

**Images of Lincoln:  
A Mural That Inspired a  
Book**



(Photo courtesy of [Historic Ipswich](#))

The Riverwalk Mural that inspired David Kent was created by artist [Alan Pearsall](#).

## **Lincoln in New England In Search of His Forgotten Tours**

Lincoln Group Former President David Kent has authored a new book, one that tells of Lincoln's two journeys to New England and the importance of these travels to the overall story of our Sixteenth President and of the country itself. In this interview, he explains why he wrote the book, the work that went into writing it, and how it adds to our understanding of Lincoln.

*Wendy Swanson*

**What inspired you to write this particular book? Why did you choose to write on this topic?**

I was inspired by two things. First, I had been visiting various Lincoln statues and places in New England in my trips to and from visiting my family in Ipswich, Massachusetts. Second, I took a closer look at a mural painted on the side of an old textile mill. There was Lincoln standing in one corner, and I realized the mural—which depicted the history of the town since 1634—was a microcosm of the history of the United States. All this coalesced into my desire to reexamine the two tours of New England made, but the public has largely forgotten. I realized that the tale of Lincoln's two tours was also a tale of two Lincolns and of two countries.

**How/why did you decide on the format you used for the book (the ride-along style)?**

Because I was traveling around to see the locations where Lincoln spoke, it seemed fitting to have the readers ride along with me. They can see what Lincoln saw and said, how those places remember (or not) his visit, and reminisce with me over my own experiences as we explore together the issues that made Lincoln who we know him as today. The style helps bring the topics into the present and make them more relatable—and hopefully more fun—for the readers.

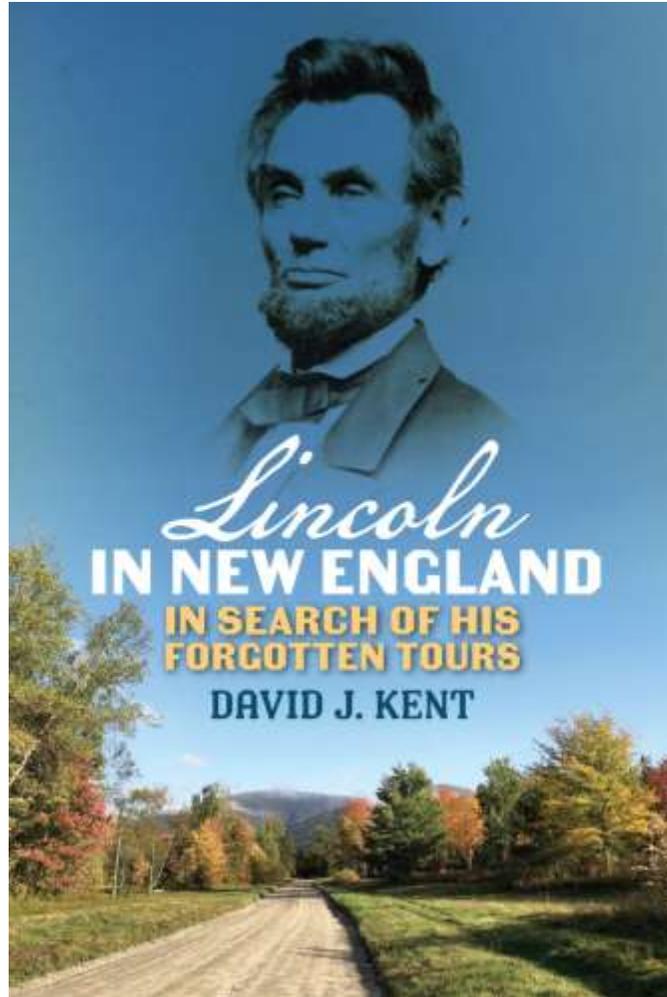
**When did you start working on this book? How long did it take you to complete it?**

I've been traveling to Lincoln sites for years but focused on his New England visits only more recently, starting soon after my *Fire of Genius* book had come out. So, the process from idea to creation is about three years. The actual writing took about nine months.

**Growing up in New England, how aware were you of these Lincoln sites/connections? If you were, which ones impressed you the most and made a lasting impression?**

I wasn't aware of his trips at all growing up. New England is so focused on the colonial and Revolutionary War eras because so much of that happened here but gives less emphasis to the Civil War. But I was an outlier, being attracted to Lincoln starting in elementary school. Only later did I discover how important his limited time in New England was.

**Did any of the sites provide the spark that first started your interest? If so, which one(s) and why? If not, do you remember what gave you that initial spark?**



*The book's cover displays Lincoln, as essentially all books on the Sixteenth President tend to do, as well as the New England countryside, the site of these journeys.*

The spark came from the mural, which was painted around 2007. I would see it along the Riverwalk in Ipswich whenever I came back to town to visit my parents. One day it hit me with a whole new way to look at Lincoln.

**Give a brief summary of the information/time period, etc., covered in the book.**

Over several chapters, Part I covers 1848, when he went to Massachusetts to stump for the Whig nominee for president, Zachary Taylor. The Part II chapters cover 1860, when he went to Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Connecticut immediately after his Cooper Union speech. In between I have an interregnum chapter that captures the profound changes to American society in the decade or so between the two trips.

**Why do you think the two Lincoln tours to New England have been essentially forgotten?**

Both were brief, less than two weeks each, and often given very little ink in biographies of Lincoln. That's a shame because they bookend incredible changes in both Lincoln and the country.

**Why are the tours important to the Lincoln story? What will readers learn about Lincoln? How does the Lincoln of the second tour differ from the first—what growth do we see? How does this part of Lincoln’s history give readers a better understanding of the man himself?**

When Lincoln went to Massachusetts in 1848, he was essentially unknown in New England. He was considered a “sucker” from the Wild West with limited education and an ungainly and unkempt appearance, who told jokes in a strange high-pitched voice. He was taken for his entertainment value rather than as a serious political leader. But he learned a lot during that trip, including about splits in the Whig party that would cause its demise (e.g., Free Soilers, Conscience vs. Cotton Whigs). He also experienced staunch abolitionism for the first time, as well as his impressionable first meeting with William Seward.

When Lincoln returned to New England in 1860, he was a celebrity that had given the Little Giant a run for his money. Now he was considered a Republican Party leader. His Cooper Union speech had convinced the eastern political elite that he was now a serious policy thinker. Whereas he was stumping for the Whig nominee Zachary Taylor in 1848, in 1860 the Republican nominee would not be chosen for another three months. Lincoln was stumping not only for the party but also for himself as an alternative to the presumptive nominee—Seward. He had learned from that first visit how to manage people and issues. On the second visit, he realized the times had changed and that he could be the right candidate for the times ahead.

The book is especially timely given that 2026 is the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. New England is integral to the nation’s founding, and I weave that history into Lincoln’s admiration for the Declaration’s concept of “all men are created equal.”

**Can you estimate how many road trips, miles, interviews, etc., went into your research? What written—or other—sources, if any, did you use?**

In addition to making stops on each of my many trips home to see family, I made three long road trips specifically to see particular locations and meet with specific scholars for background. Each spot had its local background, which meant talking to locals and experts and digging into local history. I also dug into all the speeches and newspaper reporting for Lincoln’s two trips, as well as letters Lincoln and others wrote at the time. And because I wanted to address the issues he encountered, I did additional research on the North’s complicity with slavery, Lincoln’s genealogy, key figures that influenced Lincoln (e.g., William Lloyd Garrison, the transcendentalist writers of Concord, MA), as well as the history of textile mills and Free Soilers, and much more.

**What surprised you the most while researching this subject? What do you consider the most unusual information you uncovered?**

There are many surprises in the book. One I’ll mention here is that Lincoln started corresponding with some of his distant relatives while in Congress and during his 1848 trip. He stayed with Levi Lincoln in Worcester, possibly a relative of his mother in Dedham, and traded letters with Solomon, David, and other Lincoln relatives. Not only did I visit Hingham, MA, where his ancestors first came to America, but I also visited Hingham, England, UK, where his ancestors

originated before moving here. Before this, Lincoln had very little information on his family history other than the one grandfather killed by Indians.

**You have indicated that you interviewed locals. Which conversations stand out? Any “unforgettable” characters?**

I have one story from my visit to Worcester where a local reintroduced me to the native Boston accent (it’s pronounced “Wuss-tah”). I also spoke with town historians, NPS volunteers, and docents at various mills, museums, homes, and libraries. I had dinner with Bill Hanna (who wrote a great book on Lincoln’s 1848 visit), Michael Burlingame (who is an encyclopedia of Lincoln info), and quite a few others who filled in local and Lincoln’s history.

**Any unexpected Lincolns along the way?**

There are some great Lincoln statues along the river walk in Hartford, CT, that are not to be missed. But probably the best statue I saw was one of Frederick Douglass, in a new park just opened in late 2023 in New Bedford, MA. I give credit to David Wieggers and Scott Schroeder for their Lincoln Sculpture Project Map that helped me find so many statues. I relate my conversations with them and others throughout the book.

**Will readers be able to use your book as a road map for their own tours of Lincoln sites in New England? For those inspired to seek out Lincoln in New England on their own, what would you consider the “must see” sites, whether for impact or unusual nature?**

I include maps for each of the two Lincoln tours in the book, so readers can see where he went and spoke, plus additional stops I made that relate to the Lincoln story. Those maps and my narrative can be used with the Sculpture Project Map to do a tour.

As for “must see,” I highly recommend the Boston Common area, the mills in Lowell, the abolitionist and whaling areas of New Bedford, the areas in and around Exeter, and the Hartford river walk sculptures. But I also recommend going to places like Chesterwood in western Massachusetts to see Daniel Chester French’s studio and Cornish, New Hampshire, to see Augusta Saint-Gaudens’s studio.

**I will use a cover of your book to accompany the article. What does the cover photo signify?**

Every Lincoln book has Lincoln on the cover, so mine does too. Since this is a ride-along book, I wanted to have some imagery that reflects both the aura of New England and the idea of driving along a country road. The publisher designed the initial cover, and the final cover reflects my further input.

**How does New England remember Lincoln today—or is he remembered?**

There are plenty of Lincoln statues, busts, and bas-reliefs in New England, sometimes standing alone and sometimes incorporated into Civil War monuments. But except for a few plaques on or near where he spoke, his two visits are largely forgotten. I wanted to remind people because the trips were critical to his personal and political development.

**Do you have a next project planned? Are there other Lincoln books percolating?**

My next book is related to Lincoln in a tangential way, while the one after that is likely to be a bit further afield. That said, I have several other books in various stages related to other aspects of Lincoln's life.

**Anything else you want to add?**

I'm booking speaking engagements, so if anyone knows any podcasters or venues, let me know.

*(Editor's note: The release date for David's book is March 3. You can preorder the book at [Amazon](#).)*