



Lincoln Lore

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Lincoln Comic Books

Editor's Note: During the summer months of 1965 the Editor had on his staff Miss Ann Plogsther of Fort Wayne, Indiana, a recent honor graduate of Wellesley who was employed to assist in a special project. Before she terminated her position she made a comprehensive outline study of the Lincoln comic books in the Lincoln Library. This article is based on her thorough research. R. G. M.

As it would be expected, the life of Abraham Lincoln has been related through the medium of the comic book. While many comic books pertaining to the Civil War or the period of his administration mention the Sixteenth President, only three deal with Lincoln exclusively. All three were originally published in 1958, with later editions of the one published by the United States Information Agency appearing in 1959.

Two of the comic books bear the imprint of the Dell Publishing Company and *Classics Illustrated* while the third one was widely distributed by the United States Information Agency. This latter publication bears the cover title "Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865)" and appears in many different languages. Although there is an English version, this comic book was not intended for distribution in the United States. In addition to the English version, the Lincoln Library-Museum of the Lincoln National Life Foundation has the identical publication in Arabic, Urdu, Indonesian, Italian, Nepalese, Singhalese, Thai, Vietnamese, and in the Indian dialects of Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Marathi and Tamil. This publication has reached millions of readers the world over.

The three comic books were published in anticipation of the unusual interest that would be created by the celebration of the sesquicentennial year of Lincoln's birth in 1959. These comic books are interesting as a reflection of the modern popular image of Lincoln, and they compare in many details with sermons and Sunday School tracts that were so widely published

at the turn of the century. Lincoln is less effeminate and more rough and tough than some of the Christian characters of Biblical history, but he is not revealed to have acquired a single vice or even a fault.

One can also read into these comic books evidence of the modern tendency to protect children from fear and insecurity by glossing over the unhappy incidents of Lincoln's life, especially the death of his mother. Yet these same tragic events were the major theme of the early children's books about Lincoln. This was true also of other juvenile literature of the period, particularly the McGuffey's Readers, which thrived on melancholy and death for children.

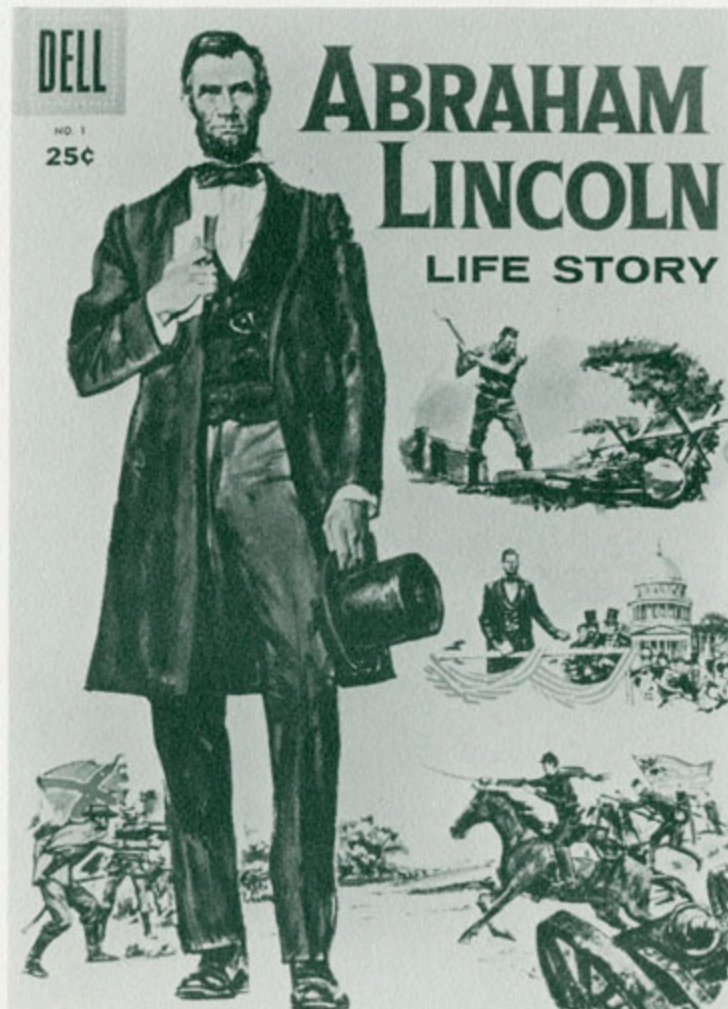
The *Classics Illustrated* Comic (page 4) merely mentions in a caption that "when Abe was nine, his mother died" and quickly moves on to the arrival of Sarah Johnston Lincoln, the good step-mother. Later, (page 16) Eddie Lincoln's death is similarly mentioned along with Willie's birth.

The U S I A comic book which was obviously intended for older foreign readers devotes one page to Nancy's death, showing the building of the coffin, while the *Dell Comic*, which likewise had to appeal to its adult readers, dwells on the details of the "milk sick" as it killed the family's relatives and the mother, Nancy Hanks. The *Dell* publication also later describes in some detail the deaths of Ann Rutledge, Eddie and Willie.

The comic book editors did not feel any compulsion to tread softly with the President's assassination,

because most children and foreign adults had already heard about the national tragedy and were acquainted with many of the details of Lincoln's death.

Because a long story must be simplified and shortened in a comic book, the incidents are shown in an almost symbolic shorthand, and transitions from scene to scene



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

The *Dell* comic book designed with an unusual regard for history to instruct both the child and the adult.



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

The *Classics Illustrated* comic book designed for the typical reader.

are often abrupt. The three comics are based on distinctly different sources; this is apparent from the varying accuracy of historical detail, the choice of incidents to be included, and the attitude toward certain controversial parts of the Lincoln story. To some extent the comics illustrate the existence of a very definite Lincoln iconography; certain traditions of pictorial and verbal presentations are faithfully followed, and if either picture or words are missing they must be supplied as best the artist can. Thus, the incident of Tad riding a chair in the White House, pulled by goats, appears in the *Classics Illustrated* (page 31) with the chair improbably balanced on two legs; in the *Dell* comic the chair more plausibly lies flat on the floor. Contemporary photographs of individuals and locations are a frequent source, but strangely enough, well-known paintings of events in Lincoln's life seldom appear. The main exception is the page "Study" in the U S I A comic, which reproduces Eastman Johnson's famous painting of Lincoln by the fireside.

The format of the U S I A production is the most puzzling of the comics. Instead of the usual frames of illustrations with captions or "balloons" the narrative is presented in a single large full-page illustration facing a paragraph of type under one headline word to sum up the theme (e.g. Destiny, America, Humanity, Heritage). Perhaps the explanation for this word format is that it would more easily lend itself to translation into foreign languages. The style of the pictures in the U S I A publication is more professional and slick, than is to be found in the other two comics, and the prose is too uninteresting and propaganda filled for children. The message seems definitely aimed against Communism: "Abraham

Lincoln seemed destined to become an illiterate farm worker," "his love for the common man," "battlefields that were once peaceful farms," "Abraham Lincoln is the beloved symbol of humanity and democracy," "his faith in people, in freedom, in the goodness of man is the very core of America's creed." The comic concludes with the implication that Lincoln's singular virtues and achievements are typical of every aspect of the American way of life.

There are also obvious references to "his essential humaneness," "his wisdom and humanity," "as a humanitarian and commander in chief," "his depth of thought and feeling, his honesty and gentle humor and kindness." As to the Civil War, the U S I A publication states that the "Humanity-loving Lincoln was grief-stricken. Not only did the slavery he despised continue, but his fellow Americans were fighting each other." Piety and home life are also mentioned: "the wholesomeness of family love," "Lincoln prayed deeply for peace," "prayers of thanksgiving [for the Union Victory] were offered up in churches all over the land." Lincoln had some virtue to suit everyone: "In addition to being a clever story teller and debater, he was an ardent student of government."

The U S I A comic appears to be aimed at a European audience, although the language does not always seem simple and clear enough for large groups of foreign readers. Apparently, translators encountered no difficulties. The stress on education especially suggests this European appeal, and the illustration of the schoolroom ("School") has a European flavor, despite the propaganda touch of the United States map the students are studying. The teacher, in his coat, vest and lorgnette, resembles a German professor more than a pioneer schoolmaster. Then, too, the physical characteristics of many of the people seem decidedly German or Dutch; Sarah Johnston Lincoln, in one scene ("Question"), lacks only wooden shoes. Even the scenery suggests the Swiss Alps. The frail figures of the children, especially Abraham, are more graceful and pathetic than accurate. There is a fairy-tale quality to the clean crisp clothing, the cozy cabin, the lush foliage, and the beautiful sunsets.

Historical accuracy does not seem to have been a concern at all. Illustrations and text imply that Abraham was older than Sarah, when in truth he was the Lincolns' second child. The only authentic facial features are Lincoln's; not even Mary Todd Lincoln ("Assassination") or Stephen A. Douglas ("Debates") are reasonable likenesses. But the grossest inaccuracy of all, and one which could serve no propaganda purpose whatever, concerns Ann Rutledge. Opposite the heading "Romance" are shown Lincoln and a young lady in a garden by moonlight. Presumably, she is Ann Rutledge, but her ruffled ball gown and elaborately curled coiffure do not suit a frontier girl. The text states, "Lincoln had fallen in love with Ann Rutledge. But she died shortly before they were to be married." The implication is that they not only were publicly engaged but had even set a definite date for the wedding. "Several years later, while still a struggling lawyer, he met Mary Todd. They were married in 1843 (1842)." There is no suggestion that he loved Mary Todd, and the portrait of her in the assassination scene suggests an obese, self-centered, superficial woman. Could the United States Information Agency have based its comic entirely on one Herndon-oriented biography without doing any further research?

The *Classics Illustrated* comic follows the usual comic book format with small illustrations, captions and "balloons." The story is far more detailed and accurate, and authentic features are included, though awkwardly. There is no interest in propaganda for America, or in upholding Lincoln as a paragon of virtue for small boys to follow; rather, the plot is more of a pastiche of incidents and sayings very loosely connected into some chronological order.

While it seems unlikely that the writer or editor of a comic book would involve himself in any elaborate historical research, it has not been possible to find one single

source which covers all the incidents in roughly the same order such as the incident of the young Lincoln giving his fish to a soldier (page 2); retrieving his dog (page 6), his jump through the trapdoor (page 13), bowling (page 15), the domestic incidents (page 17), the joke about becoming President (page 5), Congressman Washburn (page 25), and specific pardons (pages 28 and 33). The physical appearance of the characters is copied as far as possible from photographs. Sarah Johnston Lincoln wears the cap of her photograph (page 4). Mary Todd resembles one of the Katherine Helm portraits (page 14). A drawing of Lincoln and Tad (page 31) reproduces Ostendorf No. 93, and in many other cases Lincoln's face is awkwardly but exactly copied from one of the photographs. Throughout this comic, Lincoln's hair is always shown as a light brown or red brown, in contrast with the usual black. The appearance of Douglas (page 21), Lincoln's children (page 29), the Tom Thumbs (page 35), Grant (pages 37 and 41), Lee (page 42), Booth (page 44), and the Cabinet (page 43) are correct. The ruins of Richmond (page 41), the box at Ford's Theatre (pages 44-45), and the casket (page 46) are also based on photographs.

Sometimes a tableau is very abruptly and awkwardly thrust into the continuity of the story, as when Young Abe, having killed his first turkey, pronounces, "I reckon I don't enjoy killing a living thing. I aim to avoid it after this (page 3)," or when Lincoln is suddenly shown standing before the window of his home, casually commenting, "You can fool some of the people . . . (page 18)." Certainly, the detail and accuracy of this comic make it far superior to the United States Information Agency publication.

The *Dell Comic* is the most impressive and the most expensive (25¢) of the lot. The absence of "balloons" and complete reliance on captions avoids much of the awkwardness of the *Classics Illustrated* book, and the drawings are more carefully and clearly done. Three digres-

sions on the customs and history of the period are unique. They follow:

- Transportation
- Household Equipment
- Clothing
- Food and Cookery
- Architecture
- Wild Life In the Backwoods
- Backwoods Fun
- Lincoln's Store
- Tools and Equipment Familiar To Lincoln
- Town House Furnishings
- Genteel Clothing
- Political Leaders
- Fine Carriages
- City Lighting
- Industrial Progress — Inventions
- Town Houses and Federal Buildings

The history and customs of the period increase the educational value of the *Dell Comic*. The extraordinary accuracy and detail of the text can be traced to Carl Sandburg's mammoth biography, with many passages taken verbatim from the book. The accuracy of the illustrations can only have come from a careful study of photographs and documents. With as many faces as possible based on photographs, they are skillfully incorporated into the scenes. Especially striking in this respect are the pictures of the Lincoln casket, the Springfield home draped in mourning and the temporary tomb, all grouped under the heading: "Lincoln's Last Journey." Then, too, the pictures of Booth firing the fatal shot and the breaking of his leg, complete with action lines, are especially vivid. The sequence of Lincoln's prophetic dream of his assassination is drawn very delicately and really gives one the impression of a dream. The most glaring inaccuracy of the *Dell Comic* is that the women's dresses and coiffures of the 1830s to the 1860s actually look more like the 1890s.

As one would expect, these comic books are printed on cheap paper, with the pages fastened with glue or staples. Because of this impermanent construction, these books will one day likely become bibliographical rarities. Have you secured copies of all three for your collection? It may be later than you think.

Lincoln Compared With Washington

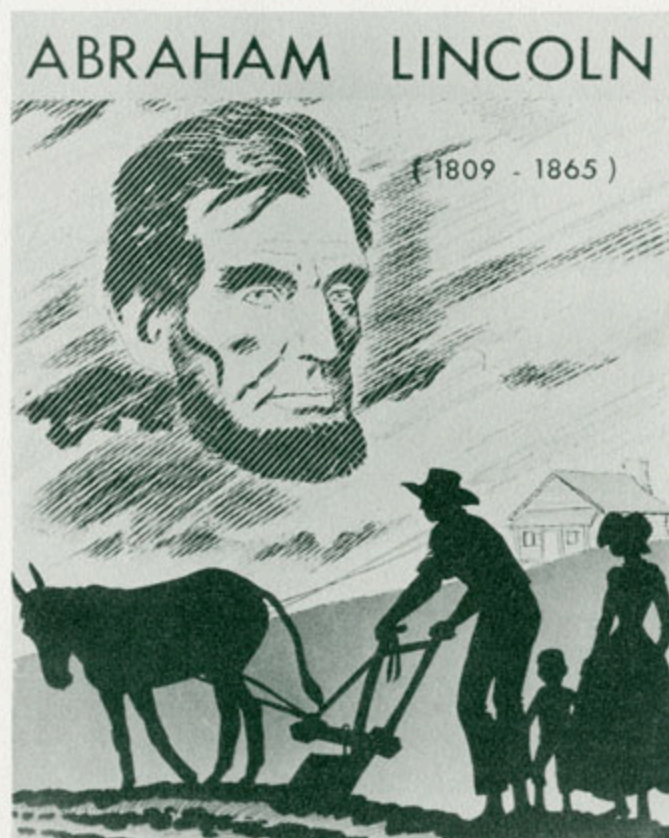
(Continued from February 1966 issue)

"When history crystallizes that the events of a century shall be recorded in a sentence, then will the administrations of Washington and Lincoln be the epochal marks of this age. The former founded a republic, the latter was the great emancipator of the nineteenth century." —C. E. Pratt

"Lincoln, more than any man except Washington, came forward to lead successfully the grand advance of human rights and progress, growing out of the development of the new continent, America." —W. B. Hazen

"Lincoln—the statesman, the emancipator, the martyr, whose services to his country will be remembered with those of Washington." —Cyrus W. Field

"He [Lincoln] had not much of the serene and contemplative gravity which belongs to our traditional Washington; none of the imperious personality of Jackson; none of the winsome and chivalric dash of Henry Clay; none of the ponderous eloquence of Webster, and but little of that polite learning which gives high ornament to literature and statesmanship; but he had a subtle and comprehensive intellect, wonderful power of intuition, and a transparency of soul through which the truth shone



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

The United States Information Agency Comic book designed for the foreign adult reader.

into affairs and gave them an interpretation almost divine." —Alexander H. Rice

"The name of Abraham Lincoln will ever stand in history and in the hearts of his own countrymen beside the name of Washington." —A. A. E. Taylor

"Washington was the Father, and Lincoln the Savior, of his Country." —H. L. Dawes

"I believe that, under the providence of God, he was, next to Washington, the greatest instrument for the preservation of the Union and the integrity of the country; and this was brought about chiefly through his strict and faithful adherence to the Constitution of his country." —Peter Cooper

"In the revolutionary struggle George Washington was raised up to be our great leader in the achievement of national independence; and in the rebellion Abraham Lincoln was placed in the Presidential chair to preserve the Union from dissolution and destruction. Each of these great men seems to have been chosen of God for his special work, and the names of Washington and Lincoln will forever be united in the memory and love of the American people." —I. W. Andrews

"Take him altogether, Abraham Lincoln was one of the most remarkable men this country has produced, and will be revered in the future more than any other President except Washington." —David D. Porter

"The Martyr President seals with his blood the emancipation of a race, and grasping four millions of broken coffles, ascends to the bosom of his God, thus consecrating the land of Washington as the home of the emigrant and the asylum of the oppressed of every clime and of all races of men." —Galusha A. Grow

"In public life Lincoln was a second Washington, and his memory occupies a corresponding position in the hearts of his loyal countrymen." —Richard Smith

"The name of Abraham Lincoln will stand forever, as the second in our history, following immediately that of George Washington." —Parke Godwin

"As honest, unselfish and patriotic as Washington, he was his superior as an orator and logician, and dealt successfully with larger and graver matters." —Willard Warner

"Mr. Lincoln, next to Washington, is the great central figure of our history in another generation." —Samuel F. Miller

"My sentiments of the life and services of Abraham Lincoln are, that he was a big-headed, big-hearted man—a man of destiny, sent, like Washington, to perform a great moral and political mission." —H. M. Rector

"It has not fallen to the lot of any American since Washington to be so loved and lamented by the whole



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

This card containing a photograph of Abraham Lincoln and a photograph of a painting of George Washington was offered for sale by A. E. Alden, 59-65 Arcade, Providence, R. I.

nation, without distinction of race, section, or party." —John Avery

"I look upon Abraham Lincoln as a special instrument of God (as was Washington) to meet a fearful crisis in our country's history." —Howard Crosby

"Washington, the Father of Liberty and the Founder of the Republic; Lincoln, the Father of Freedom and the Preserver of the Republic:—these might not improperly be distinguishing titles of these distinguished men." —E. C. Pomeroy

"The charm that lingers about the name of the immortal Washington as the Father of our Country, will also surround that of honest Abraham Lincoln as its Saviour." —Andrew Boyd

1864 Presidential Campaign Pamphlet

A recent acquisition for our Lincoln library is a "Speech of General (Irvin) McDowell at Sacramento, California, 3d November, 1864." This item does not appear in the Monaghan (Lincoln) or Cowan (California) bibliographies.

In this speech, delivered four days before the Presidential election, General McDowell attempted to give his audience "some additional reasons for your choice of Lincoln." Describing himself as "a man with eighteen brass buttons on his coat and several stars on his shoulder," the general made a vigorous political attack against General George B. McClellan who was seeking the Presidency on the Democratic ticket.

In reading the twelve page McDowell address, one will conclude that this publication is more of an anti-McClellan item than a pro-Lincoln publication, yet the general provided his audience with "a faithful analysis of General McClellan and a faithful sketch of Mr. Lincoln" for the purpose of influencing the voter to resist "any opposition to our national authority."



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation
Columbia's Noblest Sons