



Lincoln Lore

June, 1981

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LINCOLN BOOKS WITH ILLUSTRATED BINDINGS

Editor's Note: This marks the 100th issue of *Lincoln Lore* under my editorship. In celebration of that, this issue is in color and is strictly for fun. I chose as a subject Lincoln trade bindings because they are colorful and cannot, in fact, be decently rendered in black and white.

Books with trade bindings have now acquired the status of "collectible books." Published mostly between 1880 and 1915, they are abundantly available at reasonable prices and thus constitute an avenue to collecting for those who are unable to collect the now shockingly costly rarities that were sought by previous generations of collectors. I could not recommend collecting Lincoln books with trade bindings as a specialty. They are too few in number to fill a collecting career, for one thing. For another, not enough of the great book designers are represented among these Lincoln books to make it altogether satisfying as an exclusive collecting interest. Finally, trade bindings seem to have been a feature especially of juvenile and very popularly oriented Lincoln books, and one would therefore be faced with collecting mostly books whose sole virtue lies on their covers rather than within them. I would never recommend acquiring a collection of books that are not worth reading. They do make a charming addition to any Lincoln collection, however.

Before 1880, Charles Gullans and John Espey inform us in "American Trade Bindings and Their Designers, 1880-1915" (in Jean Peters, ed., *Collectible Books: Some New*

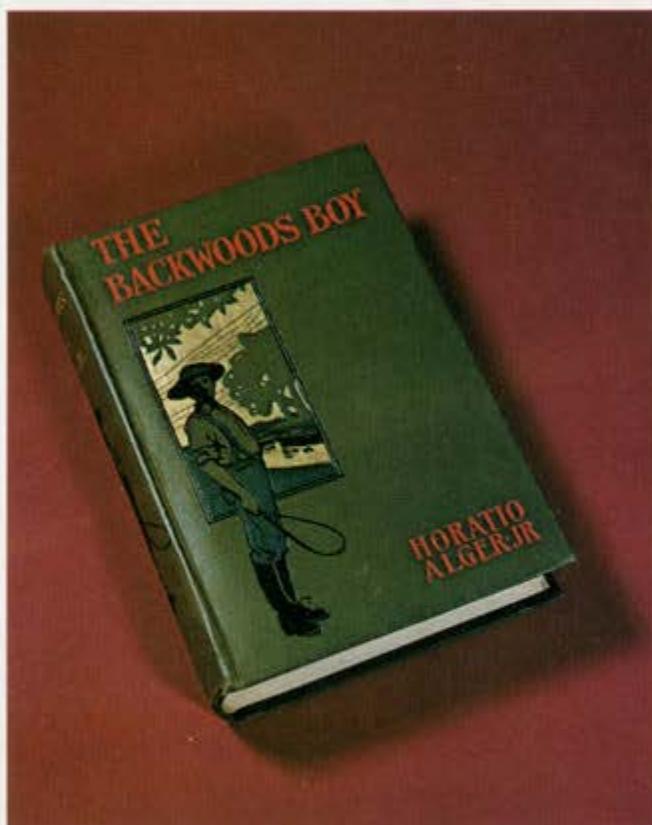
Paths [New York: R.R. Bowker, 1979]), diesinkers produced the decorations on the cloth bindings of books. After that date, publishers began to employ artists and illustrators to design decorative book covers, and a sort of golden age of trade bindings ensued. It ended quickly around 1908 or 1909, as Gullans and Espey explain:

According to Lee Thayer of the Decorative Designers . . . their business died "in a month" when the illustrated paper book jacket, nothing new to be sure, suddenly caught the fancy of the reading public. The one that probably "did it" was a jacket illustrated by Howard Chandler Christy. . . [The] cutting of many costly blocks could be eliminated. A new and popular advertising tool, which sold as effectively as decorated cloth and at less cost, had been discovered.

World War I gave the publishers the convenient excuse of austerity to eliminate what little of the practice remained in the industry in 1917. The era of the dust jacket was dawning.

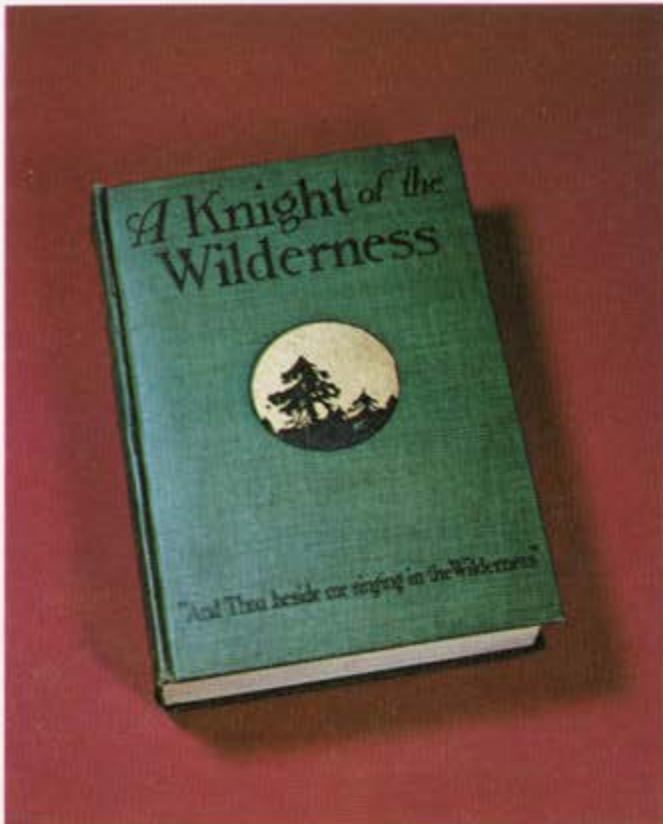
Dust jackets are nice too, but something special was lost with the demise of the decorated cloth bindings. Our sense of that loss as well as our rather precise sense of the era in which this form of book design flourished is what gives us a special feeling for those books today. They are as fondly reminiscent of an era as a "classic" automobile or a fin de siècle poster. There can surely be no harm in indulging that nostalgic feeling for one *Lincoln Lore* issue in a hundred.

M.E.N., Jr.



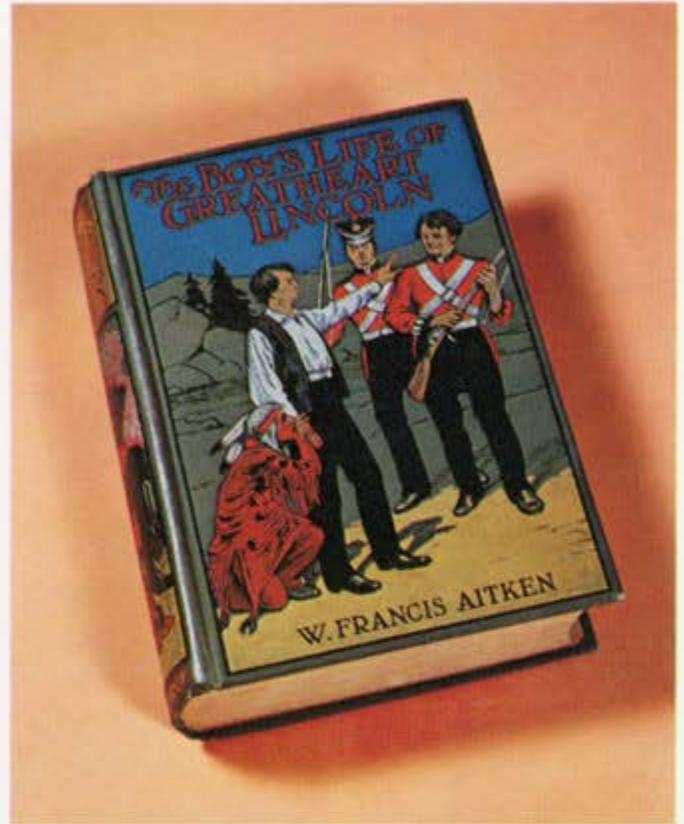
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FIGURE 1. Perhaps the best illustrated Lincoln binding is this one on Horatio Alger, Jr.'s *The Backwoods Boy or The Boyhood and Manhood of Abraham Lincoln*. This is a variant of Monaghan 995, noted by Monaghan for its publisher, David McKay in Philadelphia, but not for its distinctive and handsome binding. Monaghan described the book as a "fictional biography for boys," but the book relies, for the most part, on long quotations from Lincoln himself as well as from early Lincoln biographers. As a dean of America's success-myth writers, Alger naturally focused on Lincoln's stern advice to his improvident stepbrother John D. Johnston, but he included some surprising material as well. Alger quoted at length from Lincoln's speech in opposition to the Mexican War. "I am quite aware," Alger wrote, "that many of my young readers will skip this portion as uninteresting; but I hope that if in after years they are led to read this biography once more, they will count it worth while to read it."



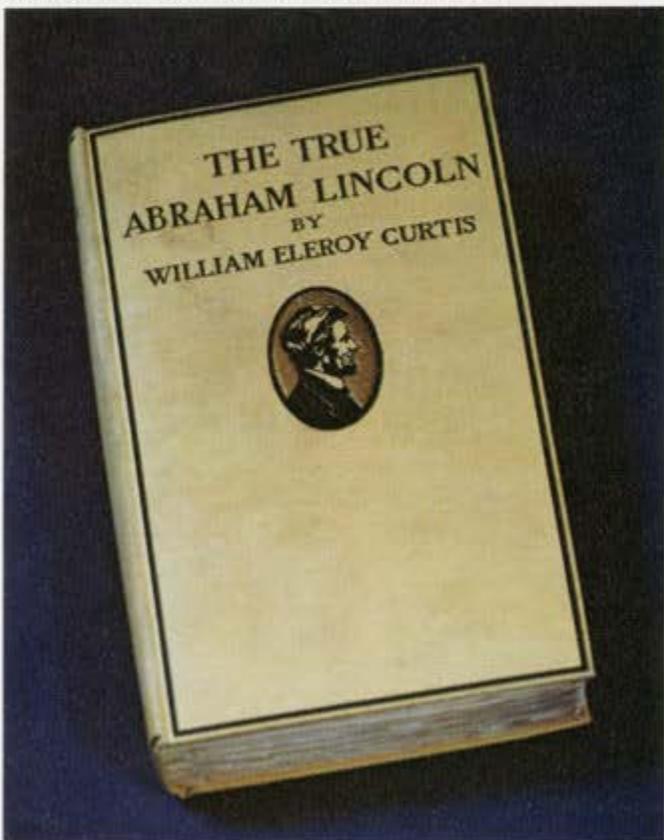
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FIGURE 2. Though lacking any evocation of the Lincoln theme, this handsomely understated cover appeared on *A Knight of the Wilderness*, a novel by Oliver Marple Gale and Harriet Wheeler.



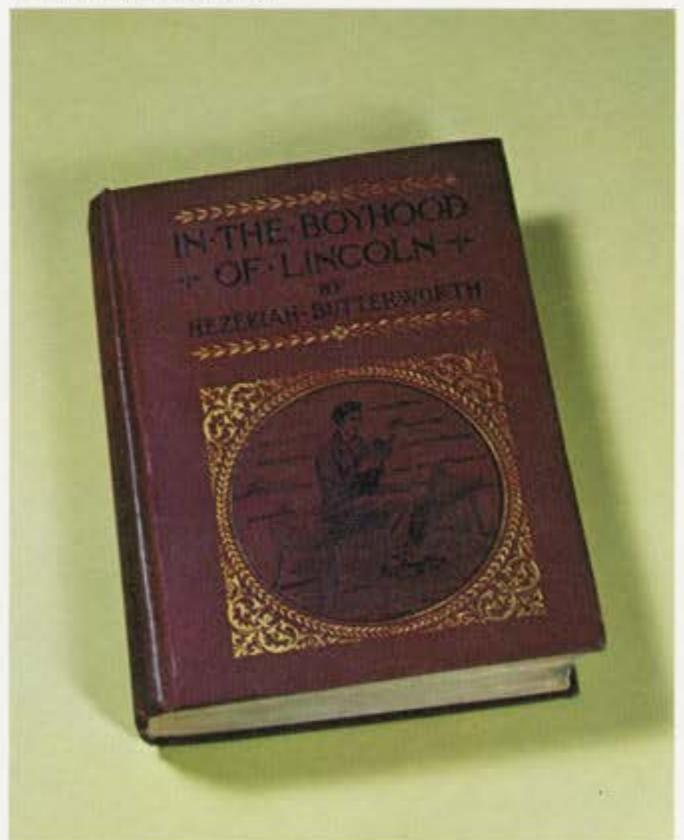
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FIGURE 4. Perhaps the brightest illustrated cover appeared on this juvenile biography published in London in 1910. Its British origin may explain the red-coated Illinois militia.



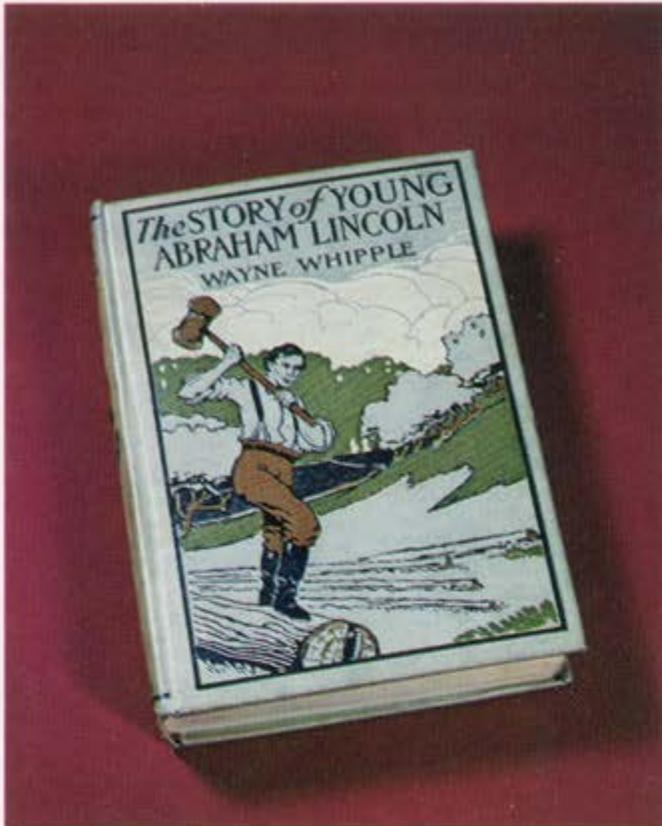
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FIGURE 3. Edward Stratton Holloway was J.B. Lippincott's art advisor in 1903, when this attractive edition of William Eleroy Curtis's book, *The True Abraham Lincoln*, appeared.



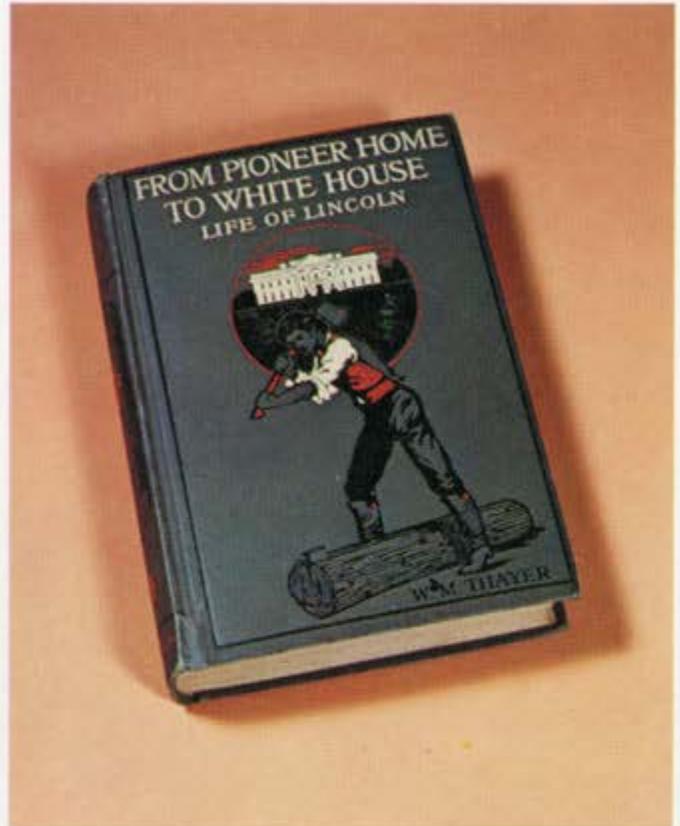
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FIGURE 5. Hezekiah Butterworth's *In the Boyhood of Lincoln: A Tale of the Tunker Schoolmaster and the Times of Black Hawk* bore an illustrated cover typical of the 1890s.



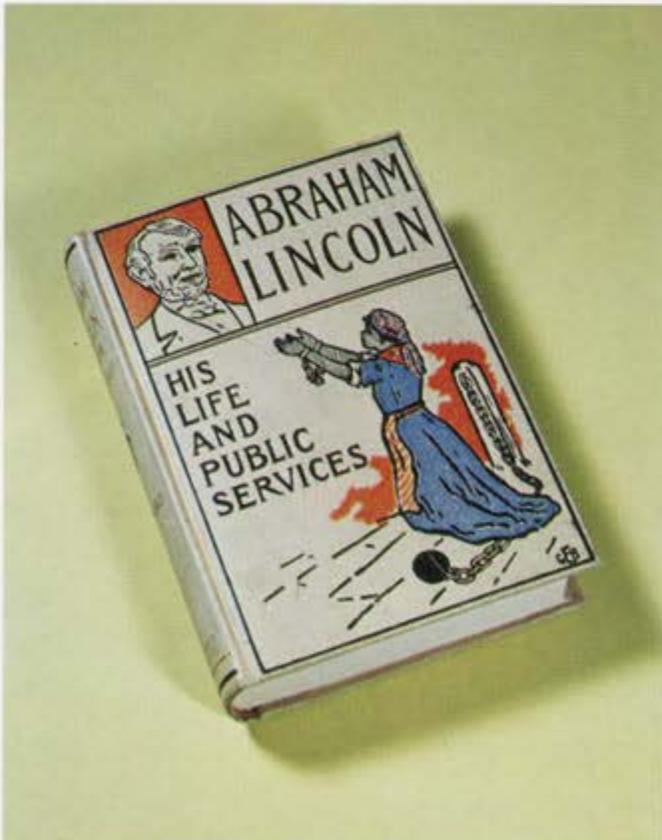
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FIGURE 6. This juvenile biography had an illustrated binding typical for 1915. However, to show Lincoln splitting logs with a wedge and mallet rather than an axe was unusual.



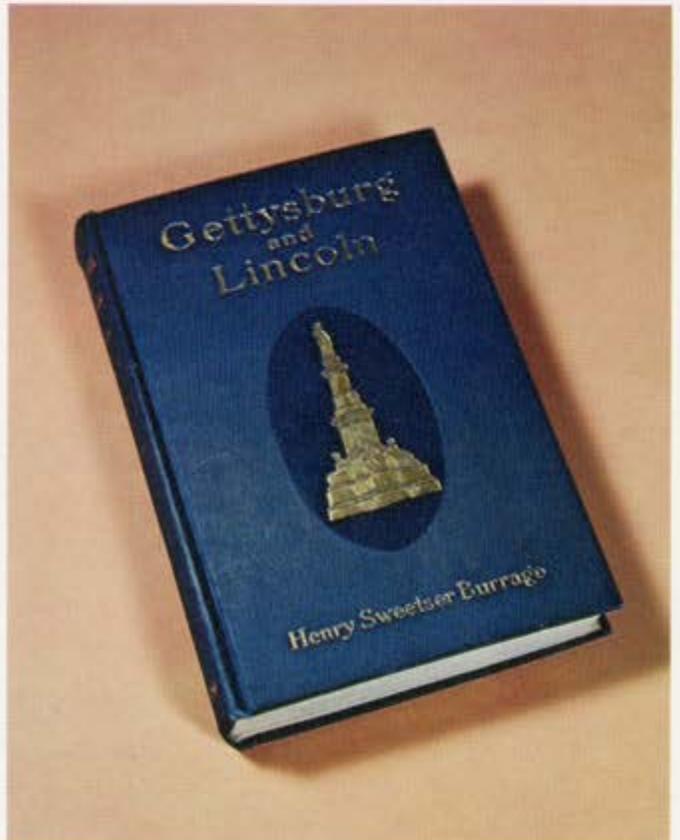
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FIGURE 7. Thayer wrote the first complete biography of Lincoln. It went out of print when fire destroyed the plates. This edition of an enlarged biography appeared around 1904.



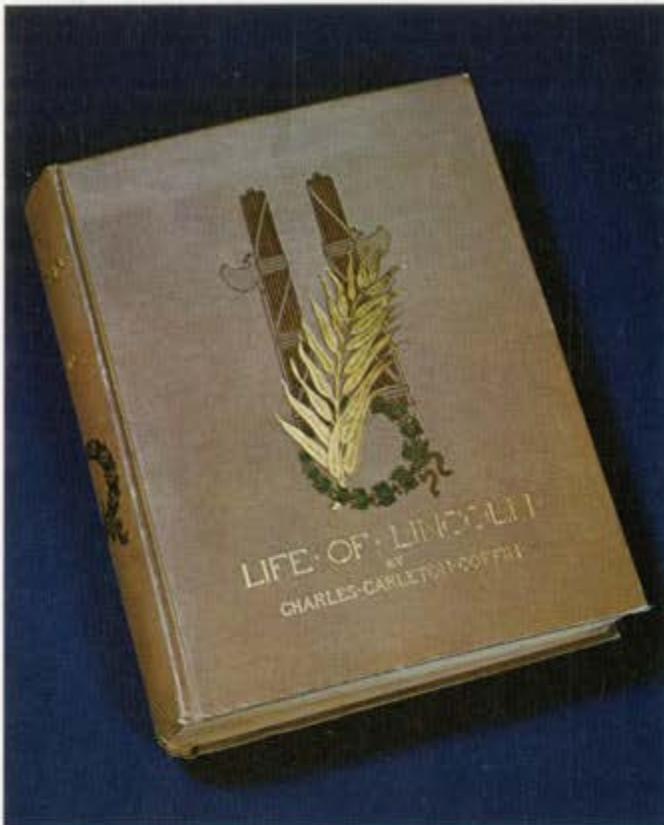
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FIGURE 8. Phebe A. Hanaford's *Abraham Lincoln: His Life and Public Services* used an unusual theme on its cover. Juvenile biographies usually sported Indians, an axe-wielding youth, or a diligent reader.



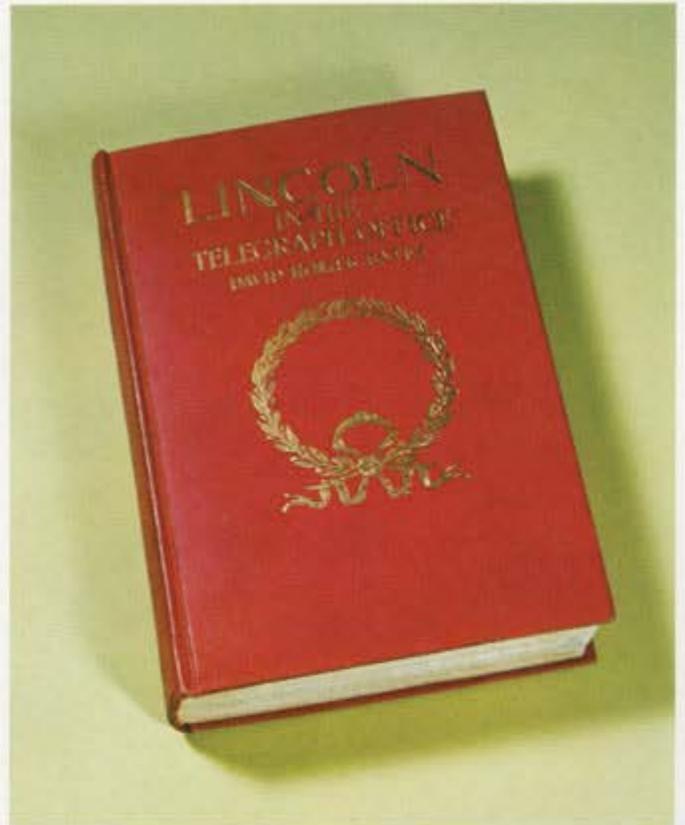
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FIGURE 9. Henry Sweetser Burrage's book was among the earliest on the Gettysburg Address. It was published by G.P. Putnam's Sons in 1906.



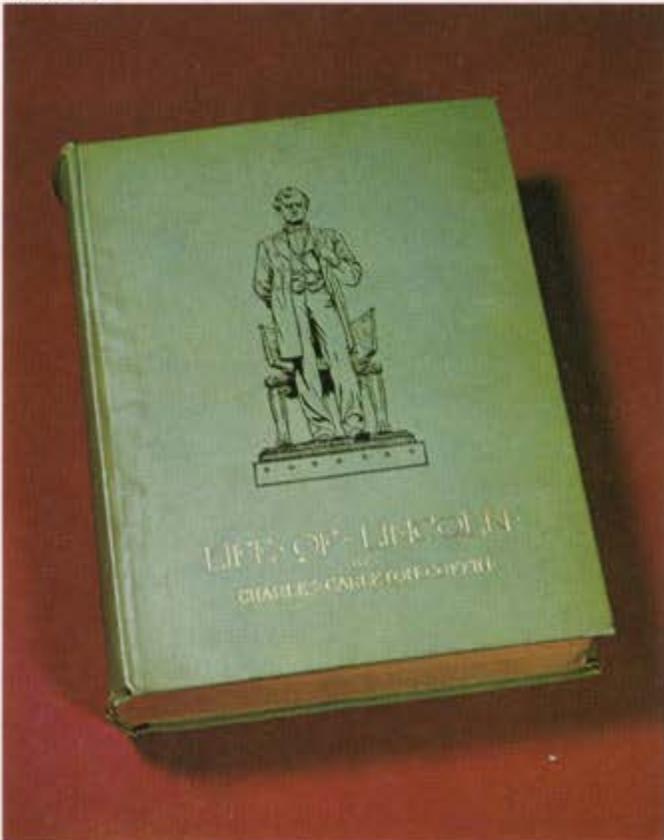
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FIGURE 10. Charles Carleton Coffin's biography (1893) had the benefit of a designer of note, designated by Gullans and Espy as "the unknown Harper's binder."



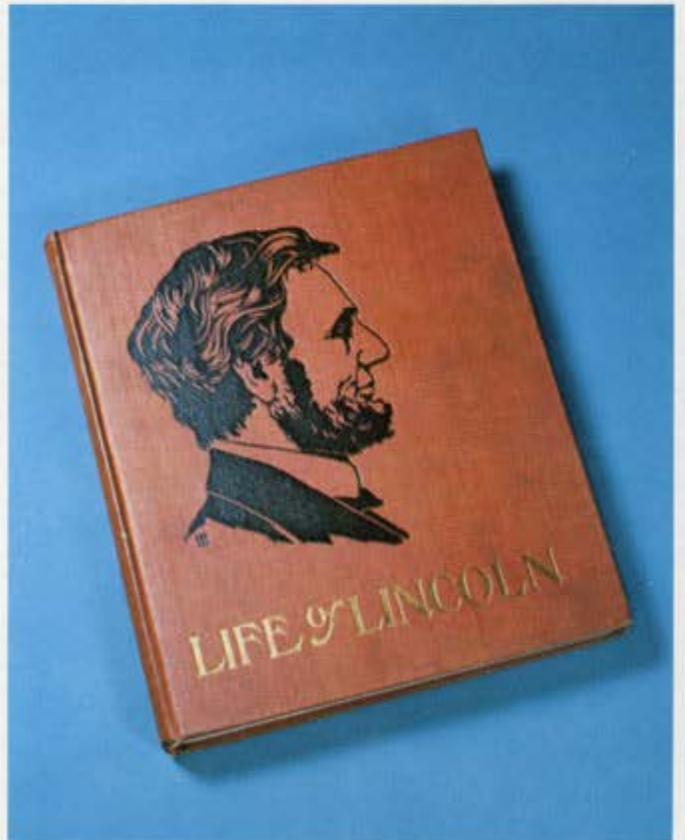
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FIGURE 12. David Homer Bates's *Lincoln in the Telegraph Office* (New York: The Century Co., 1907) is a useful work with an attractive binding.



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FIGURE 11. Later editions of Coffin's book, published after the departure of the unknown Harper's designer, carried a handsome line rendering of Augustus St. Gaudens' statue of Lincoln.



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FIGURE 13. This life of Lincoln, told by Harriet Putnam in words of one syllable, has crude illustrations inside but a striking illustration on the outside.