

MARION DOLORES PRATT

1907-1963

Marion D. Pratt, archivist with the Illinois State Archives and former Acting Illinois State Historian, died in Springfield on December 13, 1963, after an illness of 8 months.

Mrs. Pratt was a dedicated archivist and historian. She was known nationally and received many honors for her work in the field of Lincoln research. In the Illinois Archives her attention to the needs of students and research scholars was exemplary. Through special effort she found time to revitalize the Illinois land and survey records as well as the Governors' official correspondence. She was active in the Society of American Archivists and was an active contributor to the archival profession.

Mrs. Pratt was born Marion Dolores Bonzi on June 4, 1907, at Rockford, Illinois. She studied at Rockford College, where she was graduated in 1928, and at the University of Illinois, where she received the M.A. degree in history in 1929. During 9 of the next 16 years she taught history and was assistant to the dean of Rockford College. She was twice the recipient of the Talcott Fellowship at the University of Chicago, where she studied for 3 years toward the Ph. D. degree and worked as a research assistant in the history department. She also taught at colleges in Omaha and Fairbury, Nebraska.

Marion Bonzi came to Springfield in 1945 as an assistant editor of *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*. William E. Baringer was then the editor and he was succeeded by Roy P. Basler. The project was being sponsored by the Abraham Lincoln Association.

In 1950 Dr. Harry E. Pratt, who had been executive secretary of the Abraham Lincoln Association from 1936 to 1943, returned to Springfield to become the Illinois State Historian and head of the Illinois State Historical Library. There had always been a close interdependence between the State Historical Library and the association, and as a result the State Historian and the assistant editor soon found that their mutual interest in the Lincoln story was causing them to spend much of their time together. This relationship resulted in their marriage on October 1, 1950, and they became a husband-and-wife history team.

The Abraham Lincoln Association suspended operations in 1953 with the publication of the nine-volume *Collected Works* and transferred its vast files of Lincoln material to the State Historical Library. Mrs. Pratt continued to work for the association for several months to wind up its affairs and supervise the transfer to the library. She then became assistant secretary-treasurer of the Illinois State Historical Society and unofficial assistant to her husband in his Lincoln studies.

On April 15, 1955—the 90th anniversary of Lincoln's death—Dr. Pratt suffered a heart attack and was hospitalized for a month or more. During this time, with Mrs. Pratt acting as his agent and assistant, he was able to continue his work as State Historian and his Lincoln research. Then, on February

12, 1956—the 147th anniversary of Lincoln's birth—Dr. Pratt had a second heart attack, this one quickly fatal. Within a day or two Mrs. Pratt was appointed Acting State Historian—as the one person best able to tie up the loose ends of her husband's affairs at the library. She continued in this position until October, when she joined the staff of the State Archives.

Of the honors received by Mrs. Pratt for her Lincoln studies some were shared with her husband, and others were accorded to her after his death. The most unusual of their honors came in 1954 when Dr. and Mrs. Pratt were awarded Doctor of Literature degrees by Lincoln College, Lincoln, Illinois. They were presented a joint citation, which stated, in part, that they were being recognized for “unflagging devotion to the cause of historical accuracy and careful investigation . . . conscientious and creative editorship . . . [and] knowledge and integrity in the Lincoln field.”

Carl Sandburg began the dedication to his one-volume edition of *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years and The War Years* by writing: “To Harry and Marion Dolores Pratt, a handsome team of Lincoln scholars, who gave time and care to the new manuscript of the *Prairie Years*.” And Dr. James G. Randall said, in his *Lincoln the President: Midstream*, “The Pratts—Harry E. Pratt of the Illinois State Historical Library and Mrs. Marion Bonzi Pratt of the Abraham Lincoln Association—stand high among the author's distinguished benefactors by reason of their incomparable knowledge, able guidance, and unstinting service.”

In 1953 Mrs. Pratt was awarded the Lincoln Diploma of Honor by Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee—her husband had received the same recognition earlier. In 1959 she was one of 13 Illinoisans named honorable members of the national Lincoln Sesquicentennial Commission.

In the field of Lincoln scholarship Mrs. Pratt was known as an editor and researcher. On several occasions she edited the *Abraham Lincoln Quarterly*, and during her term as Acting State Historian she was editor of that journal. She also helped to edit books sponsored by the Abraham Lincoln Association, and she acted as editorial advisor for radio and television programs about Lincoln. Although she did not do much writing, two of her last magazine articles helped to further the Lincoln story. They were “From State Capitol to Historic Lincoln Shrine” (*Illinois Libraries*, June 1962) and “Some New Finds in the State Archives” (*Illinois History*, Feb. 1959).

Mrs. Pratt was an active member of the First Methodist Church of Springfield and she was serving on its official board at the time of her death. She is survived by two aunts, Mrs. Ann M. Schmidt of Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, and Mrs. Frances Karsner of Round Lake, Illinois; two uncles, Louis Bonzi of Loves Park, Illinois, and Frank Bonzi of Memphis, Tennessee; and a cousin, Mrs. Mary Ann Dreikosen of Wauwatosa.

On December 16 Mrs. Pratt was buried beside her husband on a hillside in Oak Ridge Cemetery in the shadow of the Lincoln Tomb.

THEODORE J. CASSADY
Archives-Records Management Division
State of Illinois