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A RECAPITULATION OF 25 YEARS WORK

Twentieth Century Moses



ROBERT SENGSTACKE ABBOTT, LL. B.

(From a Drawing by Henry Brown, Staff Artist)

Brought his people out of the land of bondage and has kept up a continual fight for their freedom for the past twenty-five years. He has caused more people to leave the South and escape the Jim Crow laws than any other person since the days of Abe Lincoln.

A GREATER CHICAGO DEFENDER To the Public:

(From Issue of Feb. 2, 1918)

The Chicago Defender is preparing to give the reading public a greater paper than it is now publishing. A full 16-page, up-to-date newspaper, carrying a full page of news interesting to women, two of sports, theatrical news, a column for children, fashions, a good live editorial page, cartoons excelled by none, pictorial history of world events pertaining to the Race, a soldiers' page, and a regular page on the war, written by a Defender reporter who will be with the troops.

We will attempt something new, also set a precedent for journals, by sending one of OUR REPORTERS with the boys "over there" in France and by giving to the public its FIRST 16-PAGE WEEKLY paper issued every week instead of on Christmas and during business-boosting campaigns.

It must be conceded that we have not only excelled in the field of journalism, but have always been in the lead in matters of public import, the first to speak out fearlessly and truthfully in the interest of the people without regard to whom it hurts.

We wait only upon Washington and the proposed zone system. If satisfactory we will start at once; only adverse legislation will keep us from our aims.

Write your friends in your home town to have them get their city in on the bigger Defender.

Due notice will be given when we intend running the first issue of the Greater Defender.

We wish to thank the public for their loyal support in the past, and promise them that The Chicago Defender shall continue to be "The World's Greatest Weekly" in the future, striving its utmost to serve all the people, both black and white.

ROBERT S. ABBOTT,
Sole Owner and Publisher.

Editor Robt. S. Abbott's Story of Early Struggles and Success of of The World's Greatest Weekly

By ROBERT S. ABBOTT

Editor, Owner and Founder of The Chicago Defender

The primary causes or reasons for the celebration of an anniversary of an institution are to review its past, check upon its accomplishments, and recount its achievements. In this edition of The Chicago Defender the various departments are collaborating reviewing its past and trying to determine, if possible, at least some of the things for which it has fought as an institution in the 25 years of its existence.

It is not unseemly that I, as the founder, owner and editor, should be gratified in the success it has attained, in the good it has done and in the purpose it has served. It is difficult to review the past 25 years of this institution and separate its growth and progress from the difficulties and trying experiences which were the problems of the founder and owner.

My preparation for the newspaper business had its inception in my home town in Savannah, Ga., through my connection with the Savannah Tribune, Jonathan Stern, and Cookkoo and Seaman, both newspaper publishers, and the latter school-mates of my father, gave me an opportunity as a reporter to learn something of the business.

It was with these concerns that I learned the importance of embracing the desire to own and control a newspaper of my own. This idea was accentuated at Hampton Institute through studies and contact while studying printing. Upon graduating from that institution I wended my way West, entering the Kent College of Law of this city, graduating in 1909, but I soon learned that the legal business was not as profitable for a beginner as I had thought. I soon decided to return to the pursuit of my first studies and enter the field of journalism.

In order to carry out the ideas of establishing the kind of newspaper I had in mind, it was necessary to give considerable study and thought to the mapping out of the plan for the successful carrying out of the project. Hence, I spent ten years working in various printing establishments and newspaper concerns of this city. I had reached a definite conclusion after a survey of the shortcomings of the various newspapers published by our group throughout the country that a paper properly managed, giving to the people the information which they desired, would pay.

First Edition

The first edition of The Chicago Defender appeared May 6, 1905, issued from 3159 State St. Like all new enterprises it had its obstacles and difficulties. Its founder was without money and without sympathy from those whose interest he sought to serve. I soon learned that the reading public had to be educated and trained to the importance of having a news paper that they would not be ashamed to unfold and review its pages either in public or private.

In establishing this kind of paper and to secure the co-ordinated interest of the people in general, it was necessary to cast about and discover a method whereby this might be done. Therefore I determined to open up a new field of journalism and to bring about a medium of communication whereby people in different states would know what was going on and being accomplished in their business, their civic and religious activities throughout the country.

To accomplish this it was necessary to establish methods of communication through agents and writers in the various states of the Union. This resulted in the organization of a complete train of events each week to week and a large volume of correspondence and the creating of a uniform method of conduct in the handling of the paper. By this process of journalism the Defender soon became a bureau of information. People in various parts of the South would write us asking aid in the location of their friends whom they had not seen or heard of for twenty-five and thirty years. A case in point, a family located in an old town in Georgia had been separated during slavery. A brother, right after the Civil War, came North and settled in Boston. Another member of the family migrated to California and a sister to Alabama. Through the Defender they were able to learn of each other's whereabouts and held their reunion forty years afterwards in the city of Boston. These incidents are too numerous to mention where this paper has been the instrument in bringing together relatives and friends who had lost track of each other for years.

White South Stirred

In the midst of this tremendous task my difficulties were continually multiplying and my struggles and labors becoming more stupendous, with no one to give me a helping hand or advice and with most of my friends advising me to abandon the newspaper field and secure myself a job elsewhere. I refused to be discouraged and continued on. I was often unable to secure for myself the proper and ordinary accommodations of life, yet I determined that inde-

pendence could only be secured by hard and laborious struggle. The extending of the circulation of the Defender throughout the southern states and the beginning of our people to learn something of their own business and activity soon became a menace to the staid traditions of the white South in keeping our group in ignorance. It was then that we encountered strenuous opposition from those who desired to keep our people in peonage under the system which had existed in the South since the Civil War. This opposition became so strong in numerous cities of the South the Defender had to be practically bootlegged to its readers. In one city in Alabama a judge fined one of our agents \$200 and gave him six months in jail for selling The Chicago Defender on the streets.

While the circulation was increasing by leaps and bounds and the advertising business was growing extensive, yet within the institution itself a financial deficit was giving me considerable worry and concern. The struggle to manage all the departments of the concern which had extended its activities in so many fields, had reached the point where help in the management of it was necessary. I decided to look around for a man competent to take over the task.

In 1925 I decided definitely to find some one who could help me carry the responsibility which had for so many years been borne by me alone. My attention was directed to Attorney Nathan K. McGill, whom I had known for years, then a practicing lawyer in Florida, and who had formerly held the position as secretary of the late Rufus B. Toler (now deceased) of Boston, the founder of the Boston Floating Hospital. Mr. Tobey was a man of vast means and spent a considerable portion of his wealth in alleviating the wants and misery of others. Mr. McGill, for years, was his confidential man and held by him and his family in the highest esteem.

After some persuasion on my part Mr. McGill agreed to give up his interest in Florida and come to Chicago and in April of that year the management of my paper was turned over to him. He soon discovered that my affairs were in a shape and began at once to readjust my business. This readjustment period required a thorough study of the life which had previously affected my business and he made the necessary changes from time to time in its personnel and management that has since rebounded to its improvement and success.

Meets Real Test

In the nineteenth year of the Defender's existence the life of the institution was put to its test. It was a question of whether or not it would survive the attacks from within and without. I discovered that a vicious conspiracy existed to destroy the people whom I had considered my most intimate friends who had conspired not only to destroy the Defender as an institution but also to bring about my death. This was to me a severe shock. When this was brought to my attention there was no one to whom I could go and confide; no one to whom I could unhesitatingly entrust my life and soul to destroy my life, and feel that I had their confidence and sympathy.

It had developed that some prominent physicians had been secured by the conspirators to lead their aid in this sinister conspiracy to have me declared incompetent to run my own business and put in an institution for the insane. In connection therewith several lawyers had been engaged for the purpose of legalizing the actions of these conspirators in their effort to destroy both me and the Defender. This movement was so well organized that people within my employ were giving out secret information concerning my affairs to aid and abet in my destruction.

There were instances where matters concerning my business were being adjudicated in the courts, where representatives of these diabolical conspirators were present with court reporters taking down all the legal transactions that they might by some hook or crook find something in those proceedings that might aid in destroying both me and my business. These depredators went so far and were so well organized that people were told by telephone to keep their wives and families away from the Defender office.

They had stool-pigeons planted in my office—people whom I had employed and had thought were my friends—whose jobs were to inform the conspirators on the outside of all my

actions and affairs within my plant. I could never receive a caller or transact any sort of business within the walls of my office that those bent upon my destruction were not made aware of the fact almost immediately after it happened.

Concerns with whom I had business relations were called on the phone from time to time and told that my concern was impaired and its destruction was inevitable. These are some of the things that I had to contend with in my struggle to maintain this institution and bring it to its present position.

The Defender, now located in its permanent home, occupies a building seventy-five by one hundred twenty-five feet, two stories high, located at 3435 Indiana Ave., with every facility used in the operation of a modern newspaper. Its various departments are manned by competent heads and capable assistants. The Defender prides itself on being able to say that it has never mentioned in disrespect any other newspaper in the twenty-five years of its existence. The Defender employs one hundred and ten people, fifteen of whom are women, the others members of both races.

Fought For Ideals

This enterprise has constantly, since its early existence, fought for advanced ideas and ideals. It was the first to contend for the advancement of police officers of our group from patrolmen to sergeants and lieutenants. We have fought for the proper organization of the fire departments and the advancement and distribution of men, not by races, but according to merits. We were the first to fight and advocate our rights for a judge on the municipal court bench. For years we urged the importance of members of our group being elected to the city council. Notwithstanding the remarkable service rendered by Congressman Martin B. Madden, long before his death, we urged that a member of our group should be elected congressman from the first congressional district.

Our fight for larger and better facilities for the education and advancement of our people has brought about permanent improvements of educational facilities and conditions for our people throughout the entire country. Better buildings and improved training of teachers and professors have been the direct result of a quarter of a century of our labors along that line.

The World was created in this country, as well as in other countries, a new condition and awakening of all races and people. During this struggle the attention of our group had been directed to the greater fields of activity, carrying with it larger earning capacities in the North, East and West. Hence, the migration set in. They were answering the call of the Defender to settle themselves and families in different parts of the country where their rights and liberties were not hampered to the same extent as they were in the South. As a result of this they began leaving the South in large numbers. The benefits of this were clearly evidenced in the properties they have obtained and the better facilities for the education of their children.

This history of business institutions owned and operated by our group shows us that they begin to decline in less than twenty years. No specific institution need be referred to. Assuming that the reading public is intelligently informed, the mere statement sustains itself. The Chicago Defender, beginning in its infancy, with its editor and publisher borrowing a quarter from his land-lord, has stood the test of twenty-five years with an enormous investment in machinery and equipment and a steadily growing income of over five per cent upon the investment.

It is of interest to note that the great struggle going on the world over by various racial groups to obtain a larger and greater freedom of thought and action seemingly have followed in the wake of the fight carried on for human freedom by this paper. This was indeed noticeable to me in my visit to England. The refusal of certain accommodations in English hospitality to me was evidence of the fact that my propaganda for the advancement of the "farthest down" had attracted the attention of the English government. The Chicago Defender is read in nearly all civilized countries and it is not far fetched to say that the fight now going on in India brought about by the inhumanity of the British salt tax, which is being strenuously opposed by M. K. Gandhi, the foremost leader of Indian affairs, had its inception in our fight for the freedom of the "submerged tenth."

MY MESSAGE

BEFORE I started on my life's work—journalism—I was counseled by my beloved father that a good newspaper was one of the best instruments of service and one of the strongest weapons ever to be used in defense of a race which was deprived of its citizenship rights. For 25 years I have hearkened to the sacred advice of my father, and have endeavored to give expression to my love for him, my Race and humanity through the columns of THE CHICAGO DEFENDER. I have been accused of red journalism, of insincerity of incompetence, of not owning The Chicago Defender, but in spite of all adversities for 25 years I have faithfully and diligently striven to make known and alleviate the suffering of my people. I have endeavored to bring to the attention of the reading public all the inhuman treatment, discrimination, segregation, disfranchisement, peonage and all other injustices directed at my people. I have not yielded to sentiment nor to the wishes of the pacifist, but have endeavored, by the help of God, to serve aright as He gave me the ability to see the right. And, at the end of 25 years, I rejoice in the consolation and satisfaction which follows a successful pursuit in the task undertaken and the principles espoused. These are some of the contributions of THE CHICAGO DEFENDER in its 25 years of existence and service to humanity. And now, thank God, the day is coming, yea, the day is almost here, when every land, from orient to occident, from pole to pole, from mountain to shore, and from the shore to the farthest isle of the sounding sea, at last, will throw off the yoke of doubt, forget the biased conception of human rights, and join in glad acclaim by helping to usher in the glad era of an enlightened civilization and the universal acknowledgment of the brotherhood of man. This is my 25th anniversary message.

May 5, 1930.