

# *Lincoln Love*

Summer 1999



*Number 1857*  
The Bulletin of  
*The Lincoln Museum*

## Table of Contents

In Review:  
Books by Recent  
R. Gerald McMurtry Lecturers  
*Gerald J. Prokopowicz*  
**2**

At The Lincoln Museum  
**12**



### *Lincoln Lore*

is the quarterly bulletin of

### *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.

Editor:

Gerald J. Prokopowicz, Ph.D.  
Historian/Director of Public Programs

Contributors:

Joan L. Flinspach, Director  
Carolyn Texley, Director of Collections/Archivist

For subscription information, contact The Lincoln Museum

200 East Berry, P. O. Box 7838  
Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801-7838  
(219) 455-3864 Fax: (219) 455-6922  
email: [TheLincolnMuseum@LNC.com](mailto:TheLincolnMuseum@LNC.com)  
<http://www.TheLincolnMuseum.org>

© 1999 The Lincoln Museum  
ISSN 0162-8615



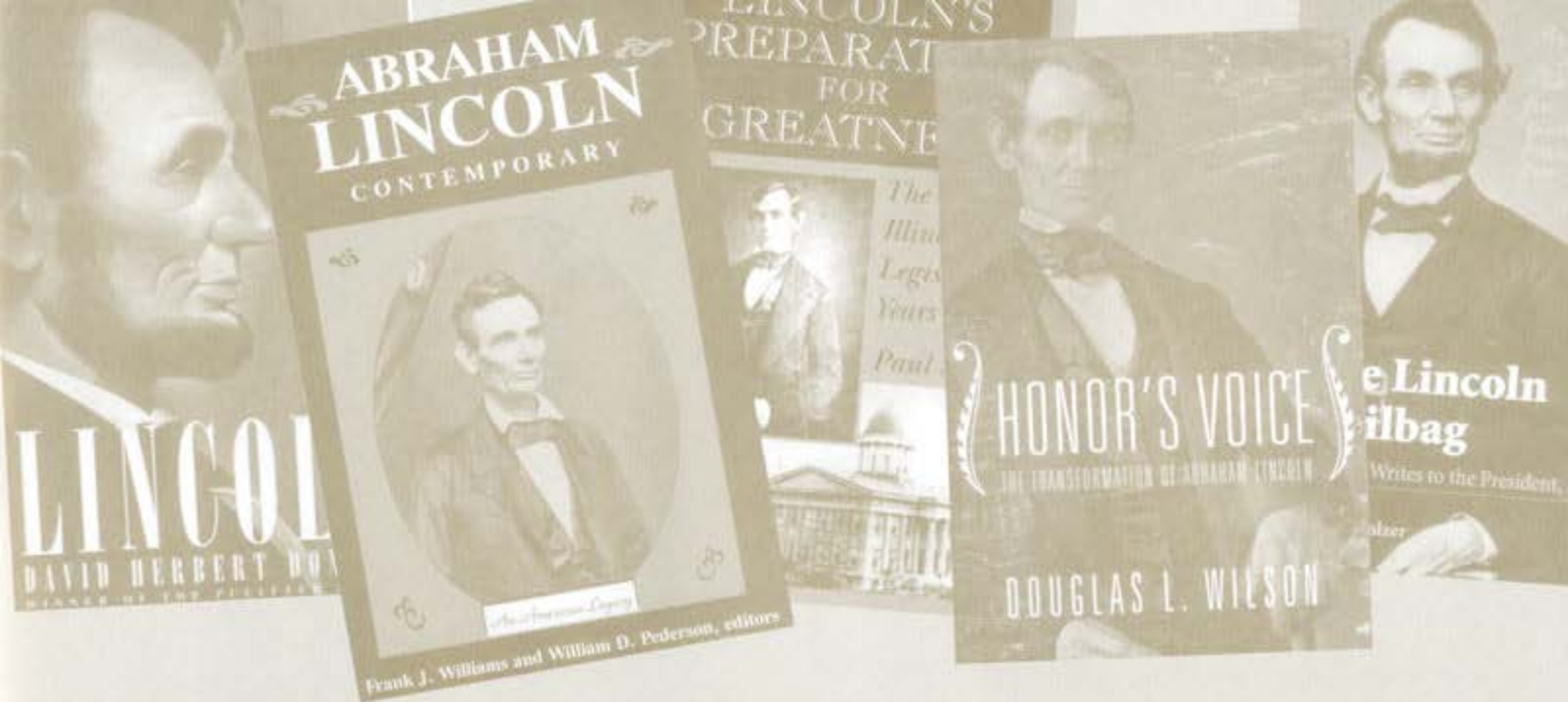
## In Review: Books by Recent R. Gerald McMurtry Lecturers

by *Gerald J. Prokopowicz*

The annual R. Gerald McMurtry Lecture is one of the highlights of The Lincoln Museum's year. The lecture series, founded by former Museum director Mark E. Neely, Jr. in 1978 and named for another illustrious former director, each year brings to Fort Wayne a leading scholar in the field of Lincoln studies to present an original aspect of his or her work, which is then published in pamphlet form, circumstances permitting. For the next McMurtry Lecture, on September 23, 2000, the Museum will bring together two significant events on the Lincoln calendar by presenting the 21st McMurtry Lecture in conjunction with the 15th Annual Lincoln Colloquium, an event jointly sponsored by the Museum, the Lincoln Home National Historic Site in Springfield, and the Lincoln Studies Center at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois. This issue of *Lincoln Lore* reviews some of the notable works produced by the McMurtry Lecturers of the past five years, with those of next year's Lecturer thrown in for good measure.

Looking over the list of these notable Lincoln scholars, a striking fact emerges: not one is an active university history professor. David Herbert Donald, the 1995 Lecturer, was for many years a professor of American history at Harvard, but has since retired. Harold Holzer (1996) is the Vice-President for Communications at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Paul Simon (1997) retired from the United States Senate to direct a public policy institute at Southern Illinois University. Douglas Wilson (1998) is a professor of English at Knox College, and William Lee Miller (1999) is an ethicist and director emeritus of the Program in Political and Social Thought at the

On the Cover: Chromolithograph, published by Louis Prang & Co., after Eastman Johnson, *The Boyhood of Lincoln*, 1868. (TLM# 2624).



University of Virginia. Frank Williams (2000) is a member of the Supreme Court of Rhode Island. In 1936, James Randall noted in his landmark essay, "Has the Lincoln Theme Been Exhausted?" that the "hand of the amateur has rested heavily upon Lincoln studies."<sup>1</sup> The talented and creative hands of recent McMurtry Lecturers can hardly be said to have rested heavily on the field, but their dominance does raise the question: why aren't more professionally-trained historians interested in Lincoln?

Perhaps one reason is that Lincoln is simply too popular. It is difficult enough for professors to get their manuscripts published and their books read when competing with their peers in the academy, but when you add novelist Gore Vidal, popular Civil War historian William C. Davis, or journalist John Waugh to the competition, the odds against making a dent on the public consciousness grow even higher. There are many active Ph.D.-card-carrying historians who have written about Lincoln in recent years, including Jean Baker, Michael Burlingame, Allen Guelzo, David Long, Philip Paludan and Thomas Turner (to name a few), but the list would surely be longer and the names better known if so many others outside the academy were not following the same path.

Nor has the popularity of Lincoln with the general public had much positive effect on interest in Lincoln studies within academia. Today, many professional historians write primarily for one another, rather than for the public. Articles in the *Journal of American History* and the *American Historical Review* are often as jargon-filled and impenetrable to the lay reader as articles in the journals of law, medicine, or engineering. These articles are apparently intended to advance the state of historical study, and to enhance the professional status of their authors, but not to be read by people outside of the field. Not only is there no incentive to write about topics of general interest, like Lincoln, there is even (as James McPherson discovered after the best-selling success of *Battle Cry of Freedom*) a negative correlation between public acclaim and professional standing, at least among those historians who believe that anything accessible and interesting to the general public must not be "real" history.<sup>2</sup>

Thirty years ago Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* caused an uproar in the scientific community by arguing that most scientific research was limited to experiments designed to confirm the current leading theory, or "paradigm,"

as Kuhn termed it.<sup>3</sup> Today it is generally recognized that in science, history, or any other intellectual discipline, the best way to gain peer approval and to exclude outsiders is to work within the current professional paradigm, not to challenge it. In the writing of history, the current paradigm enshrines race, class, and gender as the defining categories that best explain why people in the past acted as they did. This paradigm has arisen in part as a reaction to the model for history, as old as Thucydides, that focused on war, politics, and diplomacy. Since those activities were in Western society conducted primarily by white males, traditional history left untold the stories of those who were not privileged to participate.

To the extent that the current historical paradigm redresses this imbalance, it adds to our understanding of the past. Unfortunately, some historians have become so persuaded of the importance of group identity as the key to all politics, past and present, that they no longer see any need to respect traditional limitations on historical argument, such as objectivity or careful evaluation of the evidence. Following the tenets of postmodern literary theory, these authors argue that true objectivity is impossible, that texts have no

inherent meaning and can be radically re-interpreted by each reader, and that history (like all other forms of expression) can only be judged on the grounds of its ideological position; which groups does it favor, and which does it oppose?

Abraham Lincoln presents something of a problem for such postmodern historians. Lincoln was, after all, a white male who made his name in politics and war, and thus does not belong to any of the historically marginalized groups whose stories have yet to be told. Indeed, there is no one in American history whose story has been told more often than his. On a more conceptual level, if group identity is the key to understanding history, then one may justify the study of an individual as a representative of his or her race or class or gender, but not for the sake of the person's history-changing actions; there is no room in this paradigm for the individual hero like Lincoln.

But Lincoln's heroism is undeniable. In the annual poll of the members of the Society of American Historians, Lincoln continues to win the title of most admired historical figure by a wide margin. In his beliefs and his actions, he transcended his society's narrow bounds of race and gender. Today he challenges historians to do the same.

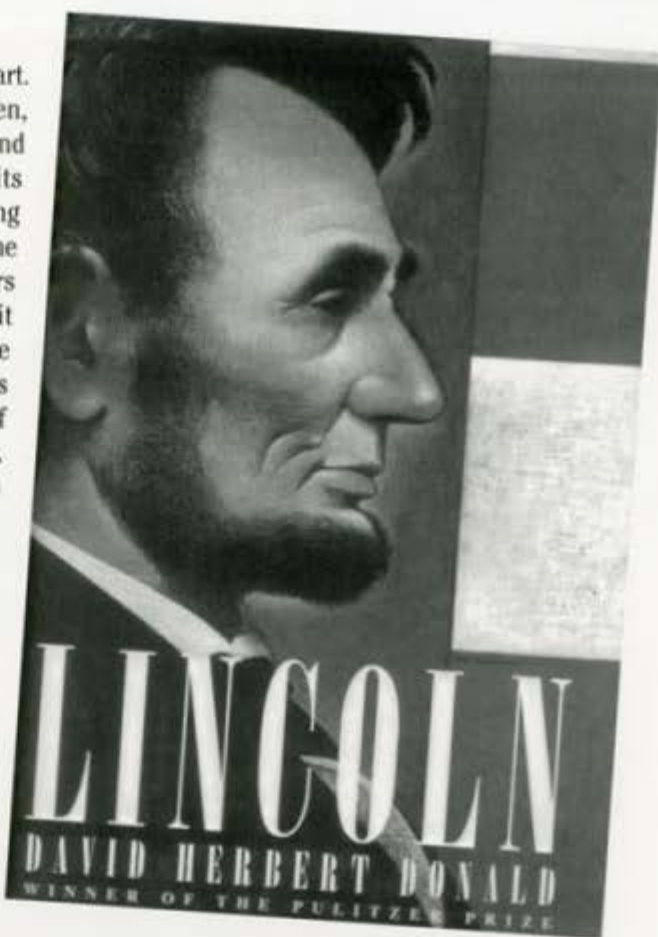
### David Herbert Donald *Lincoln*

(New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

Most readers of *Lincoln Lore* will already be familiar with this widely-reviewed, best-selling book, and those who are not ought to waste no time in getting hold of a copy. They will find that, in comparison to previous one-volume biographies like Benjamin Thomas's straightforward and relatively uncritical *Abraham Lincoln* or Stephen Oates's breezy *With Malice Toward None*, Donald's *Lincoln* requires a more substantial contribution of

effort on the reader's part. It is beautifully written, but it is also longer and more detailed than its predecessors. Drawing on the early fruits of the Lincoln Legal Papers project, for example, it presents a much more thorough view of Lincoln's legal career than that of any previous biography. More important, Donald's Lincoln differs enough from the Lincoln of tradition to require readers to re-evaluate their conceptions of the man they thought they knew.

For Donald, the key to understanding Lincoln is "the essential passivity of his nature" (p. 14). Among Lincoln's greatest strengths were his calm acceptance of events and his pragmatic willingness to adapt to realities instead of trying to mold them, as expressed in his famous remark, "my policy is to have no policy." This "passivity," or fatalism as Donald terms it elsewhere, grew out of Lincoln's belief that some superhuman agency directed and controlled all the activities of mere mortals. Lincoln may not have accepted all the tenets of any particular Christian sect, but he strongly believed in the existence of a Supreme Being, and often quoted the lines from Hamlet, "There's a divinity that shapes our ends/Rough hew them how we will." So significant was Lincoln's fatalism that Donald considered using a line from Lincoln's 1864 letter to Albert G. Hodges, "Events have controlled me," as the book's title, and gives the quote a page to itself, immediately after the dedication page.



*It is hard to think of many earthly figures with more universal appeal than Abraham Lincoln. It may have seemed to the author of Lincoln an example of the unpredictable work of the "divinity that shapes our ends" when this book lost the 1995 Pulitzer Prize for biography to God: A Biography by Jack Miles.*

In this context, "passive" seems a curious word to describe Lincoln, particularly for an author as careful with language as Donald. "Passive," according to one dictionary, means "acted upon, not acting; inert; lethargic; not reacting..." but this is practically the opposite of Donald's Lincoln. His fatalism, Donald notes, "did not, of course, lead him to lethargy or dissipation" (p. 15). Lincoln was instead, as Donald says in one of The Lincoln Museum's video exhibits, a "vigorous man who was always acting." His acceptance of the dictates of immutable fate did not stop him from working extraordinarily hard to shape his own destiny, making himself over from a poor and ill-educated country boy into a successful lawyer, politician and president, nor did

it prevent him from playing the leading role in the preservation of the Union and the demise of slavery. Any potential readers who have allowed themselves to be put off by the mistaken idea that Donald portrays a truly passive, non-responsive Lincoln are missing the best one-volume Lincoln biography yet written.

**Harold Holzer, editor**

*Dear Mr. Lincoln:*

*Letters to the President*

(Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1993).

*The Lincoln Mailbag:*

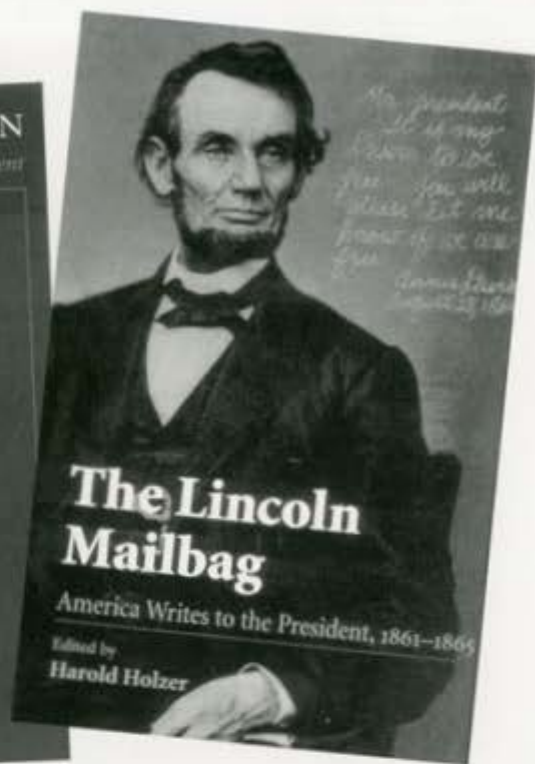
*America Writes to the*

*President, 1861-1865*

(Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998).

Harold Holzer has written or edited numerous books dealing with Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War. For these two volumes, he mined the Abraham Lincoln Papers in the Library of Congress and numerous other collections (including that of The Lincoln Museum) to find the most interesting of the hundreds of letters that Abraham Lincoln received each day of his presidency. From the selections Holzer made, the reader not only learns but feels something of the variety of pressures that Lincoln faced as he considered his correspondence. In both books, the editor's ebullient personality emerges clearly from the preface and introduction, which contain an eclectic mix of information on Lincoln's correspondence secretaries (John Hay, William O. Stoddard, and Edward Neill), illustrations, and personal anecdotes. The letters are clearly presented, with helpful annotations and (in the first volume) an index; it is unfortunate that the Southern Illinois University Press did not require an index for its volume.

In *Dear Mr. Lincoln*, the letters are organized by subject, from "Compliments



In collaboration with Mark E. Neely, Jr., Holzer has also written *The Lincoln Image* (with Gabor Boritt) and *The Lincoln Family Album*.

and Congratulations" to "Threats and Warnings." *The Lincoln Mailbag* presents letters chronologically, which helps to put the reader in Lincoln's chair, recreating the experience of receiving daily the sometimes tedious, sometimes fascinating offerings that gave the president an idea of what the public was thinking. *The Lincoln Mailbag* is thus ideal for casual reading, as the unpredictability of the contents soon creates an almost irresistible urge to turn the page to read just one more before turning out the light. For research purposes, however, the lack of subject categories coupled with the absence of an index makes it frustratingly difficult to find a particular letter on demand.

*The Lincoln Mailbag* also differs from its predecessor in that it includes numerous letters that were sent to the White House but never reached Lincoln's desk. Among these are letters from African-Americans, which were routinely forwarded to the War Department's Bureau for Colored Troops regardless of their content. The

justification given for printing these letters is that they give the reader an even fuller picture of public opinion than was available to Lincoln himself, but no evidence is offered that the interests of those who took the time to write to Lincoln were necessarily those of the public at large. The selection of letters presented certainly suggests that favor-seekers, inventors, and the mentally ill were over-represented, a view confirmed in Holzer's quotation of William O. Stoddard's observation that "so soon as a man went clean crazy his first absolutely insane act was to open a correspondence, on his side, with the President." (*Mailbag*, p. xxix)

When James McPherson, a professional historian (and 1985 McMurtry Lecturer), read some 30,000 letters by Civil War soldiers in order to analyze their motivations and ideologies in *For Causes and Comrades*, he took considerable pains to evaluate how representative were those letters. Did officers write more than enlisted men? Did Yankees write more than Rebels? Why was the casualty rate among the

# LINCOLN'S PREPARATION FOR GREATNESS



*The  
Illinois  
Legislative  
Years*  
Paul Simon



More than thirty years after its publication, Simon's book remains the standard history of Lincoln's legislative years.

writers of the letters he read higher than that for soldiers in the war generally? Answers to these technical questions were necessary before McPherson could begin to claim that his sources accurately reflected the views of Civil War soldiers. Because *The Lincoln Mailbag* lacks such methodological rigor, its claims to "provide new insight into public sentiment and political culture during the Civil War" (*Mailbag*, p. xix) must be taken with some caution.

But to quibble over the representativeness of the letters in *Dear Mr. President* or *The Lincoln Mailbag* is to miss the point. Both of

these books are charming, entertaining, informative collections of incoming White House correspondence that give the reader the rare chance to peek over the shoulder of Abraham Lincoln and read his mail.

## Paul Simon *Lincoln's Preparation for Greatness: the Illinois Legislative Years*

(1965; repr. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971).

When former United States Senator Paul Simon was first elected to the Illinois General Assembly in 1954, he took what seemed to him the logical step of going to the library to see what he could learn about the most famous person ever to serve in that body. To his surprise, he found that there was no book that focused on Lincoln's career as a legislator. His solution was to write one, which became the

## The following R. Gerald McMurtry lectures are available, for \$5.00 each, from The Lincoln Museum:

1. 1978 NOT AVAILABLE — out of print

**Unity, Ethnicity, and  
Abraham Lincoln**  
by Richard N. Current

2. 1979 NOT AVAILABLE — out of print

**The Minor Affair:  
An Adventure in Forgery  
and Deception**  
by Don E. Fehrenbacher

3. 1980 AVAILABLE

**Lincoln's Reconstruction:  
Neither Failure of Vision  
Nor Vision of Failure**  
by Harold M. Hyman

4. 1981 AVAILABLE

**Lincoln and the Riddle of Death**  
by Robert V. Bruce

5. 1982 NOT AVAILABLE — out of print

**Builders of the Dream:  
Abraham Lincoln and  
Martin Luther King, Jr.**  
by Stephen B. Oates

6. 1983 NOT AVAILABLE — out of print

**Preserving Lincoln  
for the Ages: Collectors,  
Collections, and Our  
Sixteenth President**  
by Ralph G. Newman

7. 1984 NOT AVAILABLE — out of print

**Lincoln and the Constitution:  
the Dictatorship  
Question Reconsidered**  
by Herman Belz

8. 1985 NOT AVAILABLE — out of print

**How Lincoln Won the War  
with Metaphors**  
by James M. McPherson

9. 1986 AVAILABLE

**The Long Loom of Lincoln**  
by Frank E. Vandiver

10. 1987 AVAILABLE

**House Divided: Lincoln  
and his Father**  
by John Y. Simon

11. 1988 NOT AVAILABLE — out of print

**"Not Much of Me": Abraham  
Lincoln as a Typical American**  
by Jean H. Baker

12. 1989 NOT AVAILABLE — out of print

**Lincoln and the South in 1860**  
by Robert W. Johannsen

13. 1990 NOT AVAILABLE — unpublished

**"War and Freedom and  
Abraham Lincoln"**  
by John T. Hubbell

14. 1991 AVAILABLE

**"This Grand Pertinacity":  
Abraham Lincoln and the  
Declaration of Independence**  
by Merrill D. Peterson

15. 1992 AVAILABLE

**"The Better Angels of Our  
Nature": Lincoln, Propaganda  
and Public Opinion in the North  
During the American Civil War**  
by Phillip Shaw Paludan

1993-1994 — no lecture

16. 1995 NOT AVAILABLE — unpublished

**"Events Have Controlled  
Me": The Fatalism of  
Abraham Lincoln"**  
by David Herbert Donald

17. 1996 AVAILABLE

**The Mirror Image of Civil  
War Memory: Abraham  
Lincoln and Jefferson  
Davis in Poplar Prints**  
by Harold Holzer

18. 1997 NOT AVAILABLE — unpublished

**Lincoln the State Legislator**  
by Paul Simon

19. 1998 NOT AVAILABLE — to be published 2000

**Herndon's Dilemma: Abraham  
Lincoln and the Privacy Issue**  
by Douglas Wilson

20. 1999 NOT AVAILABLE — to be published 2000

**"He Will Be Good, But  
God Knows When"**  
by William Lee Miller

standard work on the subject and remains useful today.

Simon's description of Lincoln's legislative years is generally straightforward, supported by occasional interpretive insights. He notes, for example, that the legislative session beginning in 1836, Lincoln's second term, rivaled the Virginia House of Burgesses in the 1760s as a cradle of statesman, containing "six future United States senators, three governors, a cabinet member, several generals, eight congressmen, two presidential candidates, and one President..." and yet its most significant act was to pass a wildly over-ambitious internal improvements program that ruined the finances of the state of Illinois for years. On occasion Simon the legislator lapses into present tense when describing political practices that he found true of Lincoln's day as well as his own: "If a measure is tabled by a substantial vote it is dead. But when the vote is close, it is usually not difficult to get the bill off the table." (p. 58) Simon's practical experience in politics, combined with his extensive research into Lincoln's career, give such comments an unusual degree of authority.

The greatest contribution of Simon's book is that it looks in detail at many of the votes Lincoln cast in the legislature in order to produce a clear, balanced view of Lincoln's performance. The results do not always measure up to the Lincoln of legend. On slavery, Simon finds that there was room for growth. He recognizes Lincoln's fundamental opposition to slavery, as expressed in his 1837 protest against the legislature's condemnation of abolitionism, but criticizes Lincoln's failure to speak more directly about the

murder of abolitionist Elijah Lovejoy later the same year: "The silence of Lincoln on the Lovejoy incident is not Lincoln's most shining hour." (p. 145). On education, Simon reveals that Lincoln was more talk than action, and did little of substance to improve the schools of Illinois. On economic matters, Simon shows that Lincoln, like the rest of the legislature, was guilty of serious misjudgment in trying to fund enormous canal and railroad projects that were far beyond the resources of the state.

Even in the craft of politics, Simon revises the popular idea that Lincoln was from the start a master log-roller and horse-trader. In particular, he convincingly demonstrates the falsity of the charge that Lincoln and his colleagues from Sangamon County, known as the "Long Nine" for their height, sold their votes on the 1837 internal improvements bill and other issues in exchange for having the state capital moved to Springfield. The Long Nine did not vote as a unit, and had no need to bargain their votes in favor of internal improvements, which were overwhelmingly popular with their constituents anyway. Lincoln did some good work to help move the capital to Springfield, but at that stage in his career he was not yet widely recognized as a legislative leader, much less as the moving force behind the transfer of the capital.

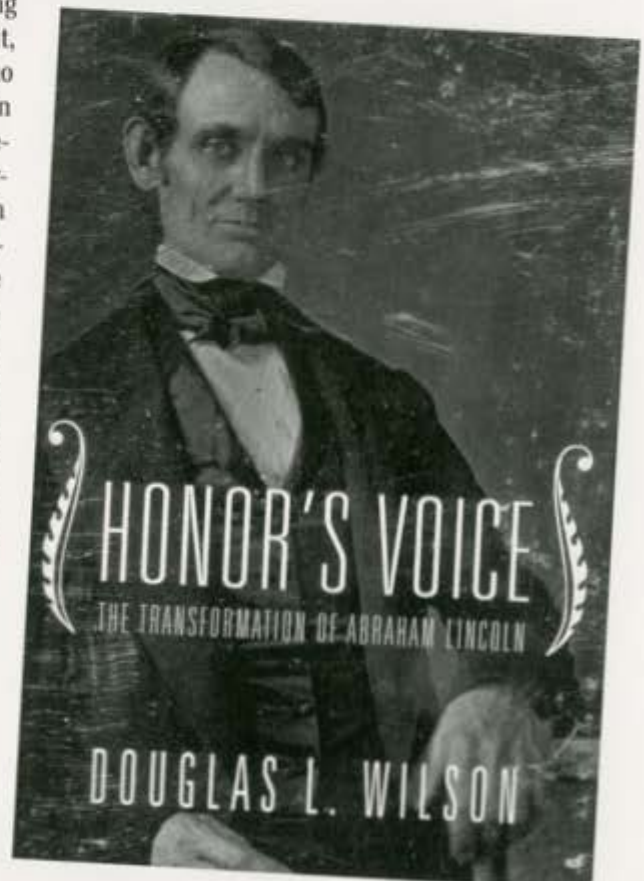
When Randall published his essay on the state of Lincoln studies

in 1936, he specifically mentioned Lincoln's legislative career as one of the subjects that deserved investigation. Almost thirty years went by before the publication of *Lincoln's Preparation for Greatness*. Remarkably, another thirty years (and then some) have passed with no new book on the subject. Much new material about Lincoln has been uncovered, and the kind of questions that historians and their readers ask about the past have changed as well. As good a work as this is, the topic is overdue for a fresh look.

**Douglas Wilson**  
*Honor's Voice:*  
*The Transformation*  
*of Abraham Lincoln*

(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998).

On what must have been a slow day in court, the lawyer Lincoln once found some amusement in writing out



*Following the example of James Randall, historians for many years dismissed as unreliable the accounts of Lincoln's early life collected by William Herndon. The reminiscences of former New Salem residents that Herndon recorded were unquestionably flawed and biased, but in Honor's Voice Wilson demonstrates how a careful and critical examination of Herndon's evidence can yield fresh perspectives on Lincoln's personal development.*

a paragraph of spoonerisms that began, "He said he was riding *bass-ackwards* on a *jass-ack*, through a *patton-cotch*..." Embarrassed by the manuscript's crude and sophomoric humor, a noted Lincoln collector once supposedly declared his intention of burning the document if he ever managed to obtain it. Fortunately he never did, and by the time the manuscript came up for public auction in December 1994, standards of propriety had evolved to the point that the winning bidder was willing to part with \$222,500 for the piece, presumably not simply to burn it.<sup>4</sup> But even today, there are many Lincoln admirers who find it difficult to reconcile the earthy, joke-telling, whisky-selling, Bible-doubting Abe of frontier New Salem with the dignified marble figure that sits in the Lincoln Memorial.

Douglas Wilson does a masterful job of solving this problem by taking an unblinking yet sympathetic view of the process in which Lincoln grew from a young man to an adult, between 1831 and 1842. He examines the formative experiences of Lincoln's early life: his reading and self-education, his experiments in various careers, the development of his religious beliefs, his generally awkward and unsuccessful relationships with women, his entry into politics, and most of all his obsession with honor. The portrait that emerges is one of a very human Lincoln, one whose great gifts of intellect and character do not excuse him from the painful process of struggling to discover his identity.

Before they can enjoy Wilson's portrait of Lincoln's coming-of-age, however, readers must pass through a test of their own, in the form of a lengthy opening chapter describing the famous 1831 wrestling match between Lincoln and Jack Armstrong. Wilson describes the match in great detail, evaluating every available scrap of evidence, much of it fragmentary or contradictory. He also traces the historiography of the event, showing

how its description has evolved in the hands of biographers from Ward Hill Lamon to Carl Sandburg to Benjamin Thomas, and he offers an excursus on the rules of wrestling as practiced on the frontier of 19th century America. Wilson succeeds in illustrating the evidentiary problems of writing about Lincoln's early life, a point he also makes in the introduction, and one that seems unnecessary to belabor in a book explicitly aimed at a general rather than an academic audience. Some readers will find the wrestling chapter fascinating (as I did), but others may be mystified or put off.

Those who stick it out, or skip over the chapter, will be fully rewarded. In place of a one-dimensional Honest Abe who never lies, they will see how a man deeply committed to honesty succeeds in politics by learning to present himself to the world, not dishonestly, but by offering appropriate amounts of truth. In place of an asexual plaster saint, they will see a healthy young man who is attracted to women but so

### New Book Discussion Group

In response to suggestions by the Volunteers of The Lincoln Museum, a new book discussion group now meets at the Museum on the last Monday of each month, immediately following the monthly volunteer meeting (which ends at approximately 11:45 a.m.). Books discussed at the first two meetings were *Honor's Voice* and *Arguing About Slavery*; future books for discussion include *Re-electing Lincoln* by John Waugh and *Lincoln at Gettysburg* by Garry Wills. The best way to join the discussion group, which is open to all and free of charge, is to volunteer at the Museum and join the monthly meetings! If you are unable to do so, but would like to join the discussion group, please call (219) 455-3864 in advance; please note that Museum is not open to the public Mondays.

unsophisticated that he can do nothing about it (even after Joshua Speed directs him to a local prostitute, according to one possibly apocryphal story). And in place of the man who naively allowed himself to be roped into marriage by Mary Todd, they will see a determined Lincoln whose decision to marry "was not impulsive but carefully considered, perhaps even calculating, and ultimately wise," (p. 321) based on his newly-gained self-knowledge that nothing was more central to his inmost identity than his honor, which he could only vindicate by fulfilling his original engagement to Mary.

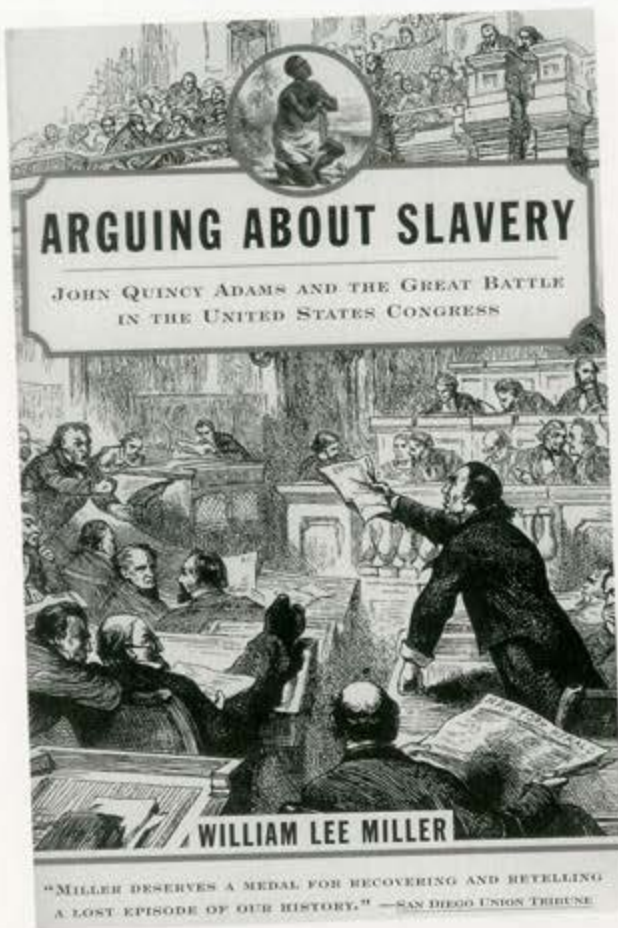
It seems safe to say that earlier generations of Lincoln enthusiasts would have been horrified by the human frailties Wilson exposes in their hero. For today's readers, accustomed to knowing far more than we want or need about the private lives of our leaders, this intimate look at the transformation from "easy going, good-natured, and open-handed" New Salem boy (p. 318) to the much sadder but more self-controlled and self-aware man whom we recognize as the mature Lincoln, will have the opposite effect of making Lincoln seem all the more appealing, because all the more real.

### William Lee Miller *Arguing About Slavery: John Quincy Adams and the Great Battle in the United States Congress*

(New York: Random House, 1995).

Like *Honor's Voice*, this is another fascinating book by a professor of something other than history. Unlike the other books in this article, it is not primarily about Abraham Lincoln, but about the controversy that raged in Congress from 1836 to 1844 over whether to allow the subject of slavery to be debated. Although Miller has not written at length on Lincoln, he was selected as the 1999 McMurtry Lecturer





In 1913, Charles Beard's *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* began to popularize the idea that crass self-interest motivated even the most revered of the Founding Fathers. In the 1960s, works like *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* re-introduced the idea that political ideas mattered, as a cause of historical events. At the end of the 1990s, authors like Miller, Wilson, and Allen C. Guelzo have focused on the moral and ethical aspects of the outlook and behavior of Abraham Lincoln, perhaps presaging a new historiographical trend.

1830s. Miller also acknowledges tacitly that the typical reader is not a graduate student of 19th century American politics by filling in useful background details in a manner neither obtrusive nor condescending. Where postmodern historians tend to revel in the use of obscure and pedantic language, “empowering” themselves by “privileging” their own discourse, Miller adopts the revolutionary strategy of writing about the past as though he valued and respected readers outside of the guild.

Substance follows style in the story Miller tells. Beginning in the mid-1830s, Southern members of Congress reacted to ever-increasing numbers of anti-slavery petitions generated by abolitionist activists by becoming more and more intransigent on the issue, to the point that in 1836 they passed a “Gag Rule” prohibiting the introduction of such petitions and effectively eliminating any discussion of slavery in the House of Representatives. From that moment until 1844, Congressman and former president John Quincy Adams fought an untiring battle to remove the Gag Rule and to speak out in favor of democratic principles (especially the right to petition the government) and against slavery. Miller’s narrative remains lively as it follows the struggle through numerous procedural twists and turns, such as Adams’s mock-innocent attempt to present a petition written by slaves in 1837:

Joab Lawler, a tough guy from Alabama, insisted that it appear in the journal (to be read back home) that he objected to the paper’s even being sent to the Chair. Mr. Haynes of Georgia found himself making a speech to say that he was speechless. [After being called to order for personal remarks toward Adams] Haynes, in response, avowed his respect for the rules of the House, but-but-but- “but he would not trust his feelings to pursue the subject further”... .

One Southern representative, unsatisfied by proposals that the petition be rejected and Adams expelled from the House, called for the document to be burned. Miller comments directly to the reader: “That would have been quite a moment in the history of civil liberty — the ritual burning of a petition in the House of Representatives of the United States of America.” (p. 231-33).

There is no question who the heroes and villains are in *Arguing About Slavery*. By drawing a sharp line between good guys and bad guys, Miller not only emphasizes the drama of the situation, but invests it with moral meaning. The author spends little time on the moral ambiguity of the slaveholders, an issue to which Lincoln was so sensitive. This is a distortion of reality, but so is all history; the historian must pick and choose which facts and conclusions to include in the three hundred or so pages available, and leave out the vast majority that remain. Miller is surely not unaware

on the promise of his essays and a work-in-progress, a book he describes as an “ethical biography” of Lincoln. Will Miller turn out to deserve the honor? If his work proves anywhere as original, accessible, and thought-provoking as *Arguing About Slavery*, then the title of Miller’s McMurtry Lecture will apply to him as well as to Lincoln: “He will be good but God knows when.”

The greatest virtue of *Arguing About Slavery* is the direct connection Miller establishes between the reader and the story. By using modern idiomatic English and topical metaphors, he lets his readers bring to bear their knowledge of contemporary events and culture to help understand the past. He gives an idea of the economic obstacles to the abolition of slavery, for example, by relating the issue to current resistance to the regulation of tobacco, comparatively a much smaller industry and one more generally recognized as a social evil than was slavery in the

that slavery, like everything in life, was a complex problem characterized by shades of gray, but dwelling on this would not have served his purpose of reaching a broad audience with a meaningful historical tale. This book does what The Lincoln Museum tries to do — to bring history out of the classroom and to give every reader (or visitor) something worthwhile to think about.

**Frank J. Williams, William D. Pederson, and Vincent J. Marsala, editors**

*Abraham Lincoln: Sources and Styles of Leadership*

(Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994).

**Frank J. Williams and William D. Pederson, editors**  
*Abraham Lincoln: Contemporary*

(Campbell, Cal.: Savas Woodbury, 1996).

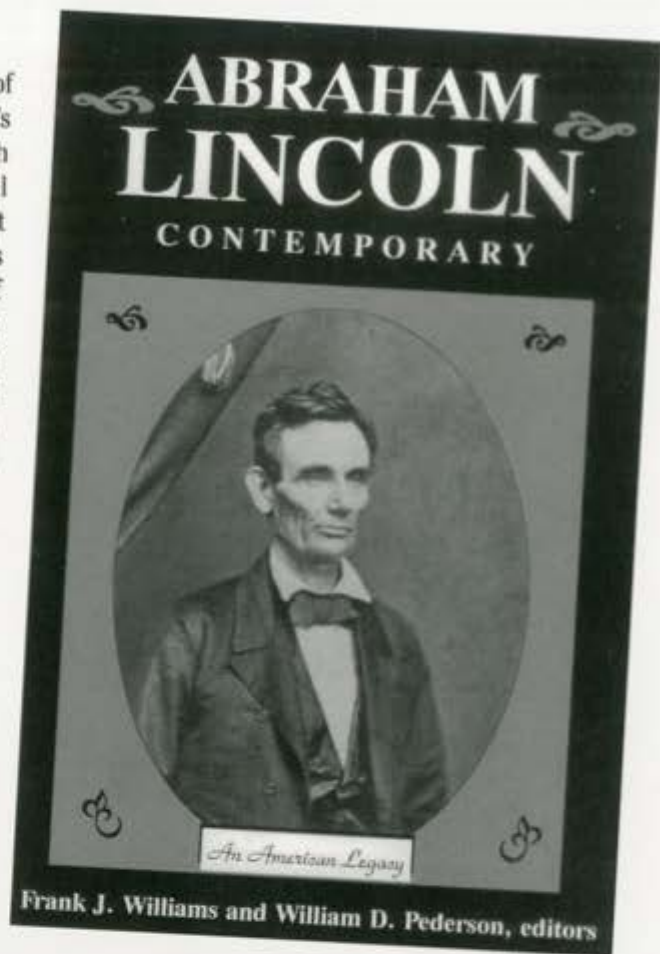
These books consist of papers delivered at conferences devoted to the study of Abraham Lincoln, held in Shreveport, Louisiana in 1992 and 1993. Like most such collections, their contents are necessarily uneven. In the first volume, contributors Ethan Fishman and Joseph Fornieri offer fresh insights into Lincoln's political philosophy, while James A. Stevenson and Brooks Simpson revise traditional views of Lincoln's poetry and his relationship with Ulysses S. Grant, respectively. Other essays are of more limited interest, in some cases because of their narrow scope (Lincoln and Idaho, for example), or because they have been superseded by the author's full-length works on the same topic (such as David Long's on the 1864 election).

The second book is notable for the absence of "the usual suspects" among its contributors; of the thirteen essayists, only Charles Strozier is known for his work on Lincoln. His

piece on the concept of the apocalypse in Lincoln's era, together with Stephen K. Shaw on civil religion and Philip Abbott on Franklin Roosevelt's use of the image of Lincoln, are the book's highlights. A debate over Lincoln's use of executive powers, in two well-focused essays by attorney William D. Bader and political scientist Mark J. Rozell, shows how non-specialists can add to the discussion of the Lincoln era. At the other end of the spectrum, there is an idolatrous article on Lincoln and Gerald Ford (idolizing Ford!), a wandering essay that purports to discuss Lincoln's management of his Cabinet

while omitting such events as the Chase-Seward crisis of December 1862, and a superficial summary of Lincoln's messages to Congress that demonstrates the pointlessness of trying to apply modern political science to the Lincoln presidency without a firm understanding of its historical context.

Unlike Donald's *Lincoln*, or even the works of Wilson, Simon, and Holzer reviewed above, these two books don't necessarily belong on every Lincoln student's shelf. Some of the essays are more specialized than most readers will care for; others are works in progress, and represent the author's first cut at a new approach rather than a finished argument; still others have already germinated into books; and some are simply not very good. It is safe to say that these books, like most collections of conference papers, will be of interest primarily to those already immersed in the field, and looking for the stimulation of new ideas or unexplored corners.



*By organizing Lincoln-related symposia at Brown University and LSU-Shreveport, founding the Lincoln Forum, presiding over the Abraham Lincoln Association and later the Ulysses S. Grant Association, contributing regularly to Lincoln Herald and Lincoln Lore, and editing these books, Frank Williams has contributed enormously to the vitality of Lincoln studies today.*

But what is most remarkable about these books is not their quality, but that they exist at all. Their publication, and the conferences from which they arose, are due to the tireless efforts of Frank J. Williams, whose day job is Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of Rhode Island. Williams has dedicated much of his adult life to promoting the history of the Lincoln era, serving nine years as president of the Abraham Lincoln Association, founding the Lincoln Forum, writing numerous articles, and amassing a remarkable collection of Lincoln-related books, manuscripts and artifacts. Williams has created

numerous opportunities for historians to speak and to publish about Abraham Lincoln, and in the process has offered his own observations on Lincoln in the form of many essays and public addresses, including a short piece in the first of these two volumes.

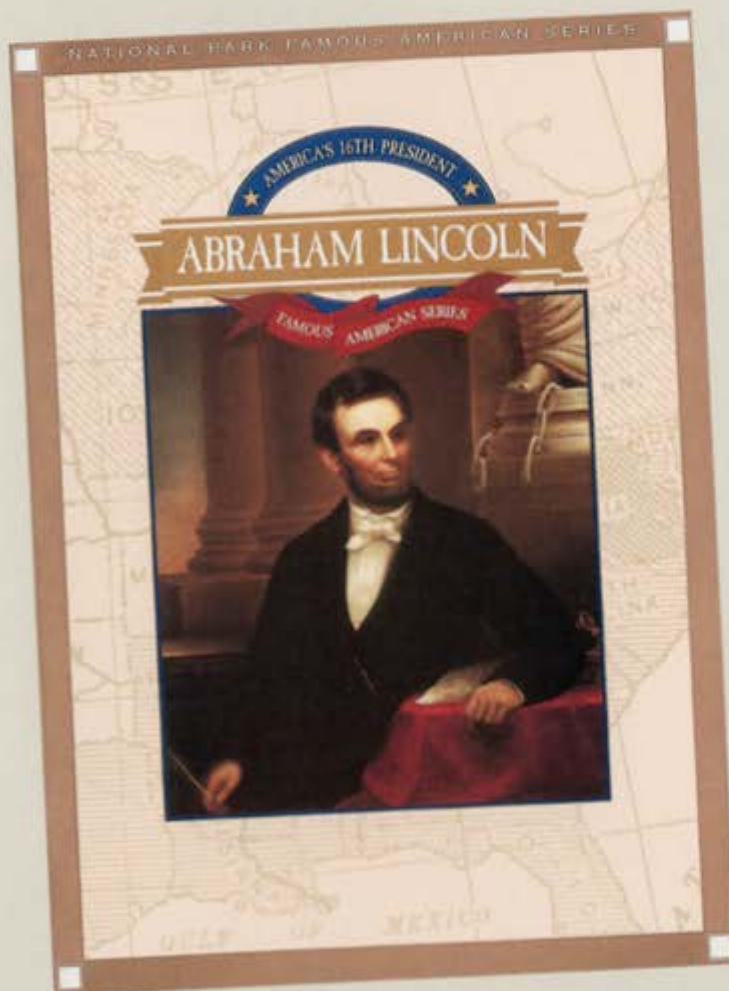
As if to prove the cynical adage that no good deed goes unpunished, a review of *Abraham Lincoln: Sources and Styles of Leadership* in the *Journal of Southern History* scolded Williams because his essay did not use "proper and precise acknowledgement in every case" in which it quoted other writers. It is true that Judge Williams did not attribute all of his sources in a style that would have passed muster in graduate school. But when the historical writing of someone who has not been formally trained fails to

meet the technical standards of the profession, historians can respond in two ways. One is to circle the wagons against the outsider by criticizing and embarrassing him in print. The other is to recognize the enthusiasm and interest that inspired the work, and offer private correction and encouragement, sharing one's knowledge in order to broaden the field of scholarship instead of driving a valuable contributor away. It is not hard to imagine which approach would appeal more to the character of Abraham Lincoln.

(Portions of the review of *The Lincoln Mailbag* previously appeared in *Civil War History: A Journal of the Middle Period* and are reprinted with permission).

## Endnotes

1. James G. Randall, "Has the Lincoln Theme Been Exhausted?," *American Historical Review*, v. 41 (1936), pp. 270-94.
2. James M. McPherson, *Drawn With the Sword: Reflections on the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 251.
3. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962; rev. ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970).
4. Frank J. Williams, "Lincolniana in 1995," *Lincoln Lore* 1843, p. 8. For the text of the manuscript, see Roy P. Basler, ed., *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, v. 8, p. 420.



The National Park Service, through its publishing affiliate Eastern National Press, commissioned The Lincoln Museum to write a concise, affordable biography of Abraham Lincoln for visitors to the Lincoln Home in Springfield, the Lincoln Birthplace in Hodgenville, the Lincoln Boyhood memorial, and other National Park Service sites across the country.

*Abraham Lincoln: America's 16th President* is the first title in the Park Service's new "Famous Americans" series, patterned after the popular Civil War Series of site books. Written by Gerald J. Prokopowicz of The Lincoln Museum, and drawing on the Museum's collection for many of its illustrations, this book gives a succinct account of the character and career of the nation's greatest president.

*Abraham Lincoln: America's 16th President* is available for \$5.95 from the Lincoln Museum Store.

# At The Lincoln Museum

## History A304 — Sectionalism and Civil War: The United States, 1840-1865

Wednesdays, 6 p.m. — 8:45 p.m.  
January 12th to May 17th, 2000



Offered by Indiana University-Purdue University at Fort Wayne, this upper-level history course explores the coming of the Civil War and the resolution of the conflict.

The course uses readings in primary and secondary sources as well as the resources of The Lincoln Museum to supplement the lectures of Dr. Gerald Prokopowicz.

For information, please contact the IPFW History Department or Department of Off-Campus Credit Programs, (219) 481-6111. ☐

## "Remembering Dr. King: A Celebration of Freedom"

Saturday, January 15, 2000, 7:00 p.m.



This year's Martin Luther King, Jr. birthday program features an inspirational message by the Reverend Clyde Adams, D.D., of Southfield, Michigan, a life-long leader in the areas of civil rights and education and friend of Dr. King. The evening will include presentations to student essay contest winners and music performed by a community choir arranged through the cooperative efforts of the Fort Wayne Ministerial Alliance.

Admission: \$5.00. Proceeds will benefit the Fort Wayne chapter of the NAACP, the Fort Wayne Urban League, and The Lincoln Museum Education Department. Seating is limited; for reservations please call (219) 455-6087. ☐

## Underground Railroad Symposium

Saturday, January 29, 2000, 9:00 a.m. — 3:00 p.m.



Speakers from historic sites as well as historians who have documented the routes, sites, and stories of escaped slaves and abolitionists will meet to share their findings relating to the Underground Railroad in Indiana. Participating institutions include the Levi Coffin House, Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana, ARCH, and the Allen County/Fort Wayne Historical Society. For further information, please call (219) 455-5606. ☐

## Presidential Sole: The Shoes of the Presidents

Tuesday, February 1 through Sunday, February 27, 2000

Since 1850, shoemakers Johnston and Murphy have handcrafted pairs of shoes for every president. This traveling exhibit, created by Johnston and Murphy, includes replicas of their work for twelve presidents, including Abraham Lincoln. ☐

## Lincoln's Birthday

Saturday, February 12, 2000, 2:00 p.m.



The Lincoln Museum will commemorate the 190th anniversary of Lincoln's birth with a dramatic program featuring Fritz Klein, portraying Abraham Lincoln, and Khabir Shareef and Andrew Bowman as Major Martin Delany of the 104th U.S. Colored Infantry and Color-Sergeant Andrew Smith of the 55th Massachusetts Regiment. Please call (219) 455-6087 for more information. ☐

## Annual Lincoln Colloquium

The Lincoln Museum  
Ft. Wayne, Indiana — Saturday, September 23, 2000

University of Illinois at Springfield, organized by the Lincoln Home National Historic Site  
Springfield, Illinois — October, 2001

## To the editor,

I wanted to commend your organization for another fine issue of *Lincoln Lore* (Winter 1999). The article, "Lincoln From Life: As the Artists Saw Him," by your guest curator, Mr. Harold Holzer, was wonderful reading. However, I do take issue with Mr. Holzer on one point. He states that after Alban Jasper Conant painted the "smiling Lincoln" in 1860, "he never again saw Lincoln in the flesh" and thus painted Lincoln from life only once.

In fact, Conant had numerous other opportunities to see and talk with Abraham Lincoln after Lincoln had become president, as documented in *My Acquaintance with Abraham Lincoln* by Alban Jasper Conant and *The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning, Vol. 1, 1850-1864*, p. 492n. If, as Holzer and Professor Mark E. Neely, Jr. have previously argued, artists such as George H. Story or William Cogswell could paint "life" portraits of Abraham Lincoln from sketches, notes, and photographs of Lincoln years after Lincoln's death, then it is equally arguable that Conant's subsequent paintings of Lincoln also qualify as "life" portraits.

Sincerely,

Mr. Kim Bauer, Historical Research Specialist  
Henry Horner Lincoln Collection, Illinois State Historical Library