

**SKETCH OF EDWARD COLES,
SECOND GOVERNOR OF
ILLINOIS, AND OF THE
SLAVERY STRUGGLE OF 1823-4**

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Sketch of Edward Coles, second governor of Illinois, and of the slavery struggle of 1823-4 by E. B. Washburne

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E. B. WASHBURNE

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SKETCH
OF
EDWARD COLES,
SECOND GOVERNOR OF ILLINOIS,
AND OF THE
SLAVERY STRUGGLE OF 1823-4.

PREPARED FOR THE CHICAGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY,

By E. B. WASHBURNE,
HONORARY MEMBER OF THE SOCIETY.

"The world knows nothing of its greatest men."
—*Philip Van Artevelde.*

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1882.

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TO THE
HON. JOSEPH GILLESPIE.

One of the connecting links between the earlier and the later Illinois, and who in his career as a lawyer, a magistrate and a citizen, has illustrated the history of our State for more than half a century, this Paper is dedicated, as a slight token of the profound respect and high esteem in which he is held by

THE WRITER.

CHICAGO, MAY, 18, 1881.

HON. E. B. WASHBURNE:

Dear Sir:— I have the honor to inform you that at a stated meeting of the Chicago Historical Society, held last evening on motion of Hon. I. N. Arnold, the following preamble and resolution were unanimously adopted:

Whereas, The late Edward Coles, second Governor of Illinois, was one of the most interesting characters in American history, and especially distinguished for the great and important services he rendered in preventing the extension of slavery into this State; and

Whereas, Many of the letters, papers and manuscripts of Gov. Coles have been placed, by his family, in the hands of our honored associate, the Hon. E. B. Washburne, with a view of preparing a Sketch of his life and services; and knowing that such a Sketch would be a most valuable and interesting contribution to the history of our State, and that Mr. Washburne, from his familiar knowledge of the history of Illinois, and his deep interest in the subject, would execute such work with fidelity, skill and ability: Therefore

Resolved, That the Hon. E. B. Washburne, on behalf of the Chicago Historical Society, and all students of American History, is earnestly requested to prepare for this society and publish a Paper on Governor Edward Coles."

I have the honor to be

Very respectfully,

ALBERT D. HAGER, Secretary.

CHICAGO, Illinois, May 26, 1881.

ALBERT D. HAGER, ESQ.,

Secretary of Chicago Historical Society.

Dear Sir: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 18th instant, enclosing the resolution of the Historical Society, requesting me to prepare for the Society a Paper on Governor Edward Coles. I have in my hands many of the papers, letters, manuscripts, &c., of Governor Coles, placed at my disposition by his son, Edward Coles, Esq., of Philadelphia, and I have spent some time in examining and looking them over with a view to the publication of some notice of that distinguished man.

Whatever I may prepare, I will cheerfully contribute to the Society, unworthy and imperfect as the contribution may be.

Important and interesting as the papers and correspondence which I have, may be found, there is a great deal lacking that is necessary for the full accomplishment of such a purpose as I have in view. Many years ago Governor Coles presented to the Alton Historical Society a large mass of books, papers, and documents, pertaining to the history of the State during his administration. He requested, however, that they might be lent to his old friend, the Rev. J. M. Peck, to be used in a historical collection he was then making.

Unfortunately, Mr. Peck's house was consumed by fire, involving the destruction of all this invaluable material. I have, however, made the best use I could of what I have in hand, and my Paper, when finished, I will send to you to go into the archives of your Society.

I have the honor to be,

Very truly,

Your obedient servant,

E. B. WASHBURNE.

"Not being aware of any consideration which should restrain me, but on the contrary, believing that my present office increases the obligation I am under, as a good citizen, to exert myself to enlighten the minds of my fellow citizens, and strenuously oppose every measure which I am convinced is unjust in principle, or injurious in its effects, and believing slavery to be both injurious and inpolitic, I believe myself bound, both as a citizen and an officer, to do all in my power to prevent its introduction into this State."

(Letter of Governor Coles to Roberts Vaux of Philadelphia, dated Edwardsville, Illinois, June 27, 1823.)

"The part which thee has been called to act privately, as well as publicly and officially, in regard to the rights of mankind and for the upholding of the principles of justice and mercy toward a degraded and oppressed portion of our fellow beings, ought to be regarded as a manifestation of Providential power, concerning which we must always believe the same Divine interposition will be extended in every emergency. I am altogether satisfied that it is reserved for thee to witness the triumph of truth and beneficence in the struggle to which thee has been exposed, and what is of infinitely greater value, as it respects thyself, to reap a plenteous harvest in the most precious of all rewards—the approbation of Heaven! I feel a deep interest in thy character, and a lively gratitude for thy services, and it will always be among the purest consolations of my mind to be assured of thy welfare and happiness."

(Letter of Roberts Vaux to Edward Coles, dated Philadelphia, 6 mo., 14, 1824.)

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