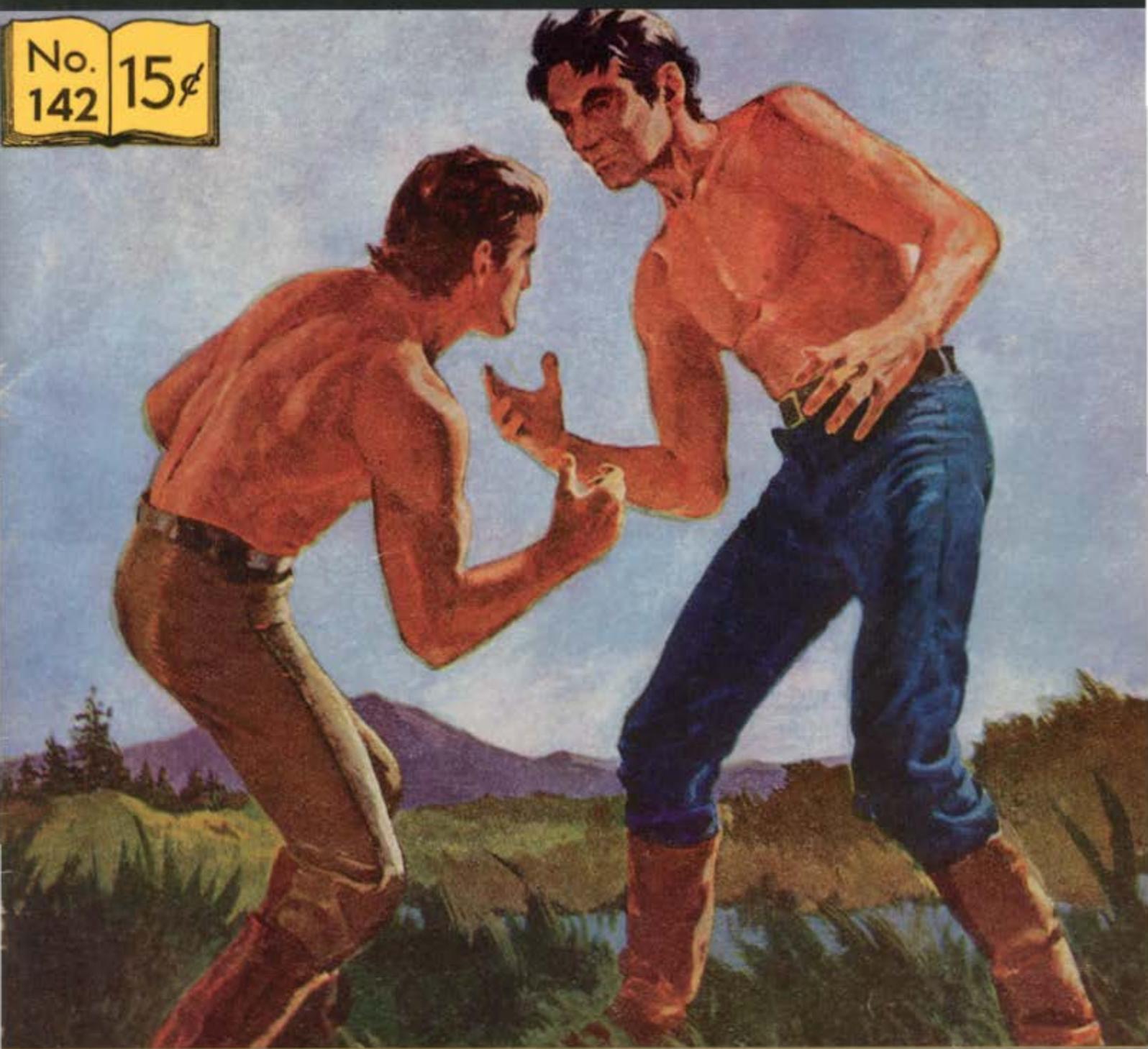


# Lincoln Love

Summer 1997

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Number 1849  
The Bulletin of  
*The Lincoln Museum*

# Lincoln The Athlete



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*The Lincoln Museum*

The mission of The Lincoln Museum  
is to interpret and preserve the history and  
legacy of Abraham Lincoln through research,  
conservation, exhibitry, and education.

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*During Lincoln's life-  
time, his reputation for  
physical prowess was a  
political asset. Today, it  
remains an important  
part of his image as folk  
hero. The conclusion of  
Professor Miller's article on  
Lincoln as a billiards  
player, along with the  
illustrations on the  
cover and the following page, reflect different aspects of  
Lincoln's physical activity, as seen both by his contemporaries  
and by future generations.*



Even with his head superimposed on the body of  
John C. Calhoun, as in this 1865 print by James  
F. Bodtker, Lincoln looks capable of holding his  
own with George Washington. (TLM # 305)

The Whig Party, to which Lincoln belonged for most of his political career,  
was frequently tarred by its Democratic opponents as a haven for effete,  
aristocratic dandies and weaklings. The only two Whigs ever elected to the  
White House, William Henry Harrison and Zachary Taylor, were able to escape  
this taint by virtue of their status as military heroes. Since Lincoln himself admitted that his brief stint as a militia



(On the cover: Detail from the cover of *Classics Illustrated* n. 142 (1958),  
featuring Lincoln wrestling with Jack Armstrong. (TLM #1792))



**THE NATIONAL GAME. THREE "OUTS" AND ONE "RUN".  
ABRAHAM WINNING THE BALL.**

*Published by Currier & Ives, 152 Nassau St. N.Y.*

Currier and Ives used the popular new game of baseball as a setting for this cartoon of Lincoln's dominance over his rivals in the 1860 presidential election. (TLM #3498)

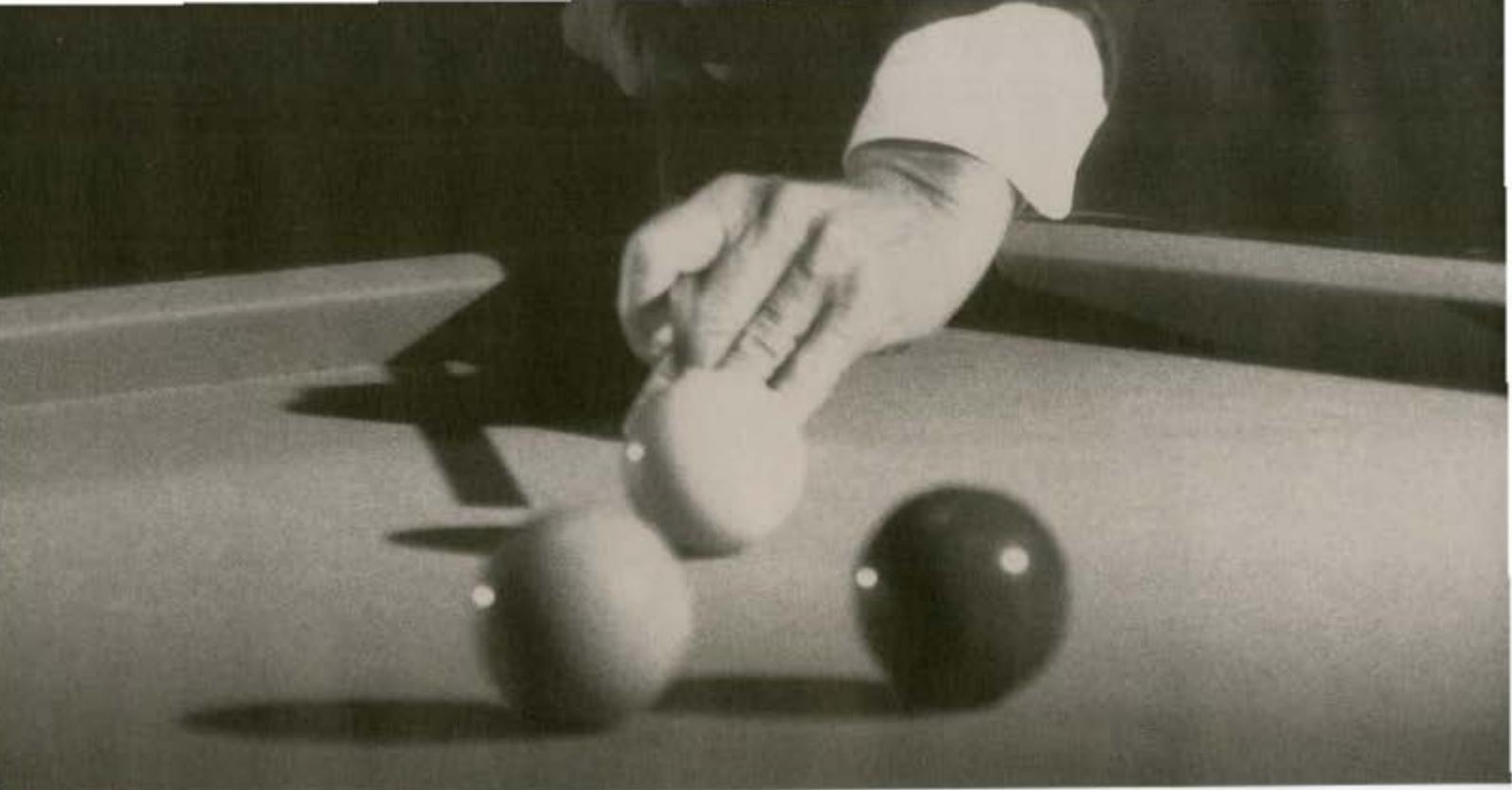
captain in the Black Hawk War of 1832 hardly qualified him as a military hero, he could not follow the examples of Harrison and Taylor. Instead, he benefited from widely-told stories of his strength and physical skill, as exemplified in his wrestling match with Jack Armstrong in New Salem and his legendary rail-splitting ability. These stories helped to distance him from his party's negative cultural image.

After Lincoln's death, the memory of his athleticism played a part in his elevation in the public mind to a status equal to that of George Washington.

Of the Founding Fathers, only Washington is remembered for his physical as well as his political deeds. There are no folk tales of Jefferson chopping down cherry trees, or of John Adams tossing silver dollars across the Potomac. Lincoln's size and strength made him a comfortable partner for the athletic Washington in the American pantheon; even had Stephen A. Douglas somehow won the election of 1860 and saved the Union, it is unlikely that Americans today would picture the five foot four inch "Little Giant" on the same platform with the six foot two inch "Father of Our Country." — GJP



M. Leone Bracker explicitly connects the nobility of Lincoln's character with the manual labor of his frontier youth in *The Railsplitter* (charcoal drawing, 1934.) (TLM #1586a)



## Abraham Lincoln And The Art Of Billiards

*Conclusion to the article begun  
in the Spring 1997 issue.*

*By Tim R. Miller, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor,  
Management Department  
University of Illinois at Springfield*

### F. L. Fake and the La Salle 'Hustle'?

According to modern pool star Buddy Hall, "hustling" in the world of pool and pocket billiards involves the use of the con, or scheming, for profit or advantage of some variety (usually money, sex, or personal property).<sup>45</sup> This brings us to a particularly intriguing article.

On February 11, 1949, the La Salle, Illinois *News Tribune* ran an article with the opening line, "Here is the story of Lincoln playing billiards in La Salle, which Charles Ulysses Gordon has so kindly sent us." It is a delightful piece and rich in detail. It contends that: (a) "one day in October, 1858" (b) Lincoln "by chance" met Frederick L. Fake (c) at the Hardy House in La Salle while "detained a few hours for the lack of transportation"; (d) three games were played "to the keen

amusement of the large crowd which soon gathered"; (e) Lincoln proposed the game and refused Fake's offer of a spot (i.e. handicap) of "forty points in the hundred"; (f) in order to play, Lincoln "divested himself of coat, waist-coat, collar, and necktie, rolling his shirt sleeves to his shoulders"; (g) when shooting, he "very carefully squar[ed] himself"; (h) the game was played on a "table being of the ancient six pocket pattern"; (i) Lincoln talked and told stories, "perhaps several of them," much to the delight of the large crowd in the "little room," as he played; (j) Fake apparently won the first game, because Lincoln refused the offer of a 50 point spot (in a game to 100) for the second game, "saying he had not played his best game, etc."; (k) they "divided the expense at the finish"; (l) much story-telling went on by Lincoln, particularly "of what he did not know of billiards, making everybody happy with a performance long to be remembered"; and (m) the participants later "went to Ottawa" where Lincoln and Douglas spoke "in the public park that evening to a large audience."

What a marvelous account! It shows Lincoln proposing the game, rejecting offers of handicap, and partially disrobing as he prepares to play; it describes some-

thing of his technique in approaching a shot, the type of table, and who paid; and it acknowledges his story-telling as social discourse during the game itself. Unfortunately, the article is highly suspect.

As with the Urbana story, the La Salle article lacks credibility because in October, 1858, Lincoln was not there.<sup>46</sup> He may have been in the area twice during the month. On the 27th he gave an address in Vermont, Illinois, and on the 28th made a "hurried visit" to the Tremont House in Chicago "for a few moments ... on his way to Petersburg." That trip could possibly have taken him through La Salle and Ottawa, but there is no such indication (nor of a speech of any kind). Otherwise, he was only within 50-60 miles of La Salle one time that month, at Toulon, Illinois, on the 8th; but his movements to and from that location originated toward the southwest (i.e. Galesburg to Toulon, Toulon to Oquawka, Illinois and Burlington, Iowa).<sup>47</sup> Likewise, the article's reference to Lincoln's giving a speech with Douglas in Ottawa during October, 1858 is troubling. He did debate with Douglas all across Illinois in 1858, at Ottawa, Freeport, Jonesboro, Charleston, Galesburg, Quincy, and Alton. "Ottawa" seems to jump out here, but that debate took place on August 21, and Lincoln

entered town for the debate from Morris,<sup>50</sup> to the east of Ottawa (La Salle is west of Ottawa). The La Salle article has Lincoln entering Ottawa the wrong month and from the wrong direction.<sup>51</sup>

Why the reference to the LaSalle "hustle"? Because of the context of the article, which is suspicious. It was written ninety-one years after the event is alleged to have taken place, and Charles Ulysses Gordon's source for the story is Lincoln's purported opponent, Frederick L. Fake. This unverified account of an event that took place when Lincoln was elsewhere is thus drawn from the remembrance of a "Captain Fake." My bet is that as these words drift to the world beyond and are picked up by the cue-sport hustlers of days gone by, more than one has a grin.

A few other elements of the story don't check out. Records at the La Salle County Historical Society show no one named Fredrick L. Fake (or "Phake") in 1858, nor do they identify Charles U. Gordon as a resident of the area in 1949 (although other Gordons are listed). The author of the 1949 article, Ms. Bazy Miller, has no recollection of Gordon, Fake, or the article itself, which was one of hundreds she wrote.<sup>52</sup>

As with the Urbana story, none of this absolutely precludes the match having taken place in La Salle at some other point in time. It is possible — Lincoln was in Ottawa on October 7, 1856, for example.<sup>53</sup> And just for fun, the author phoned Chicago directory information and asked for the telephone number of anyone with a last name spelled F-A-K-E. The operator said there was one such listing. The voice that answered sounded like that of a female senior citizen (who hung up on me when I identified myself as a professor with the University of Illinois at Sprin ... click). There apparently are people named "Fake."

All-in-all, this article must be considered among the least credible documents in the literature on Lincoln and billiards. Too bad, because it's a "beaut."

#### *Two Lincoln Comments on Billiards*

On August 12, 1948, the Neosho *Missouri Time* (probably "Times") said the following: "Abraham Lincoln, who played billiards regularly, pronounced it as 'a healthy-inspiring, scientific game, lending recreation to the otherwise

fatigued mind.'" The passage has appeared elsewhere, for example in John Grissim's history of billiards.<sup>54</sup> But I have been unable to locate its source, having pursued it across the range of writings by and about Lincoln. In a recent interview, John Grissim could not recall the comment or its citation, and had no notes of its origin.<sup>55</sup> The fact that Grissim repeated the quote proves nothing of its authenticity, but does suggest that it has appeared in still other sources, since it's unlikely that Grissim found the passage in the Neosho, Missouri newspaper article from 1948 (when he was only seven years old).

When I asked Illinois State Historian Thomas Schwartz if this quote sounded like Lincoln he responded:

This strikes me as a bit spurious. It doesn't sound like him, but there are

a lot of things that do sound like him that I think are probably not his either. Because they're on subjects that he had no reason to give an opinion on ...<sup>56</sup>

As should be evident by now, I believe that Lincoln had every reason to offer an opinion on this subject. Nevertheless, to date the search for the origin of this passage has led down blind alleys.

A more reliable first-hand account of Lincoln conversing about billiards was recorded by J. Hubley Ashton, Assistant Attorney General from 1864-69. According to Ashton, "on a bright morning in May, 1864 ... I accompanied my Chief to the White House for the purpose of being presented to the President." Lincoln, who "was in the hands of the barber" at the time, "drew his feet from the chair

## SPRINGFIELD BUSINESS DIRECTORY.

NOTE.—For the residences and places of business, of the persons herein classified, the reader is referred to the List of Names, in another portion of this volume.

### Attorneys.

Hall J. D.,  
Hesare G. W.,  
Broadwell N. M.,  
Brown Charles B.,  
Brown C. C.,  
Campbell & Cullom,  
Campbell William,  
Carventer George,  
Cookling W. J.,  
Cookling J. C.,  
Denny John E.,  
Gibson S. C.,  
Herndon E. B.,  
Keyes Chas. A.,  
Lincoln & Herndon,  
Logan & Hay,  
Mather T. S.,  
Mather J. H.,  
Matheny J. H.,  
McClernand J. A.,  
McCrillis L. F.,  
McWilliams A.,  
Moffatt T. & J. W.,  
Reynolds & Gross,  
Robbins S. W.,  
Rosette Louis,  
Rosette J. E.,  
Shutt G. W.,  
Stuart & Edwards,  
White J. H.,  
Wallace J. W.,  
Zane Chas. S.

### Agricultural and Seed Stores.

Francois S.,  
Lemon & Son.

### Bakers and Confectioners.

Coats James,  
Cook Henry,

Hall J. C.,  
Halpin Jacob,  
Myers H. C. & Co.,  
Rups Win.,  
Watson W. W. & Son,  
Hickey D. & Co.,  
Bodecker H.

### Bankers.

Bunn J.,  
Irwin Robert,  
Kidgeley N. H.

### Barbers.

Alexander G. W.,  
Butler S. W.,  
Dillman John,  
Donnegan P. L.,  
Donnegan Spencer,  
Ellis Henry,  
Fountain J. N. H.,  
Killion Thomas,  
King David,  
Mecku John,  
Rodgers B.,  
Watson Franklin.

### Billiard Saloons.

Lavenson J.,  
Smith J. P.

### Blacksmiths.

David —,  
Duncan Alex.,  
Fitzgerald Horace,  
Eisler Wm.,  
Fraser James,  
Gambrel A. J.,  
Gathard Nathan,  
Gathard Charles,  
Guhler Jacob,  
Hall Thomas,

Hainno Moses,  
Hinnould Gen.,  
Jamison & Ford,  
Kepis Thos.,  
Klein Geo.,  
Klein Louis,  
Kun Augustus,  
Laloycaux John,  
Laje Phillip,  
Luen Christian,  
Lindsay John,  
Loeh Wm.,  
Long Henry,  
Malony Thos.,  
Miller Henry,  
McKerhaie Charles,  
Nagle Thos.,  
New Jacob,  
Newton Chas.,  
Pierik & Bro's,  
Redman G. W.,  
Schwarz Wm.,  
Shuppard Jno. W.,  
Tallutt Wm.,  
Thurston Wm.,  
Thurston Thos.,  
Thier Jno.,  
Vanborn H.

### Book-Binders.

Davis Wm.,  
McCandless J. B.,  
Richards B. A. & Co.,  
Payne Enoch,  
Pitcher P. M.,  
Roderick Richard,  
Tappert Julius,  
Webster J. E.

### Books & Stationery.

Barnum & Baron,  
Johnson & Bradford.

The 1859 *Springfield Business Directory* included two billiard saloons. (Photo courtesy of Tim R. Miller)

on which they had been resting, and wrapping one leg around the other, turned to us as for conversation." The President outlined a problem regarding his authority to intervene in a contractual matter between a federal agency and a private vendor, and asked his Attorney General and Ashton their opinions. Ashton suggested a strategy by which the President could achieve his objective through indirect means. Lincoln responded:

"Do you ever play billiards," asked Mr. Lincoln, with a look on his face.

I replied that I did not.

"Well," he said, "I thought you did, for your answer reminds me of the performance in billiards I saw the other day, where the fellow caromed on the white and hit the red on the opposite side of any object placed in the middle of the table," and slowly drawing himself out of his chair, with the barber's towel still under his chin, he proceeded to show us, with the aid of a pen, a hat, and two inkstands, how the player he spoke of could strike a ball, on one side, and hit another ball on the opposite side, of the hat, without touching the hat.<sup>57</sup>

This account, written shortly after the pertinent event by a high-ranking member of Lincoln's administration, shows both that Lincoln watched billiards while in the White House, and used billiards as a metaphor through which to explain more substantive matters of law and presidential authority. Both points confirm Lincoln's interest in billiards.

#### *Lincoln's Opportunities to Play*

The game of billiards was enormously popular during the era of Lincoln.<sup>58</sup> Billiards historian Mike Shamos has written:

During the 1850's, interest in billiards increased to the point that public competitions were held for paying spectators. In 1858, the *New York Times* began reporting the results of matches. The following year, thousands of people filled Fireman's Hall in Detroit to see (Michael) Phelan himself beat John Seereiter for the astronomical prize of fifteen thousand dollars (by contrast, the first prize in the U.S. Open Pocket Billiard Tournament held 130 years later was only ten thousand dollars) . . . .

Based on newspaper and magazine articles of the day, as well as the number of billiard licenses issued and tables sold, it appears that billiards was the chief sport for men in the United States from the 1850's until the 1930's.<sup>59</sup>

Quite obviously, Lincoln's involvement with billiards would have been diminished had there been no place for him to play, but the game was apparently quite popular in Springfield as well. The first Springfield City Directory, published in 1857, lists two "Billiard Saloons," the "St. Nicholas, under St. Nicholas Hotel" and "Hickox's, over Fosselmans."<sup>60</sup> Two years later, the second City Directory (for 1859) lists two "Billiard Saloons," but with different owner-operators, "Lvenson, J." (or possibly "Lavenson") and "Smith, J.P."<sup>61</sup> Keeping in mind that many billiards tables of the era were located in inns, taverns, hotels, and in the homes of exceptionally prosperous individuals — who would have had no reason to be listed in the City Directory as billiards establishments — it is highly likely that other tables were in use during the period.<sup>62</sup> Although it remains undocumented, I take it as certain that tables were in Springfield before 1857, as was typical elsewhere in the nation.<sup>63</sup>

In contrast, the White House did not have a table during Lincoln's presidency. The first billiards table in the White House was placed there amid much controversy in 1825, by John Quincy Adams. With his defeat in 1828 at the hands of Andrew Jackson — who made the table a campaign issue by arguing that it showed Adams' aristocratic nature, gambling tendencies, and extravagant use of public funds (which was untrue, as the table was actually a privately-purchased used model) — the table was removed. The White House remained without a billiard table until U.S. Grant's personal table was installed in 1869.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, billiard tables would have been available in any number of public and private venues in Lincoln's Washington.

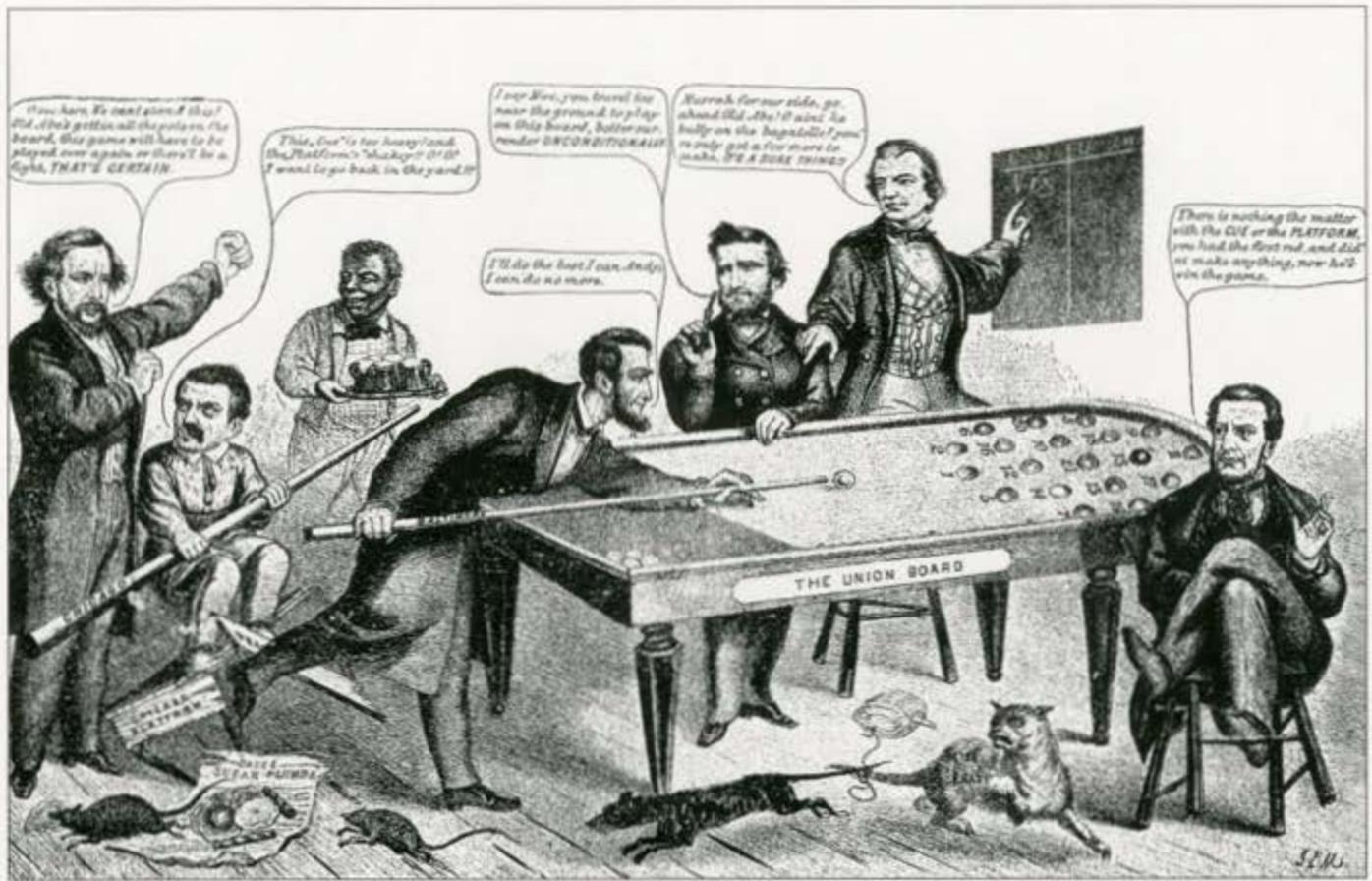
#### **What it Means**

Although the literature on Lincoln as a billiards player is broader than it is deep, the following five conclusions can reasonably be drawn.

1. *Abraham Lincoln was a billiards player.* The evidence leaves no doubt of this. To argue that he was not personally involved in the sport, we would have to ignore the personal recollections of Lincoln's seven-year circuit companion H.C. Whitney, the experiences of his long-time law partner William H. Herndon would have to be set aside, and the testimony of editor E. L. Baker (with whom Lincoln spent time on the day he was nominated for president) and Assistant Attorney General Ashton would have to be refuted. Further, the reader would need to discredit not only the suspicious La Salle account but also the highly plausible reports of matches in Clinton and Atchison.

It is true that the recollections of seemingly all of Lincoln's companions have been criticized, including those of Whitney and Herndon. Whitney, for example, has been accused of exaggerating his personal intimacy with the man to whom he looked up, and Herndon's reputation has likewise been scathed. But in the case of Lincoln's billiards playing they are not alleging anything remarkable about the man. They are not purporting to have some secret inside track to his friendship or confidence, nor are they claiming any particular insight into his motivation or the rationale underlying some great event of state. They are simply saying that Lincoln liked to play this game, as corroborated by Baker, Ashton, and others. In point of fact, if there were any reason for these associates to distort the record of Lincoln's billiards playing, it would be to contend that he did not play, thereby shielding him from the two contradictory stereotypes of the era: that billiards was either an unsavory game of the masses or the elitist pastime of the idle aristocracy!

2. *Abraham Lincoln should rightly be considered a billiards "enthusiast."* According to the dictionary, "enthusiasm" means "absorbing . . . possession of the mind by any interest or pursuit; lively interest." And an "enthusiast" is "one who is filled with enthusiasm for some principle, pursuit, etc."<sup>65</sup> Thus, Lincoln would be considered a billiards "enthusiast" if he possessed a "lively interest" in the sport. The author contrasts the idea with his own view of bowling. When asked to go bowling, I go and always find it enjoy-



A cartoon of the 1864 presidential election shows Lincoln comfortably winning "a little game of bagatelle" against Democratic candidate George McClellan, who finds his cue too heavy and platform too "shaky."

able. Yet, there is no particular interest otherwise: I never encourage nor invite others to go bowling; I neither think nor talk about the game; thus I rarely engage in the sport and when I do it is as an afterthought. I am not a bowling "enthusiast."

By this admittedly subjective standard, Lincoln was a billiards enthusiast at least during the latter part of his life. Whitney says Lincoln used to "seek out" his opponent, suggesting that it was Lincoln who proposed playing billiards, consistent with an active rather than passive attitude toward the game. Baker and Herndon tell us that at a minimum he attempted to engage in the sport during a time of considerable stress, using it as a source of comfort — as it would likely be for an enthusiast — during a period of anxiety. The Urbana account shows the enjoyment he found in play. Lincoln's use of billiards as a metaphor is another sign of personal interest and familiarity with the game. And the Clinton article suggests that many people who were familiar with him knew of his engagement in the sport.

Firm evidence? No. Strongly suggestive? Absolutely. The evidence of Lincoln's billiards playing suggests that his interest was not merely casual but enthusiastic, particularly considering that he was so busy in so many other endeavors.

3. *Lincoln most likely played "billiards" rather than "pool."* "Pool" or "pocket billiards" is a sport involving as many as 16 balls, the object typically being to knock all but the cue ball into pockets. "Billiards" is a game usually involving only three balls, with no pockets, typically played on larger tables, the object being to billiard (i.e. carom) the balls off one another after making contact with a designated number of rails (usually three). Lincoln most likely played billiards. Of the references across the literature reviewed here, all but one cite Lincoln as a billiards player; the only exception is the suspect La Salle article involving F. L. Fake. Both J. H. Ashton and Henry Beardsley's unnamed "old citizen" quote Lincoln as describing what are clearly "billiards" rather than "pool" shots,

involving caroms. It is possible, of course, that all of the sources reviewed here were written by people who were unaware of the distinction and used "billiards" as a generic term meaning any cue sport, but I believe that the probability is much stronger that billiards was Lincoln's game.

4. *Lincoln did not appear to be a particularly skilled player.* The references to Lincoln's game are nearly unanimous in describing it as "awkward." Henry Russel, for example, described the Urbana match as "one of the most awkward and laughable games I ever witnessed." Perhaps the kindest, if backhanded, comment about his game is Whitney's contrast between Lincoln and Lawrence, explaining that "one played about as well as the other." It is obvious from these accounts that the great man almost certainly lacked great billiards technique.

This is not at all surprising given other accounts of his coordination and movements. Whitney called Lincoln "an awkward specimen of manhood" and said that "his legs and arms were dispro-

portionately long, his feet and hands were abnormally large, he was awkward in his gait and actions.<sup>76</sup> He walked "crookedly" and was "infernally awkward" on horseback.<sup>77</sup> As to his ballroom dancing skills, Mary Todd, when allegedly asked, "Well, Mary, did he dance with you the worst way?" is said to have responded, "Yes ... the very worst."<sup>78</sup> So, the contention that Lincoln was awkward — which is certainly not a characteristic associated with billiards success — is nothing new.

But to say he did not appear to be skilled is not to say that he was necessarily a poor player. As an athlete, Lincoln was no slouch: "in any sports that called for skill or muscle he took a lively interest."<sup>79</sup> The accounts of his athleticism as a young man are widely known; he is said to have excelled at throwing things like crow bars and cannon balls, and to have been "obviously proudest of his wrestling talent, which was demonstrated time and again."<sup>80</sup> While billiards and wrestling are quite different sports, strength is an asset in both. As an adult in Springfield, Lincoln played catch, ball, and fives (i.e.

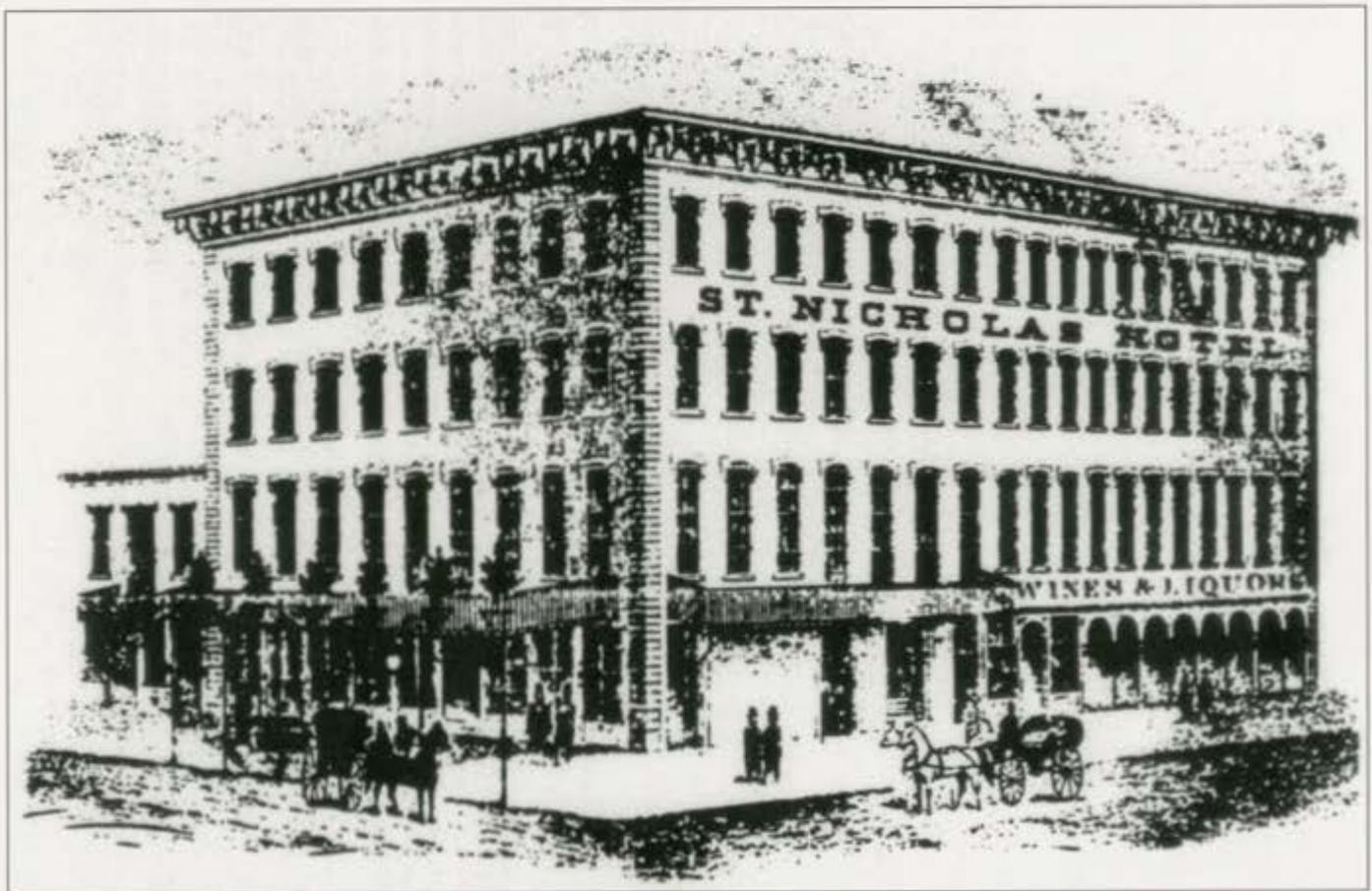
handball), apparently with regularity and interest.<sup>81</sup> Catch and handball are difficult for people without minimal levels of coordination, so Lincoln's fondness for them suggests that his awkward demeanor may not have been as relevant to his billiards skills as might first appear.

Likewise, as all cue-sport enthusiasts know, pool and billiards are games calling for mental toughness, even over physical coordination.<sup>82</sup> In that regard Lincoln stood out. As William Barton relates, "Lincoln's ... frequent feeling of awkwardness, must have made him realize very early that to succeed in life he must cultivate intrinsic mental ... traits."<sup>83</sup> By another account, Lincoln had an unparalleled ability to focus his mind. "No man had greater power of application than he," writes Merrill Peterson. "Once fixing his mind on any subject, nothing could interfere with or disturb him."<sup>84</sup> Or, as Whitney put it, "his mental vision was perfect .... Inside [his mind] all was symmetry and method."<sup>85</sup> Combined with his "great fondness for geometry,"<sup>86</sup> it is possible that Lincoln's mental strength may have at

least partially offset the awkwardness with which he moved, and may have produced better billiards skills than would otherwise be expected.

Admittedly, this is speculative, and the primary point stands — Lincoln's billiards technique is reported to have been awkward. Nevertheless, he was a strong handball player with a remarkable mind, mental toughness, long reach, and a penchant for symmetry. Speculation or not, there have been billiard players who were less well-equipped.

5. *Lincoln's interest in billiards has largely gone unnoticed by Lincoln scholars and historians.* I interviewed a dozen Lincoln scholars for this project, asking each of them two questions: "Have you personally encountered the idea that Lincoln was a billiards player?" and "What, if anything, can you tell me about the idea that Lincoln may have played billiards?" Nine said they knew nothing of it (my favorite response was, "I don't know, did he?"), two said they could recall something somewhere but weren't certain (although



The St. Nicholas Hotel, Springfield, Illinois. The 1857 and 1866 city business directories listed it as the home of a billiard saloon. (Photo courtesy of Tim R. Miller)

*Tim Miller, a billiards enthusiast, began his study of Lincoln's participation in the game partly because he hoped to find that Lincoln shared his interest. As columnist Eric Zorn notes, politicians have traditionally claimed that Lincoln shared their interests and beliefs, with far less justification than Dr. Miller. This column originally appeared during the political convention season of 1996. — GJP*

## Still Trying to Get Right With Lincoln

By Eric Zorn  
Chicago Tribune

"Tonight," said Bob Dole early last month to the Republican delegates in San Diego, "this hall belongs to the party of Lincoln."

"Today," said Ted Kennedy two weeks later to Democrats in Chicago, "in everything but name, the Democratic Party is the party of Abraham Lincoln."

One week after that, GOP vice-presidential candidate Jack Kemp told a South Side campaign rally, "I believe with all my heart that the party of Lincoln will not be whole again until blacks and African-Americans come home to the party of Lincoln."

On and on this goes, an earnest game we'll call "Steal the Stovepipe Hat" after a phrase coined in the 1950's by Lincoln biographer David Donald, emeritus professor of history at Harvard University. What Donald observed then is just as true now: Politicians in America shouldn't even bother kissing the first baby until they stake some claim to being a political heir of the martyred savior of the Union and emancipator of the slaves, Honest Abe.

The late U.S. Senator Everett Dirksen called this quasi-religious obligation "get(ting) right with Lincoln," an expression Donald borrowed for the title of an essay in which he traced the practice back to the post-Civil War era, which saw "a ghoulis tugging at Lincoln's shroud" as Democrats

and Republicans attempted to identify their Reconstruction programs with the slain president's likely wishes.

"He was a man of great character who was on the right side of history," said Daniel Weinberg, owner of the Abraham Lincoln Book Shop in Chicago. "He was also a common person who embodied our national aspirations."

Yet at the same time, Lincoln was a somewhat enigmatic figure personally and ideologically. This, as David Donald, Mark Neely of St. Louis University — who won a Pulitzer Prize for his book on Lincoln — and others have pointed out, has left him vulnerable to adoption by all manner of partisans.

The endorsement of the spirit of Lincoln has been claimed by those supporting the New Deal, those blasting the New Deal, by integrationists and segregationists, by prohibitionists, Communists, vegetarians, foes of tobacco and by those on both sides of abortion, affirmative action and most other big issues. The core reasoning is, "Lincoln was a righteous thinker, I am a righteous thinker, therefore Lincoln must have thought as I do."

"Lincoln would find Indy car racing absurd, but he would have been a big fan of the NASCAR circuit," said Gerald Prokopowicz, satirizing the sorts of judgments some ask him to make in his role as historian at The Lincoln Museum in Fort Wayne, Ind. "It's good when people look to history for guidance," he added, "but if they're hoping to find what Lincoln would have done or thought about particular contemporary issues, they're not going to find those kinds of answers readily."

Times have changed, after all. Lincoln was more or less a big government guy in his day — before he helped form the

Republican Party, he was a Whig, then the party of big government, compared to the Democrat — and he made his mark in history leading an enormous exercise of federal power over the states in the Civil War. His famous quote, "The legitimate object of government is to do for a community of people whatever they need to have done, but cannot do for themselves," sounds downright Hillaryesque.

Yet Lucas Morel, a political scientist at John Brown University in Arkansas who writes frequently on Lincoln, argued that Lincoln's overall legacy, in context, is of self-governance. Therefore, he said, "The Republican Party remains the party of Lincoln both in heritage and in principle."

That's almost half right, said Northwestern University Lincoln expert David Zarefsky, dean of the School of Speech.

Though Lincoln did espouse self-reliance, today's "Democrats best reflect Lincoln's legacy with regard to an active use of government for the public good and with regard to respect for diversity," he said. "I would give the nod to the Democrats as being closer to the Lincoln legacy."

Most experts interviewed declined to award the stovepipe hat to either party — "a ridiculous question," said retired University of Virginia historian Merrill Peterson, author of *Lincoln in American Memory* — and several pointed out that Lincoln himself would have been amused at this game of dress-up.

Two things for sure, though: No party today is fully worthy of him, and were he still alive, he would be an avid reader and admirer of my columns.

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both did in fact find the references), and one had heard the question before, but not the answer. Several pointed out that playing billiards was consistent with their understanding of Lincoln and the world in which he lived, particularly life on the circuit.<sup>77</sup> None of them, however, had a definitive answer. As Lincoln collector Frank Williams put it, "he's supposed to have

played the 'Jews harp' too, but no one's ever looked."<sup>78</sup>

My point is not to call attention to what these scholars do not know; they have undoubtedly been exploring more meaningful and substantive questions of this great life. My topic is considerably more modest in scope. More than once, my inquiry produced chuckles on the

other end of the telephone. Since this research deals with the minutia of Lincoln's life, there is no reason to expect scholars with more substantive interests to have encountered the idea. But it is worth noting that until now, Lincoln scholars have not generally acknowledged that billiards played a role in Lincoln's life.

## Conclusion

One of my earliest phone calls to a Lincoln scholar requesting an interview resulted in the inquisitive response "Why do you care?" I am surprised more people didn't ask that question.

Millions of people around the world share the blessing of a love of billiards, pool, snooker, and the other cue sports. For us, the cue sports are a gift more than a game, a purpose more than a play time, a means more than an end. John Grissim subtitled his book on billiards "The Search for Higher Truth on the Green Felt." Corny as it will sound to the unindoctrinated, I am confident that he meant it literally. By one account, the origin of all ball and stick games is in religious ceremony.<sup>29</sup> For some 500 years the cue sports have held the fascination of people across time, geography and culture. The cue sports are a vehicle to beauty and meaning. At their best, they bring symmetry, perspective, and insight to those of us who have received this gift of joy. Billiards enthusiasts want to know the complete history of our sport ... and we want to know if Lincoln was "one of us."

I also care because as a student of the American presidency who lives and works in the hometown of arguably our greatest president, I would like to know more of the "real" Lincoln. After three years of research, I am more baffled than ever. I now see that there is a perplexing duality to Lincoln. In the preface to his Lincoln biography Whitney explained that after Lincoln's death, Dr. J. G. Holland spoke with Lincoln's neighbors and others who knew him well, for the purpose of determining "what manner of man he was." What Holland found, Whitney reported, was

the queer result that the more he extended his inquiries and the deeper his research, the more entangled and obscure became his knowledge, and the more hopeless the difficulty of gaining any intelligent and satisfactory data upon which to base an analysis of his subject ... he found out that Mr. Lincoln was an able man, and also that his ability was meager: that he was a profound, and likewise a superficial, lawyer: that he was a Christian and also an atheist: that he possessed a refined, and likewise a coarse, nature: that he was a profound dialectician, and that he was

very shallow, and so on. On no one trait, did even those who saw him daily, for twenty years, agree."<sup>30</sup>

Herndon likewise sought the input of many who knew Lincoln, but found that no two "agree in their estimate of him. The fact was that he rarely showed more than one aspect of himself to one man. He opened himself to men in different directions."<sup>31</sup> Over 125 years later, with all the scholarly work that has transpired, Merrill Peterson can still write of the impossibility of producing a definitive picture of Lincoln:

Paradoxically, the more [scholars] wrote about Lincoln the more blurred, confused, and problematic the image became. It almost seemed as if the *modus operandi* was to disagree. ... All the work devoted to illuminating and elucidating particular subjects tended to obscure the forest for the trees.<sup>32</sup>

## Acknowledgments

Cullom Davis (Lincoln Legal Papers) showed me where to begin and offered advice along the way. Tom Schwartz (Illinois State Historian) spent approximately eight hours with me, lending his expertise on Lincoln and Lincoln resources and coaching me on the vagaries of Lincoln research. Bill Beard (Lincoln Legal Papers) plunged headlong into the project, not only helping me make sense of the rich original data bases available for Lincoln researchers, but also dedicating the time to personally comb the Herndon papers in a fruitful search for evidence of Lincoln's billiard playing. The assistance of these scholars was invaluable and is deeply appreciated.

Other scholars readily joined in as well. Rodney Davis (Knox College), David H. Donald (Harvard University), Michael Burlingame (Connecticut College), Gerald Prokopowicz (The Lincoln Museum), and Mike Shamos (Billiard Archive) shared their rich data bases with me. John Hoffmann (University of Illinois at Champaign/Urbana) spent an afternoon reviewing Carl Sandburg's notes in support of my project. John Y. Simon (Southern Illinois University at Carbondale), Wayne Temple (Illinois State Archives), Mark Plummer (Illinois State University), Frank Williams (Lincoln

Forum and U.S. Grant Association), Richard Current (Lincoln Forum), and Mike Panozzo (Billiards Digest) all shared their opinions and offered varying degrees of guidance at the outset to the project; the late James Hickey (former Illinois State Historian) was also helpful.

It ought to be possible to assemble this complete image, but it isn't.

So why do I care? I care because as historians and others interested in the presidents set out to unlock the mysteries of their subjects, they need whole and complete sets of information with which to work. In this instance — happily for me — the issue has to do with a recreational interest that I share with a great man and president. This work is yet another tree (and a very young one, at that), to return to the metaphor of Peterson. But it is a tree which until now was a mere seed, below the surface and out of sight. Nothing I have written will define the broad forest, of course. Still, by uncovering this, the next tree, we are one small sapling closer to seeing the parameters of the woods, even if we can never truly know the forest itself.

That's enough for me ...

I received help from many sources in tracing the newspaper articles on file with the Illinois State Historical Library. The author of one article, Ms. Bazy Miller (La Salle News Tribune), was found to have a retirement home in the West. For the others, thanks to officials of the Atchison (Kansas) County Historical Society (Ms. Anne C. Grego-Nagel) and the Kansas State Historical Society (Dr. Virgil Dean); the Champaign County Historical Archives of the Urbana Free Library (Dr. Frederick Schlipf and Ms. Jean Gordon); the La Salle County Historical Society (Ms. Susan Martyn); the Springfield Lincoln Library (Mr. Ed Russo); and the staff of the Illinois State Historical Library and Reading Room.

Ms. Kathryn Fyke served as Research Assistant and Ms. Ruth Mullenix (both of the University of Illinois at Springfield) served as original manuscript editor; their assistance has been invaluable.

## Notes

47. W. W. Woody, *Buddy Hall: Rags to Rifleman, Then What?* (Lebanon, Tenn.: Huckleberry Publishing, 1995), XVI. Much has been written of the "deceptive art" of hustling in the pool and sports worlds. Three of the classics from the cue sports are: Danny McGoorty and Robert Byrne, *McGoorty: A Billiard Hustler's Life* (Secaucus, N.J.: Citadel Press, 1972); Willie Mosconi and Stanley Cohen, *Willie's Game: An Autobiography* (New York: Macmillan, 1993); David McCumber, *Playing Off the Rail: a Pool Hustler's Journey* (New York: Random House, 1996). From the world of baseball see Bill Veeck and Ed Linn, *The Hustler's Handbook* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1965).
48. Miers, *Lincoln Day by Day*, 2:231-34.
49. *Ibid.*
50. Miers, *Lincoln Day By Day*, 2:225.
51. Of course, the La Salle article does not contend that the Ottawa speech was part of the Lincoln-Douglas Debates. While it is the case that Lincoln and Douglas did have other joint speeches during their careers, it is highly unlikely that they did so in Ottawa in October, 1858. This was during the same time period as their famous debates, in a town they had previously met and debated in, yet is unnoticed by Miers, *Lincoln Day by Day*. In fact, such a joint speech would have amounted to an eighth great debate.
52. Bazy Miller, personal communication to the author, September, 1996.
53. Miers, *Lincoln Day by Day*, 2:181.
54. John Grissim, *Billiards: Hustlers & Heroes, Legends & Lies and The Search for Higher Truth on the Green Felt* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), 38.
55. John Grissim, personal communication to the author, September, 1996.
56. Thomas F. Schwartz, interview with the author, Springfield, Ill., August 29, 1996.
57. J. Hubert Ashton, "A Glimpse of Lincoln in 1864," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 69 (February 1976): 68-69. Special thanks to David H. Donald for his assistance with this citation.
58. So popular, in fact, that Lincoln is reported to have fired a General Foster during the Civil War over a matter of billiards. Benjamin F. Butler reported, "In November, 1863, I received an order to proceed to Fort Monroe and resume command of the Department of Virginia and North Carolina, relieving General Foster. En route through Washington I called upon the President and thanked him for this mark of confidence, and he said: 'Yes, General, I believe in you, but not in shooting deserters. As a commander of a department, you can now shoot them for yourself. But let me advise you not to amuse yourself by playing billiards with a rebel officer who is a prisoner of war.' And it was thus that I learned one of the causes for General Foster's being relieved, which was for playing billiards with General Fitz Hugh Lee, then a prisoner of war." See Benjamin F. Butler in Allen Thorndike Rice (ed.) *Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln By Distinguished Men of His Time* (New York: North American Publishing, 1886), 145. This author is presently exploring this matter in more detail.
59. Shamos, *Pool*, 23-25.
60. *Springfield City Directory*, 1857-58 (S.J. Jameson, 1857), 56, 89.
61. *Springfield City Directory*, 1859, 14. An interesting note here is that while the billiard saloon in the St. Nicholas Hotel is listed in the 1857-58 City Directory, it is not listed in the 1859 Directory; The Billiard Saloon in the St. Nicholas reappears in the City Directory for 1866.
62. As in the modern era, a tavern with one or two tables almost always considers itself a tavern rather than a billiards facility. Similarly, a modern bus terminal with a darts machine will be advertised as a bus terminal (with no mention of darts), but the machine is there nevertheless.
63. Ed Russo, Springfield City Historian, explains that "Springfield thought of itself as a city, rather than a village, in the 1840's ... I would say if it's likely there were billiards tables in 'the Philadelphias', they were here in Springfield, too." Interview held at the Lincoln Library, Springfield, Illinois, September 27, 1996.
64. William G. Allman (Assistant Curator, The White House), personal communication to the author, June 6, 1994. For a more complete and delightful discussion of the politics of the billiards table in the Adams-Jackson dispute, see Stein and Rubino, *Billiard Encyclopedia*, 143-50.
65. C.L. Barnhart (ed.), *The American College Dictionary* (New York: Random House, 1967), 401.
66. Whitney, *Life on the Circuit with Lincoln*, 40, 55.
67. Emanuel Hertz (ed.) *Lincoln Talks: A Biography in Anecdote* (New York: Viking Press, 1939), 89; Harold Holzer, *Dear Mr. Lincoln: Letters to the President* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1993), 148.
68. Ray B. Browne (ed.) *Lincoln-Lore: Lincoln in the Popular Mind* (Bowling Green, Oh.: Popular Press, 1974), 266.
69. Alexander K. McClure, "Abe" *Lincoln's Yarns and Stories* (Philadelphia: International Publishing, 1901), 466. This phrasing is from a longer account in Herndon and Weik, *Herndon's Lincoln*, 1:117, 125-26.
70. See Suppiger, *The Intimate Lincoln*, 43-45.
71. Wayne Temple, interview conducted in Springfield, Illinois, November 12, 1996. Also, see McClure, "Abe Lincoln's Yarns" 271 and Emanuel Hertz, *The Hidden Lincoln* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1940), 380, 382, 384.
72. Much has been written on this theme in the cue sports. See, for instance Richard D. Smith, "It's Mental — Self Confidence," *Pool and Billiard Magazine*, November, 1993.
73. William Barton, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1925) 1:428.
74. Merrill D. Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 132.
75. Whitney, *Life on the Circuit with Lincoln*, 121-22.
76. *Ibid.*, 69.
77. Although the point has not been very fully developed in these pages, the idea of a billiards table as center stage to Lincoln's story-telling is consistent with both Lincoln's nature and life in 1850's Illinois. See Hawke (ed.), *Herndon's Lincoln*, 113-14; Browne (ed.), *Lincoln-Lore*, 65; Ida M. Tarbell, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: S.S. McClure, 1899) 1:241-46.
78. Frank Williams, interview conducted November 10, 1996.
79. Stein and Rubino, *The Billiard Encyclopedia*, 9-46.
80. Whitney, *Life on the Circuit with Lincoln*, 10.
81. Herndon and Weik, *Herndon's Lincoln*, 3:582.
82. Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, 332.

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