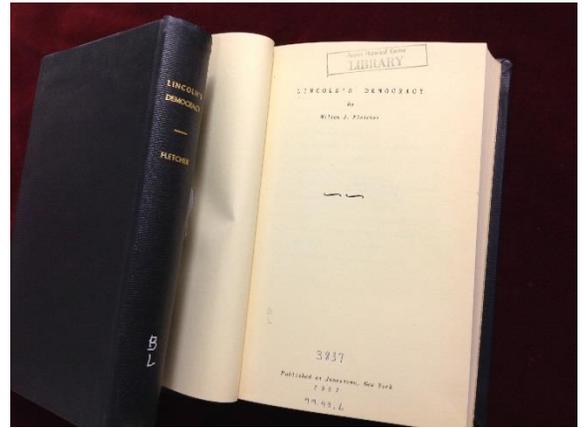


President Lincoln's Democracy and M.L. Fletcher

By Karen E. Livsey, Archivist

As the 150th anniversary of the death of Abraham Lincoln approaches, there are many stories, articles and programs about him. This Hometown History will add to the list of articles. Many of our readers will recognize the name of Milton J. Fletcher because one of Jamestown's elementary schools is named for him. A few will remember him as their teacher. Fletcher was a teacher for over 30 years and retired from the Jamestown public school system as the Superintendent, serving in that capacity from 1919 until his retirement in 1932.



His subject was American history. After his retirement, he started work on *Lincoln's Democracy*, a book according to the Foreword designed for use as a supplementary reading course for high school students of American history. Ill health prevented Fletcher from finishing the manuscript until a few months before his death in 1952. After his death, his daughter and others in the community sent the manuscript to publishers. Many had good things to say about the manuscript but all felt that there was a small and unreachable market for such a book. For that reason, no commercial publisher agreed to publish the book.

A group of friends, former students and other admirers of Fletcher decided that his work needed to be preserved and created the Milton J. Fletcher Memorial Fund to collect money which they used to publish the book. It was published in Jamestown and copyrighted by his daughter, Louise E. Fletcher, in 1957. Correspondence in the collection of the Fenton History Center indicates that 115 copies of the book were bound, so it was a limited edition. Copies went to the fund donors and were available to high school and public libraries. There was at least one request for a copy of the book to go to the Lincoln Collection at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island.

One of the publishing houses sent a review after reading the manuscript. It includes "Through an analysis of the life and times of Abraham Lincoln, Mr. Fletcher has attempted an interpretation of American democracy and a clarification of what is meant by the 'American Way of Life.' The approach is novel and the attempt is obviously successful." One other comment is interesting in light of Fletcher's teaching career. The reviewer writes "It is not planned as a textbook but it can be used in the classroom as an excellent reference book. As it stands the book is too difficult for the typical high school student. The vocabulary, sentence structure, and concept load are on a more mature level than the present date [sic] eleventh and twelfth graders can comprehend."

Three copies of the book and two manuscript copies of *Lincoln's Democracy* and a few other papers of Milton J. Fletcher are in the collection of the Fenton History Center. A quick look at WorldCat.org (an online catalog for many libraries) shows that 18 libraries claim to have a copy of the book, including Brown University.

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