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LINCOLN BIOGRAPHIES OF 1860

More books have been written about Abraham Lincoln than any other character, Christ excepted, in the history of mankind. This fact should make the first attempts to tell the story of Lincoln worthy of attention. The direct cause of the initial publications was his nomination, on the republican ticket, for the presidency of the United States. The party leaders saw the wisdom of using as much publicity as possible about their rather obscure candidate, and they were supported by the publishers who saw the opportunity to release books of quick sale and wide circulation.

The nomination of Lincoln was announced on May 18, 1860, and about one week later the first biography of the nominee appeared. In the newspaper files at Brown University I discovered the following editorial in the Erie, Pennsylvania True American of May 26, 1860: "There will soon be no lack of biographies of 'Honest Old Abe,' in the market, as well as no lack of readers to welcome them. W. A. Townsend & Co. will soon publish a life of our candidate with a steel portrait in a dollar volume, and a campaign edition for 25 cts. H. Dayton will issue about the 10th of June a biography with a portrait. Derby & Jackson will publish immediately another 'Life' written by Bartlett, the Washington correspondent of the New York Evening Post, and Follett, Foster & Co. of Columbus, Ohio are about to undertake a similar publication."

There were eight authors who contributed the first installment of biographies. Two of them are anonymous and the others follow in alphabetical order: Barrett, Bartlett, Howard, Howell, Scripps, and Vose. This list may be divided into four groups considering the two anonymous writers first.

Although these authors, with but one exception, had their respective publications on the market within one month after the Chicago convention, there has been much controversy as to which one had the honor of being the first Lincoln biographer. Daniel Fish who published the first exhaustive bibliography of Lincolniana, was under the impression that the anonymous editor of the Wigwam edition, published by Rudd and Carleton of New York, should be given the prefer-

ence. It appears to me from evidence that I have been able to gather, that the anonymous writer, who edited the Lincoln books of Thayer and Eldridge, the Boston publishers, was the first Lincoln author. If I am correct in this conclusion the first biography of Abraham Lincoln is not listed among the three thousand volumes, which have been named in Lincoln bibliography.

Before Thayer and Eldridge brought out "The Wide-Awake Edition" of 320 pages, which is listed by Fish, they published a cheap paper covered campaign biography of 128 pages, which sold for twenty-five cents. It has the same title page as the larger book with the exception of the line; "The Wide-Awake Edition." Internal evidence in the larger book gives positive proof that the smaller publication preceded it.

An excerpt from an advertisement in the New York Tribune for May 26, 1860 carries the following advice: "Order the Wigwam edition. Lincoln and Hamlin. Nearly ready." Two days later an advertisement by Thayer and Eldridge in the same paper reads: "Now ready, Life and Public Services of Abraham Lincoln."

While the above announcement would imply that the Thayer and Eldridge publication was the earliest of the two publications, a note on the back of the front page of both copies of the Wigwam edition which I now have before me says that, "The Wigwam Edition, has already taken precedent among the lives of Lincoln and Hamlin." This note would indicate that at the time these two copies were issued, at least one other book was on the market.

The similarity in the names Barrett and Bartlett has caused some confusion among present day Lincoln students, and undoubtedly the two names were not clearly distinguished from each other, at the time their biographies first appeared. How far this confusion was capitalized by one or the other of the publishers we do not know. There is some evidence of rivalry between the publishers handling these books. The preface of Bartlett's book is dated Washington, D. C., June 1, 1860, while the preface of Barrett's book bears the imprint—Gazette Office, Cincinnati, June 18, 1860.

The first issue of the Bartlett publication bears the imprint Derby and Jackson, New York. In the meantime Barrett's book had evidently been published by Moore, Wilstach, Keys & Co. Cincinnati, carrying at the head of the title page, the line "Barrett's Authentic Edition." The issue of the Bartlett publication by H. Dayton, New York, then appears with a line at the top of the title page, reading "Authorized Edition."

The Howard and Howell biographies of Lincoln present an illiteration in name, but their books were published

by the same company, the Follett, Foster & Company of Columbus, Ohio so no rivalry was experienced here. The same firm printed the Lincoln-Douglas debates which had such a remarkable sale during the 1860 campaign.

I fear that Mr. Fish is in error when he refers to the Howard publication as the one which caused Mr. Lincoln to write a letter to Samuel Galloway on June 19, 1860, stating that "Messrs. Follett and Foster & Company's life of me is not by my authority and I have scarcely been so much astounded by anything as their public announcement that it is authorized by me . . . I made myself tiresome if not hoarse with repeating to Mr. Howard their only agent seen by me my protest that I authorized nothing, would be responsible for nothing."

It is true that Mr. Lincoln mentions Mr. Howard's name, but I cannot find that the biography by Howard ever claimed to be an "authorized," edition, although the Howell book of 406 pages published by the same company made this claim.

Lincoln evidently read the advertisement which appeared in the third, fourth, and fifth issues of the Lincoln-Douglas debates printed by the Follett, Foster & Co. They stated that the Lincoln and Hamlin biography by Howell was "The Authorized Edition." Newspaper advertisements also carried this information. The Howell publication was first advertised to appear on June 12 but later the date was changed to June 24. W. A. Townsend & Co. of New York, was a distributor of this publication.

The short campaign life by Howard did not come from the press until June 26. It contained 102 pages and the copies before me bear the imprint of Anderson, Gates, and Wright, Cincinnati.

The two biographies of Lincoln grouped last in this list are by no means the least important. Scripps's sketch of Lincoln which appeared as "Tribune Tract Number Six," and published by Horace Greeley, is without doubt the most reliable work of the group. It was not published, however, until the middle of July making it the last of the early campaign biographies. It is in pamphlet form and contains but thirty-two pages.

The Vose Life of Lincoln published by Hilton, Gallaher & Co., New York, is a campaign biography of 118 pages. It was one of the earliest of the group possibly having been published as early as the Wigwam edition. It seems to be the least known of the early biographies and the number of volumes in circulation must have been much smaller than the other publications mentioned.

Note: I am indebted to Miss Cushman, librarian of the Lincoln collection at Brown University, for some of the information contained in this presentation.