

LINCOLN LORE

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PERIOD EMPHASIS IN LINCOLN BIOGRAPHY

Lincoln Books are very much in the public eye at this Christmas season and we may imply from the reports on the Best Seller lists that at least two of them will be largely used as presentation copies. The *New York Times Book Review* list which compiles reports from leading book sellers in thirty-six cities notes in each of the two divisions, "Fiction" and "General," a Lincoln book at the top of one, also one next to the top of the other. We cannot recall that such a situation has ever existed before, over so long a period.

Possibly the most widely distributed volume of Lincoln fiction through all the years is Irving Stone's story entitled *Love is Eternal*, which reveals the romance, marriage, and domestic life of Mary Todd and Abraham Lincoln. It first appeared on September 5 as sixteenth on the "Fiction Best Seller List," the next week it had jumped to sixth place, then to fourth one week later. On September 26 and October 3 it was listed as third, and on October 10 as second. It appeared as the best seller in fiction on October 17 and still continues to occupy that place after ten consecutive weeks.

Carl Sandburg's biography *Abraham Lincoln. The Prairie Years and the War Years* first appeared on the "Best Seller List, General," in eleventh place on October 17. On the two following weeks it was placed in fourth position, then to third on November 7. Since November 21 it has been in second place.

While our attention is centered on Lincoln books, it would seem appropriate to make a survey of some full length Lincoln biographies with respect to the division of the argument by periods. After nearly one hundred years of biographical effort with respect to the life of Lincoln, we should be able to draw some rather important conclusions as to the matter of emphasis as it relates to the amount of subject matter which approaches proper proportion and balance in each separate period of Lincoln's life.

There are five very natural place and chronological divisions in the Lincoln story, falling under these captions: Kentucky, Indiana, Rural Illinois, Springfield and Washington. The Kentucky period would include data about the ancestry, parentage, and such childhood experiences of Abraham which occurred through his seventh year including 1816. The Indiana period takes account of Lincoln's formative years from eight to twenty-one up to the spring of 1830. The Early Illinois years cover the environs of Decatur, New Salem and Vandalia, concluding with Lincoln's removal to Springfield in 1837 at twenty-eight years age. It will be observed that these periods represent just half of Lincoln's life in terms of years.

The Springfield period beginning in 1837 continues through Lincoln's term in Congress and up to the time he left for Washington on February 11, 1861, one day before his fifty-second birthday. From then on, of course, the Washington years would follow without interruption up to the time of his death on April 15, 1865 when he had reached the age of 56 years.

The ten, one volume biographies selected for this study were chosen primarily because each one covers the full span of Lincoln's life and most of them are well known. They also have a publishing sequence dating from 1866 to 1954. The two biographies published this last year represent the shortest and the longest of the group in pagination, which seemed to be an important factor in determining the average length of an acceptable one volume biography.

In order that the reader may draw his own conclusions about an author's over or under emphasis of a n y particular period, a chart in terms of percentage of wordage in each section is presented. Round numbers instead of

PERCENTAGE ANALYSIS

Book	Ky.	Ind.	Rural Ill.	Springfield	Washington	Text Pages
Holland 1866	2	2	6	34	56	544
Herndon 1889	3	8	21	50	18	467
Tarbell 1900	3	4	14	39	40	688
Nicolay 1902	1	2	3	22	72	555
Charnwood 1916	1	3	4	29	63	453
Stephenson 1922	2	2	3	15	78	422
Angle 1947	3	4	5	45	43	537
Thomas 1952	1	3	7	32	57	522
Lorant 1954	2	4	6	24	64	256
Sandburg 1954	1	2	4	17	76	747
AVERAGES	2	3	7	31	57	519

fractional digits are used. It will be observed that the line showing the totals will present what might be termed the mean, average, or possibly the accepted division of subject matter. In other words, this survey would suggest that the standard one volume publication, to be in harmony with what has been done in the field of Lincoln biographies, should not deviate greatly from the following division of subject matter: Kentucky 2%, Indiana 3%, Rural Illinois 7%, Springfield 31%, and Washington 57%. It will also be observed that the average length of a book excluding preliminaries, appendix, bibliography and index totals 519 pages. Possibly the publisher's viewpoint may find some expression here with respect to the length of a book. It is interesting to note that the first published volume used in the survey follows the pattern almost identically and one other highly recommended book recently published offers even a closer parallel to the standard listing. By far the worst example of subject matter arrangement is an early publication which once was highly regarded as a Lincoln biography.

We may look for some slight changes in emphasis in the division of subject matter in years to come. It is doubtful if the Kentucky, Indiana, and Rural Illinois years will show much change. There will be the necessity of eliminating the Herndon folklore which has predominated in this period and supplying it with more authentic sources. This should bring a decided shift to the relative importance of Vandalia as compared with New Salem in the Rural Illinois section. The trend also indicates that a larger percentage of data will be used for the Washington period and less for the Springfield years.