters, typescripts/excerpts, 1839-1843 Helen Nicolay draft incorporating Osborne letters
3	Research, continued Springfield, Illinois, notes Springfield Farewell notes Inauguration Day, 1861 "Lincoln Likeness" Lincoln Children Robert Lincoln Willie Lincoln Tad Lincoln Mary Todd Lincoln

Thomas Lincoln (father)
 White House Visitors (children)
 Elmer Ellsworth
 Miscellaneous—Print sources
 Helen Nicolay—Miscellaneous Notes
 Writings, unpublished
 “Lincoln the Artist”
 Writings, articles
 “Lincoln’s Friendliness”
 Writings, books
 Reviews, letters about *Boy’s Life of Abraham Lincoln*
 Reviews, letters about *Boy’s Life of Grant*
 Reviews, letters about *Personal Traits of Abraham Lincoln*
 Reviews, letters about *Our Nation in the Building*
 Reviews, letters about *Book of American Wars*
 Boston City Council reviews of *Book of American Wars*
 Reviews, letters about *Boy’s Life of Lafayette*
 Reviews, letters about *Our Capital on the Potomac*
 Notes used in *Children’s Lincoln*
 Notes for early chapters
 Lincoln and the Children, Chapters 1-8
 Children’s Lincoln, Chapters 1-7
 Early and discarded portions of *Children’s Lincoln*
 White House Attic chapter
 Children’s Lincoln, Chapters 1-11
 Children’s Lincoln, Chapters 12-18
 Carbon copy, discarded paper from *Children’s Lincoln*
 Early Form of *Lincoln’s Secretary*, Preface, Chapters 1-2
 Lincoln’s Secretary, Preparation, Chapters 1-2
 Lincoln’s Secretary, Service I, Chapters 4-7
 Lincoln’s Secretary, Service II, Chapters 9-13
 Lincoln’s Secretary, Service III, Chapters 14-18
 Lincoln’s Secretary, Interim, Chapters 19-21
 Lincoln’s Secretary, Fulfillment, Chapters 22-25
 Lincoln’s Secretary, Fulfillment II, Chapters 26-28
 Loose paper regarding *Lincoln’s Secretary*
 Discarded sheets from *Lincoln’s Secretary*

4

Writings, books, continued
 Nation in the Building/Our Capital on the Potomac, Notes [alphabetical,
 incomplete]
 Adams, Hannah – Adams, Samuel
 Advertisements – Arthur, Chester A.
 Amusements
 Art
 Bancroft, Geo. – Boone, Danl.
 Booth, J. Wilkes – Busey, Dr. S.C.
 Hale, Mrs. Sarah – Hayne

Health – Houston, Saml.
 Inaugurations – Irving, Washington
 Andrew Jackson
 Japanese Embassy – Jay, John
 Jefferson, Thos. – Johnson, Richard M.
 Paine, Tom. – Political Parties
 Polk, Jas. K. – Putnam, Herbert
 Railroads – Rutledge, J.
 Sampson, Adm. – Sherman, Gen. W.T.
 Sigourney – Smithsonian
 Social Customs – Surratt
 Written but not used in *Capital on the Potomac*
 Lincoln Commission of the New York Avenue Presbyterian
 Church/Lincoln Pilgrimage, Washington, D.C. (1970s)
 Lincoln—Miscellaneous

- 5 John G. Nicolay Collection
- Notes on *Personal Traits of Abraham Lincoln*
 - Notes on *Abraham Lincoln, A History*
 - John G. Nicolay inventions
 - Letters regarding the Nicolay Papers at the Library of Congress
 - Letters of John Hay to John Nicolay
 - Letters regarding Nicolay, Hay at Crystal Park
 - Nicolay Papers, Dec. 21, 1859 – Dec. 30, 1860
 - Nicolay Papers, Jan 6, 1861 – May 31, 1861
 - Nicolay Papers, June 2, 1861 – Dec. 31, 1861
 - Nicolay Papers, Feb. 2, 1862 – Dec. 7, 1862
 - Nicolay Papers, Jan. 4, 1863 – Aug. 2, 1863
 - Nicolay Papers, Feb. 17, 1864 – Dec. 30, 1864
 - Nicolay Papers, Jan. 6, 1865 – June 1, 1868
 - Miscellaneous Nicolay papers
- 6 Cased ambrotypes and ferrotypes; calendar book; photograph album

Emily Fischer, May 2008
 Updated, J. Gastineau, September 2008