

1955

ABRAHAM LINCOLN:

Everybody's Business

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Greer Williams

IN THE 90 years since his death, Abraham Lincoln has been written and talked about more than any other human being. He is the great American folk hero. His popularity has steadily grown and purified itself until he has come to be worshiped by mankind far beyond the limits of his own country.

Since Lincoln's own fellow citizens first mourned his passing, in one of the longest funeral processions of all time, millions from all over the world have visited his tomb in Springfield, Ill. More millions have paused in reverence before his statue in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D. C. Each year hundreds of thousands tour the "Lincoln country," from the cabin where he was reputedly born near Hodgenville, Ky., to New Salem State Park, 20 miles northwest of Springfield, where



stands a faithful restoration of the pioneer village in which Honest Abe spent his young manhood.

Ralph G. Newman, owner of the Abraham Lincoln Book Shop in Chicago, refers to his business as part of the "Lincoln industry." With a \$250,000-a-year gross, Newman is a chief beneficiary among an estimated 500 persons who make a direct living from Lincoln. These include rare-manuscript and -book dealers, monument custodians and souvenir sellers.

Perhaps 10,000 Americans collect printed matter about Lincoln. This need not be an expensive hobby; much information may be obtained from historical libraries and societies at little or no cost. But big-league collectors have invested huge sums in things that were Lincoln's. The Gettysburg Address, for instance.

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man with dirty writing five copies of these 266 im-
torn slacks. He tu mortal words. The two drafts he
of physicist Joris B made before giving the speech are
was shooting 25 both in the Library of Congress.*
blue and purple A afterward, he made a third copy at
mixture of deute the request of Edward Everett, who
order to generate he had given a two-hour oration that

tion as the H-bom cheerfully. Then, copy was written to be sold at auc-
he added, "No gh." tion in a benefit for wounded sol-
gh." diers. Many years later it brought

returned to Tra the highest price ever paid for a Lin-
is vice-president coln "autograph" — \$150,000. This
tor. He and presid was paid by an anonymous Chicago
ave turned out to businessman, not long before the
with Peacock gene 1929 stock-market crash. In 1944 the
nd Barbour putt man's widow sold it for \$60,000 —
t. the second-highest price. Illinois
all-time employe school children raised \$50,000 and
has grown to a Marshall Field gave \$10,000, so it
business with a p could be placed in the Illinois State
000 persons. It Historical Library.

ice branches in The fourth and fifth copies Lin-
ing business in coln penned for historian George
Bancroft, again to raise money for
Peacock are co war veterans. One of these is now in
world will be run he possession of Cornell University.
and power — a The other belongs to Oscar B. Cin-
t people think. T sas, former Cuban Ambassador to the
n competition wi

est corporations * According to legend, Lincoln dashed off the
some 25 per ce speech while on the train to Gettysburg —
y-product and riting with a pencil borrowed from young
it can hold ont Andrew Carnegie on the back of an envelope
outhful Tracer borrowed from Secretary of State Seward. Actu-
o be the Gener ally, he wrote a large part, if not all, of the
mic era. rst draft while still at the White House, be-
ginning the text in ink on Executive Mansion
stationery and finishing it in pencil on ruled,
blue-gray foolscap. He finished writing the
peech on the morning of its delivery, Novem-
ber 19, 1863. There is good historical evidence
that he copied off the second draft (to be used
as a reading copy) in Gettysburg.

United States. He paid \$54,000 for it.

The last big turnover of Lincoln relics was in the 1952 auction in New York City of the collection of the late Oliver R. Barrett, Chicago attorney. The little book in which Lincoln as a boy wrote, "Abraham Lincoln, his book and pen, he will be good, but God knows when," went for \$3600. The Waltham Co. paid \$1600 for the Waltham watch Lincoln gave his cousin, Dennis Hanks. Total sales amounted to \$273,610.

Lincoln writers are an industry in themselves. The outpouring of words began the day after Lincoln's death; there are now some 6000 books and pamphlets about him.

Biographies number hundreds; they have been written in German, Spanish and Norwegian. One of the best was by an Englishman, Lord Charnwood. After World War II, three Japanese published books about him.

Early biographies glorified Lincoln beyond his human proportions, causing certain associates, such as William Herndon, his old law partner, to react with reminiscences unduly vulgarizing the man. Later, objective historians reached a more balanced view.

Literary interest rose to a high plateau with the 1926 publication of Carl Sandburg's two-volume *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years*. Sandburg finished his job in 1939 with four volumes called *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*. The literary tide has been high ever since, and

added to it in 1953 was Roy P. Basler's eight-volume, 115-dollar *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*.

Hoaxes and whole-cloth inventions have given much trouble to truth-seekers about Lincoln. Dealer Newman, of the Lincoln Book Shop, has turned down enough Lincoln hair to stuff a sofa, and a rag-bag full of alleged scraps from the blood-stained pillow case on which Lincoln's head rested in his final hours.

Yet even the palpable frauds may achieve collector's value, such as the small stone inscribed: "A. Lincoln Ann Rutledge were betrothed here July 4, 1833." This stone, said to have been found in Old Salem in 1900, brought \$75 at auction.

Herndon's unproved tale of the Ann Rutledge romance is undoubtedly the biggest fraud of all. He used this to buttress his contention that there was no love between Abraham and Mary Lincoln (untrue); the story of young love and untimely death captured popular imagination and led to further hoaxes.

In 1928 a Miss Wilma Frances

Minor convinced the editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* that a series of Lincoln letters, including love letters to and from Ann Rutledge, was authentic, and the magazine published it. Historian Paul M. Angle pronounced the letters a fraud and, in an article also published in *The Atlantic Monthly*, spelled out the discrepancies:

Green ink was used in some of the letters . . . yet green ink contains aniline dye not introduced until later. The handwriting alleged to be Lincoln's was similar to his . . . but nowhere else had he begun sentences with a small letter. In one of Ann's letters was written: "I am greatfull for the Spencers copy-book. I copy frum that every time I can spair." Ann Rutledge died in 1835. Spencer's first penmanship book was not published until 1848.

All that cold-blooded scholars can determine for sure is that Abe and Ann lived in the same town at the same time, and that she was engaged to someone else. Yet the legend of Lincoln's love for her lives on.

Banner Boners

* HEADLINES like these are what give newspaper editors nightmares:

JURY GETS DRUNK DRIVING CASE HERE — Austin, Texas

NIGHT SCHOOL TO HEAR PEST TALK — Oakland, Calif.

— *American Press*, quoted by Charles M. Sievert in New York *World-Telegram and Sun*

COUNTY OFFICIALS TO TALK RUBBISH — Los Angeles, Calif.

HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS LEARN TO FILL OUT THEIR FORMS

— New York, N. Y.

POCATELLO MATTRESS FACTORY PLAYS IMPORTANT ROLE IN CITY'S GROWTH — Pocatello, Idaho, quoted in *In Transit*

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Could I have been saved?
Coron 1941 Apr (69)

