Ten Years of Book Reviews by David J. Kent

I have been writing this book review column for the *Lincolnian* newsletter for over ten years. This will be my last column. Last quarter I focused my penultimate article on the history of scholarship coming from Lincoln Group of DC members over our 90+ year history (and boy, there was a lot). In this final column I'm taking a look back at the last ten years of book reviews.

As a reminder, the column generally reviewed two books about Abraham Lincoln in each quarterly issue of the *Lincolnian*. One review came from the recently released literature, usually something from that year or the previous year. The other review examined an older but worthwhile read—a classic Lincoln tome or one of the more obscure books. There were a few exceptions to that rule, which I'll get to below.

To get a sense of what that looked like, let's start with some statistics. In the just over 10 years of these columns, there were a total of 41 issues (including this one). That came out to 82 individual book reviews. That's just in the *Lincolnian.* I also wrote periodic reviews in other venues, magazines, and journals. There were three books I intentionally did not review—my own. During this ten-year period, I published *Lincoln: The Man Who Saved America*, *Lincoln: The Fire of Genius*, and *Lincoln in New England*. I'll leave it to others to comment on those.

So, what books did I review? I'm not going to name all 82, but in going back through the issues, I discovered some interesting aspects in my choices.

Several authors were lucky enough to have more than one of their books reviewed. Perhaps not surprisingly since he has authored, co-authored, and edited by far the most Lincoln books of any Lincoln scholar, the list is led by Harold Holzer. In the spring of 2024, I reviewed both his new book (*Brought Forth on This Continent*) and one of his classic books (*Lincoln at Cooper Union*). But I also found three other books by Holzer that made their way into reviews: *Monument Man* (about Daniel Chester French, which I included in the issue celebrating LGDC involvement in the Lincoln Memorial Centennial), *A Just and Generous Nation* (co-authored with Norton Garfinkle), and *The Lincoln Image* (co-authored with Gabor Boritt and Mark Neely). Boritt had an additional review of his classic masterpiece, *Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream*.

Jonathan White was also represented for multiple books. At various times I reviewed his *Our Little Monitor* (about the ironclad Monitor, co-written with Anna Gibson Holloway), *A House Built by Slaves* (about Lincoln's relationship with African Americans in the White House), and most recently, *Measuring the Man* (Frederick Douglass's views on Lincoln, co-authored with Lucas Morel). Not to be outdone, Sidney Blumenthal had two of his books reviewed, which just happen to be the first two books in his Political Life of Abraham Lincoln series: *A Self-Made Man* and *Wrestling with His Angels*. I somehow never reviewed the third book in the series, *All the Powers of Earth*. [And for those, like me, eager to read the next two volumes, rumor has it they are in the works, and we should see the fourth volume as early as 2027). Meanwhile, another twofer is our very own Ed Steers, who had two of his books show up in the same issue: *Getting Right with Lincoln* (dispelling myths) and *His Name is Still Mudd* (documenting why Dr. Mudd was rightly convicted in the murder conspiracy trials).

Interestingly, there were some prominent Lincoln scholars who only managed to get one of their books reviewed during this ten-year period, including Michael Burlingame (and it wasn't even the Green Monster), Allen Guelzo, Douglas Wilson, David Herbert Donald, Paul Angle, Ron White, Jason Emerson, Brian Dirck, J.G. Randall, Jon Meacham, Michael Vorenberg, Richard Brookhiser, and many others. And, of course, there were many worthy books that didn't make it into the mix at all.

I managed to review ten books written by women, which is about 12% of the total. I rarely reviewed books related to Mary Lincoln, many of which are written by women, which is at least part of the reason for the skewed results. But prominent women authors included Stacy Lynn, Heather Cox Richardson, Elizabeth Keckly, C.J. King, Carol Dark Ayers, Elizabeth Smith Brownstein, Edna Greene Medford, Lois Einhorn, Anna Gibson Holloway, and Penny Barrick.

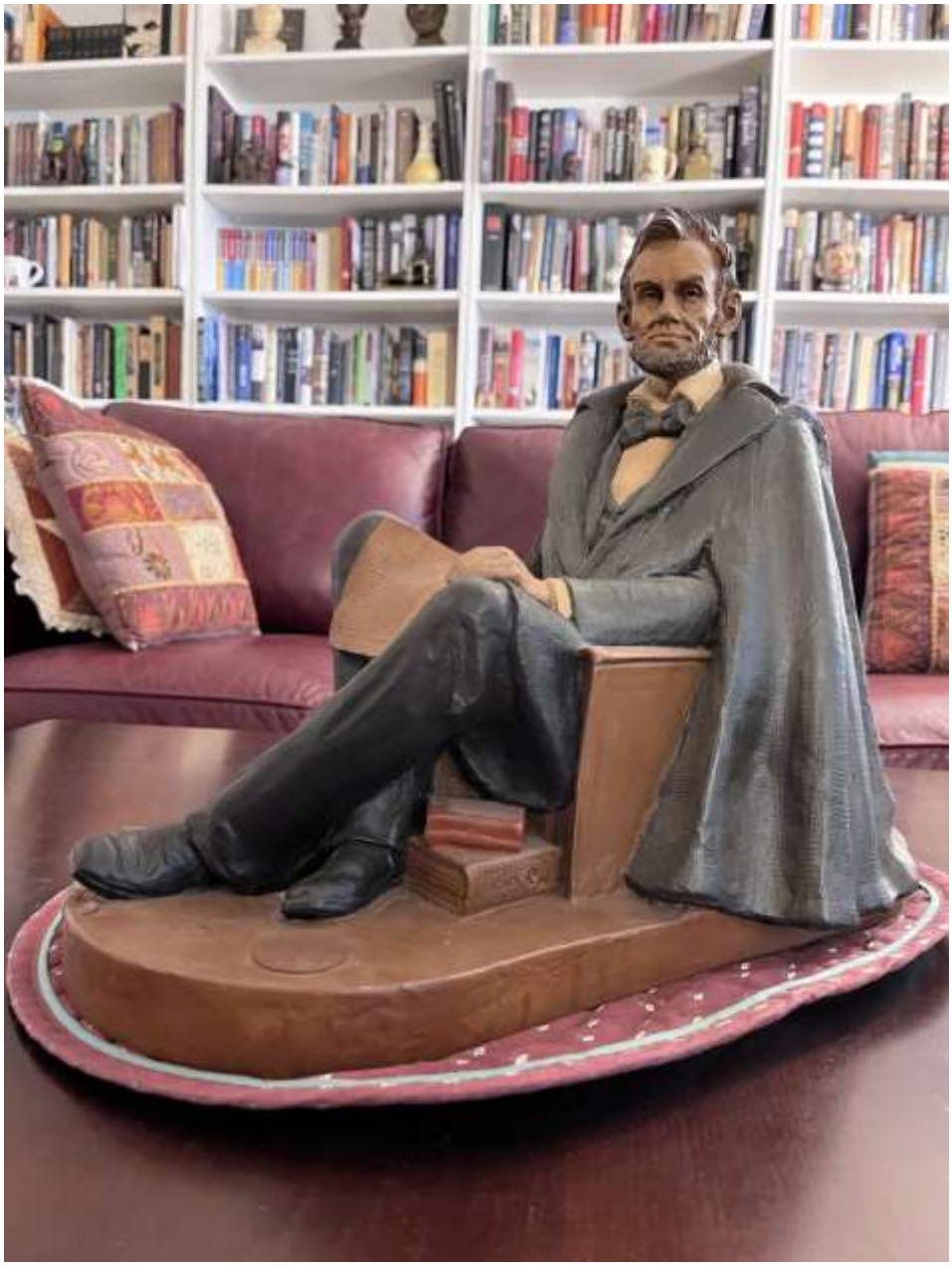
As I mentioned earlier, there were a few exceptions to the "one new + one classic" format. In the spring of 2022, to coincide with LGDC's Lincoln Memorial Centennial program, I provided four reviews instead of two, with each book related to the Lincoln Memorial. There were also the two issues I mentioned above where both books were by the same author (i.e., Holzer or Steers). On other occasions I had the two books support a theme. In the Winter 2018 issue, for example, the theme was Lincoln photographers and featured *Shooting Lincoln* by Nicholas Pistor and *The Photographer and the President* by Richard S. Lowry. In the Spring 2021 issue, the theme was Lincoln and Native Peoples, and it featured *38 Nooses* by Scott W. Berg and *Lincoln and the Indians* by David A. Nichols.

Finally, I tried to review some of the more obscure books to give LGDC members a taste of authors and topics that we don't usually see. They include: *Berry and Lincoln, Frontier Merchants: The Store that "Winked Out*," by Zarel C. Spears and Robert S. Barton (Lincoln's New Salem store); *Lincoln's Lost Speech* by Elwell Crissey (recreating, somehow, a speech so impressive that reporters forgot to take notes); *Abraham Lincoln: The Orator* by Lois Einhorn (Lincoln as a speechmaker); *Abraham Lincoln: The Evolution of His Literary Style* by Daniel Kilham Dodge (Lincoln as a writer); *A Shelf of Lincoln Books* by Paul M. Angle (books everyone should read by a noted Lincoln expert of many moons ago); *The Unpopular Mr. Lincoln* by Larry Tagg (people who hated Lincoln, but even more a novelty because Larry Tagg was a rock star and singer/songwriter that moonlighted as a Civil War and Lincoln scholar); *Lincoln and Kansas* by Carol Dark Ayres (Lincoln's 1859 speeches in Kansas, where he previewed some of the material he would make famous at Cooper Union); and *Hanging Captain Gordon* by Ron Soodalter (about the only slave trader that was ever executed after conviction, ordered so by Lincoln despite a long history of slave traders going free).

And don't forget the *Lincolnian* issue just before this, in which I highlighted the incredible Lincoln scholarship by our very own Lincoln Group of DC members over the years. LGDC has contributed to the Lincoln canon in many ways, great and small.

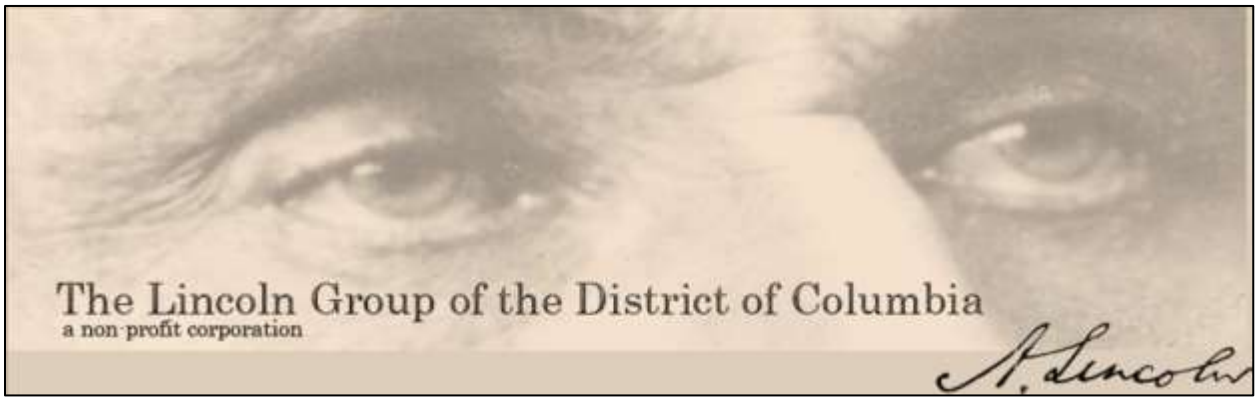
So…thanks to all Lincoln Group of DC members for being so supportive of this column for so long. I've read a lot of books, and I hope I've been able to encourage our membership to read both new books and those perhaps more obscure volumes that have enriched the Lincoln field. While I won't be writing this column, I will be staying close by and will continue to contribute occasional articles for the *Lincolnian*. I may even be showing up in unexpected places. For those interested in seeing book reviews in the future, you'll have two outlets: First, this column will be

continuing under the capable hands of a new reviewer. Second, I'll continue to post reviews at https://abrahamlincolnbibliography.wordpress.com/, the Abraham Lincoln Bibliography Project website.



David provided the above photo of a recent Lincoln sculpture he acquired; some of his Lincoln bookshelves serve as a backdrop. The work is by Tom Clark. Quite a fitting exclamation point to David's time as the Lincoln Group's reviewer of books!

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Of Lincoln Books and Reading Glasses