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Ann Rutledge in American Memory: Social Change and the Erosion of a Romantic Drama

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A legend of a shining, deathless, holy and pure passion arose, spread, grew by some inherent vital sheen of its own or of the need of those who wanted it, of Ann Rutledge....

Carl Sandburg, *The Prairie Years*

Among the many love stories that poetry, biography, film, and drama told during the first half of the twentieth century, that of Abraham Lincoln and Ann Rutledge occupies a special place. Although scholars have argued for decades about the role Ann Rutledge played in Abraham Lincoln's life,¹ this essay says nothing about that question; rather, it speaks about the diminished relevance of the question itself. Moving back and forth between images of tragic romance and the changing ethos of American culture, the essay reviews the emergence and diffusion of the Ann Rutledge story. It explains why the story evoked strong public interest during the Progressive and New Deal eras, remained popular until the 1950s, then faded as a postindustrial society intensified demands for diversity, inclusion, racial justice, and gender equality.

Diminishing popular interest in Ann Rutledge accompanied by rising academic interest raises important questions for scholars of collective memory. A second-cousin of "public opinion," "collective memory" refers to the distribution throughout society of beliefs, knowledge, feelings, and moral judgements about the past. Only individuals possess the capacity to contemplate the past, but beliefs do not originate in the individual alone, nor can they be explained on the basis of personal experience. Individuals do not know the past singly; they know it with and against others situated in diverse communities and in the context of beliefs that predecessors and contemporaries have transferred to them.

Since different communities bring unique experiences and presuppositions to representations of the past, they perceive it differently. This is why vast revisions of the historical record often have little or no influence on the public. Revisionist accounts of Christopher Columbus show him bringing death and slavery to the New World, but national surveys show that these accounts have been largely ignored. The rise in Alexander Hamilton's prestige among Progressive Era academics and ideologues never rubbed off on the people at large. Thirty-five years of presidential greatness surveys indicate that revisionist views of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson have failed to change their place in the public's esteem. Likewise, books and articles about Abraham Lincoln rose sharply during the last twenty-five years, but his prestige in American popular culture, as Merrill Peterson

suggests, and this author demonstrates, has waned.²

Recent reassessments of Ann Rutledge's role in Abraham Lincoln's life³ have been met with indifference by the general public.⁴ The number of Ann Rutledge stories in magazines and newspapers, indexed in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* and *New York Times Index*, peaked during the 1920s, remained high throughout the 1930s, gradually declined through the 1940s and 1950s, then virtually vanished. The index most likely to contain *Ann Rutledge* as a keyword, the online *Reader's Guide*, has not mentioned her since it was established in 1986. The pattern of Ann Rutledge items, however, is more important than the number. Not only is she absent from today's most popular movies, stageplays, poetry, and magazines; she no longer interests the best talents of our day, as she did during the first half of the twentieth century. Even visitation rates for the site most closely related to Ann Rutledge's life—New Salem, near Springfield, Illinois—show a forty-year decline.⁵ Citation counts, artistic production, and visitation rates are no substitute for surveys of public knowledge, but changes in those counts and production patterns provide a reasonable estimate of changing popular interests.

4

The Story of Ann Rutledge

Its Emergence

Ann's and Abe's story goes something like this. Abraham Lincoln, a New Salem, Illinois, postmaster in his early twenties, becomes attracted to his landlord's pretty daughter, Ann. William Herndon tells us that Ann was an able and attractive but by no means exceptional girl. By temperament and skill, she fit into the frontier life surrounding her: "She was a beautiful girl, and by her winning ways attached people to her so firmly that she soon became the most popular young lady in the village. She was quick of apprehension, industrious, and an excellent housekeeper. She had a moderate education, but was not cultured except by contrast with those around her. One of her strong points was her woman skill. She was dexterous in the use of the needle—an accomplishment of far more value in that day than all the acquirements of art in china painting and hammered brass are in this—and her needle-work was the wonder of the day. At every 'quilting' Ann was a necessary adjunct, and her nimble fingers drove the needle more swiftly than anyone else."⁶

5

When Abe meets Ann, she is already betrothed to John McNamar, an easterner who had come to Illinois to make a new life for himself. Having established a successful business, he returns east to reunite with his family and bring it to Illinois. He will then marry Ann. After many months without a letter from McNamar, she and her family assume he will never return. At this point, young Lincoln begins to see her regularly, soon expresses his tender feelings for her and proposes marriage. She consents but somehow cannot forget her original promise to McNamar. An intense conflict between her duty to her fiancé and her love for Lincoln weakens her physically. The tortured young woman contracts a fatal "brain disease," struggles for awhile, then dies. For many days after Ann's funeral, Abe wanders about in the woods, muttering incomprehensible sounds. He stops eating and sleeping and begins to embrace the "shadows and illusion" of his own "heated brain." Friends watch as "his mind wandered from its throne." The damage is permanent: Abraham Lincoln recovers his mind but can never love another woman.⁷

6

Stories about young Abe and Ann had been topics of local gossip from the beginning of Lincoln's presidency. William Herndon, Lincoln's law partner, knew about these, and soon after Lincoln died he sought details by questioning as many former residents of New Salem as he could find. After presenting the results of his inquiry in a November 1866 public lecture,⁸ many local people criticized him. So soon after Lincoln's death, while Mary and the two boys were still grieving, Herndon's revelation seemed pointlessly unkind.

7

The Diffusion of the Story

To assert publicly that Abraham Lincoln was incapable of loving his wife may have been unkind, but if it had been pointless the public would not have responded so strongly. Herndon's story of Lincoln's first and only love spread. Ward Hill Lamon included it in his life of Lincoln⁹ (based on Herndon's papers) and, later, Herndon included it as a chapter in his own (1889) biography.¹⁰ Herndon's and Lamon's versions—expositions of witnesses' testimony—described a realistic, not idealized, romance. Popular magazines, however, filled in the needed scenes, provided the needed color, retold the stories in a way that enlarged what their readers already "knew." The retelling, as will soon be shown, began during the Progressive Era, matured during the New Deal, and subsisted during World War II and the early decades of the Cold War. Ann Rutledge's story articulated the concerns of these periods, laid them out for all to see, understand, and feel. But to understand the story's symbolic qualities, the public's relishing it, and the academy's disbelieving and ridiculing it must be recounted.

8

Eleanor Atkinson's writing for *Ladies Home Journal* (1908) is a good place to begin. She told her readers (who numbered more than Herndon's) about the meeting where Ann realizes her love:

9

When they came to where the sycamore was weaving its old, faery weft in the sunset light she laid the bonnet on the grass, and listened to his stories and comments on the new men and things he had seen until he made her laugh, almost like the happy girl of old tavern days: for Lincoln was a wizard who could break the spell of bad dreams and revive dead faiths. A pause, a flutter of hearts as light as the leaf shadows, and a hasty question to cover the embarrassment. There was a puzzling point in her grammar lesson—how can adverbs modify other adverbs?

Yes, he had been puzzled by that, too, and Mentor Graham had helped him with an illustration: "I love you *very dearly!*"

Oh, yes, she understood now! A burning blush, a gasping sigh at the shock of flooding memory. She still struggled to forget this blighting thing. But could she ever again listen to such words without pain or shame? She had the courage of a proud race. If her lips trembled she could at least lift her eyes to meet that immemorial look of brooding tenderness.¹¹

That a young man who had spent his childhood reading books by a fireplace should express his first love in the form of a grammar lesson seemed natural. That the man who showed the nation right from wrong by ending slavery should, in his youth, break "the spell of bad dreams and revive dead faiths" seemed equally appropriate. That the Man of Sorrows should have betrayed to his young love a "look of brooding tenderness" was understandable ... and wonderful.

Three years after *Ladies Home Journal* published its article, Martin L. Bunge brought Herndon's facts to life in his play *Abraham Lincoln, A Historical Drama* (1911).¹² Twenty years later, the State of Illinois enshrined Ann Rutledge in its reconstructed New Salem. Earlier, the Old Salem League had devoted several pages to her in a publication advocating the village's restoration,¹³ and when the reconstructed village opened to visitors in the mid-1930s, it included among its attractions a replica of the Rutledge Tavern, the authentic Rutledge family Bible, and the sidesaddle Ann used for riding. Mere objects are hardly proof of Ann and Abe's love for one another, but the people could fasten upon them and reinforce beliefs they already cherished.

10

Not all sacred relics are locked in museums and shrines. In 1934 a Lincoln admirer came across Mrs. Elizabeth Funk's hymnal and found a notation written in ink beside one of its songs, "Pilgrim Stranger": "Lincoln heard Ann Rutledge sing this song before he fell in love with her." Mrs. Funk's daughter-in-law explained everything: how Lincoln heard a fresh, young voice hidden from view in the forest, then heard it again the next day in church. How he must have marveled on that day, the day he first laid eyes on sweet Ann!¹⁴

11

Pageant masters and filmmakers worked apace. In 1937 a great-great niece of Ann Rutledge played her role in an Iowa pageant and later expressed "surprise at the number of newsmen, photographers and Lincoln worshipers present."¹⁵ She did not realize that she was a living relic.

12

True, Ann Rutledge's memory had been revered long before her niece portrayed her, but never so intensely or by so many people. When D. W. Griffith's *Abraham Lincoln* (1930) opened in Washington, D.C., newspapers advertised the principal roles as "Mr. Walter Huston as Lincoln; Miss Una Merkel as Ann Rutledge."¹⁶ Mary Todd Lincoln's larger and more important part in the film was not even mentioned. The ad writer knew that the public wanted to see Ann, not Mary.

Ann Rutledge's story was central to the 1937 stage and 1940 film versions of Robert Sherwood's *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* because she added depth to Lincoln's character and made apparent his emotional vulnerability. Sherwood depicts him leaning heavily on Ann, seeking in her the strength and stability he cannot find in himself: "I've been loving you—a long time—with all my heart. You see, Ann—you're a particularly fine girl. You've got sense, and you've got bravery—those are two things that I admire particularly." Abe's emotional dependence causes him to grieve profoundly when Ann dies. "I can't stand it. I can't live with myself any longer. I've got to die and be with her again, or I'll go crazy." His friends never let him out of their sight, but he only gets worse. "I cannot bear to think of her out there alone," he cries as he waits for the darkness.¹⁷ Audiences loved the play. In 1941, a few years after the first appearance of *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, E. P. Conkle's WPA-supported *Prologue to Glory*¹⁸ appeared on Broadway, with Ann portrayed again by her great-grand-niece. It, too, became one of the most popular plays of the year.

Since Miss Katherine Peterson of Chicago fit the description of Ann Rutledge almost perfectly, artist Paul Von Kleiben painted her portrait for the Lincoln exhibit at the Chicago World's Fair. At last, everyone could know how Lincoln's beloved looked.¹⁹ Louis Bonhajo later painted Abe and Ann alone on an afternoon outing. Abe holds Ann's one hand, while she places her other hand on his forearm. In the background, a horse waits as the couple exchange words of love. This painting, and others like it, appeared on calendars and in storybooks distributed throughout the land.²⁰ Some of the books may have been read on *The Ann Rutledge*, companion train to *The Abraham Lincoln*, added in 1937 to the Alton Railroad's Chicago to Saint Louis run.²¹

In 1927 the executive secretary of the Abraham Lincoln Association, Paul M. Angle, complained that "ninety-five percent of the thousands who visit Springfield and New Salem on Lincoln pilgrimages are firmly convinced that Ann Rutledge was the only woman Lincoln ever loved."²² By 1945 the numbers remained the same. James G. Randall, the most influential Lincoln scholar of the day, observed that "The romantic linking of Abraham and Ann has become universal."²³ Whether that linkage was authentic or not is important. Collective memory based on knowledge is one thing; on fantasy, another. Were Americans duping themselves? Were their convictions based on fact, or did their convictions determine what counted as fact? Was Ann Rutledge in American memory discovered or invented?

The Story's Authenticity

One of the most peculiar aspects of the Ann Rutledge story is the determination of so many Lincoln scholars to dispute its accuracy. Information about many parts of Lincoln's life, including those furnished by Herndon, is dubious; yet, none has been scrutinized so closely and skeptically as his relation to Ann Rutledge. The intensity of stir caused by the story is itself an aspect of its significance. Why should a presumably minor event in Lincoln's life arouse such passionate popular interest and such stern scholarly denunciation. To this day the question remains, and it is now time to answer it.

Young Lincoln definitely knew Ann, and on the basis of that fact alone many were willing to assume he loved her. But mere acquaintance is not proof of romance, let alone proof of permanent effects on Lincoln's life and presidency. William Barton and Paul Angle believed that Herndon only presented materials favorable to his version of the story, suppressing contrary documentation. Barton and Angle also confirmed Herndon's dislike for Mary Lincoln and desire to hurt her.²⁴ As the years passed, more people came forward to tell what they knew about Abe and Ann, but the

new testimony, like the old, was contradictory. Since no negative evidence existed, however—no proof that Abe did not love Ann—many people, including Carl Sandburg, felt free to assume he did: "The name 'Ann Rutledge' would come to him and he would pronounce it softly to the shadows in the blacksmith shop where he lay burning wood shavings to light the paper of *Kirkham's Grammar*."²⁵

Who could doubt it? In 1919 *Literary Digest* carried details of Abe's and Ann's romance, as recalled by Ann's sister, then ninety years old.²⁶ That she was only five years old when the affair was supposed to have occurred, yet remembered so many details and described them so coherently, troubled no one. Ann's brother, Robert, was seventeen years old when she died, and his testimony was identical to his sister's. After William Herndon had asked him about Lincoln's feelings for Ann, he consulted his family and answered three months later in a carefully composed letter. Robert's testimony, as James G. Randall later described it, consisted of "one person reporting what another person had written him concerning what that person recollected he had inferred from something Ann had casually said to him more than thirty-one years before!"²⁷ For most Americans, however, such testimony was more than convincing. **18**

In 1928 new evidence appeared. Wilma Minor sent *Atlantic* three articles about Abe and Ann's romance, including photocopies of three letters that had passed between them. Before publishing the astonishing documents, *Atlantic* editor Ellery Sedgwick received assurance of their authenticity by Carl Sandburg and Ida Tarbell. But it was only a matter of time until Paul Angle and his colleagues proved the letters to be forgeries.²⁸ The Wilma Minor incident embarrassed *Atlantic* but had no effect on the story. That Abraham Lincoln fell in love with Ann Rutledge and remained in love with her for the rest of his life was a great truth that could not be diminished by cheats wishing to exploit it. **19**

The Minor affair convinced historians that the Ann Rutledge tale was "one of the great myths of American history."²⁹ Curiously, however, the same scholars who gloated over Wilma Minor's fraud were later silent about the 1944 discovery of a *Menard Axis* article proving that Herndon had not invented the romance, as so many had claimed. Written in 1862, four years before Herndon's public lecture, the article describes the Lincoln-Rutledge affair, from beginning to end. In the *New York Times*, historian Lloyd Lewis wrote that the *Menard* discovery meant that the Ann Rutledge "Myth" was a fact after all."³⁰ **20**

Discounting Ann Rutledge's role in Lincoln's life, professional scholars were willing to accept without criticism every other part of the story, including Ann's engagement to John McNamar. The entire history of Lincoln's New Salem days, in fact, relies on the same incomplete and contradictory reminiscences as those on which the love story is based. Thus, historian John Y. Simon, while recognizing the misuse of the romance in film and fiction, asserted that the critics had gone too far. In 1993 he questioned Randall's assessment of the documentary evidence and challenged his conclusion. "This commendable correction of the historical record, once valuable, now requires reappraisal, especially as it provoked an overreaction."³¹ To deny the reality of Lincoln's romance had become an imperative of political correctness among Lincoln scholars, needlessly impoverishing the historical record. **21**

As Simon performed his work, Douglas L. Wilson re-examined the evidence of Herndon's informants and found more consensus about the romance than did Randall. Wilson conceded that there would never be conclusive proof, but he insisted that inferences from incomplete evidence must be drawn according to uniform standards. The issue was, at bottom, methodological. On all questions about Lincoln's youth and New Salem days, the *preponderance* of evidence determined affirmation and denial. On the question of Lincoln's love affair, however, Lincoln scholars required irrefutable evidence.³² **22**

Simon and Wilson were right, but they never explain why the standard of proof was so much higher for the Lincoln-Rutledge case than for any other. Critical scholars seemed to believe that acceptance of a false Ann Rutledge story would undermine the true Abraham Lincoln story. Indeed, **23**

Randall included a critical analysis of the Ann Rutledge romance as an appendix to his 1945 book on Lincoln's *presidency*. Popular commotion over the romance, however, reflected more than a trivialization of Lincoln's political career; the two elements were interdependent: Lincoln's love life would have interested no one if it were not part of the foundation of his political fate, while the latter would have had a different meaning outside the context of a romantic tragedy that appealed strongly to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century tastes. Lincoln's greatness, in the public's mind, was predicated on his humanity, and nothing better dramatized his human side than his love for poor Ann. Thus, Ida Tarbell, although discredited by the *Atlantic* scandal, soon afterward and without a blush, published details on "Lincoln's First Love" for *Colliers*. Thousands eagerly read her account without giving her role in the Minor controversy, or Angle's role in resolving it, a second thought.³³

Neither Angle nor Randall nor any other Lincoln scholar could articulate the reason for Ann's symbolic power. They could not understand the tension between their own craft, analytic history, and commemorative symbolism, which embodies history's affective and moral meanings. They championed the newly professional field of Lincoln studies, defended truth rooted in historical fact against myths rooted in social relevance. But if they were concerned simply to establish the truth of Lincoln's life, they would have challenged all its unfounded aspects, no matter how obscure. Instead, they confined themselves to one aspect—the romantic theme that had entranced the public. The intensity of their criticism, then, derived less from the effort to affirm professional credentials than the nature of the profession itself. "At the heart of history," Pierre Nora declared, "is a critical discourse that is antithetical to spontaneous [popular] memory. History is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it."³⁴ Professional historians targeted popular myth for deconstruction because they needed something rich on which to feed. But what of critical discourse itself? Rather than analyzing it, Lincoln's historians deferred to it. Instead of addressing commemoration on its own terms, they dismissed and ridiculed it. Doing so, they only made themselves vulnerable to skeptical critics within their own discipline, critics eager not to restore Ann's aura but to diminish authority of any stripe, including that of their predecessors. Their skepticism, however, revealed nothing about the enigma of Ann's celebrity.

24

Why America Loved the Ann Rutledge Story

The Favored Version

Over many years, symbolic anthropologists influenced by Emile Durkheim, including A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Claude Levi-Strauss, have shown how the relationship between objects in the natural world, like totemic animals and plants, symbolize the relationship between individuals and groups in the social world.³⁵ Ann and Abe perform this function: their relationship to one another idealizes the relationship between the common man and the state. As president, Lincoln's enduring love for Ann articulates the state's concern for the welfare of the people, manifested in Progressive and New Deal reform.

25

By the 1890s America's "second revolution,"³⁶ based not only on industrial development but also population growth and cultural change, led the American people to realize the obsolescence of many of their political and economic traditions. During the ensuing Progressive Era (1900–1920), fundamental economic and political reforms extended the rights of common men and women alike. Warren Harding won the presidency in 1920 on a promise to end reform, to "return to normalcy," but neither Harding, Coolidge, nor Hoover rolled back the Progressive Era's political and economic achievements. Upon these achievements Roosevelt's New Deal superimposed unprecedented measures: direct support to ordinary citizens in the form of food, housing, jobs, and retirement financial security. Meanwhile, the subjective gap separating governing elites from the masses became narrower than ever before. Wealth, refinement, and achievement, as always, differentiated the population, but they did so in a new matrix of equality and new meanings of citizenship. The

26

masses—once a source of labor and military manpower, and occasionally an object of paternalistic beneficence—had inherited rights as well as obligations and had become an object of dignity rather than condescension.

Ann Rutledge, like Abraham Lincoln, made this newfound dignity tangible, articulated the common man's fears and moral mood in a time that put the premises of American society to their severest test. But if the story of Ann's love for Abe became familiar fare during the first half of the twentieth century, only one of its versions could formulate the people's political sentiments. **27**

The stronger the version of a story, the more expansive its claims and the more assumptions it requires.³⁷ That Abe Lincoln loved Ann Rutledge, intended to marry her, grieved over her death, and eventually recovered is the story's *weak* version. Lincoln scholar William Barton believed in this version. His painstaking research led him to the conclusion that "Abraham Lincoln and Ann truly loved each other," but he saw no reason to exaggerate the consequence.³⁸ Roy Basler, too, believed that "Lincoln knew Ann and very probably loved her. She returned his affection." But Lincoln was courting another young lady shortly after Ann's death, "and his memory of her was not of any considerable efficacy in his later life."³⁹ The *strong* version of the story, professed by William Herndon, goes much further: it asserts that Lincoln never got over Ann's death, mourned her the rest of his life, and suffered an unhappy marriage because his wife never matched Ann's merits. The *strongest* version of the story goes further yet, asserting that Lincoln derived his presidential virtues from his memory of Ann. Forgiveness, sensitivity to suffering, and love for the common people came to Abraham Lincoln through his grief, and he retained these through fond memories and repeated contacts with Ann's spirit. She became, in short, his comfort and guiding light. That the strongest version of the story became the most popular is very important to our understanding of its appeal, for it was this version that resonated with the realities of the day. Ann Rutledge's character, life, and early death on the one hand, and Progressive and New Deal reforms on the other, appeared to invoke the same principles of equality and compassion, such that the representation of one brought to mind the relevance of the other. **28**

The story's strongest version—a product of poets, not historians—appealed most to the public. In D. J. Snider's poem, Ann plays a supernatural role: "She will spring out of air to him when he is harried by trouble, / Or when hit by men's hate he is tempted to vengeance to hit back; / She will haunt him ghost-like in his night till again he shall love her...." Ann Rutledge, so Snider believes, incarnates Abraham Lincoln's "Upper Self."⁴⁰ Among the many virtues of that Self, R. L. Duffus finds compassion to be preeminent: "Never toll the bell, never summon / The unreturning dead. / But do you remember / Ann Rutledge of New Salem? / Did you in that far summer, / Losing her, learn to pity / The pain and grief of a nation?"⁴¹ **29**

From the pain and grief over Ann's loss, it is a short step to pitying the pain and grief of America. How could this be, if Ann were not the nation incarnate? Edgar Lee Masters' "Ann Rutledge" from *Spoon River Anthology* (1914) gave the mystical union eloquent poetic expression: "Out of me unworthy and unknown / The vibrations of deathless music; / 'With malice toward none, with charity for all.' / Out of me the forgiveness of millions toward millions, / And the beneficent face of a nation / Shining with justice and truth. / I am Ann Rutledge who sleep beneath these weeds, / Beloved in life of Abraham Lincoln, / Wedded to him, not through union, / But through separation. / Bloom forever, O Republic, / From the dust of my bosom!"⁴² **30**

Masters sees Ann as an invisible mover of history and source of Lincoln's will to bind the wounds of war and reconstitute the nation, although he does not explain how Lincoln's grief in 1835 translated into liberal plans for reconstruction thirty years later. Neither William Herndon nor his informants saw such a connection, but the idea seemed right.⁴³ Edwin Markham, writing in the mid-1920s, believed as much: "She left upon his life a light, / A music sounding through his years, / A spirit singing through his toils, / A memory in his tears. / But from her beauty and her doom / A man rose merciful and just; / And a great People still can feel / The passion of her dust."⁴⁴ **31**

Twentieth-century writers were making Ann the source of everything Lincoln was to become, the template of his political legacy. Out of her rose "the vibrations of deathless music." Out of her "a man rose merciful and just."⁴⁵ But if poets articulated the *strongest* case of the Ann Rutledge story, dramatists did most to popularize it. Through four acts of dialogue and soliloquy, Harold Gammans' *Spirit of Ann Rutledge* (1927) credits Ann's ghost as the main source of Lincoln's strength and moral purpose.⁴⁶ In John Ford's film, *Young Mr. Lincoln*, Abe is unsure what to do with his life when Ann dies. He places a stick on her grave and allows the direction of its fall to determine whether he will study law. Ann determines that direction and seals Abe's fate. Robert Sherwood's *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* attributes Lincoln's successes to Ann. Abe had decided not to enter politics, but during the scene in which he professes his love for Ann, he changes his mind. He feels that he must make himself worthy of her affections by running for the state assembly. In E. P. Conkle's (1941) play, too, Ann is literally Abe's *Prologue to Glory*, for without her he would have remained a contented clerk and achieved nothing. **32**

Thus, American popular opinion was not content with an ordinary love affair. It had to be an extraordinary one that affected the fate of the nation. If such a story resonated with early twentieth-century cultures of egalitarian reform, what linked the two? What symbolic connections and oppositions made the story so much a part of the society? **33**

Counterpoint: Ann vs. Mary

Figures like Ann Rutledge do not appear in a vacuum but in a field occupied by other figures. That field which resonates so strongly with Ann Rutledge also resonates, positively and negatively, with other people in Lincoln's life. The public's dislike of Mary Lincoln, in particular, was an essential part of Ann Rutledge's appeal. Just as "one linguistic term," according to Ferdinand de Saussure, "derives its value from opposition to all others,"⁴⁷ so Ann symbolized the cultural ideals that distinguished her from Mary. True, the death of a husband and three of four children brought Mary Lincoln as much pain as Ann Rutledge's death was supposed to have brought Abraham, but the disagreeable parts of Mary's personality cost her sympathy. Some but not all the censure was warranted. She certainly put the president in debt by purchasing luxurious White House furnishings, but no more than the president put the nation in debt by insisting on completing an expensive dome for the Capitol building, and for a comparable reason: to dignify the presidency and the Union it represented. On the other hand, Mary offended men whose good will Lincoln needed and insulted women whom she imagined were attracted to her husband. Warranted or not, generations of Americans learned to dislike Mary Lincoln. Her Illinois contemporaries deemed her an "other": "Southern, proud, witty, willful, ambitious, dark, stocky, and more cultured than her future husband."⁴⁸ Her reputation fell further after her husband's death, when her only living son, Robert, committed her to a mental institution. **34**

In 1938 Emanuel Hertz reprinted a William Herndon letter that disparaged Mary by emphasizing Lincoln's feelings toward Ann. Writing to an acquaintance, Herndon explained why Lincoln broke his first engagement to Mary: "[D]id you know that Mr. Lincoln was 'as crazy as a loon' in this city in 1841...? Did you know that his crazy bout was partly caused by *that old original love* coming in conflict with *new relations about to be assumed*? His fidelity to it was *sublime*. Did you know that all Lincoln's struggles, difficulties, etc. between himself and his wife were partly, if not wholly, caused by Mrs. L's cognition that Lincoln did not love her, and *did love another*? Lincoln told his wife that he did not love her, did so before he was married to her; she was cognizant of the fact that Lincoln loved another."⁴⁹ **35**

Moviemakers built on this conception by placing Mary Lincoln in an unfavorable light and emphasizing one vice that William Herndon had never mentioned. Herndon disliked Mary's aggressive personality but said nothing about her determination to see her husband president; he believed that Lincoln had more than enough political zeal of his own. By the late 1920s, however, Lincoln's ambition vanishes while Mary's becomes brutal. In D. W. Griffith's (1930) *Lincoln*, the young lawyer confesses on his wedding day that he is "afraid" of Mary's ambition. He turns to **36**

Ann Rutledge's picture and flees Springfield; but on his return Mary accepts him back. "You need me," she says coldly. Sherwood's drama treats Mary's aspirations more sympathetically. Unlike other women of her class, including her own sister, Mary was not deceived by Lincoln's rude appearance. She was in truth the shrewish and demanding wife, but she recognized political potential when she saw it. Mary's impatience with her husband's desire to be an obscure state politician gives the impression of his avoiding rather than seeking the presidency. Established in the role of reluctant candidate, he remains part of the people while his self-serving motives are displaced onto his wife. It comforted Americans of every generation (especially the Depression generation, for which symbols of equality were so necessary and meaningful) to know that the Savior of His Country really loved a common girl, not a Frenchspeaking aristocrat who would have despised their low ambitions and paltry achievements.

As time passed, Ann became more worldly and acquired ambitions of her own. Robert S. Harper's "Abe's Dream of Ann Rutledge," published in *Collier's* (1952), twists the traditional narrative to include a forward and aggressive Ann. Harper's version begins with the president-elect tearfully bidding farewell to his Springfield neighbors and entering the train that will take him to Washington. As the train pulls away, Lincoln remains shaken. He throws aside his hat and shawl, pretends to blow his nose as "he wipes from his face tears that had trickled down the furrowed, bewhiskered cheeks." Wife Mary sighs contemptuously. "I'm glad that's over. Maybe we can get a little rest now." When her husband explains there will be no rest where they are going, she rebukes him. "I've worked my head off to get you into the White House, and ... I'm going to enjoy myself while I can."⁵⁰ With these words, Lincoln tires, falls asleep, and is visited in a dream by Ann Rutledge. Ann tells him that she knew he would become president. She now knows that he will save the Union and die. Then she reveals his fate: "When you return, Abe, you will belong to me. Only a little while and we'll be together. You and I for eternity ... you will belong to me and to your country and to the Sangamon." Abe replies: "I've always liked it around here, Ann."⁵¹ Mary did not like it, and Abe will go to the Sangamon River, back to the people, without her.

Given the author's characterization of Mary, his readers must have shaken their heads approvingly as they thought of the new song, published just three years earlier. "In the Spring by the Sangamon River, / They would stroll, he so tall, she so fair; / And Abe knew he would love Ann forever, / Ann with the cornsilk hair. / Through the years in the soft hush of dawning / Or at dusk he would see her still there, / And he'd dream of the days when he courted / Ann with the cornsilk hair."⁵²

The old Ann Rutledge was still alive in the 1950s but less diffident and reserved. Alive, she courts Abe assertively; dead, she becomes a home-wrecker—a pushy ghost determined to take him away from his wife and children forever. Abraham Lincoln's sweetheart is beginning to look like a modern woman. Abe, ready to abandon his wife and children for Ann, is beginning to look like a modern man. The plot highlights the old tension between Mary and Ann, defining one in terms of the other. In these new versions of the Ann Rutledge story the same moral alternatives appear: ambition against love; old attachments against present obligations.

Ann and Abe were also remembered by music, including *Songs Lincoln Loved*, newly published in 1954. "Vain man, thy fond pursuits forbear" were the words Ann sang to Abe while she was on her deathbed.⁵³ Years later, when Lincoln heard the soft chords and words of Stephen Foster's "Gentle Annie" ("like a flower thy spirit did depart"), old feelings overtook him. One day the melody reached his ears while he considered an appeal to release a man from prison, and he immediately granted it. No one knows the source of this story, but it reinforced the belief that Ann's death shaped Abraham Lincoln's character.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, the story's other theme—the disparaging of Mary Todd Lincoln—gained credence. In 1959, several years after the newest Ann Rutledge stories and songs appeared, the *New York Times* reported the discovery of fresh documentary evidence: contemporary telegraphs to the President asserting that his wife's aggressive personality was as unbearable as everyone suspected.⁵⁵ Symptomatic of this conviction is Lloyd Ostendorf and Walter Oleksy's controversial *A House Divided: An Oral History of Mariah Vance, 1850–1860*,

wherein Abe admits to Mary, already shocked by his possession of a photo of Ann's likeness, how much Ann had affected his life and how fondly he remembers her.⁵⁶ Whoever produced this manuscript, the comment about Ann and Mary adheres to the same logic of incompatibility and conflict, reflecting the public's contrasting attitudes toward the two women.

As Mary's symbolic foil, Ann's contribution to the Lincoln story can be grasped. The Rail Splitter image did much to make Lincoln popular, but what is to be said of his marriage to the wealthy and genteel Mary Todd? Lincoln's critics assumed that he married Mary for her money, but many Lincoln admirers must have believed it, too, especially in light of his supposedly unhappy marriage. Preventing Lincoln's being known as an ambitious leech required counter-images, like Ann Rutledge's. However, a simple story telling of Lincoln's falling in love with a country girl, grieving but eventually recovering from her death, was not enough. It was necessary that this girl influence Abraham Lincoln from the grave, that she sustain his identity as a man of the people. He was, in truth, the husband of an aristocrat and might have married for selfish reasons, but if he remained under the influence of such an ordinary country girl he must have been what he seemed: the incarnation of democracy. Ann Rutledge was Abraham Lincoln's Teflon. **41**

Ann and Nancy

The business of all myth, according to Joseph Campbell, is to guide the individual through the psychological traumas of living. "The happy ending is justly scorned as a misrepresentation; for the world, as we know it, as we have seen it, yields but one ending: death, disintegration, dismemberment, and the crucifixion of our heart with the passing of the forms that we have loved."⁵⁷ Ann Rutledge was central to the imagination of Abraham Lincoln because she embodied this tragic element. She made Lincoln a more effective model for living—especially during the wars and economic crises of the early twentieth century. **42**

The themes of death and mourning run through many Abraham Lincoln stories, and few exploited them better than William Herndon. In November 1866 he concluded his public revelation of Lincoln's first love by reading the poem "Immortality," the last stanza of which incorporates the mood of the other thirteen: "'Tis the wink of an eye, 'tis the draught of a breath, / From the blossom of health to the paleness of death, / From the gilded saloon to the bier and the shroud— / Oh! why should the spirit of mortal be proud?"⁵⁸ Herndon's listeners, steeped in the Victorian culture of death, appreciated the poem and understood why he had recited it. "Immortality" democratized death. The fate of all men, from kings to slaves, rich to poor, is to die in God's good time. Written by William Knox, the poem was soon credited to Lincoln and set to music. Listeners were haunted by the tune, made mental connections among Lincoln's assassination, the early death of his sister Sarah, his second son Edward, his third son Willy, his mother Nancy Hanks. **43**

They dwelled on Nancy most of all. When she died, according to all reports, nine-year-old Abe "sat alone on the mound of fresh earth until the shadows grew deep and dark and wept his first bitter tears."⁵⁹ Of his feeling toward her there was never doubt, and from one decade to the next political and civic spokesmen reminded the public how her passing affected him. "[I]t left the lad bereft and alone, and none could bring him comfort."⁶⁰ Perhaps Lincoln's display of grief at Ann's death reiterated his reaction to his mother's and sister's. Perhaps it was more than coincidence that the name 'Nancy' is a variant of 'Ann.'⁶¹ Perhaps the power of the Ann Rutledge story became more understandable when set in the context of Nancy Hanks's, for the two stories conveyed the same idea of tragedy and suffering. **44**

The ritual dimensions of Ann's and Nancy's suffering were redundant and mutually reinforcing. **45** Nancy's resting place was enshrined in 1879, when James Studebaker placed on it a stone marker. In 1897 the Nancy Hanks Memorial Association took possession of the site, then, in 1907, turned it over to the State of Indiana. During the 1930s, the site became a major Lincoln shrine, its construction paralleling the development of New Salem. Nancy Hanks's grave is located prominently at the Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial, marking the end of the "Trail of Twelve

Stones" (a secular variant of the Stations of the Cross), taken from different locations associated with her son's life and death.

By 1934 pictures of young Lincoln and his mother Nancy appeared on Mother's Day notices in newspapers and magazines. "All I am and all I hope to be," Abe is said to have remarked, "I owe to my dear mother." He became the patron saint of mothers. *Of Human Hearts*, a 1938 film starring Walter Huston, James Stewart, and Charles Coburn, is about an Ohio clergyman's son who quarrels with his father and runs off to medical school. His mother sacrifices heavily to support him, but when he becomes a medical officer during the Civil War he stops writing her. President Lincoln learns about his ingratitude and reprimands him for not giving his mother the attention she deserves. He generalizes to all mothers the tender feelings he felt toward his own. **46**

Ann Rutledge is very much a part of Nancy Hanks's story. Nancy, like Ann, was a plain woman. That her common background was essential to her identity is evident in the fact that she is so rarely referred to as Nancy Lincoln. (Even on her tombstone the name Lincoln is hardly discernable.) It is as if the prestige of the Lincoln name would elevate Nancy Hanks beyond the point where ordinary people could identify with her. Despairing over Nancy Hanks's and Ann Rutledge's death, Abraham Lincoln identified himself with the social world to which they belonged. **47**

Nancy's and Ann's appeal inhered in an aura of grief that transcended their own deaths. Lincoln's personal letters, according to Representative James Monahan of Wisconsin, suggest as much. "In them he...comforts the broken-hearted with a tenderness that had blossomed upon the graves of Nancy Hanks and Ann Rutledge and upon those of his children."⁶² Bonds connecting Lincoln to the people, as to his family and his sweetheart, were bonds of affliction. "Lincoln could and did love intensively and madly," said Representative John Robson of Kentucky in his Philadelphia Lincoln Day speech. "We who have been bereft of a good mother and have loved deeply a gentle, pure, beautiful woman, and this love has been returned, can not we feel that we are [Lincoln's] comrades."⁶³ **48**

Abraham Lincoln grieving over his mother's and sweetheart's death—was this not the perfect Man of Sorrows? In democratic societies, stricken generations require a Man of Sorrows to define themselves. In him they see their own suffering and struggle, and they recognize both as central to their collective experience. Lincoln's sorrow became more defining than ever as the 1930s drew to a close and the prospect of war and death intensified the pain of the Depression. **49**

Erosion of a Myth

Postindustrialism and the Transformation of Romantic Love

One question stands in the way of our reaching the crux of the Ann Rutledge myth. Myths are stories that answer ultimate questions, that stir the soul as they enlighten the mind. The myth of Ann Rutledge revealed the essence of the common man, but we still do not know what gave that story its extraordinary emotional power during the first half of the twentieth century and why that power has since declined. **50**

John Y. Simon states that one man, James G. Randall, facilitated Ann Rutledge's decline by making it difficult for any successor to argue that Lincoln loved her. James Randall's name was so mighty in 1942 that when he went out of his way to criticize the Rutledge story, most scholars would have hesitated to challenge it publicly.⁶⁴ Simon's argument about Randall is compelling, but Randall was not the first authority to deny the authenticity of Herndon's story. Paul Angle, after uncovering the Minor fraud in 1929, convinced his professional colleagues that the story was contrived; yet, the public continued to believe it. Given such indifference to strong evidence during the first half of the twentieth century, would Randall's *endorsing* the story have *promoted* Ann's celebrity during the second half? The answer to that question must be negative. **51**

Since the effects of scholarly trends on public opinion are weak, an alternative argument must be addressed: love and tragedy are cultural themes that not only survive factual uncertainty but also outlive changes in a nation's experience. Victorian *culture*, as Gertrude Himmelfarb demonstrates, continued to work powerfully long after the Victorian *era* ended⁶⁵— which is why Victorian ideals of love, death, and suffering, so essential to Ann Rutledge's narrative, sustained it in the American mind through the first but not the second half of the twentieth century. During the second half of the century these ideals rapidly faded. **52**

The post-World War II social revolution was known by many different names— "Postmodern Turn," "Psychohistorical Dislocation," "Great Disruption"—but all refer to the same developments. A successor to late capitalism (the Progressive Era and its consolidation, 1900–1930) and welfare capitalism (the New Deal and the emergence of the welfare state, 1930–1960), postindustrial society is distinguished by the expanding role of science and technology, increased wealth, enlarged role of the mass media, meritocracy (with a premium placed on intelligence), expanded civil rights and liberties, a widening role of women in the labor force, reduced fertility, and smaller families.⁶⁶ Postmodernism, as Frederic Jameson observes, is the culture of postindustrialism. Among the prominent entailments of that culture are erosion of gender, racial, and national boundaries, blurring of traditional authority and hierarchy, and the development of a technically disciplined yet morally remissive workforce.⁶⁷ Nowhere is the erosion of traditional authority more evident than in rising divorce and illegitimacy rates, postponing of marriage, fertility rates falling below replacement level, and, above all, the transmutation of romance itself. Such developments are highly relevant to the fate of Ann Rutledge. **53**

Late-nineteenth-century romance was defined by courtship practices linking love to marriage, but by the late twentieth century that connection weakened. The word "courtship" itself is quaint and will soon be obsolete. The present culture of romance, indeed, subverts rather than stabilizes marriage, which is no longer based on the kind of relationship that might have united Abe and Ann. The new culture of romance, as Daniel Ceres sees it, celebrates the "close relationship," one that has been "stripped of any goal beyond the intrinsic psychological or sexual satisfaction it brings to the individuals involved." Close relationships replace the transcendent ideal of love with the varied "love styles" of individuals seeking personal satisfaction and self-realization. Marriage and the family in light of modern "close relationship theory" is a mere commonsense construct that limits scientific work on real adult relationships. "The new world imagined by close relationship theory—essentially a world of serial coupling—is more and more with each passing day the world in which we live."⁶⁸ How can the romantic drama of Abe and Ann move the inhabitants of such a world? **54**

Romantic dramas, as James Dowd and Nicole Pallotta define them, involve people who wish to be together but are prevented by strong obstacles, natural or social, or who succeed by overcoming these obstacles. Romantic drama deals with the kind of love whose object is limited to one person, an irreplaceable "one and only" recognizable even at first sight.⁶⁹ The romantic model is therefore possessed by tragic elements. "Since it must affirm the supremacy of passion, it is usually doomed to end with the parting of the lovers."⁷⁰ That Abraham Lincoln read and appreciated the work of Edgar Allan Poe⁷¹ is, from this vantagepoint, no surprise, for both men were inclined toward morbid states of mind; both had lost their mothers at an early age; both had depended on women for whatever sense of place they felt in the world. In this tragic complex, death plays the central role, but the death of the young woman, as Edgar Allan Poe explained, is the most tragic imaginable. **55**

In 1844, less than ten years after Ann's death, Poe reflected the mentality of his day by joining beauty to melancholy. "Of all melancholy topics, what, according to the universal understanding of mankind, is the most melancholy? Death....When it most closely allies itself to Beauty: the death, then, of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetic topic in the world."⁷² Poe and Lincoln's cultural environment, however, was dominated by a romantic ideal alien to contemporary Americans. When nothing stands in the way of two lovers wishing to be together, when each lover regards a relationship as temporary and the "partner" replaceable, then dramas focusing on death **56**

and other obstacles to lasting love lose their relevance. Lifelong, romantic relationships give way to the "long-term relationship," which refers, in practice, to the temporary "affair."

Romantic drama emerged during the Victorian era in which Lincoln lived, and it matured during the first half of the twentieth century when Victorian culture's after-effects were still powerful. During the second half of the century, romantic drama was replaced by romantic comedy revolving around rapid, casual, and even humorous successions of lovers.⁷³ Romantic drama declines in tandem with changes in the way human beings conceive love, learn to love one another, and in what they expect of love. "Few take seriously the notion that we each have a perfect match, someone in the world who would complete us as a missing piece does a puzzle."⁷⁴ Since less hinges on any one relationship, choosing the wrong partner ceases to be fateful, and the loss of any partner ceases to be tragic. Traditional drama, exemplified by Ann Rutledge, is a victim of the new ethos of love. **57**

During the first half the twentieth century, motion pictures dramatized young Abe's preference for girls of the ordinary sort; during the second half of the century, television reinforced the image. Yet subtle changes in the story's content were becoming apparent. James Agee's four-part (1952–1953) television drama, *Lincoln: The Beginning and the End*, for example, was strikingly revisionist. In pre-World War II versions, Lincoln is the lovesick suitor; in this one, Ann is the eager one. Abe, by now an extraordinarily ambitious man, puts her off. If we marry now, he says, "it will finish me." The purpose driving him is unclear; there is just "something in me that I must live up to." Ann agrees to wait, but she dies before Lincoln achieves what he wants. Ann's death overwhelms him with ambivalence. His immediate reaction is a sense of relief and freedom, but he realizes he cannot live with this feeling for long. Bowling Green, knowing that his friend Abe is cold with ambition, warns him of its consequences. Lincoln protests but realizes Bowling is right. Soon his ambivalence toward Ann turns to grief and his "love for woman," in his words, is forever buried with her. Then occurs the great transfiguration: out of the small-minded, grasping prairie youth emerges the altruistic president. **58**

Agee's romantic conclusion is an effort to make part of tradition safe from modernity, but it fails. The virtual forgetting of Ann Rutledge manifests the loss of interest in the folk hero, traditional romance, loyalty, and family values. Ann's fading marks the emergence of a new culture, a postmodern culture in which her symbolic presence is not only unneeded but also unwelcome. **59**

Conclusion

When first revealed, the Ann Rutledge story was controversial—at once an object of indignation and curiosity—but it became part of the Lincoln legend as the industrial revolution matured and the ideal of "romantic love" replaced economic convenience as a basis for marriage. Not all romantic themes became popular. In 1896 Paul Leicester Ford presented what he believed to be compelling evidence, including authentic letters, that George Washington had fallen in love with his best friend's wife, Sally Fairfax.⁷⁵ Ford's many readers took note of his revelation, most believed it, but no one seemed to care much about it. No one wrote poems about Sally or cared to visit her grave in England. The romance was interesting, but romance alone could not elevate Sally to the status of an Ann Rutledge. **60**

Both the rise and fall of Ann Rutledge from public view were overdetermined. After World War II, America became a cosmopolitan society in which traditional rural and small-town ideals waned. In this world, Ann Rutledge had no place; fewer people wrote about her, fewer learned about her, fewer cared about her than ever before. Many other things about American society changed during these years, including its gender roles and family structures, contraception technology, educational goals, and women's conception of themselves and their role in society. During this same period, three things happened to Lincoln's memory. First, a diminishing percentage of Americans considered him a great president; second, a diminishing percentage of Americans thought of him as he had been imagined during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, namely, a frontier-reared, self-made man of the people; third, Lincoln as Emancipator replaced Lincoln as Savior of the Union in the public's imagination.⁷⁶ **61**

Lessening regard for Ann Rutledge is part of this new understanding of Lincoln, and the context for both is a recasting of relations among social minorities and the dominant majority. Abraham Lincoln's emergence as the Great Emancipator is more than a current tendency; it is the overwhelmingly salient aspect of his historical reputation. Admired earlier as a simple man whose hard work and frontier values led to political success, Abe's marriage to an ambitious Kentucky aristocrat was counterpointed by Ann, the epitome of rural feminine simplicity. With Lincoln respected today as a morally driven leader intent on eliminating slavery and racial injustice, Ann Rutledge's place in his story seems superfluous, if not downright distracting.

62

In the first half of the century, the opposition between Ann Rutledge and Mary Lincoln was good for thinking about egalitarian democracy and elitism, between the masses and the classes; in the second half of the century, where issues of minority rights and justice replace issues of class and privilege, traditional symbols—the frontier, log cabins, axes, Nancy Hanks, Ann Rutledge, and future presidents grieving over the loss of their sweethearts and, yes, even their mothers—stir the passions of scholars alone. For the public, few symbols are less engaging. Traditional romantic myths, including Ann Rutledge's, have not disappeared; many Americans still know about them; some continue to be moved by them; but for most they remain ghostly shadows reflecting the existence of something no longer present.

63

For almost a hundred years following Lincoln's death, Ann Rutledge and Nancy Hanks appealed to America's white populations; their presence in the African American community has been at best marginal. Ann and Nancy were objects of white American affection during a time when many white Americans remembered or were reared in environments that resembled theirs. The symbolic network in which Ann and Nancy now find themselves is different. Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, homosexuals, the poor, and minorities can identify with Abe Lincoln but not with Ann Rutledge and Nancy Hanks. Late nineteenth-century women who most impress the American people were minority reformers and resisters, which is why Harriet Beecher Stowe, Sojourner Truth, and Harriet Tubman are now paired more often with Abraham Lincoln than is Ann Rutledge. It is not the public's diminishing confidence in historical evidence but a new worldview that has brought Ann's story to its present state. Dramatic new evidence helped to validate that story, but this evidence cannot offset the postindustrial culture that has diminished its relevance.

64

Notes

¹ Robert N. Burkholder, "On the Ann Rutledge Merry-Go-Round," *Lincoln Herald* 104 (Winter 2002): 151–58. See also Monroe Ackerman, "The Love Life of Abraham Lincoln," *Lincoln Herald* 104 (Spring 2002): 10–26.

² Herbert Croley, *The Promise of American Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1909); Gallup Polls, July 1956, November 1975, June 1985, February 1991, December, 1991; University of Maryland Survey, November 1999; Howard Schuman, Barry Schwartz, and Hannah d'Arcy, "Elite and Popular Collective Memory: Christopher Columbus, Hero and Villain?" *Public Opinion Quarterly*, forthcoming; *American Book Publishing Record* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 2001); Merrill Peterson, *Abraham Lincoln in American Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 379–80; Barry Schwartz, "Postmodernity and Historical Reputation: Abraham Lincoln in Late Twentieth-Century American Memory," *Social Forces* 77 (September 1998): 63–103.

³ John Evangelist Walsh, *The Shadows Rise: Abraham Lincoln and the Ann Rutledge Legend* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993). See also Virginia R. Eisenhower, *Song of the Sangamon* (Frederick, Md.: Publish America, 2001); Matt Patterson, *Union of Hearts* (Grand Junction, Colo.: Mangus Press, 2000). H. Donald Winkler is a descendant of Ann Rutledge. His book titled *The Women in Lincoln's Life* (Nashville, Tenn.: Rutledge Hill Press, 2001) is mainly about Ann.

⁴ Outside the field of Lincoln scholarship is an even vaster body of literature demonstrating the gap between academic

and popular interests. Samuel Stouffer's research, motivated by widespread convictions in the academy and media that McCarthy-era antisubversive activities posed a threat to civil liberties, found few Americans sharing this worry. Howard Schuman reports totally different bases of opposition to the Vietnam War in the general public and on college campuses. Philip Converse revealed large differences among academic, media, and popular beliefs on a wide range of political issues. Samuel A. Stouffer, *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955); Howard Schuman, "Two Sources of Anti-War Sentiment in America," *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (1972): 513–36; Philip E. Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in the Mass Public," in *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. by David E. Apter (New York: Free Press, 1966), 206–61.

5. Between 1964 and 1969 the annual number of visitors to New Salem, where Lincoln and Ann Rutledge lived, averaged 1,016,000 (rounded to the nearest thousand). Between 1970 and 1979, that figure dropped to 561,000. During the next three decades, the average annual visitation was 561,000, 401,000, and 612,000 respectively. During the first three years of the new century, the average was 580,000. Counting criteria sometimes changes (as it did in 1984, which produced an elevated number), making these figures only rough approximations; yet, there is no discernible upward trend, despite a 47 percent increase in the national population and 17 percent increase in both the Midwest and Illinois populations between 1965 and 2000. (Undated reports, *Attendance Figures: Springfield Visitors and Conventions*, Research Division, Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce; U.S. Census Bureau, *Dicennial Census of Population, 1900 to 2000*, Appendix A (www.uscensus.gov).

6. William H. Herndon and Jesse W. Weik, *Herndon's Lincoln: The Story of a Great Life*, 3 vols. (New York: Belford, Clarke, 1889) 1:139.

7. Ibid.

8. William H. Herndon, "Abraham Lincoln, Miss Ann Rutledge, New Salem, Pioneering, & the Poem: Lecture Delivered in the Old Sangamon County Court House, November, 1866." Original broadside in Henry Horner Lincoln Collection, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, Illinois.

9. Ward Hill Lamon, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (1872; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 159–71. Lamon's account is somewhat more elaborate but basically the same as the one Herndon published sixteen years later.

10. William H. Herndon and Jessie W. Weik, *Herndon's Lincoln: The True Story of a Great Life*, 1:128–42.

11. Eleanor Atkinson, "Love Story of Ann Rutledge," *Ladies Home Journal* 25 (November 1908): 18. See also Atkinson's *Lincoln's Love Story* (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1909). For other romance novels, see Carrie Douglas Wright, *Lincoln's First Love: A True Story* (Chicago, 1901); Bernie Babcock, *The Soul of Ann Rutledge: Abraham Lincoln's Romance* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1919).

12. Martin Bunge, *Abraham Lincoln: A Historical Drama in Four Acts* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Milwaukee Press, 1911). For commentary on this and other dramas featuring Ann Rutledge, see Bruce L. Nary, *A Study of Major Lincoln Dramas in Relationship to Selected Lincoln Biographies*, Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan. (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1956).

13. *Lincoln and New Salem* (Petersburg, Ill.: Old Salem Lincoln League, 1917).

14. John Lair, *Songs Lincoln Loved* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1954), 14.

15. *New York Times*, February 12, 1937.

16. Advertisement in unknown Washington, D.C., newspaper, Lincoln Museum, Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee.

- [17.](#) Robert Emmet Sherwood, *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), 48, 61.
- [18.](#) E. P. Conkle, *Prologue to Glory* (New York: Samuel French, 1938).
- [19.](#) Letitia B. Martin Papers, Box 4, 1933, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress.
- [20.](#) Lincoln Museum, Harrogate, Tennessee.
- [21.](#) Advertisement, Box 92A, Illinois State Library, Springfield, Illinois.
- [22.](#) Paul M. Angle, "Lincoln's First Love?" *Lincoln Centennial Association Bulletin*, 9 (December 1, 1927): 1.
- [23.](#) J. G. Randall, *Lincoln the President, Springfield to Gettysburg* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1945), 321.
- [24.](#) Paul M. Angle, "Lincoln's First Love?"; William Barton, *The Women Lincoln Loved* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1927), 147.
- [25.](#) Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1926), 1:141.
- [26.](#) *Literary Digest*, 61 (May 24, 1919): 82–84. See also *New York Times*, March 12, 1922, sec. 2, p. 6; March 26, 1922, sec. 2, p. 6.
- [27.](#) J. G. Randall, "Sifting the Ann Rutledge Evidence," in *Lincoln the President: Springfield to Gettysburg* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1945) 2:328.
- [28.](#) Wilma F. Minor, "Lincoln the Lover: The Setting: New Salem," *Atlantic Monthly* (December 1928): 838–56; "Lincoln the Lover: The Courtship," *Atlantic Monthly* (January 1929): 1–14; "Lincoln the Lover: The Tragedy," *Atlantic Monthly* (1929): 215–25. The editorial introduction to this series, "The Discovery: A New Storehouse of Lincoln Material," describes the list of experts who found Minor's evidence authentic (*Atlantic Monthly* [December 1928]: 834–37). For an overview, see Don E. Febrenbacher, "The Minor Affair: An Adventure in Forgery and Detection," in *Lincoln in Text and Context: Collected Essays* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987), 246–69.
- [29.](#) Paul M. Angle, "Lincoln's First Love?" 1.
- [30.](#) Lloyd Lewis, "The New Light on Lincoln's Only Romance" (*New York Times Book Review*, February 11, 1945): 3, 27.
- [31.](#) John Y. Simon, "Abraham Lincoln and Ann Rutledge," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 11 (1990): 28. The author is grateful to John Y. Simon for comments on earlier drafts of this paper.
- [32.](#) Douglas L. Wilson, "Abraham Lincoln, Ann Rutledge, and the Evidence of Herndon's Informants," *Civil War History* 36 (December 1990): 301–24. See also Douglas L. Wilson, "William H. Herndon and His Lincoln Informants," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 14 (Winter 1993): 15–34, for general commentary on Herndon's value as a source of information on Lincoln.
- [33.](#) Ida M. Tarbell, "Lincoln's First Love," *Colliers*, 85 (February 8, 1930): 7–8; 36, 38. Tarbell had committed herself to this thesis twenty-five years earlier in *The Life of Abraham Lincoln*, 2 vols. (New York: Lincoln Memorial Association, 1895). See also *New York Times*, November 29, 1908, sec. 5, p. 1.
- [34.](#) Pierre Nora, "Between History and Memory: *Les Lieux de Memoire*," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 9.

- [35.](#) Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915; reprint, New York: Free Press, 1965); A. R. Radcliffe Brown, "The Sociological Theory of Totemism," in *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (1929; reprint, New York: The Free Press, 1968), 117–32; E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956); Claude Levi-Strauss, *Totemism* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1963).
- [36.](#) James M. McPherson, *Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
- [37.](#) For detail on "strong" and "weak" cases, see Gary A. Fine, "Reputational Entrepreneurs and the Memory of Incompetence: Melting Supporters, Partisan Warriors, and Images of President Harding," *American Sociological Review* 101 (March 1996): 1159–93.
- [38.](#) Barton, *The Women Lincoln Loved*, 185.
- [39.](#) Roy P. Basler, *The Lincoln Legend* (1935; reprint, New York: Octagon Books, 1969), 153.
- [40.](#) Cited by Basler in *Ibid.*, 161–62.
- [41.](#) R. L. Duffus, "Lincoln Memorial: February, 1941," *New York Times Magazine*, February 9, 1941, sec. 7, p. 3.
- [42.](#) Edgar Lee Masters, *Spoon River Anthology* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 219.
- [43.](#) Descendants of Ann's New Salem acquaintances liked Masters's poem so much that they inscribed it on the headstone for her new grave.
- [44.](#) Reprinted in countless sources, including *Ladies Home Journal*, 43 (February 1926): 167.
- [45.](#) *Ibid.*
- [46.](#) Harold W. Gammons, *Spirit of Ann Rutledge: A Drama in Four Acts* (New York: Samuel French, 1927). Bernie Babcock's *The Soul of Ann Rutledge, Abraham Lincoln's Romance* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Lippincott, 1919), a novel about the effect of Ann's spirit on President Lincoln, was also performed occasionally on stage.
- [47.](#) Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), 117.
- [48.](#) Horace Green, "Love Affairs of Abraham Lincoln," *New York Times Magazine*, March 12, 1922, 4.
- [49.](#) Emanuel Hertz, *The Hidden Lincoln* (New York: Viking, 1938), 37.
- [50.](#) Robert S. Harper, "Abe's Dream of Ann Rutledge," *Colliers* (February 16, 1952): 16–17; 54, 56.
- [51.](#) *Ibid.*, 56.
- [52.](#) Richard Bryon and Bert Reisfeld, *Ann with the Cornsilk Hair* (New York: G. Shirmer, 1949).
- [53.](#) John Lair, ed., *Songs Lincoln Loved*, (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1954), 14.
- [54.](#) One qualification of the story's strong version appears at the turn of the century in Alexander K. McClure, *Lincoln*

Yarns and Stories (Chicago, Ill.: John C. Winston, c. 1900), 311–12. *Perhaps* Lincoln's memory of Ann induced him to grant clemency to a condemned man, the storyteller suggests. Later accounts of Ann's influence on Lincoln were, as noted, unqualified and emphatic.

[55.](#) *New York Times*, February 9, 1959, p. 31.

[56.](#) Lloyd Ostendorf and Walter Oleksy, eds., *Lincoln's Unknown Private Life: An Oral History by His Black Housekeeper Mariah Vance, 1850–1860*, Preface by Adah Sutton (Mamaroneck, N.Y.: Hastings House Book Publishing, 1995), 279–80.

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[59.](#) *Congressional Record*, 68th Congress, 2nd sess., 1925, 66, pt. 4:3534.

[60.](#) *Ibid.*, 72nd Congress, 1st sess., 1932, 75, pt. 4:3817. For a characterization of Lincoln's reaction to his sister Sarah's death, see *Ibid.*, 66th Congress, 2nd sess., 1920, 59, pt. 3:2795.

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[62.](#) *Congressional Record*, 59th Congress, 2nd sess., 1920, 59, pt. 5:4473.

[63.](#) *Ibid.*, 68th Congress, 2nd sess., 1925, 66, pt. 5:5532.

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[67.](#) Frederic Jameson, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (1984): 53–92; Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

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