

LINCOLN LORE

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FIRST EDITIONS AND FIRST IMPRESSIONS

During the war most publishers limited their first impressions of new books to the lowest possible number of copies with the result that many collectors were disappointed in not being able to acquire the desirable first editions. This situation has accentuated the interest in determining what actually constitutes a first edition.

The definition for an edition of a book given by Webster follows: "The whole number of copies of a work printed and published at one time, as the first, second or third edition of a work, usually distinguished from an impression. In editions, after the first, corrections, additions, or alterations of the text are made or the type reset. A second or succeeding impression is from the unaltered plates." The Century Dictionary defines an impression as "The whole number of copies printed for one issue especially those printed without alteration."

The term "First edition" is rather loosely used considering the premium one often is asked to pay for a book so designated. The tendency to classify as first editions all impressions which bear on the title page the original date of publication is not unusual. Some companies continue to use the same date for subsequent impressions irrespective of the time element involved and with little attention paid to corrections. The establishment which clearly designates on the verso of the title page of its book, the month and year the first edition appeared, and follows through with citations referring to subsequent impressions and editions is contributing much to an intelligent understanding of the history of book distribution.

Regardless of how carefully the galley proofs and page proofs are read almost before the ink is dry on the first copies of a book and often before the signatures are bound there is a close scanning of the text for typographical errors and mistakes in the format. If errors are discovered that justify the stopping of the presses and corrections or alterations in the format are made the subsequent printings which follow immediately are usually called second impressions, while literally they are first impressions of second editions.

It is to be regretted that first impressions and first editions are not synonymous as most people who acquire the latter are convinced that they are securing the earliest copies which come from the press. What a collector is really anxious to acquire might be termed a "double first" or the first impression of the first edition. The most recent Lincoln book to appear, Randall's, "Lincoln the President", offers a good illustration of how a first impression often is limited to a comparatively small circulation.

It is doubtful if many lengthy Lincoln manuscripts have been prepared quite so free from historical errors as Randall's work, yet there appeared in volume one a mistake which will ever serve as an infallible proof of a first impression of the first edition. Inasmuch as many sets of pages were printed before the error was detected an errata slip was bound in at the place the error occurred with this notation: "Correction—Page 210, line 21; delete Toombs." The presence of the word Toombs in the text and the accompanying errata slip identify the first impression.

Volume two of the same work also has an "ear mark" which sets the first impression apart from all other impressions. This mistake can be charged to the publishers

who bound in the wrong margins of an illustration opposite page 312. This mishap caused one of the two exhibits, featuring newspaper copies of the Gettysburg Address, to appear upside down.

While it is very likely that corrected copies of Randall's work bearing the 1945 imprint will be accepted and advertised as first editions one who is at all meticulous in selecting his "firsts" will demand copies bearing the line with "Toombs" in the text and the illustration with the upside down Gettysburg Address.

Possibly the most desirable impressions which are almost certain to be first editions are what is known as "review copies". They may be identified by inserts or slips laid in stating that they are for review purposes. Sometimes they are distributed in paper covers and in some instances in unbound condition. While the publishers by this practice may save money in bindings they do put in the hands of the reviewer a book greatly enhanced in value by these unmistakable evidences of a first impression, and which soon becomes a rarity.

Referring to covers, recalls a Lincoln book where the spelling of the author's name on the cover determines the identity of the first, second, and third impressions. When covers for Clara E. Laughlin's book "The Death of Lincoln", were printed, a mistake in the middle initial was made and it was printed "M". Many books were bound before the error was discovered. Some covers had been printed but not used in the first issue, and these were so corrected that the impress of the typed "M" can be noted under the correct gold lettered initial "E". The third impression in need of new covers used the correct "E" but there is no former "M" impress visible. All three impressions have the same title page and all state "Published January 1909."

Sometimes the earlier Lincoln publications were distributed through several different dealers who had their own company imprints added to the name of the publishers controlling the stereotype plates. Howell's cloth bound book of 406 pages is a good example of this cooperative effort. One might infer, without assuming too much, that the original publishers who took out the copyright and whose book carried an imprint similar to the name of the copyright holder would be responsible for the first impression. It would be an unlikely probability that an impression imprinted for some dealer would proceed their own first edition. There are also in the Howell work some plate injuries and some changes in text, added errata slip and extra pages of advertising which are good evidence of various impressions. Furthermore three different styles of type are used on the backstrip which prove different printings and also three different cover designs. If one had before him for examination all these variants he might establish the identity of the first impression and some sequence for the other editions.

For almost eighty years the 808 page edition of Raymond's work on "Lincoln, His Life and Times" had been advertised as a first edition. We now know that it was not even an impression of the first edition which had but 802 pages. The addition of six pages of important data in the appendix would certainly make the extended text a second edition. Before a student purchases what is reputed to be a first edition of a book he should attempt if possible to learn whether or not he is acquiring a "first impression."