

# THIRTY YEARS OF SERVICE

## The Chicago Defender Passes Another Milestone in Its Campaign to Make America Safe for All Americans

### World's Greatest Weekly Reviews Its Progress

By DEWEY ROSCOE JONES

ROBERT SENGSTACKE ABBOTT (Bachelor of Laws) founded The Chicago Defender in 1905. He founded it at a time when everybody said it could not, or should not be done. Hadn't others tried to run a newspaper for Negroes in this country—and hadn't they failed? Hadn't such brilliant journalists as T. Thomas Fortune and John T. Mitchell bemoaned in their newspapers that their efforts in behalf of the Race barely offered them the necessities of life?

But Robert S. Abbott, Hampton graduate, journeyman printer and sometime lawyer, was determined. The time was ripe, he said, to give this race a real organ with which to fight its battles. Not only was the time ripe, but the place—Chicago—was ready. He foresaw, rising with a young and growing city, an institution which would take its place in the grand march, and, in due time, work its way to the head of the procession.

It mattered not to Editor Abbott that he had no capital. Somehow he had been imbued with the ideas that courage and determination are more important than dollars and cents. Above all that, he was sure of the conviction that he could give the people the kind of newspaper they needed, and that, in return, they would support him. And so, with a twenty-five cent piece which he borrowed, a penny pencil and a five cent pad, and a room at 3159 S. State street, The Chicago Defender came into being.

The first edition of four pages, sixteen by twenty inches in size and consisting of three hundred copies, came from a job shop in Chicago on Friday afternoon, May 4, 1905. The editor, who walked the streets with his papers under his arms soliciting his friends, acquaintances and strangers alike, to invest two cents in the new paper, was Robert S. Abbott. The papers were sold out, and its editor, circulation manager, advertising manager, business manager and reporter, Robert S. Abbott, rested for weary months, preparatory to beginning another week and another edition.

It was the beginning of a routine that was to last for more than a year. During those weary months that dragged themselves along with tantalizing deliberateness, young Abbott made his rounds of homes, shops for ads, and the press for papers, while a great many Chicagoans stood by and scoffed, or gave advice. Some few, visioning the possibilities of the paper, and believing in the genius of its editor and publisher, came forward with offers of financial assistance which was sorely needed and gladly accepted.

And in those months, The Chicago Defender, while not making any headway against the apathy with which it was received, did make some definite progress. It also increased its size to eight pages of seven columns, standard dimensions, and began its bid for national recognition by printing stories which were ignored by daily newspapers. It organized a corps of volunteer reporters and "correspondents" who assiduously gathered every item of news from the four corners of the world, and mailed, or brought it personally to the office of the Defender on State street.

In connection with this fact, it is interesting to note that much of this type of help was given the Defender by railroad porters and Pullman porters who found themselves in the course of their daily occupations, here today, in Atlanta or Birmingham, or New York, or in some other place tomorrow, and who never lost an opportunity to boost their home paper. And not only did they gather news for the Defender, but they took the Defender with them to the various towns, thus creating a demand for them.

In the meantime, Robert S. Abbott, having once planted his feet firmly upon the soil, and with his eyes turned firmly to the clouds, went about his business of making news, in fact, as well as in name, "The World's Greatest Weekly." How well he has succeeded in this all the world knows today. Among our contemporaries we have "The South's Greatest Weekly," "The Negro's Greatest Weekly," and other similar titles, but "The World's Greatest Weekly" has been left to The Chicago Defender—and there is no one to dispute that claim.

THE years from 1905 to 1910 were eventful ones in the life of The Chicago Defender. In those years there were lynchings—453 of them—there were battles to be waged against "Grandfather Clauses," there were fights against residential segregation battles in both southern and northern cities, there were campaigns against segregation and discrimination in our schools—and there were riots, notably the Atlanta outburst which showed up the white people of that city in their barbaric savagery—and all these evidences of man's inhumanity to man had to be met and dealt with as only a fearless paper

and a fearless editor could deal with them. Naturally, Robert S. Abbott, still the chief component of an editorial staff advertising staff circulation staff whatever other staffs his paper boasted was a busy man. From morning till night he worked, lived and breathed his newspaper. Never was he seen without a copy, and no place was too sacred or too profane for him to open his receipt book for business. On the hottest of summer days, or in the dead of winter (and Chicago's winters were real winters in those days) he could be seen along State street or on Wabash avenue, or on Dearborn street in quest of news, subscribers and advertisers.

And so, in 1910 The Chicago Defender boasted in large streamer type: "12,000 people read Chicago's only weekly newspaper." People who saw that line and believed it knew that the Defender was a coming newspaper—that it would not stop until it established itself firmly at the top of the ladder.

The Chicago Defender is divided into three periods, each coinciding with the greatest upheavals in American and world history during the past thirty years. In the first period, from 1905 to 1910, The Chicago Defender was principally Robert S. Abbott. It was Robert S. Abbott who not only solicited the news, but who did most of the editing and all the financing. It was he who sought ads and circulation. It was he who watched his paper being printed and then delivered the product to his customers in State street saloons, Dearborn street churches and in Federal street homes. It was he who instituted the numerous campaigns for which his paper was famous in those days.

HE fought lynchings vigorously and fearlessly. He tackled the problems of riots and mob murders; he "demanded" Federal prosecution of lynchers and protection of citizens. He begged his readers to stand and fight, and demanded that they cease their bickerings among themselves. He demanded political preferment for Negroes in Chicago, and warned the Republican party, both locally and nationally, that it would lose support of his people unless it took wider cognizance of their trials in this land of the free and home of the brave.

In fact, so dynamic was Robert S. Abbott, and so forceful was his stand on the numerous issues which his paper fought, that even the greatest scoffers ceased their jeering to salute the great fight. During this period there were those who had become so imbued with the spirit of The Chicago Defender that they volunteered their services gratis that Editor Abbott might have wider latitude to carry on his crusade.

Numbered in this group were Mrs. Henrietta P. Lee in whose home on State street the paper was founded, and J. Hockley Smiley, "Mother Lee," as she later became known, was one of the most encouraging of all the persons whose lives crossed that of the young editor—and he certainly needed encouragement in those days. It was she who urged him on when his path seemed darkest. On bleak winter days when the wind whistled down State street with a bitter vengeance or when the sun failed in its effort to cast cheer and warmth upon the dreary world, it was "Mother" Lee who had a kind word and a steaming bowl for Editor Abbott at the close of a heart-breaking round from shop to shop in the interest of his paper.

One day, in 1909, J. Hockley Smiley walked into the office and announced to Editor Abbott that he had come to work. All he wanted to do was to be of service in a good cause, he said. And it was this same J. Hockley Smiley who subsequently became the first managing editor of The Chicago Defender—a position he held until his death in 1915. Under Smiley The Chicago Defender adopted its title, "The World's Greatest Weekly."

THE second real period in the development of The Chicago Defender can be placed at from 1910 to 1920. It was during this period that the paper became recognized as a great national institution. No longer a provincial sheet now, The Defender boasted of its 12-12,000 circulation, its standard makeup of 12 pages of eight standard columns each. It also boasted of a sport section and a section devoted to women's news and news of society happenings in Chicago.

It was in 1915 that The Chicago Defender brought out its first full sport page, and this was a year ahead of the same feature in any other Race weekly. This first page, which told of the record-breaking athletic feats of Howard P. Drew, was under the editorship of Frank A. Young, a railway waiter who had found time and interest to collect sport events for Editor Abbott until he felt safe in leaving the "road" to devote his full time to this new work.

The Chicago Defender had also attracted to its colors in its fight for complete equality for all people several other men and women who formed the nucleus of a real organization and who contributed their bits to the development of a unique institution in American life. Listed in this group were Mrs. Nettie George Speedy, Fon Holley, cartoonist; Carey B. Lewis, Lucius C. Harper, present managing editor; A. N. Fields, present editorial writer; Leslie Rogers, cartoonist; the late W. Allison Sweeney, editorial writer, and numerous others.

In 1915 Dr. Booker T. Washington, founder and principal of Tuskegee Institute, was taken suddenly ill in New York and was rushed to his Alabama home just before the end came. His death gave the Defender its opportunity to be the first in another field—it was the first newspaper in Chicago to print the story of Dr. Washington's death, and was the first weekly newspaper in the country to print an extra full page of news interesting



CONGRATULATIONS—WELL EARNED:

dence of progressiveness on the part of The Chicago Defender editor and his staff further enhanced it in the minds of its readers. What vestige of doubt as to its sincerity that had persisted, quickly disappeared, and the world suddenly realized that here, in Chicago, was a potent, living, vibrant organism whose existence could no longer be ignored. And the Defender went ahead with its world expansion. Although it already had one foreign office—in Dawson's Steamship Agency, 17 Charing Cross Road, London—set up in 1913, it proceeded to open an office in Paris, hence, before the beginning of the third period in the life of The Chicago Defender, it could boast of a circulation in excess of 25,000 and offices in London, Paris, Cape Town, New York, Atlanta and New Orleans.

WITH the coming of the Mexican expedition and the World War, The Chicago Defender took an added significance. Here, made to order, were incidents which made newspapers absolutely necessary. Thousands of young men had been taken from their homes and transported to camps at widely separated points from their homes. Others were being sent to war-torn battle fronts, some of them never to return home. It was only natural that parents and relatives at home would wish to know what was happening on these fronts. And since the radio hadn't been developed prior to 1920, so that it could broadcast news events in a few moments as it does now, people had to rely upon their newspapers. White papers were too busy telling of the exploits of white men in camps to devote more than passing notice to Negroes. This task fell upon the Negro press of the country, and it was Robert S. Abbott who again arose to the occasion by specializing in war news.

In the February 2 issue of 1918, the following statement appeared:

**A Greater Chicago Defender To the Public:**  
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, 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 the public its first 16-page weekly paper issued every week instead of on Christmas and business-boosting campaigns.

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

ROBERT S. ABBOTT,  
Sole Owner and Publisher.

THE third period in the development of The Chicago Defender may be said to have started with its occupancy of its new home and plant, at 3435 Indiana avenue. This great event was celebrated in 1921, shortly after Editor Abbott had announced to his staff that his circulation had now reached the imposing figure of 100,000. The opening up of this new plant was attended with quite a ceremony. There was speaking by prominent citizens, letters of congratulations were received from dignitaries and noted Race leaders throughout the United States, and the lobby of the building, decorated with murals by Scott, was a veritable flower garden. When the large Gothic press—the first one owned by a Race newspaper, started turning off copies of The Chicago Defender, it was Mrs. Flora Butler Sengstacke, mother of Editor Abbott, brought here from her home in Savannah for that occasion, who pushed the button.

From that auspicious start of the third period, The Chicago Defender has been going ahead ever since. It was but a small step from the opening of this new plant to a complete program of expansion in The Chicago Defender. Within four years (1924) the press was turning out two editions each week. The national edition, carrying news of interest to people all over the world, was printed Wednesday afternoon and the City Edition, suited to the peculiar needs of Chicago, on Thursday nights. In the course of this expansion, the press on Wednesday nights, the local edition is printed today on Fridays so as to meet the needs of local ad-

vertisers who like to withhold their copy for week-end sales.

DURING this period The Defender also became the first weekly newspaper to devote an entire page to children. The Bud Billiken department, which started as a column, is at present, one of the most dynamic forces in the entire institution. Started by Bud Billiken, Managing Editor Harper back in 1917, it has reached its greatest heights under David W. Kellum, known the world over as Bud Billiken. Some of the features successfully sponsored by The Chicago Defender through this department are Thanksgiving parties for children, a huge picnic in Washington park, the recent one attracting more than 50,000 persons; branch clubs and other activities of interest to children. You may take the word of Bud Billiken for it that more than 250,000 youngsters have registered as members in the Bud Billiken club of The Chicago Defender.

The Chicago Defender was the first weekly newspaper to start a full page of comics in color. This feature, which lasted longer than its occupancy of its new home and plant, was drawn by Leslie M. Rogers, and was quite a step-up for Bangalore, the pioneer of Race comic strips in a weekly newspaper. "Old Bung" is still carrying on in the Defender under the ministrations of Jay Jackson, who supplanted Rogers as staff artist and cartoonist.

NOT only has The Chicago Defender kept abreast of the times, but it has continued its policy of expansion, a tribute to the progressiveness and aggressiveness of those men and women upon whom Mr. Abbott relied for promulgation of his ideas, ideals and aims. While the Defender was still owned by one man, it was no longer a one-man institution. Departments had come into being which required expert handling. There were constant efforts to supply the demands of thousands of critical readers. Anything which these readers demanded, and which was found to be consistent with good journalism, The Chicago Defender attempted to give them.

A glance through any current issue of The Chicago Defender will illustrate the great distance it has traveled from its starting point in 1905. Its make-up, its editorial pages, its sports and theatricals (two pages of each) its news, its society pages, and its features are, taken singly or collectively, superior to those of any other newspaper published for Negroes, and the

Continued on Page 18, Col. 8



INTERIOR VIEW OF DEFENDER LOBBY

Here are some comparative figures on The Chicago Defender showing concretely how and where it started, and how and where it is today:

THEN		NOW	
Number of copies, first edition	300	Number of copies (average weekly in excess of)	100,000
Size of first edition: four pages, 15x20 inches.		Present size: 24 to 32 pages, 8 columns, 12 1/2 ems wide.	
Number of paid subscribers: 3. Price \$1 per year.		Present subscribers: more	
Total cost of first edition \$7.50			
Staff (editors, reporters, advertising men, etc.): 1.			
Office and equipment: A room in a State street flat; a folding card, table and one (borrowed) chair.			

Number of newstands and agents	2,350
Number of newsboys in Chicago	563
Number of editions each week	2
Approximate cost of present edition	\$3,500
Cost of presses (2 Gosses)	\$14,835
Number of linotype machines, six.	
Number of pounds of metal used weekly	3,000
Amount of newsprint (paper) used for each edition	90 tons
Amount of ink used weekly	850 pounds
Employees in home office	35
Office and plant now housed in spacious building, valued at	\$475,000
Approximate number of people who wholly or in part get their support from the Robert S. Abbott Publishing Co.	3,450

# Defender History

Continued from Page 17

paper compares favorably with the best daily paper in the country.

**A**ND so The Chicago Defender, young in years but old in experience and in work accomplished, faces the future. At its helm is still its founder, Robert S. Abbott, who, though not an exuberant as he once was, is still the dynamic Justice force driving his creation. **Must** on and on to better things. **Prevail!** Still enthusiastic, still hopeful, Mr. Abbott goes ahead, believing that justice and right must eventually prevail. He believes, however, that the forces which impede these virtues must constantly be fought, and that it is his paper which has accepted the challenge to fight them. No issue is too small and no fight too formidable for the Defender to enter if it believes the principles of Justice and Fair-play are at stake.

Thirty years of battle scars and of victory wreaths, but The Chicago Defender moves on, never stopping, never ceasing its vigilance. Although it now boasts a large staff, many "experts," and some material wealth, it still is essentially and at heart the breathing, living soul of its founder, Robert S. Abbott. And under the inspiration of this individual it holds out the torch of light and salvation to a Race and a Nation.