Lincoln Lore

March, 1984

Bulletin of the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum. Mark E. Neely, Jr., Editor.
Ruth E. Cook, Editorial Assistant. Published each month by the
Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801.

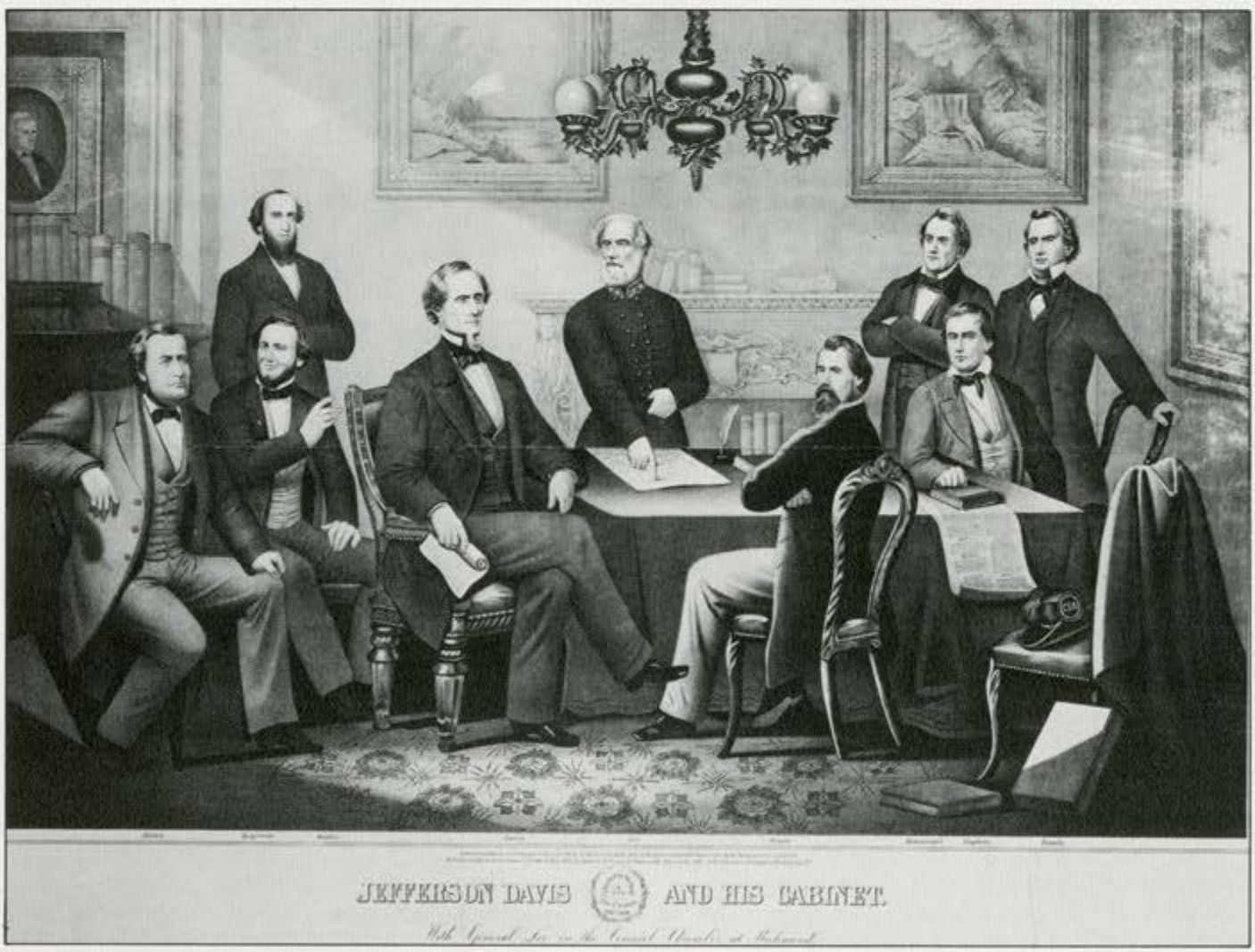
Number 1753

THE CONFEDERACY AND THE ELECTION OF 1864

> I know there are many persons amongst us whose opinions are entitled to high consideration, who do not agree with me on the question of McClellan's election. They prefer Lincoln to McClellan. Perhaps the President belongs to that class. Judging from his acts, I should think that he did.
>
> Alexander H. Stephens, November 14, 1864

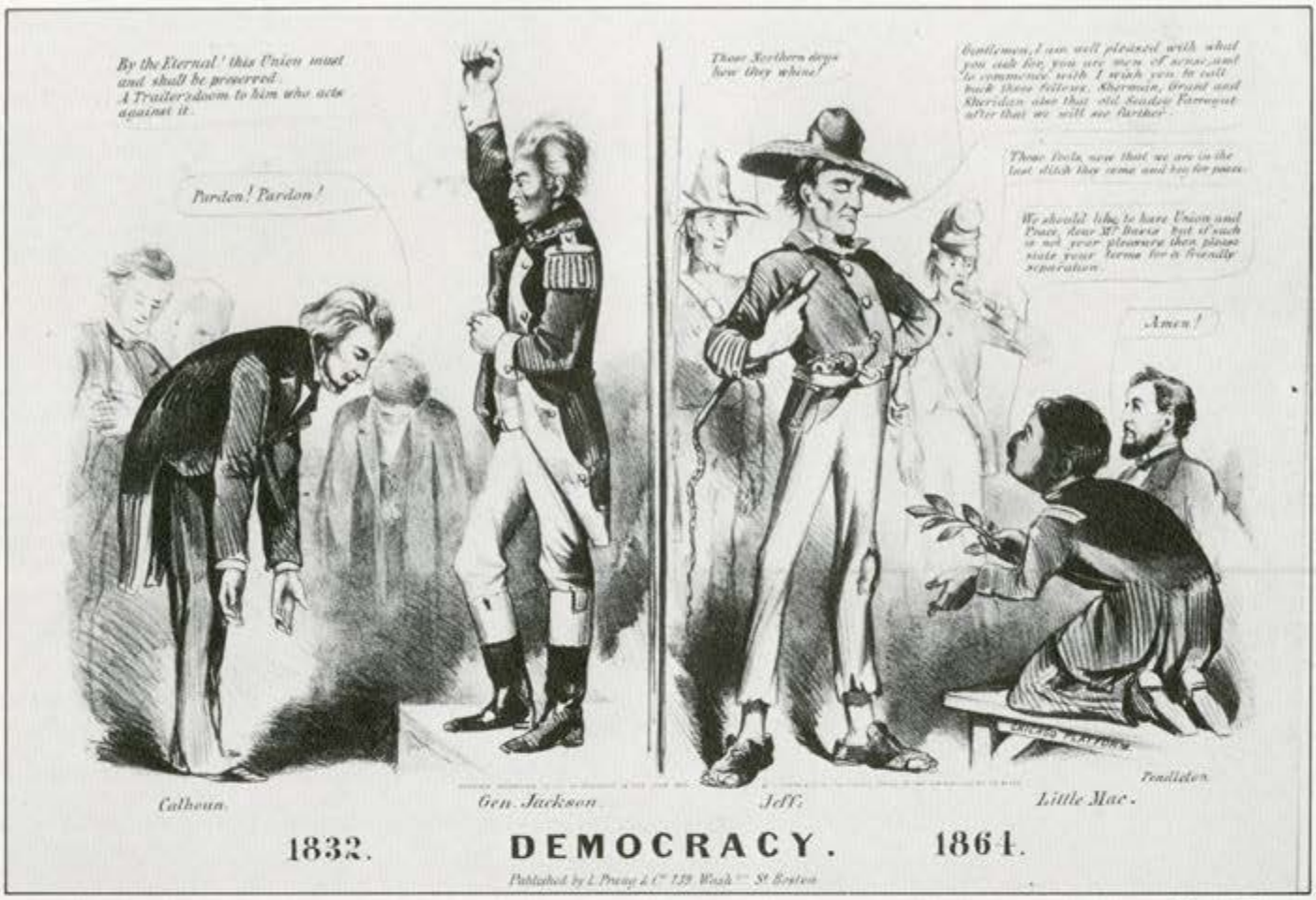
Jefferson Davis in favor of Abraham Lincoln's reelection? It seems a preposterous idea, but it stemmed from a high source: the vice-president of the Confederacy himself, Alexander H. Stephens.

In truth, Stephens' allegation and the bitter argument with Jefferson Davis which followed it are proof mostly of the strained relations which existed between the Confederate president and vice-president by late 1864. But they serve also to remind us that the election of 1864 was fraught with significance not only for Democrats and Republicans in the North but also for citizens and soldiers in the Confederate States of America. Studies of that election rarely look beyond the loyal states, but Larry E. Nelson has reminded us of its broader impact in *Bullets, Ballots, and Rhetoric: Confederate Policy for the United States Presidential Contest of 1864* (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1980).



Library of Congress

FIGURE 1. The figure of Jefferson Davis dwarfs Robert E. Lee and the members of the president's cabinet in this post-war print.



Library of Congress

FIGURE 2. Andrew Jackson remained a symbol of uncompromising Unionism throughout the Civil War. In this 1864 cartoon, John C. Calhoun and the Nullifiers beg Jackson's pardon, and George B. McClellan grovels before Jefferson Davis.

Stephens' letter, part of which is quoted above, went on to say that Confederates who hoped for Lincoln's reelection had been fearful of the election of a more conservative man or any man actually running on the Chicago platform of the Democratic party because such a person might have offered terms for restoration of the Union which many Confederates would have accepted. In other words, Stephens wrote, the "specter of reconstruction rears its ghastly head at every corner of their imaginations."

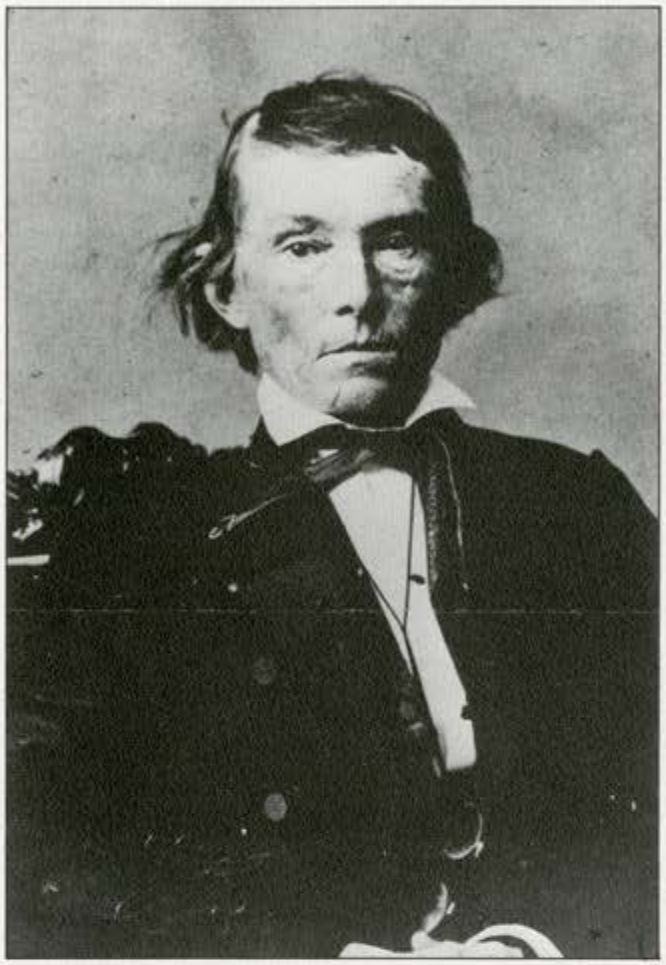
The proper policy, thought the Confederate vice-president, was to have encouraged "the State Rights party at the North." If done, "an out and out State Rights man might and would have been nominated [by the Democratic party] at Chicago, and elected." Instead, the Davis administration (except for its vice-president, of course) pursued a policy "with a view to weaken, cripple and annihilate that party. So far from acting even upon the policy of dividing the enemy, their object seems to have been to unite and enflame them." Even after the nomination of George B. McClellan, Stephens argued, President Davis might have "made a favorable response to the Chicago resolution looking to a convention of the States, as a mode of inaugurating negotiations of peace," and "it would greatly have aided his [McClellan's] election."

Jefferson Davis was, understandably, angered and demanded an explanation of Stephens' allegations. Stephens wrote a twenty-six page letter in reply. Davis, in turn, answered that letter by saying, "I . . . [have] never done an act or uttered a word that could justify you in attributing to me a preference for Lincoln over McClellan."

Stephens had been able to point to two things which he claimed were indicative of Davis' pro-Lincoln leanings. One was the David F. Cable affair. Cable was a Federal prisoner of war at Andersonville who had written to Stephens, claiming to be an Ohio intimate of Copperhead Clement L. Vallandigham who wanted to discuss the best means of bringing about the election of a peace man in 1864. Stephens suggested an investigation and Davis promised one, but the president's order miscarried and nothing was done. Cable wrote Stephens again, and Stephens, in turn, wrote Davis again. The president gave another order to investigate the prisoner, but Cable died before the investigating officer reached him. Stephens thought Davis had simply ignored this possibly golden opportunity.

The Confederate vice-president could also point to Davis' speaking tour of the fall of 1864. Although the Confederacy had no presidential elections because the constitution fixed a six-year term for the chief executive, President Davis nevertheless toured the Confederacy at the same time the Northern canvass was being conducted in 1864. In that curious imitation of the Northern political campaign, Davis denounced Confederates who sought terms for a reconstruction of the Union as Israelites willing "to turn back to the fleshpots" of Egypt. "We are not engaged," he told an audience in Columbia, South Carolina, "in a Quixotic fight for the rights of man; our struggle is for inherited rights; and who would surrender them? . . . There is but one thing to which we can accede — separate State independence." Neither slavery nor the principle of state rights was Davis' goal, as Nelson accurately points out. "Some there are," said Davis, "who speak of reconstruction with slavery maintained; but are there any who would thus measure rights by property? God forbid."

The peace issue in the Confederacy arose well before the Northern Democratic party wrote a platform in the late summer of 1864, but what that platform said certainly exacerbated the issue. The Democrats' notorious peace plank, written in Chicago in August, declared "that after four years of failure to restore the union by the experiment of war . . . justice, humanity, liberty, and the public welfare demand that immediate efforts be made for a cessation of hostilities, with



From the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 3. Alexander H. Stephens.

a view of an ultimate convention of the States, or other peaceable means, to the end that, at the earliest practicable moment, peace may be restored on the basis of the Federal Union."

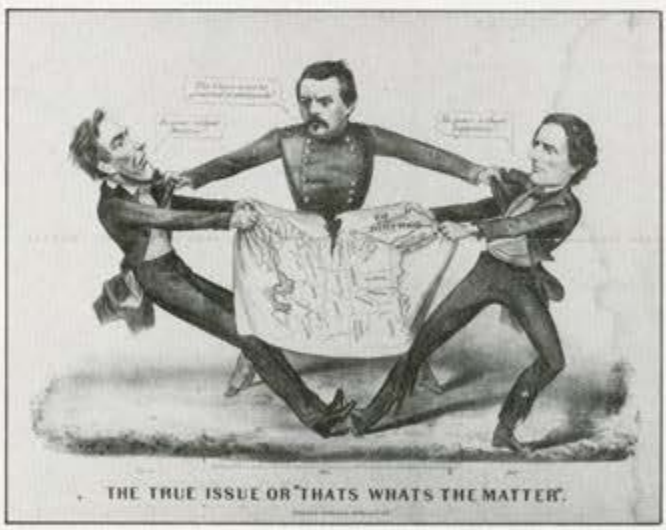
Even this did not bring unalloyed optimism to the struggling southerners. For one thing, the plank stated as the ultimate goal, the restoration of the Union, anathema to Jefferson Davis and an essentially treasonous ideal for any Confederate. They were supposed to set up a separate nation.

Those peace forces in the Confederacy who championed a convention of states to settle the conflict could do so loyally only by claiming that the outcome of such a convention would not in fact be what the Democrats wanted, reunion. The Confederate peace men, especially those of Stephens' stamp, liked the idea because it seemed true to the truest principle of the Confederacy by their lights, state rights, but that was not Davis' principle nor was it, apparently, legal under the Confederate constitution. War and peace were the powers of the national Confederate government and not of the individual states. To Davis and other Confederate nationalists, such convention talk sounded distressingly like threats to seek a separate peace (on the part of especially discontented states like North Carolina or Georgia), and purist state-righters like Stephens thought individual states could secede from the Confederacy to engage in peace talks. A final problem was that any talk of peace might weaken the Confederacy by luring its least loyal elements away — so that a rabidly nationalistic Confederate might hope for Lincoln's reelection as the best means to galvanize the Southern fighting spirit and unite the Confederate states.

Ultimately, the dispute over a proper Confederate strategy for the Northern election of 1864 did little more than widen the already existing gaps between Davis and Stephens and between the die-hards and the peace movement in the South. Nelson is critical of Davis for being unresponsive to the events and to the criticisms of the peace movement. The Confederate president did little until McClellan's nomination to lead or solidify public opinion in the South, and then all he did was to offer flat defiance and insist on hard fighting as the only route to a peace which would leave the Confederate States of America intact. For all that most Confederate citizens could tell, Davis had no policy to exploit the Northern peace movement (though in fact he maintained agents in Canada and watched for any evidence of genuine peace feelers from the North).

History is notoriously the product of victors, and Jefferson Davis suffered the fate of the defeated, personal imprisonment after the war and sharp criticism from historians ever after. If it seems as though he had no real policy for the election of 1864, maybe it would be fairer to apply to Davis the same standards used to praise the victors. Abraham Lincoln has often been praised by historians for saying that his policy was to have no policy. Perhaps Davis should be praised rather than blamed as well, in this instance. He did, after all, prove to be an astute reader of Northern public opinion and politics. Davis knew, as many Northern Republicans apparently did not and as many historians since the war have not, that George B. McClellan would try to save the Union, just as Lincoln did. Davis also realized that peace sentiment in the North was rather shallow and that there was no substantially organized disloyal network in the North to exploit. He had a better understanding of Northern public opinion than many Northerners did at the time and a better understanding than many historians since that time.

Bullets, Ballots and Rhetoric nevertheless reminds us of a nearly forgotten chapter in Confederate history. One will find no mention of Confederate strategies for the election of 1864 in a standard history like Emory M. Thomas' *The Confederate Nation, 1861-1865.* One can remedy that neglect by reading Nelson's book and be reminded as well of the importance of looking at Civil War events from both sides.



From the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 4. By contrast with the cartoon pictured in Figure 2, this Currier & Ives lithograph depicted McClellan as a staunch defender of the Union, in fact, as the only staunch defender of Union. Lincoln, by insisting on abolition of slavery as a condition of reentry to the Union, and Jefferson Davis, by insisting on Southern independence, were the true disunionists in this view. Note Davis' tattered clothing, a consistent symbol of Southern economic backwardness. Here, however, he lacks the whip of slavery and the knife and pistol symbolic of Southern violence.

CUMULATIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY 1983-1984

by Ruth E. Cook

Selections approved by a Bibliography Committee consisting of the following members: Dr. Kenneth A. Bernard, 50 Chatham Road, Harwich Center, Mass.; Arnold Gates, 168 Weyford Terrace, Garden City, N.Y.; Carl Haverlin, 1711-7 Margate, Encino, California; James T. Hickey, Illinois State Historical Library, Old State Capitol, Springfield, Illinois; Ralph G. Newman, 175 E. Delaware Place, 5112, Chicago, Illinois; Lloyd Ostendorf, 225 Lookout Drive, Dayton, Ohio; 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 Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum.

1983

ABRAHAM LINCOLN ASSOCIATION **1983-24**

Papers of the Abraham Lincoln Association/Volume V 1983/The Lincoln Administration and Arbitrary/Arrests: A Reconsideration/By Mark E. Neely, Jr./Lincoln's Constitutional Dilemma:/Emancipation and Black Suffrage/By Eugene H. Berwanger/Lincoln and War Powers. /. . . /. . . /. . . /By Harold M. Hyman/Lincolniana in 1983/By Frank J. Williams/Abraham Lincoln Association/1983/Marilyn H. Immel Editor/[Copyright 1983 by the Abraham Lincoln Association.]

Pamphlet, paper, 9 1/16" x 6", 84 (6) pp., illus. Yearly memberbship dues include a subscription to this publication. Requests for information should be directed to the Abraham Lincoln Association, Old State Capitol, Springfield, IL 62706.

DAVIS, DAVID BRION **1983-25**

The Emancipation Moment/David Brion Davis/Sterling Professor/Yale University/22nd Annual/Robert Fortenbaugh Memorial Lecture/Gettysburg College/1983/

Pamphlet, paper, 9" x 6", fr., 23 (6) pp., illus. Requests for information should be directed to Professor Gabor S. Boritt, Department of History, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, PA 17325.

SILVESTRO, CLEMENT M. **1983-26**

The Controversial Mr. Lincoln/(Photograph of Lincoln by Berger)/An Exhibition Commemorating the 175th/Anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's Birth/Scottish Rite Masonic/Museum of Our National Heritage/Lexington, Massachusetts 02173/1983/

Pamphlet, paper, 7 5/8" x 8 1/8", 20 (31) pp., illus., price, $2.50, in an edition of 4000 copies. Requests for information should be directed to the Museum of Our National Heritage, Lexington, MA 02173.

1984

ABRAHAM LINCOLN ASSOCIATION **1984-11**

Papers of the Abraham Lincoln Association/Volume VI 1984/Address by Abraham Lincoln Before the/Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield,/January 27, 1838/Lincoln After 175 Years:/The Myth of the Jealous Son/By Richard N. Current/Commentary at 10th Annual/Lincoln Symposium/By John Y. Simon/Lincolniana in 1984/By Frank J. Williams/Abraham Lincoln Associaton/1984/Marilyn H. Immel Editor/[Copyright 1984 by the Abraham Lincoln Association.]

Pamphlet, paper, 9 1/16" x 6", 64 (6) pp., illus. Yearly membership dues include a subscription to this publication. Requests for information should be directed to Abraham Lincoln Association, Old State Capitol, Springfield, IL 62706.

BELZ, HERMAN **1984-12**

Lincoln and the Constitution/The Dictatorship Question/Reconsidered/Herman Belz/Professor of History/University of Maryland/Louis A. Warren/Lincoln Library and Museum/Fort Wayne, Indiana/1984/

Pamphlet, paper, 9" x 6", 31 pp., illus.

HOLZER, HAROLD, GABOR BORITT AND MARK E. NEELY, JR. **1984-13**

The/Lincoln/Image/Abraham Lincoln and the Popular Print/Gettysburg College-Brown University-Fort Wayne Museum of Art/(Picture)/(Cover title)/[1984]

Folder, paper, 9" x 6", (4) pp., illus.

LINCOLN COLLEGE **1984-14**

Lincoln/Newsletter/(Device)/Volume V, Number 1 Lincoln, Ill. February, 1984/(Cover title)/

Pamphlet, paper, 11" x 8 1/2", (8) pp., illus. All previous issues qualify as Lincolniana. Requests for information should be directed to the Editor, Lincoln Newsletter, Lincoln College, Lincoln, IL 62656.

LINCOLN MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY **1984-15**

Lincoln Memorial University Press/(Device)/Summer 1984/Vol. 86, No. 2/Lincoln Herald/A Magazine devoted to historical research in the field of Lincolniana and/the Civil War, and to the promotion/of Lincoln Ideals in American/Education./[Harrogate, Tenn.]

Pamphlet, flexible boards, 10 1/8" x 7 1/8", 49-128 pp., illus., price per single issue, $5.00.

LINCOLN MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY **1984-16**

Lincoln Memorial University Press/(Device)/Fall 1984/Vol. 86, No. 3/Lincoln Herald/A Magazine devoted to historical research in the field of Lincolniana and/the Civil War, and to the promotion/of Lincoln Ideals in American/Education./[Harrogate, Tenn.]

Pamphlet, flexible boards, 10 1/8" x 7 1/8", 129-192 pp., illus., price per single issue, $5.00.

LINCOLN TIMES **1984-17**

A nation mourns/The Lincoln Times/Volume 1, No. 1 April 7, 1984 Indianapolis, Indiana/Lincoln comes home to Indiana/(Cover title)/

Pamphlet, paper, 17 1/4" x 11 1/4", 12 (1) pp., illus. This souvenir edition is the forerunner of a bi-monthly publication. Requests for information should be directed to Elbert L. Watson, Traveler Enterprises, P.O. Box 1092, Indianapolis, IN 42606.

McFARLAND, HENRY R. **1984-18**

New Jersey Law Journal: Abraham Lincoln And The/Illinois Bar/By Hon. Henry B. McFarland,/Judge, Hudson County District Court (Retired)/(Cover title)/[Offprint from the *New Jersey Law Journal*, Thursday, February 9, 1984.]

Pamphlet, paper, 8 1/2" x 5 1/2", (4) pp.

MILGRAM, JAMES W. **1984-19**

Abraham Lincoln Illustrated/Envelopes and Letter Paper/1860-1865/by/James W. Milgram, M.D./Published/by/Northbrook Publishing Company, Inc./[Copyright 1984 by Northbrook Publishing Company, Inc.]

Book, cloth, 10 1/2" x 8 1/2", fr., 272 (4) pp., illus., price, $24.95. Available from Northbrook Publishing Company, Inc., 1800 South Lane, Northbrook, IL 60062.

NEELY, MARK E., JR. **1984-20**

The/Emancipation/Proclamation/Our Second/Declaration of Independence/by Mark E. Neely, Jr./Published by/The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company/Fort Wayne, Indiana/(Device)/[1984]

Pamphlet, paper, 8" x 5", (19) pp., illus.

TEMPLE, WAYNE C. **1984-21**

By Square and Compasses:/The Building of Lincoln's Home/And Its Saga/(Device)/by/Wayne C. Temple, Ph.D./Deputy Director/Illinois State Archives/The Ashlar Press/Bloomington, Illinois/1984/

Book, paper, 9" x 6", fr., xii p., 139 (33) pp., illus., price $4.75. Published in a limited edition of 4000 copies by The Ashlar Press, P.O. Box 3306, Bloomington, IL 61702-3306. Copy autographed by author.