



Lincoln Lore

August, 1976

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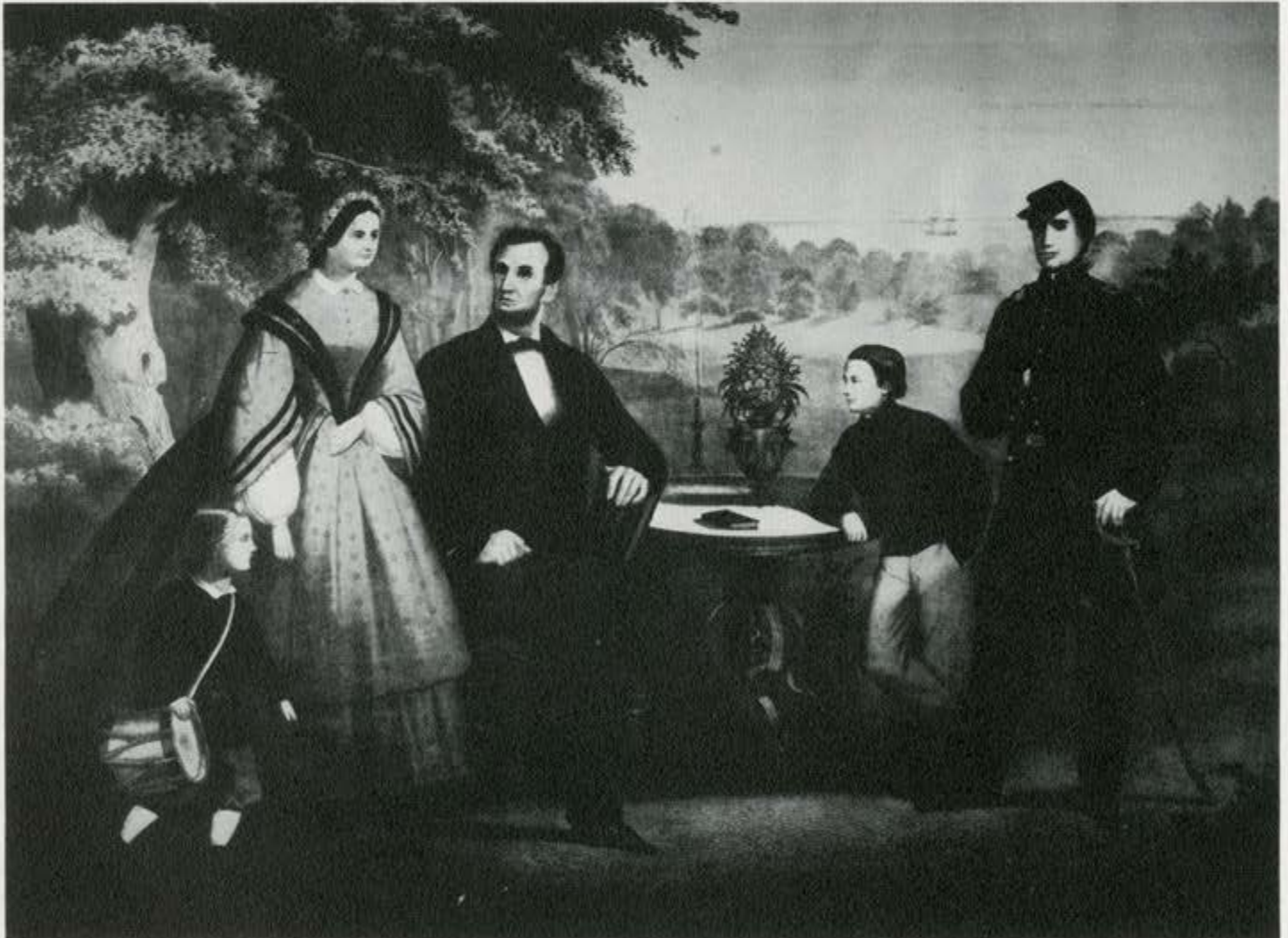
Number 1662

LINCOLN HISTORIOGRAPHY: NEWS AND NOTES

There is big news in the field. All signs indicate that there are a half-dozen important Lincoln books in preparation. The one nearest completion is scheduled to be published on Lincoln's birthday in 1977. Others are in lesser stages of progress, one being merely in the stage of "contemplation." Should they all appear in the near future, however, we will be confronted with the greatest body of Lincoln literature since the Civil War Centennial. In fact, one is tempted to see in all this the definite earmarks of a revival—of still another "Great Awakening" in the Lincoln field.

It would be wrong to speculate at length on the causes for the revival before we even see the books. But one thing does seem certain. The renewed interest is not a function of fresh

discoveries of important documents which were previously lost or hidden. There have been no major documentary discoveries in almost three decades. The new books are more probably signs of the times. Many Americans have a feeling that an era of American history has closed. We can already conjure up some feeling of the remoteness and historicity of the decade of the 1960s. We often feel that the political and economic questions of the 1970s cannot be answered by any of the programs suggested by the political parties since the Great Depression. Even the religious, cultural, and artistic climates seem different. We live in a new era, and each era has come to grips with the figure of Abraham Lincoln as the supreme symbol of the American past. We may be getting a



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

FIGURE 1. This piece of White House Lincolniana was lithographed by George Spohn from a painting by Anton Hohenstein and published by Joseph Hoover of Philadelphia.

new Lincoln for a new age.

The first book to appear should be Stephen B. Oates's one-volume biography, *With Malice Toward None: A Life of Abraham Lincoln*, to be published by Harper & Row next February. Professor Oates teaches history at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and is famous for writing biographies, most notably of abolitionist John Brown. Hints of what is to come in his biography have appeared in recent issues of two popular historical magazines. "Wilderness Fugue: Lincoln's Journey to Manhood on the Kentucky and Indiana Frontier" appeared in *The American West*, XIII (March/April, 1976), 4-13. It is an extremely well-written and lively reconstruction of Lincoln's pre-adult years, based on the latest secondary sources but not lingering to discuss disputed interpretations or to weigh controverted pieces of evidence. It does not glorify the limitations of Lincoln's frontier environment, it stresses his estrangement from his father, and it shows a special interest in Lincoln's inner life, noting a preoccupation "with death, with madness, with the bizarre and macabre."

The theme persists in "Why should the spirit of mortal be proud?" (*American History Illustrated*, XI [April, 1976], 32-41). Again, Oates's discussion of Lincoln's law career is based substantially on the latest available treatments by specialists in the field and dwells (in his customary sparkling style) on familiar and famous cases from Lincoln's practice, *Hurd vs. The Rock Island Bridge Co.*, and the Duff Armstrong murder case.

G. S. Boritt's long-awaited *Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream* is at a press now, but no date for its appearance has yet been announced. Harvard's Oscar Handlin is writing a biography of Lincoln for the Library of American Biography series (published by Little, Brown), of which he is the general editor. Professor Harold Hyman of Rice University has been assigned a volume on Lincoln in a series on American Presidents published by the University of Kansas Press. Professor Don E. Fehrenbacher of Stanford University is working on a book about Abraham Lincoln and the Constitution. Northwestern's George M. Fredrickson, currently at work on a book on race relations, is considering a book for the future on Lincoln's political thought. All of these books will be duly noted in *Lincoln Lore* when they appear.

It is a privilege to be able to give notice of the appearance of *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), the newest volume in the distinguished New American Nation series. David M. Potter, Professor of History at Stanford until his death in 1971, began the book, and Don E. Fehrenbacher, a colleague of Potter's at Stanford, finished and edited the uncompleted manuscript. Both men have made truly significant contributions to Lincolniana before, and it is justification enough for the existence of the "News and Notes" series in *Lincoln Lore* that it allows mention of this excellent volume by these two masterful scholars.

The Impending Crisis is not technically Lincolniana, but it is a good book with many wonderful insights on Abraham Lincoln. Two chapters deserve particular notice, and a discussion of them may serve to suggest the high quality of the whole volume. Chapter 13 deals with the Lincoln-Douglas debates, a specialty of Professor Fehrenbacher's and an event which benefits from the famed evenhanded judiciousness of Professor Potter. They say much in the space of twenty-seven pages.

The crucial point of the debates was not the Freeport question, which demanded that Douglas say whether the local populace could exclude slavery from a territory as yet un-

ganized to form a state constitution. If Douglas said yes, the South would hate him; if he said no, the North would hate him. But Douglas had already answered this question and never dodged it when it came up. He was anxious to answer it and answer it in the affirmative, for his recent fight with the Buchanan administration over the proslavery Lecompton constitution had killed his chances in the South anyhow. Douglas "cares nothing for the South—he knows he is already dead there," Lincoln wrote Henry Asbury on July 31, 1858.

The crucial aspect was Lincoln's shifting "attention from the policy aspects of the question [of slavery in the territories], where the positions of Douglas and the Republicans might converge, to the philosophical aspects, where he believed their differences were fundamental." Thus Lincoln struck a blow for conscience and, simultaneously, for his own political livelihood, for he wanted no mistaking of Douglas for a good Republican on the part of the leaders of the Republican party from the East.

Lincoln thus unmasked in Douglas's political philosophy one quite different from his own. When Douglas spoke of rights for Negroes, "clearly he did not mean intrinsic rights, carrying their own claim to fulfillment," says Potter. "He thought, instead, of 'rights' granted as a gift, at the discretion of the state, and he did not believe they ought to be very extensive." Douglas, he adds, "became almost obsessively committed to the doctrine of popular sovereignty, [but] the key to his thought lay not in his political theory but in his belief in the inferiority of Negroes and Indians." It "was not that majoritarianism made him ready to subordinate the blacks, but that a readiness to subordinate the blacks made him responsive to majoritarianism."

Potter and Fehrenbacher defend Lincoln's allegation that there was a conspiracy afoot to bring about a second Dred Scott decision to legalize slavery nationally. It was not altogether implausible in the judicial context of 1858. No less a person than the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court had said that "The right of property in a slave is distinctly and expressly affirmed in the Constitution." They conclude that "Lincoln wanted to assail the slave power in a way that would sharply differentiate his position from that of Douglas. He did so more by attributing to Douglas a sinister design for future expansion of slavery than by criticizing Douglas's concrete proposals." Nevertheless, they say,

The difference between Douglas and Lincoln—and in a large sense between proslavery and antislavery thought—was not that Douglas believed in chattel servitude (for he did not), or that Lincoln believed in an unqualified, full equality of blacks and whites (for he did not). The difference was that Douglas did not believe that slavery really mattered very much, because he did not believe that Negroes had enough human affinity with him to make it necessary for him to concern himself with them. Lincoln, on the contrary, believed that slavery mattered, because he recognized a human affinity with blacks which made their plight a necessary matter of concern to him.

To say all this and still retain a healthy respect for Douglas is no easy matter; yet it is the sort of thing for which David Potter is famous. Douglas had burned his bridges back to the Democracy of James Buchanan and the South, and Roger Taney's court decision had made popular sovereignty seem a nullity. "Many a man, at such a point, might have decided to scuttle the popular sovereignty doctrine and to look for a vehicle by which to move into the antislavery camp [which many Eastern Republicans wanted him to do]," says Potter.

"Especially so, if he faced, as Douglas did, the immediate necessity of gaining reelection to the Senate in the preponderantly antislavery constituency of Illinois, with both the administration Democrats and the antislavery Republicans assailing him." But he chose to stick with popular sovereignty. He was a man of principle whether our times find his principles wrongheaded or not.

Chapter 16 deals astutely with the election of 1860. Lincoln gained the nomination because of the Republican party's Southern strategy, that is, because Republicans sought a candidate who could win the Northern states which bordered slave states: Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. New England and the upper North were in the bag no matter who ran on the Republican ticket. This strategy made only Edward Bates of Missouri and Abraham Lincoln viable candidates. Seward, despite being the most experienced man in the party, had spent a decade trying to prove his radicalism on the slave question, and though he tried to pull his horns in now, it was clearly too late. Bates, despite support by Republican heavyweights like the Blairs, Horace Greeley, and Schuyler Colfax, was too old and had dallied too long with the position that slavery in the territories was not a matter of Congressional concern.

Lincoln got the nomination and the election, which was guaranteed by his moderation (the "Southern" strategy paid off) and not by the Democratic split (which might merely have thrown the election into the House). Nevertheless, the fact that the election of 1860 was two contests, between Lincoln and Douglas in the North and between Breckinridge and Bell in the South, helped guarantee secession. The Republicans had no reason to advertize their moderation and devotion to states' rights to a merely Northern audience, and they did not have contacts enough with Southern sensibilities to understand that threats of secession were anguished and sincere promises rather than blackmail and bluster.

En route to reaching such judgments, Professor Potter gives the reader his customary smooth style, intelligent command of language, urbane wit, sensitivity, and sensibleness. Of the Lincoln-Douglas debates he says: "In these face-to-face encounters, the rivals sometimes assailed each other with the blunt combativeness of men who believed in their cause and were not afraid of a fight, but always in the American fashion of being able to shake hands after they had traded blows. This was what laymen have called good sportsmanship and what scholars have called consensus, and what it meant at bottom was that the values which united them as Americans were more important than those which divided them as candidates, or if not that, at least that the right to fight for one's ideas involved an obligation to fight fair and to recognize a democratic bond with other fighters for other ideas."

Professor Fehrenbacher faced the unbelievably thankless task of working hard on a book from which he knew he would get little fame (it is Potter's book and Fehrenbacher's name appears only as editor). He even had to leave in footnotes which criticized his own work! But he did a wonderful job—aided by the fact that Potter, himself a great historian, knew the quality of Fehrenbacher's work on Lincoln and adopted most of his interpretations.

Over the last couple of years Harold Holzer has written a series of articles on Lincoln portraits and prints which constitute the best available sources on these difficult items of Lincolniana. It is next to impossible to come by dependable data on the number, chronology, cost, and purpose of the thousands of Lincoln portraits produced by various processes in the nineteenth century, and these articles provide much useful information. "Looking for Lincoln: The King of Collectibles at 108" appeared in *The Antique Trader* of February 12, 1974, pages 34-36; it discusses hotly pursued items and the ever-volatile prices for items of Lincolniana. "Prints of Abraham Lincoln" appeared in the same month in *Antiques*, CV (February, 1974), 329-335; it provides a good brief introduc-

tion to the subject. "White House Lincolniana: The First Family's Print of the Lincolns," *Lincoln Herald*, LXXVI (Fall, 1974), 132-136, tells the story of Holzer's painstaking investigation of the origins of the Lincoln family print (see Figure 1.) which appears in the Lincoln Sitting Room of the White House. "Hohenstein: Lincoln's 'Print Doctor,'" *Lincoln Herald*, LXXVI (Winter, 1974), 181-186, discusses the efforts of German-born lithographer Anton Hohenstein in improving or pirating pictures of Lincoln for Philadelphia printer Joseph Hoover. "Lincoln from the Parlor Album," *Americana*, II (July, 1974), 24-27, focuses on the Lincoln portraits which appeared on *cartes de visite*, two-inch-by-four-inch paper photographs mounted on cardboard and collected in many a Victorian parlor album. "Some Contemporary Paintings of Abraham Lincoln," *Antiques*, CVII (February, 1975), 314-322, concentrates strictly on paintings done before 1869. Another introduction to the zany world of lithographed and engraved Lincolniana is Holzer's "Lincoln and the Printmakers," which appeared in the *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, LXVIII (February, 1975), 74-84. Lincoln's own feelings about such artistic efforts were discussed in "Lincoln and His Prints: 'A Very Indifferent Judge,'" *Lincoln Herald*, LXXVII (Winter, 1975), 203-211. Finally, there are more tips on prices and collecting in Holzer's "Lincoln Prints," *American Collector*, April, 1976, pages 18-20, 23 and "Lincoln in His Own Write," *The Antiques Trader*, February 10, 1976, pages 50-54 (on signatures).

Mr. Holzer has recently joined forces with Mr. Lloyd Ostendorf, renowned photograph collector, historical artist, and the foremost authority on photographs of Abraham Lincoln, to do some work on the portraits of Lincoln painted from life. Though their work is incomplete, they are already disputing the word of the Librarian of Congress, Daniel Boorstin. The National Portrait Gallery recently acquired from Boston dealer Maury Bromsen the long-lost miniature portrait of Abraham Lincoln, executed from life by John Henry Brown. Professor Boorstin unfortunately claimed that it was the first life portrait, and Messrs. Holzer and Ostendorf pointed out in a February news release that it was "at best the fifth," after the works of Thomas Hicks, Charles Alfred Barry, Thomas Johnston, Lewis Peter Clover, and, possibly, George Frederick Wright. Moreover, though Brown's portrait has some legitimate claims to being a life portrait, he did commission a set of photographs to be made, from one of which he worked very closely.

A marathon five-day conference on "Lincoln's Thought and the Present" was held at Sangamon State University in Springfield, Illinois, from June 7-11. The National Endowment for the Humanities and the Illinois Bicentennial Commission funded the conference as a part of a larger program to "upgrade the interpretations" of the Lincoln sites in and about Springfield. It was truly a gathering of the great; papers were presented by Don E. Fehrenbacher, Roy P. Basler, Richard N. Current, Robert W. Johannsen, Norman Graebner, George M. Fredrickson, G. S. Boritt, Kathryn Kish Sklar, Arthur Margon, Douglas Morgan, John H. Keiser, Christopher N. Breiseth, and Roger Bridges. The NEH grant also includes funds to underwrite publication of a book containing the papers from the conference. Apparently, the volume is at least a year from completion; its appearance will be duly noted in the pages of *Lincoln Lore*.

Ronald D. Rietveld edited "An Eyewitness Account of Abraham Lincoln's Assassination" for *Civil War History*, XXII (March, 1976), 60-69. The account, by Frederick A. Sawyer of Massachusetts, is in private hands and has never been published previously.

Richard Sloan of 3855 Arthur Avenue, Seaford, New York, is now editing a mimeographed bulletin called *The Lincoln Log*. It features rather brief notices of "newsy" items in the field of Lincolniana. Whether by chance or design, most of the issues thus far have dealt primarily with assassination lore.

CUMULATIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY 1975-1976

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 Lincoln National Life Foundation.

1975

DELL, CHRISTOPHER

Lincoln/and the/War Democrats/The Grand Erosion/of Conservative Tradition/Christopher Dell/(Device)/Rutherford . Madison . Teaneck/Fairleigh Dickinson University Press/London: Associated University Presses/[Copyright 1975 by Associated University Presses, Inc.]

Book, cloth, 9 1/2" x 6 1/4", 455 pp., price, \$ 18.50.

LEONARDI, DELL

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Pamphlet, flexible boards, 10 1/8" x 7 1/8", 137-188 pp., illus., price per single issue, \$ 2.50.

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Pamphlet, flexible boards, 10 1/8" x 7 1/8", 189-236 pp., illus., price per single issue, \$ 2.50.

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Pamphlet, paper, 8 1/2" x 5 1/2", 6 pp.

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Book, leather, 9 1/2" x 6 1/2", fr., xxxii p., 492 (8) pp., index (i-xvi), illus., price, \$ 100.00. Limited edition of 50 copies of which this is No. 23. Page from second copy of Weichmann's original typed manuscript tipped in. Autographed copy by Floyd E. Risvold with photo of editor at front of book.

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Regular unnumbered edition, price, \$ 15.00.

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Book, cloth, 8 1/4" x 5 1/2", fr., xxi p., 225 pp., illus., price, \$ 6.50.

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LINCOLN NATIONAL LIFE FOUNDATION

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