

LINCOLN LORE

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HERNDON—MASTER MYTH-MAKER

After sounding the sources of our ever-increasing Lincoln mythology, one is bound to conclude that William Herndon should receive the title of Master Myth-Maker. Not only are the old untenable Lincoln fables to have another airing by making available to every Tom, Dick, and Harry the Herndon hodge-podge of fact and fancy at one dollar a copy, but already we observe emerging from the indiscriminate use of these published Herndon papers a new batch of apocryphal stories which strike at the very foundation of Lincoln's morality. Apparently Abraham Lincoln like so many of his contemporaries is going to be humanized or debunked.

Anyone who is familiar with biographical Lincolniana is conscious of the tremendous influence which the papers gathered by William Herndon have played in the creation of Lincoln literature in general. These Herndon traditions, fragments of folklore and personal reminiscences, should be recognized as valuable for reference purposes, but their importance has been emphasized out of all due proportion when compared with Lincoln's own correspondence, state papers, addresses, interviews which were recorded verbatim, and documents which are duly authorized.

William Herndon wrote no book himself but these four different writers had full use of his manuscripts: Chauncey F. Black who wrote the *Lamon Lincoln*; Jesse W. Weik who wrote the three-volume *Herndon's Lincoln*; and *The Real Lincoln*; Albert J. Beveridge, the author of the two-volume Beveridge work; and Emanuel Hertz, the compiler and editor of the Herndon papers.

Long before the first of the above-mentioned books appeared, the lecture platform and personal correspondence were utilized by Mr. Herndon as avenues of release for his studies in psychoanalysis and his whisper stories, but it was largely in the writings of Chauncey F. Black and Jesse W. Weik that the Herndon myths took root and were nourished.

Mythology in the Lamon Volume

Ward H. Lamon acquired in September 1869 the bulk of the information about Lincoln gathered by Herndon, for which he paid Lincoln's law partner the sum of four thousand dollars. John Spencer Clark makes known in one of the publications of the Massachusetts Historical Society for May-June 1918 some of the incidents connected with the publication of the Lamon work. Lamon approached the publishing house represented by Clark in 1870 with the information that Chauncey

F. Black was to do the writing for the contemplated Lincoln biography. Clark knowing something of Black's political background said "I raised objection to a life of Lincoln being prepared under such apparently hostile influences."

The contract for the book was signed, however, and the complete life of Lincoln was anticipated. Clark's prophecy about Black's attitude toward Lincoln was confirmed before very much copy was presented, and in one instance a whole chapter was eliminated because of the partisan viewpoint of Black. When Clark discovered that Black was sacrificing Lincoln to uphold the Buchanan administration and learned that Black's political bias was "stronger than his desire to have full justice done to Mr. Lincoln's memory," both Clark

when placing a valuation on the Herndon work.

Much of the book was written by Weik in a room above a grocery store in Greencastle, Indiana, and the larger part of his source material came in long letters from Herndon who stated twenty-three years after Abraham Lincoln was dead, "I have in my memory a thousand unwritten facts about our good man Abe that were told me by good and truthful friends." Herndon wrote down for Weik many of these stories which had slumbered in his memory for nearly a quarter of a century, and they formed the nucleus for some of the myths which we now have to combat. A book published by Weik in 1922 also grew out of the Herndon sources.

The Beveridge Lincoln

The Herndon manuscripts were carefully guarded by Mr. Weik from the time of the publication of the Herndon Lincoln until he allowed Albert J. Beveridge to use them in 1924. In the preface of Beveridge's book is the statement that from Weik came "The largest and most important aid."

Possibly Beveridge might have had access to the Lincoln papers now impounded in the Library of Congress if Robert Lincoln had not learned that he was relying very much on the Herndon manuscripts which Robert had a just reason to deplore. There can be no question but what the Herndon traditions greatly influenced the Beveridge volumes, and his work contributed considerably to the myth-building which originated with Herndon.

The Hertz Hodge-Podge

One would expect an apparent admirer of Abraham Lincoln such as Emanuel Hertz to have used some discretion in the selection of items for a Lincoln book he was to edit. It is known that he did not print everything in the collection of Herndon, and why he should make available to the public letters about Lincoln and statements by Herndon that Hertz knew to be absolutely false is beyond our knowledge.

There are two entirely different Lincolns in the Hertz volume. The character portrayed by Herndon in his earlier writings would hardly be recognized in the Lincoln which emerges in the letters which Herndon wrote ten years later, especially those to Weik. You can count on these latter sources completely overshadowing the earlier writing compiled shortly after Lincoln's death, and they will become the major source for the humanizing effort of mercenary writers—the modern myth-makers.

A DOZEN LINCOLN MYTHS

Supported by Herndon Manuscripts

THE PATERNITY MYTH
THE SHIFTLESS FATHER MYTH
THE MATERNAL LINEAGE MYTH
THE POVERTY MYTH
THE ANN RUTLEDGE MYTH
THE MATRIMONY MYTH
THE OBSCURITY MYTH
THE FAILURE MYTH
THE INFIDEL MYTH
THE SLAVERY MYTH
THE BOOTH MYTH
MODERN DEBUNKING MYTHS

Note—Lack of sufficient space in *Lincoln Lore* to discuss the origins and growth of some of these myths will necessitate the use of the *Lincoln Kineman* for this purpose in the coming year. Subject matter associated with the first six myths are directly within the scope of the *Kineman*.

and Lamon broke with him and no more copy was forthcoming. So the Herndon manuscripts when first used for publication were not interpreted by the friendly Lamon but by the antagonistic Black.

The Herndon Lincoln

The three-volume work known to students as the "Herndon Lincoln" was not written by Herndon but by Jesse W. Weik who was only eighteen years old when he first approached Herndon with reference to the Lincoln story. It cannot be said Weik was familiar with Lincoln's writings and public speeches, as there was not available to him at such an early date any extensive compilation of Lincoln's works. The fact that he began writing the book when he was little more than a youth without any former literary experience is another factor that must be considered