



Lincoln Lore

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LINCOLN HISTORIOGRAPHY: NEWS AND NOTES

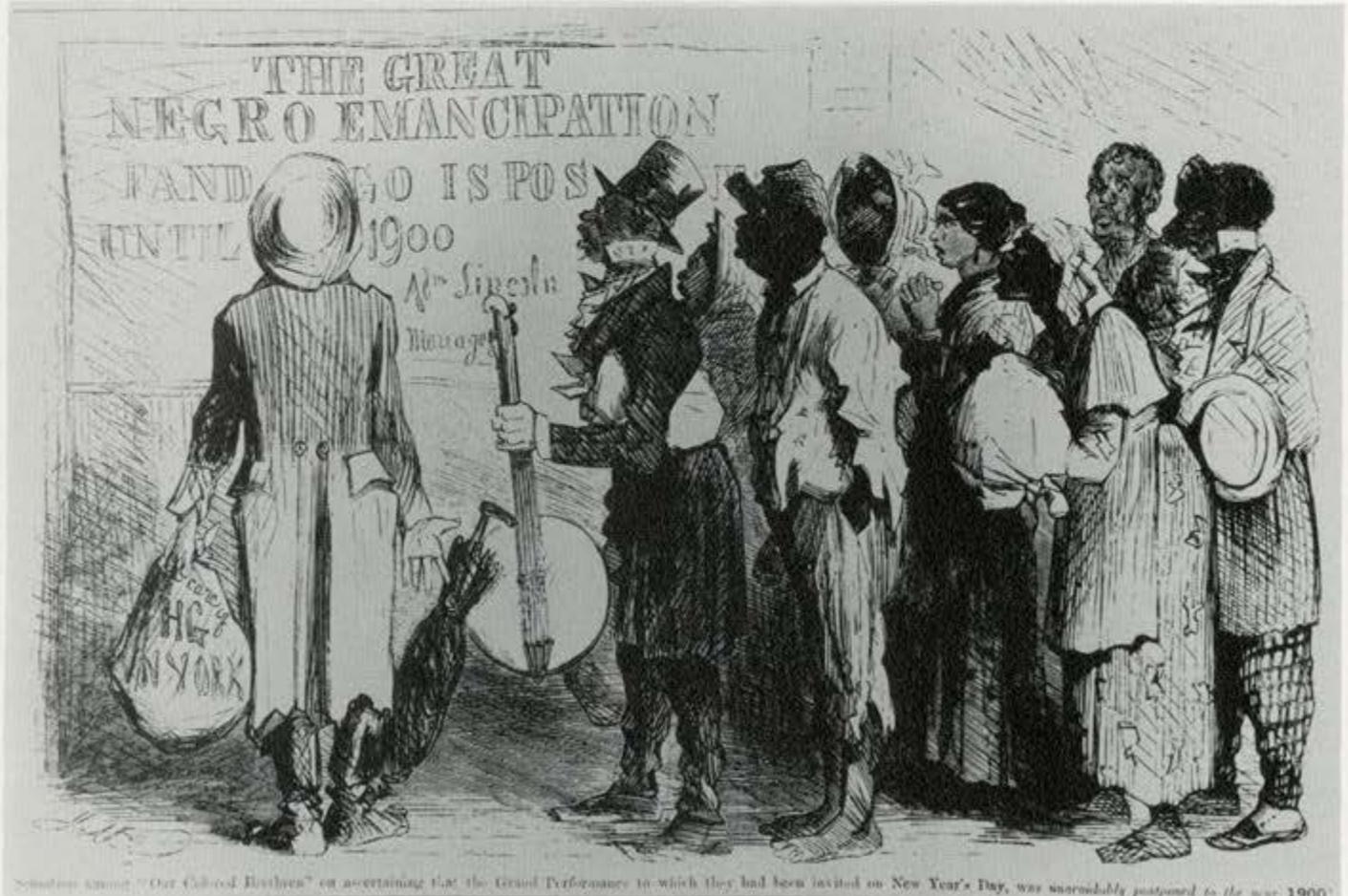
Editor's Note: A sufficient number of significant articles on Lincoln have appeared since this column was initiated (in June, 1974) to merit devoting the better part of a whole issue to it. This time the discussion is followed by the *Lincoln Lore* Cumulative Bibliography, making this issue in its entirety a bibliographical tool.

M.E.N., Jr.

Fourteen years have passed since Leon F. Litwack documented the pervasiveness of racial prejudice in the antebellum North and then argued that Abraham Lincoln reflected that prejudice. Seven years have passed since *Ebony* magazine's Lerone F. Bennett popularized this view in an article entitled "Was Abe Lincoln a White Supremacist?" Coping with these arguments has been a major preoccupation of Lincoln students ever since.

Two well-considered and mellow responses appeared this winter: Don E. Fehrenbacher's "Only His Stepchildren: Lincoln and the Negro," *Civil War History*, XX (December, 1974), 293-310 and George M. Fredrickson's "A Man but Not a Brother: Abraham Lincoln and Racial Equality," *Journal of Southern History*, XLI (February, 1975), 39-58. Both are essential reading for all Lincoln students and rate as substantial productions that will be read and discussed for years to come.

If you have a choice, read Fehrenbacher's article first, because it provides a useful background to the historical problem. Fehrenbacher argues that Lincoln has always been a paradoxical figure: he has been seen simultaneously as the people's "epitome" and as their savior, as typical and as heroic at the same time. This uneasy historical personality began to



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

FIGURE 1. In his Annual Message to Congress of December 1, 1862, President Lincoln, despite having already announced the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, proposed a series of amendments to the United States Constitution. The first promised federal compensation to states abolishing slavery by 1900. "The time," he said, "spares both races from the evils of sudden derangement — in fact, from the necessity of any derangement. . . ." *Harper's Weekly* on December 20, 1862, just eleven days before the Emancipation Proclamation would take legal effect, took a different view of the thirty-seven year delay.

fall apart in the 1960's. Liberals had argued that Lincoln outgrew the racial assumptions of his hardscrabble frontier background and led a reluctant nation to emancipate the slaves. Black activists, disappointed that Lincoln's racial views did not measure up to their own, attacked him as one of the unenlightened mass in his racial opinions — as just another "honkie."

For white radicals too, rejection of Lincoln signified repudiation of the whole American cultural tradition, from the first massacre of Indians to the Viet Nam War. In what might be called the "malign consensus" school of United States history, Lincoln remained the Representative American, but the America that he represented was a dark, ugly country, stained with injustice and cruelty. Plainly, there is much more at stake here than the reputation of a single historical figure.

Fehrenbacher's solution to the problem of Lincoln's split historical personality depends on a new appreciation of the meaning of the word "racist." It is not to be used as an all-or-nothing term like "pregnant." There are shades and degrees of meanings on different levels of thought and feeling — from leading a lynch mob to *de facto* social avoidance. Fehrenbacher is able to make several careful distinctions about Lincoln's racial opinions, considerably improving any monolithic interpretation. Lincoln, he argues, did not have any strong thoughts about blacks one way or another before he was forty years old; his era was not transfixed by the race problem as our own is. Lincoln denied black equality with obviously researched arguments showing real interest in the question only after Fremont's defeat in 1856, which Lincoln blamed in part on Democratic charges that Republicans were amalgamationists. Even so, all of Lincoln's arguments thereafter were *disclaimers*, answers to Democratic charges; therefore, he always stated "the *maximum* that he was willing to deny the Negro and the *minimum* that he claimed for the Negro."

These were *politic* remarks; Lincoln knew at first hand the popular attitudes Leon Litwack rediscovered in 1961. It is hard to pin Lincoln himself down. His remarks, argues Fehrenbacher, add up only to the position that "the Negro *might not* be his equal" or "the Negro *was not* his equal in *certain respects*." This is not "racism" in any pure and simple sense. Lincoln's famed advocacy of colonization led only to schemes so puny in scope that they may have been minimal *politic* concessions to popular racial fears.

George Fredrickson takes a somewhat dimmer view of Lincoln's racial opinions, but he is attempting to do the same things Fehrenbacher attempts: discover the content of Lincoln's views in all its particulars and not make "racism" an all-or-nothing proposition. Fredrickson points to the importance of Lincoln's "*beau ideal* of a statesman," Henry Clay, in the formation of Lincoln's racial views. Clay was not only "the Great Compromiser" but also "a racial moderate and proponent of gradual emancipation." Slaveholder Clay was like Lincoln in that he never, despite even greater constituent pressures, denied the Negro's humanity. Fredrickson considers Lincoln's views in the context of the "differences in the degree, emphasis, and application of racism" in Lincoln's day. He places Lincoln in the middle of the Republican party, itself to the left of the systematically and aggressively racist Democratic party.

Colonization was an important aspect of the views of both racial moderates. To Lincoln, it meant a belief in the Negro's ability to exercise and enjoy his natural rights on his own native soil. Lincoln did not, says Fredrickson, ever foresee a biracial society, but he did not deny the blacks' ability for self-government or share the assumptions of later imperialists.

The promise of colonization was that it would transplant blacks to regions where they could rule themselves and develop their own democratic institutions free of white interference. This concept of a democratic world of distinct races enjoying perfect self-government on their "own soil" repudiated internationalist racism while affirming the inevitability of domestic racism. It implied "the ideal of racial homogeneity," the belief that equality in a given nation or climatic zone could exist only for the one racial group which had attained a dominant position because of its superior

adaptability to the physical environment. It followed that a society guaranteeing equality for all its inhabitants would have to be racially homogeneous.

In a notable departure from Fehrenbacher's views, Fredrickson argues that colonization was central to Lincoln's opinions and that he believed in it as late as April, 1865, when Benjamin Butler reputedly discussed a colonization scheme with him.

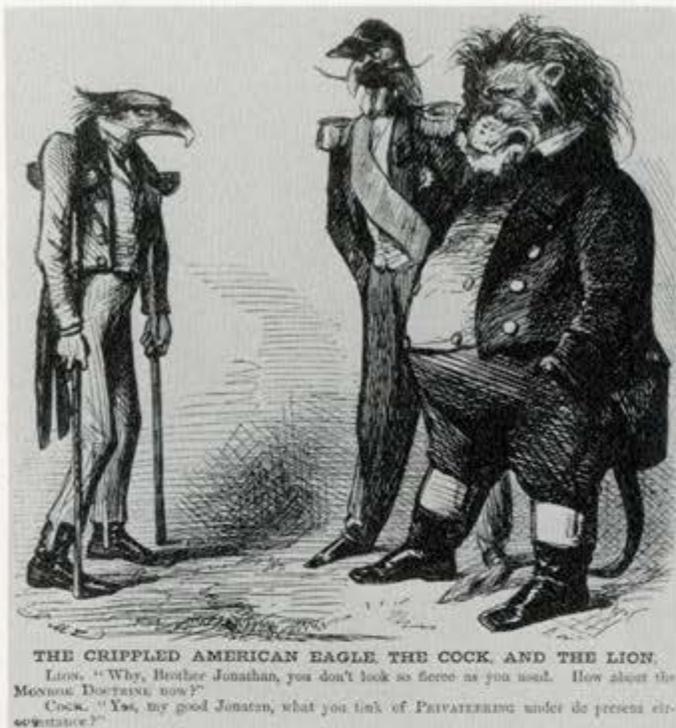
Fehrenbacher and Fredrickson differ considerably. The former believes it "unwise to assert flatly, as some scholars do, that Lincoln embraced the doctrine of racism." The latter holds more modestly that Lincoln's "self-awareness . . . [may have] made it possible for him to control his prejudices precisely because he acknowledged their existence and recognized their irrational character." Still, they agree on many important points. Lincoln's *minimum* claim was humanity for the Negro. Within the context of racial opinion in Lincoln's day, he was at least in the center of the Republican party and thereby a moderate (and perhaps a liberal) among liberals. Belief in colonization was not a badge of lost innocence: it may have been mere lip-service to popular doctrines of white supremacy, and it was at least an indication of faith in the Negro's capability for self-government in certain spheres.

Both articles share in the new appreciation for the odds which even a moderate antislavery man faced. A graphic picture of the opposition is available in Larry A. Greene's article, "The Emancipation Proclamation in New Jersey and the Paranoid Style," *New Jersey History*, XCI (Summer, 1973), 108-124. Greene argues that "Lincoln's Proclamation served as a catalyst which transformed ante-bellum fears into wartime phobias." The irrationality of the fears expressed by the opposition and the ridiculous conspiratorial explanations advanced to explain Lincoln's Proclamation are the focus of Greene's article. He advances only a brief explanation for New Jersey's marked susceptibility to such beliefs (it was the Northeastern state most opposed to the Proclamation). New Jersey had, proportionally, a black population twice as large as that in any other free state. Moreover, the whole state was peculiarly dominated by large urban centers, New York and Philadelphia, which contained important elements of foreign population hostile to emancipation.

Greene calls New Jersey a Northeastern state with a border-state mentality, but Gary L. Williams's interesting analysis of a real border state provides some contrast. "Lincoln's Neutral Allies: The Case of the Kentucky Unionists" (*South Atlantic Quarterly*, LXXIII [Winter, 1974], 70-84) depicts a very frail love of Union indeed. Kentucky's Unionists, led by the Speed family, John J. Crittenden, George D. Prentice, and William Nelson, wanted to keep the state neutral and to keep federal recruiters out of the state. However, they did secretly run government-supplied guns to Unionist supporters. All of these Unionists warned Lincoln that Fremont's proclamation freeing the slaves of those opposed to the federal government in Missouri, if upheld or just ignored by the administration, would cause Kentucky to secede. Lincoln's famous overruling of Fremont was a direct result of the advice he got from Kentucky, whose neutrality he recognized in secret while denouncing it as tantamount to treason in public.

The Lincoln administration's policy towards *foreign* neutrals has been receiving increased attention of late. An excellent case in point is Kinley J. Brauer's "Seward's 'Foreign War Panacea': An Interpretation" (*New York History*, LX [April, 1974], 133-157). Brauer carefully rehearses the events of March, 1861, which surrounded Secretary of State William Seward's decision at the end of the month to write the famous memorandum, "Some Thoughts for the President's Consideration." Brauer concludes that Seward wanted to provoke an international *crisis* rather than an international *war* in order to reunite the nation by focusing attentions outward instead of inward. In other words, the domestic problem of secession was uppermost in his mind.

A nationalist whose mind fairly boggled at the notion of the Union's being divided, Seward sanguinely assumed that all that was needed was time (for sober second thoughts on the part of Southern moderates) and a tough foreign policy (meant to keep European powers who wanted to see the United States



From the Lincoln National Foundation

FIGURE 2. This cartoon, which appeared in *Harper's Weekly* on February 16, 1861, even before Lincoln was inaugurated, betrayed what Americans knew to be the true condition of their country. Seward's bellicose bluster in March probably fooled no one in Europe, least of all the British lion or the hawk-like Louis Napoleon. Many theories have been advanced to explain the failure of England and France to exploit the weakness of the United States during the war years. Explanations have stressed the importance to Europe of Northern wheat shipments, the sympathy of the English working classes with the anti-slavery movement, and the traditional conservatism of English diplomacy, especially in regard to blockades and freedom of the seas. The salvation of the United States would lie in the facts that France had to follow England's lead and England could accomplish a very desirable end without risking intervention on the wrong side in the Civil War: the war drove America's merchant marine from the seas.

weakened from encouraging the secessionists). Seward thereby became the principal advocate in Lincoln's cabinet of a policy of appeasement. He wanted to abandon Fort Sumter but collect tariff duties on shipboard outside Charleston harbor, thus buying time for domestic peace and maintaining the semblance of national authority to keep foreign powers from recognizing the Confederacy. By mid-March, Seward knew that Europe would not tolerate such interference with her commerce. By March 24, he knew that appeasement would not work quickly. He had thought the counterrevolution against the Confederacy would begin in Texas, but on March 23, Texas repudiated pro-Union Governor Sam Houston and ratified the Confederate Constitution. On March 29, the cabinet gave a majority vote for saving Fort Sumter, and Seward was left with only one possible policy, provoking an international crisis to waken the still slumbering Unionists in the South.

By looking at Seward's policies in their domestic context, Brauer argues, one can see that he was not motivated, as some have said, by a desire to acquire Cuba and Puerto Rico. The acquisition of these potentially slave-supporting territories would only exacerbate sectional conflict. Seward did not really desire foreign war either. He thought his policy would succeed; success would mean a reunited nation; and no European power wanted war with an undivided United States.

The weakness of Seward's policy, says Brauer, was not its sinister imperialistic design or its sabre-rattling bluster, but its assumption that Southern Unionism was stronger than it really was. Seward's policy would have led to disaster, for an

intransigent South would have faced him with war on two fronts or a humiliating back-down before the European powers. Lincoln, sometimes criticized for overestimating the strength of Southern Unionism, had a lower estimate of it than Seward, and he was shrewd to reject his Secretary of State's proposal.

It is hard to estimate Abraham Lincoln's character without also estimating that of Stephen A. Douglas. An interesting insight on the latter can be gained in David E. Meerse's "Origins of the Douglas-Buchanan Feud Reconsidered," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, LXVII (April, 1974), 154-174. Meerse is concerned with the problem whether the feud between Douglas and President Buchanan in 1857 was precipitated by an already existing struggle over control of the patronage appointments or by a struggle over principles involved in the Lecompton Constitution in Kansas. Buchanan's cabinet, says Meerse, contained no one who was closely identified with any Democratic presidential aspirant; that Douglas had no man in the cabinet was hardly a slight. Douglas did about as well with the Buchanan administration as with the previous Pierce administration in terms of percentage of appointments made from people recommended by Douglas. Moreover, he did about as well with the Buchanan administration as his factional rivals in the party, Jesse Bright of Indiana and John Slidell of Louisiana. In fact, by virtue of his position as chairman of the Senate Committee on Territories, Douglas controlled the appointments made to territorial positions from his section of the country. The Buchanan administration turned out a large number of office holders in northern Illinois, but this was done (1) because the northern part of the state went Republican, and it was only fair to give new men a chance to turn the Democratic fortunes around and (2) on Douglas's recommendation (he ran the Illinois Democratic party, and no other recommendations counted). When Douglas and Buchanan fought, they fought over political principles.

Lincoln Lore readers of long standing will doubtless find Frederick Tilberg's article, "The Location of the Platform from Which Lincoln Delivered the Gettysburg Address" (*Pennsylvania History*, XL [April, 1973], 178-191), of much interest. Amassing evidence from many eye-witness accounts, Tilberg, the retired Gettysburg National Military Park Historian, disputes the site designated by Wisconsin's representative at the dedication (W. Y. Selleck) in a document owned by the Lincoln National Life Foundation.

Other articles on Lincoln themes include Mark E. Neely, Jr.'s "American Nationalism in the Image of Henry Clay: Abraham Lincoln's Eulogy on Henry Clay in Context" (*The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, LXXIII [January, 1975], 31-60) which argues that Lincoln saw in Clay what George Fredrickson said he did: an antislavery advocate rather than the Great Compromiser. *Historical New Hampshire* contains Lucy Lowden's article, "New Hampshire At Chicago — 1860: 'The Only Fit and Proper Nomination . . .'" (XXIX [Spring, 1974], 20-41). Two previously unpublished Lincoln documents, though of slight content, can be found in Bonnie B. Collier's "A New Lincoln Letter" (*Yale University Library Gazette*, XLVIII [January, 1974], 192-194) and John A. Williams's "A Lost Lincoln Telegram" (*Vermont History*, XLI [Winter, 1973], 29). Continuing interest in Lincoln's Indian policies is evidenced in Edmund J. Danziger, Jr., "The Indian Office During the Civil War: Impotence in Indian Affairs," *South Dakota History*, V (Winter, 1974), 52-72 and in Tom Holman, "William G. Coffin, Lincoln's Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the Southern Superintendency," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, XXXIX (Winter, 1973), 491-514. Charles T. Morrissey's article, "The Perils of Instant History: Josiah G. Holland's Biography of Abraham Lincoln," appears in the *Journal of Popular Culture*, VII (Fall, 1973) 347-350. Martin A. Sweeney's article, "The Personality of Lincoln the War President," appears in *Social Studies*, LXV (April, 1974), 164-167. Two presentations discussed in the last column have since been published, and they are welcome and useful productions indeed: Eric Foner, "The Causes of the Civil War: Recent Interpretations and New Directions," and Richard O. Curry, "The Civil War and Reconstruction, 1861-1877: A Critical Overview of Recent Trends and Interpretations," both appear in *Civil War History*, XX (September, 1974), 197-238.

CUMULATIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY 1973 - 1974

Selections approved by a Bibliography Committee consisting of the following members: Dr. Kenneth A. Bernard, Belmont Arms, 51 Belmont St., Apt. C-2, South Easton, Mass.; Arnold Gates, 289 New Hyde Park Rd., Garden City, N.Y.; Carl Haverlin, 8619 Louise Avenue, Northridge, California; James T. Hickey, Illinois State Historical Library, Old State Capitol, Springfield, Illinois; E. B. (Pete) Long, 607 S. 15th St., Laramie, Wyoming; Ralph G. Newman, 18 E. Chestnut St., Chicago, Illinois; Hon. Fred Schwengel, 200 Maryland Avenue, N.E., Washington, D.C.; Dr. Wayne C. Temple, 1121 S. 4th Street Court, Springfield, Illinois. New items available for consideration may be sent to the above persons, or the the Lincoln National Life Foundation.

1973

ILLINOIS — DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION DIVISION OF PARKS AND MEMORIALS 1973-30

Lincoln's / tomb / State Memorial / (Picture of tomb) / Printed by authority of the State of Illinois / issued by / Department Of Conservation (Device) / Division of Parks and Memorials / 500M-5-73 / (Cover title) /

Folder, paper, 5½" x 3¼", single sheet folded six times, printed text, illus., folder contains statistical data on the Lincoln Tomb.

1974

(AMERICAN BANKERS ASSOCIATION) (1974)-10

President Lincoln's Savings / (Cover title) / [Published by the American Bankers Association, 1120 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.]

Folder, paper, 10¼" x 8¼", single sheet folded once, detached insert page facsimile of Lincoln's memorandum dated June 10, 1864, covering an itemized listing of savings from his salary as President thru courtesy of Illinois State Historical Library and Society.

AMERICAN BANKERS ASSOCIATION (1974)-11

Abraham Lincoln / by Carl Sandburg / (Caption title) / [Six dramatic television specials covering the life and times of one of the most significant figures in our 200 year history. Actor, Hal Holbrook as Abraham Lincoln in the NBC-TV Colorcast of "Sandburg's Lincoln." Published by the American Bankers Association, 1120 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.]

Pamphlet, paper, 11" x 9¼", (8) pp., colored illustrations, national advertising ads on books, magazines, illustrations, etc., to promote the Lincoln Series and its sponsorship by the American Bankers Association.

DENNIS, FRANK L. 1974-12

The / Lincoln-Douglas / Debates / Frank L. Dennis / (Device) Mason & Lipscomb Publishers New York / [Copyright 1974 by Mason & Lipscomb Publisher, Inc. All rights reserved.]

Book, cloth, 8½" x 5½", fr., xi p., 106 pp., illus., price, \$6.95.

FLECKLES, ELLIOTT V., CAPTAIN 1974-13

Willie Speaks Out! / The Psychic World Of / Abraham Lincoln / Captain Elliott V. Fleckles / Chaplain, United States Air Force, Retired / 1974 / Llewellyn Publications / St. Paul, Minnesota 55165 / [Copyright 1974 by Elliott V. Fleckles. All rights reserved.]

Book, cloth, 9¼" x 6¼", fr., xxi p., 226 (1) pp., illus., price, \$7.95. Autographed copy by author.

ILLINOIS, (DIVISION OF TOURISM) (1974)-14

Lincoln, Illinois / in / Logan County / (Picture of Postville Courthouse) / (Cover title) / [Published by Tour Illinois, Dept. of Business and Economic Development, Tourism Div., (1974).]

Pamphlet, paper, 9¼" x 4", 15 pp., printed text, illus., illustrations and maps of the Logan County area and points of interest covering the Lincoln Circuit on the Lincoln Heritage Trail.

ILLINOIS STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY 1974-15

Journal / of the Illinois State Historical Society / Volume LXVII / Number 1 / February 1974 / Printed By Authority / Of The State Of Illinois / [Abraham Lincoln Issue. Copyright 1974 by the Illinois State Historical Society.]

Book, flexible boards, 9½" x 7½", 128 pp., illus., price, \$2.00.

LINCOLN MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY 1974-16

Lincoln Herald / Index / Vol. 75 / Spring, 1973 through Winter, 1973 / Compiled by / Lois R. Rowlett / Lincoln Memorial University / Harrogate, Tennessee / 1974 / (Cover title) /

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LINCOLN MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY 1974-17

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Pamphlet, flexible boards, 10½" x 7¼", 56 pp., illus., price per single issue, \$1.50.

LINCOLN MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY 1974-18

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MITGANG, HERBERT 1974-19

The Fiery Trial / a life of Lincoln / Herbert Mitgang / The Viking Press New York / [Copyright 1974 by Herbert Mitgang. All rights reserved. First edition.]

Book, cloth, 9½" x 6¼", fr., 207 (1) pp., illus., price, \$7.95.

NEWMAN, RALPH G. 1974-20

Lincoln / Speaks At / Gettysburg / by Ralph G. Newman / (Caption title) / [Copyright 1974 by History House, Inc., Chicago, Illinois.]

Folder, paper, 14" x 11", single sheet folded twice, colored illustrations along with a full page colored illustration on cover entitled "Lincoln's Gettysburg Address" and a full page facsimile of his address on verso.

RICHMANN, LELA KERN 1974-21

Hidden Springs / Or / Abe Grew Strong In Indiana / (A Play in Four Acts with Prologue and Epilogue) / By Lela Kern Richmann / (Portrait of Lincoln) / Matthew S. Farson, Publisher / Indianapolis, Indiana / 1974 / -1- / [Edited by Mary E. Ramier. Copyright 1974 by Mary E. Ramier.]

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A. Lincoln- / A Play In Two Acts / By Bill Stonebarger / (Device) Hawkhill Associates, Inc. / Black Earth, Wisconsin 53515 / [Copyright 1974 by Bill Stonebarger. All rights reserved.]

Brochure, paperback, 8½" x 5½", 51 pp., price, \$1.75.

WOODS, THALIA S. 1974-23

The / Month / Was June / A Story in Verse / of the Wedding of / Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks / By Thalia S. Woods / (Cover title) / [Copyright 1974 by Thalia S. Woods.]

Pamphlet, paper, 7¾" x 5½", (8) pp.

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Lincoln Lore / Bulletin of The Lincoln National Life Foundation . . . Mark E. Neely, Jr., Editor. Published each month / by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801. / Number 1637, July 1974 to Number 1642, December 1974.

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