

Jesse W. Weik

The Young Indiana Lawyer Who Made *Herndon's Lincoln* Possible

RANDALL T. SHEPARD

Among the sixteen thousand books written about Abraham Lincoln, none can match in the public mind the work associated with his law partner William Herndon. Published in 1889, *Herndon's Lincoln: The True Story of a Great Life* has continued to be a leading point of reference in the world of scholars, alternately revered, denigrated, and rehabilitated for more than a century.

Without the assistance of a young Indiana lawyer, however, this influential source would likely have never come to print. Although Herndon collected most of the source material and gave the book its intimate vision of Lincoln, the work itself was almost entirely written by Jesse William Weik of Greencastle. This article tells the story of that collaboration and illuminates the life of Weik, who has long remained in Herndon's shadow.

WEIK'S EARLY LIFE

Weik's father Louis immigrated to the United States in the 1840s, first to Cincinnati and then to Greencastle, Indiana, where he started

The Hon. Randall T. Shepard is Chief Justice of the Indiana Supreme Court. Justice Shepard is a seventh-generation Hoosier and a graduate of Princeton University, Yale Law School, and the University of Virginia School of Law. He is co-author, with David Bodenhamer, of *The History of Indiana Law* (2006).

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Young Jesse Weik at the beginning of his career, standing tall before his mentor John Clark Ridpath's home. Aided by Ridpath's "intensity . . . as teacher and scholar," Weik would go on to do great things in his future.

Courtesy of Ann Weik Grifalconi and the author

out as a baker and later moved into the grocery business. Louis Weik's wife died a few months after childbirth, and it was his second wife, Katherine Schmidt, with whom he had Jesse, born August 23, 1857. With little education but an active mind, Louis took a special interest in the students, faculty, and administration at Indiana Asbury, slipping extra food into the bags of struggling students and presenting a tall silk hat to the college's president each Christmas. Weik's father determined to impress his son with the value of education and to introduce him to the wider world. Louis took him to Indianapolis, for example, to join thousands of others for the Lincoln funeral train's stop, and to view

Lincoln's corpse lying in state.¹ The elder Weik even lifted his son up to see the late president's face.²

At the age of thirteen, Weik entered Indiana Asbury College in Greencastle, now known as DePauw University. He graduated before he turned eighteen—the youngest ever at the time—earning an A.B. in 1875.³

Weik's connection to Asbury was enriching in many ways. For example, he married DePauw alumna Frances Almaretta Hays on December 1, 1890.⁴ Frances died March 19, 1911, in the family home in Greencastle.⁵ They had three children, one dying in infancy.⁶ The other two were John Weik and Mary Hays Weik Grifalconi.⁷ Both his daughter and his granddaughter Ann Weik Grifalconi became well-respected authors in their own right.⁸

Through Asbury, Weik crafted more than one beneficial future relationship. While a student there, he built a relationship with prominent historian Professor John Clark Ridpath, whose *History of the World* was widely advertised through direct mail and by canvassers, including a

¹Jesse W. Weik, *The Real Lincoln: A Portrait*, ed. Michael Burlingame (Lincoln, Neb., 2002), xxiii. Burlingame's eight-page introduction discusses Weik's life as an author and a Lincoln scholar. Burlingame, a former student of David Herbert Donald, taught at Connecticut College in New London until his retirement in 2001. He has written the two-volume *Abraham Lincoln: A Life* (Baltimore, Md., 2008) and *The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln* (Urbana, Ill., 1994) as well as edited a number of other Lincoln-related editions. He has received the Abraham Lincoln Association Book Prize and the Lincoln Diploma of Honor from Lincoln Memorial University. He was inducted into the Lincoln Academy of Illinois in 2009.

²Glenn Tucker, "Lincoln's Jesse W. Weik," *Lincoln Herald*, 77 No. 1 (1975), 8. Tucker knew the older Weik as he grew up in Greencastle, "from that observation and the occasional sort of conversation that goes between a youth and mature man in a small town."

³"Jesse W. Weik Passed Away Sunday Night," *The Greencastle Daily Banner*, August 18, 1930, p. 1; Weik diary, June 24, 1875, DC 1504, Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Indiana.

⁴*DePauw Alumna Record*, Jesse W. Weik, ed., (1918), p. 112; "Jesse W. Weik Passed Away Sunday Night," *Daily Banner*.

⁵*DePauw Alumna Record*, Jesse W. Weik, ed., (1918), p. 112.

⁶"Jesse W. Weik Passed Away Sunday Night," *Daily Banner*.

⁷"Jesse W. Weik Passed Away Sunday Night," *Daily Banner*; "Facts About Lincoln's Early Life Preserved by Hoosier," *The Indianapolis Sunday Star*, February 12, 1939, p. 19.

⁸Ann Grifalconi won a Caldecott Honor Award in 1987 for her book *The Village of Round and Square Houses*. Association for Library Services to Children, "ALA Caldecott Medal & Honor Books, 1938–Present," <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/caldecottmedal/caldecotthonors/caldecottmedal.cfm> (accessed October 9, 2009).

young Huey Long. Ridpath had come to Asbury in 1869 and eventually became one of the best-known popular historians of the time. After publishing his seminal *Cyclopedia of Universal History*, Ridpath moved first to Boston where he edited *The Arena*, a muckraking journal, and finally to New York, where he was an editor in the literary department of his publisher.⁹

Ridpath's intensity was felt both as teacher and scholar. While Weik was a student, Ridpath regularly gave lectures. He took students to visit great writers such as Henry Watterson in Louisville and James Whitcomb Riley in Indianapolis. It was said that "his concentration was so intense during the long periods he spent at his writing table that a doctor would have to be summoned to relieve him with a catheter."¹⁰ Weik's diary of his Asbury years reflects regular interaction with Ridpath.¹¹

Contrary to the prevailing strict rules of Asbury's Methodism, Weik enjoyed going to the theater, often seeing his Professor Ridpath in the front row. Weik also began travelling to Indianapolis, including one trip to see Edwin Booth, the famous actor and brother of Lincoln's assassin John Wilkes Booth.

Weik also commonly spent his time during his college years sending off letters to national figures, a fact reflected in the diary he kept. "The usual letter writing night," he once recorded.¹² Weik's correspondents included Thomas Carlyle, William Lloyd Garrison, Charles Francis Adams, and President Charles Eliot, and sometimes this correspondence produced results. "Received an autograph from William Cullen Bryant to-day," Weik noted.¹³ This fascination with famous people was something he shared with Herndon, to whom some scholars have credited at least part of Lincoln's rise in politics, based on the active correspondence Herndon maintained with notables of the day, bringing people and ideas to the office for Lincoln to encounter.

⁹John Clark Ridpath, *Cyclopedia of Universal History* (Cincinnati, 1885); Ridpath, *History of the World* (New York, 1897). Ridpath died in New York in 1900. Clifton J. Phillips and John J. Baughman, *DePauw: A Pictorial History*, (Greencastle, Ind., 1987), <http://www.depauw.edu/library/archives/ehistory/chapter2/2index04.html> (accessed October 9, 2009).

¹⁰Tucker, "Lincoln's Jesse W. Weik," 8.

¹¹For example, he gave his Junior speech to Ridpath for his critique. Weik diary, November 21, 1873.

¹²*Ibid.*, October 17, 1875.

¹³*Ibid.*, August 24, 1874.

FASCINATION WITH FAMOUS PEOPLE

Indeed, glimpses throughout Jesse Weik's early life consistently suggest strong interest in the world of ideas and a particular interest in well-known public figures, and his occasional brushes with prominent men fit nicely alongside his very long interest in the world of government and politics.

The involvement intensified while Weik was an Asbury student. He was a member of the Philological Literary Society, a precursor to the modern fraternity system, and one of the two rival groups at Asbury which served as the school's chief extracurricular activity at the time. Weik even held leadership positions there in his later college days, with the society electing him its vice-president at the end of his junior year. He ran for president, but was "gloriously defeated."¹⁴ When Weik graduated, he delivered the valedictory for his "own beloved Philo Society."¹⁵

He also was a member of the "Good Templars Lodge," a fraternity modeled on freemasonry and which advocated temperance.¹⁶ The Templars chose him for various offices (once as "W.F.S." and once as "Janitor," each of which he held but briefly), and he served on a committee regarding literary exercises. He went to the Grand Lodge of Good Templars in Indianapolis in 1874, and attended many temperance meetings while in college.¹⁷

Shortly after college, Weik started a club for young Republicans in Greencastle. Although Putnam County at the time was at the center of the north-south split in Indiana politics, both sides of Weik's family had been stalwart Republicans. His father joined the party shortly after 1861, and his maternal grandfather so staunchly supported Lincoln in 1860 that he had his sons pick him up and carry him to the polls, despite a leg injury that confined him to bed.¹⁸ Weik's grandfather died a week later from the resulting exposure.

¹⁴Ibid., November 20, 1874.

¹⁵Ibid., June 22, 1875.

¹⁶Weik diary, May 4, 1874; Wikipedia, "International Organisation of Good Templars," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Organisation_of_Good_Templars (accessed October 9, 2009).

¹⁷For example, see Weik diary, March 10, 1874: Attended a "Temperance Social [at] the Good Templars Hall."

¹⁸Weik's father accepted a position as city councilman despite his refusal to run. Jesse Weik, *A History of Putnam County, Indiana*, (Indianapolis, 1910), 706.

This commitment to the Republican Party during a period of its ascendancy worked in concert with Weik's own energy, and placed him well for participating in the patronage system. Even before he published with Herndon, Weik was considered a rising star in the Republican Party.¹⁹ During James A. Garfield's administration, he held a position as State Examiner for the United States Pension Bureau.²⁰ Later, in 1882, Weik obtained a clerkship at the Interior Department's pension office in Washington, before being transferred to serve as a special pension examiner in Springfield, Illinois, a few months later.²¹ He served as an examiner until 1885 and again from 1891 to 1894. The appointment was in fact but one in a series of political posts he either held or sought. Weik spent part of 1897, for example, seeking a consulate from President McKinley before abandoning that pursuit for a Terre Haute collectorship.²² He also sought appointment as secretary to the governor of the Territory of New Mexico, but he did not receive the position because he was not a Civil War veteran.²³

Weik became a regular part of the Republican political apparatus. He frequently served as a delegate from Putnam County to Indiana Republican conventions, and sometimes served on its principal committees.²⁴ He was elected a delegate to the 1896 national Republican convention in St. Louis,²⁵ and served on the committee that notified William

¹⁹"The State Capital. Young Hoosier Republicans who Deserve Recognition at the Hands of the Party," *Fort Wayne Gazette*, February 17, 1884, p. 6.

²⁰Russel M. Seeds, ed., *History of the Republican Party of Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1899), 312.

²¹See note on "Applications and Appointments," Interior Department records of 1882, in Weik, *The Real Lincoln*, xxiii.

²²"Mr. Weik can obtain a dissolving view of the rear platform of his train going around a distant curve if he is quick about it. Judge Henry has that berth nailed down." "John Russell Young Tendered the Spanish Mission By President M'Kinley," *Indiana State Journal*, May 12, 1897, p. 3, col. B. See also "Office Seekers in Washington," *Fort Wayne Gazette*, March 25, 1897, p. 3, col. 4.

²³David Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon*, (New York, 1948), 297. Donald was a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner in biography for his work on Charles Sumner and Thomas Wolfe and a professor of history at Harvard University. *Lincoln's Herndon*, Donald's first major work and the first book-length biography of Herndon, examines Herndon's life and his seminal work, and in so doing tells much about Lincoln as well. In his introduction to *Lincoln's Herndon*, Carl Sandburg wrote "The man Herndon comes bold and plain, the hovering silhouette of Lincoln in the background often moving to the fore in a speaking likeness and reality."

²⁴"Call for Annual Convention of Indiana State League of Republican Clubs," *Fort Wayne Gazette*, January 27, 1899, p. 4.

²⁵*History of the Republican Party of Indiana*, 312. Charles W. Fairbanks congratulated Weik on his election to the convention. Charles W. Fairbanks to Weik, March 20, 1896, Herndon-Weik

McKinley in Canton, Ohio, of his nomination for the presidency. In 1898, Weik launched an unsuccessful bid for election as Clerk of the Indiana Supreme Court. One newspaper recounted his reaction to this defeat, saying that he “poured forth his sentiments on the occasion in a flowery speech in German” at the Republican state convention.²⁶ In 1900, Weik similarly lost the Republican nomination for Reporter of the Supreme Court.²⁷

These serial political ventures once resulted in a nationally-noticed indictment. After serving as a postal inspector under Benjamin Harrison, Weik forged the new Postmaster General’s signature and continued using his credentials to travel on railroads across the country. Tipped off, the government sent an inspector to track him down, and the inspector caught Weik in the act of offering the forged pass to a conductor on the Terre Haute & Indianapolis railroad. When the inspector asked the conductor to secure Weik’s credentials, Weik somehow became conscious of his predicament and jumped off the moving train, seriously injuring himself. The credentials then went missing for a time, so the only charges initially brought were three counts of impersonating an officer. A railroad section hand, however, eventually found the forged documentation in a cattle guard near where Weik jumped off. The District Attorney thereafter pressed the fourth, most serious charge—forging the name of Postmaster General Charles Emory Smith—and the news made the papers around the nation.²⁸ In the end, though, it appears that Weik

Collection of Lincolniana, reel 13, p. 747, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress. Fairbanks delivered that year’s keynote address and was first elected Senator from Indiana that year.

²⁶“Mount’s Views,” *Logansport Pharos*, December 24, 1898, p. 4, col. 3.

²⁷“Local News,” *Fort Wayne Gazette*, March 2, 1900, p. 3 (Weik was in Ft. Wayne calling on political friends for support); “Crowds Are Gathering,” *Fort Wayne Morning Journal-Gazette*, April 24, 1900, p. 4; “Candidates Rounding Up,” *Logansport Daily Journal*, April 7, 1900, p. 1 (lists candidates—Weik, Charles F. Remy of Columbus, and Leroy B. Nash of Tipton). Weik did serve on the Greencastle school board. *History of the Republican Party of Indiana*, 312.

²⁸“Federal Grand Jury Will Investigate Counterfeiting and Election Cases,” *Logansport Daily Reporter*, November 14, 1900, p. 3; “Weik in Deep Water: Author of ‘Life of Lincoln’ Indicted for Forgery,” *Fort Wayne Journal Gazette*, November 24, 1900, p. 1; “Former Official Indicted,” *Coshocton (OH) Daily Times*, November 24, 1900, p. 4; “Politician Accused of Forging the Signature of a Cabinet Officer: Jesse Weik of Greencastle, Ind., Who Narrowly Escaped Death in Attempting to Avoid Arrest, Indicted by Federal Grand Jury,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 24, 1900, p. 4; “Former Official Indicted,” *New York Daily Advocate*, November 24, 1900, p. 12; “Forged Cabinet Official’s Signature,” *Frederick (MD) News*, November 24, 1900,

may somehow have eventually managed to “make this go away”; one newspaper speculated that multiple postponements of the trial date suggested President McKinley’s administration seemed uninterested in pushing the case.²⁹

THE COLLABORATION OF HERNDON AND WEIK

Political appointments and advancement were not the full extent of Weik’s life in those years, however, and did not occupy all of either his time or his efforts. In 1881, then twenty-five-year-old Jesse Weik had written to Herndon requesting an autograph, and Herndon sent him a page from one of Lincoln’s handwritten notebooks.³⁰ The sheet contained Lincoln’s arithmetic lessons and the couplet:

“Abraham Lincoln, his hand and pen
He will be good, but God knows when.”³¹

Weik was extremely grateful for the page and asked permission to publish it in the local newspaper, to which Herndon agreed. Years later, in Springfield, that brief collaboration would once more pay dividends.

Almost immediately after Lincoln’s assassination, William Herndon had begun interviewing individuals close to Lincoln and collecting letters and other memorabilia from his lifetime. Unfortunately, as a result of the scandalous nature of some of his information and his personal disposition and life affairs, Herndon could not seem to bring the great work he had in mind to completion. The project stalled for more than a decade.

p. 1; “A Clever Swindler: Posed as Government Official—Forged Secretary Smith’s Name,” *New Brunswick (NJ) Daily Times*, November 24, 1900, p. 3.

²⁹“Weik’s Trial Continued,” *Ft. Wayne Weekly Sentinel*, October 3, 1900, p. 3.

³⁰William H. Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, October 1 and October 8, 1881, Herndon-Weik Collection of Lincolniana, Library of Congress (as cited in Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, Editor’s Introduction to *Herndon’s Lincoln* by William H. Herndon and Jesse W. Weik, The Knox College Lincoln Studies Center Series (Urbana, Ill., 2006), xxiv). This twenty-two page introduction by the editors outlines the history of the original’s creation, including the relationship between Herndon and Weik. Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis are co-directors of the Lincoln Studies Center at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois. Wilson won the Lincoln Prize for both his *Honor’s Voice: The Transformation of Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 1998) and his *Lincoln’s Sword: The Presidency and the Power of Words* (New York, 2006). They recently co-edited *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates: The Lincoln Studies Edition* (Urbana, Ill., 2008).

³¹Tucker, “Lincoln’s Jesse W. Weik,” 9, citing Jesse W. Weik, *The Real Lincoln*, 23.



“With a federal courtroom and post office in the same building, and the county courthouse one block away,” Lincoln and Herndon’s Law Offices at the corner of Sixth and Adams streets, Springfield, Illinois, were ideally located. In later years, they would also prove a treasure trove to Weik in his efforts to write the president’s biography.

Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress. “With Malice Toward None: The Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Exhibition” (<http://www.myloc.gov/Exhibitions/lincoln/Pages/Default.aspx>)

By 1882, Weik had taken up his pension agent’s post in Springfield. He soon tracked down Herndon once more, and asked him for a tour of the back room of the old Lincoln & Herndon law office, where the pair of them rummaged through boxes of Lincoln papers. Weik’s delight in this encounter prompted him to further research on his own, interviewing individuals who had known Lincoln (including Lincoln’s sister-in-law Mrs. Ninian Edwards) and visiting old courthouses. Weik would later tell his daughter about his assessment of doing research at Springfield: “The whole town is full of Lincoln legends. . . . Every family has inherited one or two of its own. Some are fantastic. You have to sort out the truth from the cobwebs.”³² Shortly thereafter, Weik moved back to Greencastle and continued his correspondence with Herndon. After Weik asked Herndon about the possibility of collaborating on an article about Lincoln for *Harper’s Weekly*, Herndon began sending him a

³²Mary Hays Weik, “My Father and Lincoln,” September 1968, Herndon-Weik Collection of Lincolniana, box 36 [unfilmed], Library of Congress (written for Glenn Tucker).

series of detailed letters. In three months' time, Herndon mailed Weik thirty-five long letters replete with details about Lincoln's pre-presidential life. In July 1886, Weik contributed a Lincoln article to the *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*.³³ Herndon by contrast found himself rebuffed by papers like *The Chicago Tribune* and the British newspaper *The Graphic*.

Besides corresponding with Herndon, Weik spent his time in Greencastle helping his aging father run the family's grocery store. Jesse's brothers were away or off at school, so he assumed the role of dutiful oldest son and worked as the store clerk, eventually earning a partnership with his father. He moved into a room above the store, "where he could slip away now and then from behind the counter to work at his writing upstairs."³⁴

Herndon came to see Weik occasionally, starting in March 1885, and occasionally lectured at DePauw. It was during this time, as Herndon told Weik more stories about Lincoln, when Herndon put forth his theory that Lincoln's conception was a result of his mother's infidelity. In fact, Herndon still desired to write a full Lincoln biography, but did not enjoy the mechanics of writing.³⁵ Eventually he wrote to Weik asking if he would be interested in writing a book about Lincoln, and they soon began planning a series of articles to be published in book form.

In 1886, the two of them drew up a contract and Herndon sent Weik what he called his "Lincoln Records," the archive of letters, interviews, and research materials he had assembled over time, including testimony of some 250 informants. Herndon envisioned a subjective, unconventional, nonlinear biography of Lincoln's life emphasizing Lincoln's special qualities, rather than a traditional narrative presentation, but Weik pictured a narrative, chronological format ending when Lincoln became president, "leaving him a grand figure standing up against the clear deep blue sky of the future."³⁶ After sorting through Herndon's file, Weik noticed some gaps in the available information. In March 1887, Weik went to Lexington, Paris, and Elizabethtown in

³³"Lincoln's Early Life," *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, July 11, 1886, p. 14.

³⁴Mary Hays Weik, "My Father and Lincoln," 3.

³⁵Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon*, 300.

³⁶Herndon to Weik, December 13, 1886, Herndon-Weik Collection, Library of Congress, as cited in *Lincoln*, Editor's Introduction, pp. xxvi, xxviii.

Kentucky, hoping to interview people with memories of Lincoln as a youth, but the trip produced little.

By the summer of 1887, the partners were finally ready to start writing. Herndon planned to join Weik in Greencastle to begin the writing process, but when the time came he was in such dire financial straits that he was unable to afford the trip. He wrote to Weik, asking for money in return for some Lincoln materials. Weik agreed, and Herndon left home on the first day of August.

Once Herndon arrived in Greencastle, “[a] second room (after Weik’s own) above the store was fitted up for Herndon, and here, between wrapping cheese and bagging potatoes downstairs in the store, [Weik] escaped now and then to Herndon’s room to work with him on their book—running out occasionally (as his diaries relate) to buy Mr. Herndon tobacco.”³⁷ The building’s tin roof ensured miserably hot temperatures in the summer heat. They wrote tirelessly, sometimes until eleven at night. Herndon produced dozens of chapters on various topics, designed to be rough drafts which Weik was to compile and edit, but Weik found them almost impossible to work with.³⁸ After this month-long writing session, Herndon was worn out and considered the book basically complete, so he took a train back to Springfield. Weik, who viewed the biography as far from finished, immediately began revising it, perhaps unbeknownst to Herndon.

Weik transformed the text of the biography, attempting to maintain the essence of Herndon’s passages while improving the language and flow. He filtered Herndon’s views, making the passages more upbeat and probably enhancing the biography’s eventual appeal to the general public. He also took liberties when summarizing the contents of some of Herndon’s interviews,³⁹ and followed Herndon’s drafts in just five of the

³⁷Mary Hays Weik, “My Father and Lincoln,” 3.

³⁸Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, Editor Interview, Abraham Lincoln Online, <http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/books/herndon.htm> (accessed on October 9, 2009). Donald, *Lincoln’s Herndon*, 318.

³⁹For example, Weik altered Herndon’s notes from their rudimentary form into a more conversational form. From Herndon’s notes from an interview with Henry Dummer: “Lincoln used to come to our office in Spfgd and borrow books . . .” becomes “Lincoln used to come to our office—Stuart’s and mine—in Springfield from New Salem and borrow law-books.” Weik’s pattern of recasting Herndon’s language in this way often was substantially harmless, but sometimes resulted in inaccurate or seemingly unfounded statements. Editor’s Introduction, Herndon and Weik, *Herndon’s Lincoln*, Knox College Series, xxx.

twenty chapters.⁴⁰ Ultimately, the book was almost exclusively Weik's composition.⁴¹ In a preface signed by Herndon, the senior partner wrote that he was "assisted in the preparation of the book by Mr. Jesse W. Weik of Greencastle, Ind., whose industry, patience and literary zeal have not only lessened my labors, but have secured for him the approbation of Lincoln's friends and admirers."⁴² All told, the final work combined twenty years of Herndon's collecting, five years of Weik's follow-up and more intensive research, and three years' writing time. It is this last part to which Weik contributed most, and which makes him vital to the work's existence.

The Herndon-Weik biography faced strong competition. A recently written biography by John Hay and John G. Nicolay, Lincoln's wartime secretaries, was serialized in *Century Magazine* and later published as their ten-volume *Abraham Lincoln: A History*.⁴³ Because Hay and Nicolay focused on Lincoln's presidential years, though, Herndon did not view their work as competition; after all, the Herndon-Weik book was about Lincoln's personal life before the White House. Many publishers disagreed, though, believing that the Nicolay-Hay biography had cornered the market.⁴⁴ Another source of worry was the costly failure of Ward Hill Lamon's 1872 biography.⁴⁵ Lamon's work was based on papers he had purchased from Herndon, and the public rejected it due to some controversial contents.⁴⁶ These included references to Lincoln's and his mother's illegitimate births, his "shrewd game" of masquerading as a Christian, and his domestic difficulties.⁴⁷ The Herndon-Weik biography contained similar passages likely to offend.

⁴⁰Chapters VI (the Lincoln-Rutledge romance), IX (the Lincoln-Todd wedding), XI (Lincoln as a lawyer), XIV (Lincoln's domestic difficulties), and XX (analysis of Lincoln's character). Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon*, 318 n.44.

⁴¹Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon*, 318.

⁴²See Herndon in preface to Herndon and Weik, *Herndon's Lincoln*, Knox College Series, 5.

⁴³John J. Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History* (New York, 1890).

⁴⁴See Charles L. Webster & Co. to Weik, Nov. 4, 188[6], Weik MSS, as cited in Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon*, 311–12, n.14.

⁴⁵Ward Hill Lamon, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln; From His Birth to His Inauguration as President* (Boston, Mass., 1872). Lamon had actually partnered with Buchanan Democrat and anti-Lincoln author Chauncey F. Black, who agreed to ghostwrite the text, but Black is not credited in the published work. Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon*, 253, 266–67.

⁴⁶Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon*, 269–70.

⁴⁷Lamon, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln*, as cited in Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon*, 268–69.

After suffering multiple rejections by publishers, Herndon and Weik finally settled on Belford, Clarke & Company of Chicago, a third-rate outfit with a reputation for reckless business practices and a lack of concern regarding criticism.⁴⁸ The company viewed the Herndon-Weik biography as a good opportunity to gain publicity. The publishers' deal was a tough one: they took all revenue from the sale of the first 1,500 copies, and any profits above that were to be equally divided between the publishers and Weik.

After the manuscript went to the press, Herndon and Weik discovered that quite a few tasks remained, including finding people who had known Lincoln and were willing to have their photographs published in the book. Weik and Herndon soon became frustrated with their publisher, too, who had unilaterally decided to change the title and to remove long passages dealing with Lincoln's early life. When Herndon received the page proofs, he suggested many corrections to the text; since making corrections at that stage would have been costly, most were subsequently disregarded.

During the final editing, Ridpath encouraged him to take a greater ownership role in the product, rather than merely being listed as an editor. The publisher agreed that the book should include a statement describing Herndon and Weik's roles in its creation. Weik submitted a new preface for Herndon's approval. He gave himself exclusive credit for composing the biography, while Herndon received credit for gathering information. Herndon was insulted and responded that the new preface would ruin the book because it was supposed to be from Herndon's vantage point. The eventual resolution was amicable, with Herndon and Weik listed as coauthors on the title page and Herndon given additional credit in the preface for his work collecting material.

After what Herndon considered painstaking delay, the book was finally released in July 1889 as *Herndon's Lincoln: The True Story of a Great Life, The History and Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln*. The three-volume biography sold for between \$4.50 and \$9.00, depending on the material in which it was bound. It was well-received by many critics, who had feared a far more disparaging account of Lincoln's life. The *Illinois State Register*, for example, compared it favorably to other

⁴⁸See *Publisher's Weekly* XXXVI, 470, 478, 540, 637, 693, as cited in Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon*, 323.

biographies by saying that none “approach this in faithful portrayal of his real life.”⁴⁹ The biography’s honesty was repeatedly commended. The *Literary World* applauded its “honesty and shrewdness.”⁵⁰ To be sure, there were negative evaluations—*Life* called it “lacking the finish of expert work”—but they were far outweighed by the positive reviews.⁵¹

Unfortunately, the relatively short press run soon made copies hard to find, especially after the publisher went bankrupt. Worse, when the book was eventually re-released, though it was published in its original form, it was advertised as a second edition. Herndon’s dreamy anticipation of royalties foundered still further when Belford Clark Company distributed only \$110 to the authors, claiming that many of the newly printed copies had been distributed to reviewers. Herndon was furious; he even momentarily accused Weik of conspiring with the publishers, before later apologizing. In the end, the absence of the hoped-for profit levels largely reflected the fact that neither Herndon nor Weik was a particularly savvy businessman.

Luckily, Horace White of the *New York Evening Post*, who had covered Lincoln and Douglas for the *Chicago Tribune*, was willing to get involved. He gave Weik and Herndon suggestions (such as proposing to remove a few of the more controversial segments of the book), and took a substantial role in managing their affairs. For the third edition, White found a more reputable publisher, Charles Scribner’s Sons. Herndon and Weik were working on this new edition when Herndon died in 1891. In 1892, Weik published the revised version of the book, titled

⁴⁹*Illinois State Register*, Aug. 11, 1889 (“There have been other lives of Lincoln written, but none that approaches this in the faithful portrayal of his real life, from his humble birth to his martyred death”); *Cincinnati Enquirer*, July 5, 1889 (“Mr. Herndon comes nearer giving the general reader an insight to the real Lincoln than any one of the many writers who have made attempts in that direction”); *Portland Eastern Argus*, July 13, 1889 (“casts all other [Lincoln] biographies] into the shade”); *Boston Commercial*, August 17, 1889 (“Herndon’s ‘Life of Lincoln’ is a history worthy of Macaulay”) all as cited in Donald, *Lincoln’s Herndon*, 331.

⁵⁰*Literary World* 20, 253; see also *Nation* 49 (August 29, 1889), 173–74 (“Mr. Herndon’s personal recollections of Lincoln . . . will doubtless remain the most authentic and trustworthy source of information concerning [Lincoln] prior to his election to the Presidency”), both as cited in Donald, *Lincoln’s Herndon*, 333.

⁵¹*Life*, July 25, 1889 (“a rugged picture, lacking the finish of expert work, but very interesting and suggestive”); *Decatur Republican*, July 15, 1889 (“the vaporings of a silly old man”); *Nebraska State Journal*, undated clipping, Lincoln National Life Foundation (“a gross, and infamous slander from beginning to end,” “the work of a sneak and a villain”), all as cited in Donald, *Lincoln’s Herndon*, 333–34.

Abraham Lincoln: The True Story of a Great Life (New York: D. Appleton, 2 vols.).

WEIK THE WRITER AND LECTURER

From early in Weik's life, he displayed an interest in public speaking and writing. He was elected the second essayist at commencement during his junior year at Asbury, where he delivered a work titled "This one thing I do."⁵² In Weik's senior year, he delivered a second speech, titled "Out of the Ruts."⁵³ From his youth onward, Weik likewise frequently spread his opinions in print, contributing to the Greencastle newspapers.⁵⁴

By the time of his encounters with Herndon, Weik was already reaching out to papers once more, this time in other states. He submitted an article to the *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette* while he was collaborating with Herndon in July 1886, but the paper did not credit his work or pay him. The half-page article detailed the collection of J. W. Keyes. A Springfield native and a nephew of a Lincoln acquaintance, Keyes's collection consisted of office furniture and accessories as well as a few pieces from the Lincoln home in Springfield.⁵⁵

Weik's writing frequently focused on Lincoln. Weik quoted Herndon, "Lincoln read less and thought more than any other man of his day and generation,"⁵⁶ and wrote an essay titled "Some Traces of Lincoln's Eloquence," about the second inaugural, attributing some of its tone and content to Horace White. *Harpers Weekly* published it on February 15, 1896. The New York-based weekly journal *The Outlook* likewise published an article Weik wrote on the Gettysburg Address for the fiftieth anniversary of the speech. His continued collecting of Lincoln materials made Weik a subject of news throughout his life, as he

⁵²Weik diary, February 27, June 23, 1874.

⁵³Weik diary, November 20, 1874.

⁵⁴For instance, he and Greencastle chum Tom Lee once travelled to Putnamville after a fire "destroyed a quantity of property" and "secured a report of the occurrence for the press." Weik diary, May 26, 1878. Weik's diary indicates that he was contributing to local papers as early as 1874.

⁵⁵Keyes had also collected correspondence relating to Lincoln, including a letter penned by Herndon reflecting on Lincoln in 1886. "Lincoln's Early Life: Mementos of Great Value," *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, July 11, 1886, p. 14.

⁵⁶Tucker, "Lincoln's Jesse W. Weik," 11.

released noteworthy documents piecemeal throughout his own research.⁵⁷ Weik contributed to the *Century*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's Weekly*, and *The Republican*, among others,⁵⁸ and worked as editor of the *DePauw Alumna Record*.⁵⁹ Likewise, Weik's research trips continued long after his collaboration with Herndon, with frequent travels to Illinois and Kentucky. When the *Indianapolis Star* named him one of "Who's Who Among Hoosier Authors," it said: "he has studied the career and achievements of the immortal railsplitter more profoundly and with more zeal, perhaps, than any other American now living."⁶⁰ Another observer had a different slant: "Jesse Weik was more a reporter than an analyst, essentially a narrator, and . . . historical narration stands among the highest forms of literary art."⁶¹

Weik also lectured about Lincoln. Ridpath once described the special nature of these orations, observing that a Weik lecture "differs from all other Lincoln lectures in that it is a vivid and realistic transcript of the man himself."⁶²

As national interest in Lincoln grew and Lincoln organizations appeared and expanded, Weik became a desired commodity. When the flagship Lincoln Fellowship assembled at Delmonico's in New York for its first dinner in 1908, the organizers felt the need to include a written endorsement from Weik—alongside the likes of Robert Todd Lincoln and Grover Cleveland—in their program.⁶³ The Lincoln Fellowship still survives in various state chapters.

Similarly, Weik was a founding member of the Order of Lincoln in 1895. When the group convened in Indianapolis, he was elected

⁵⁷"Retracing Lincoln Road East of Illinois: A Conversation Between Abraham Lincoln and Colonel Chapman Recalled by Jesse W. Weik Important," *Waterloo (Iowa) Times-Tribune*, December 13, 1913, p. 1.

⁵⁸"Jesse W. Weik Passed Away Sunday Night," *Daily Banner*.

⁵⁹John Braeman, "Albert J. Beveridge and Demythologizing Lincoln," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 25 (Summer 2004), 9.

⁶⁰"Who's Who Among Hoosier Authors," *Indianapolis Star*, June 23, 1915, p. 8. In addition to Weik's biography and work on Lincoln, the article mentions Weik's writing on the telephone industry.

⁶¹Tucker, "Lincoln's Jesse W. Weik," 11.

⁶²John Clark Ridpath to Weik, October 16, 1890, Herndon-Weik Collection of Lincolniana, reel 13, p. 558, Library of Congress.

⁶³*Proceedings at the First Annual Meeting and Dinner of the Lincoln Fellowship, held at Delmonico's, New York City, Wednesday, February 12th, 1908* (New York, 1908), 10.

Supreme chaplain and historian.⁶⁴ (Justice Robert McBride of the Indiana Supreme Court, who as a young soldier had been a Lincoln bodyguard, became vice-president.) This positioned Weik to travel the state as new Lincoln Lodges were founded, giving speeches and making connections.⁶⁵ Always the joiner, Weik was a member of the American Historical Association, Lincoln's Fellowship Club of New York, and the Author's Club of London.

Weik was also an enthusiastic participant in public sector Lincoln activities. In 1915, Indiana Governor Samuel M. Ralston appointed Weik to the Lincoln Highway Commission, the purpose of which was to trace the Lincoln family's 1830 path to Illinois. Illinois had recently completed a similar report. Much was at stake for the small Hoosier communities vying for a spot along the route, and the campaign for commission appointments had been hotly contested. Several of Weik's friends wrote the governor to recommend him, and Weik eventually became the commission's secretary. The commission caused quite a controversy, and as soon as it issued a final report in late December 1916, the Indiana General Assembly sought to begin a second study.⁶⁶

Still, Weik was not finished with serious volumes. He continued to build Herndon's Lincoln archive, and in 1922, published a book titled *The Real Lincoln: A Portrait*. Weik told people that Leonard Swett, who rode the circuit with Lincoln as a fellow lawyer, had prodded him to follow up the Herndon biography—which Swett and several other Lincoln contemporaries had perceived as falling short. More precisely, Swett emphasized that Lincoln's greatest abilities were as a lawyer, not as a statesman. He encouraged Weik to reveal this part of the president's life more thoroughly. Weik determined to frame the book so that Lincoln's "office and his home should be made to swing open and the light turned on so that we may indeed view him as a man."⁶⁷ He worked on the book

⁶⁴"A New Order: A Lincolniana Museum to be Established in This State," *Fort Wayne Weekly Gazette*, November 28, 1895, p. 5.

⁶⁵"Banquets Galore. The Order of Lincoln Lodge No. 6 Organizes Social Diversions," *Fort Wayne Journal Gazette*, May 12, 1896. (Weik delivered his speech titled "Lincoln the Man" for the first meeting of Lodge No. 2 in Ft. Wayne); "The 'Order of Lincoln.' An Organization to Perpetuate His Memory," *Logansport Journal*, August 15, 1896, p. 8 (Weik delivered "Lincoln the Man" at Logansport's first meeting).

⁶⁶"Legislature will resume sessions," *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*, January 25, 1917, pp. 1 & 6.

⁶⁷Tucker, "Lincoln's Jesse W. Weik," 10.

mainly in Greencastle and finished his work in August 1921, at which point Senator Albert Beveridge interceded with Houghton Mifflin, persuading them to publish *The Real Lincoln*.⁶⁸

Weik's solo biography used both the Herndon papers and material Weik had collected in the intervening three decades to portray aspects of Lincoln's life never before presented to the public. Critical reaction paralleled the reception of *Herndon's Lincoln*. The *Outlook* review pronounced it a "genuine advance over Herndon's work," and went on to state that while the work, like Herndon's, offered "no 'interpretation' of his life," the two men were "historians of the highest order—collectors of facts, urged on in their work by a deep love for the many whose humanity they have helped mightily to establish for all time."⁶⁹ *The Nation* lauded the book as a series of "interesting episodic phases of his life," and stated that Weik was "at his best in the five chapters in which he tells of Lincoln as a lawyer."⁷⁰

The book's symmetry with the spirit of *Herndon's Lincoln* appealed to the public.⁷¹ *The Real Lincoln* and Weik's underlying research quickly became a source for many subsequent works.⁷² As these new works—like that of Carl Sandburg—appeared, the critics frequently mentioned Weik's *Real Lincoln* among modern additions to the canon.⁷³

While Lincoln was the work of Weik's life, he nonetheless produced important pieces on other subjects. In 1910, B.F. Bowen &

⁶⁸Braeman, "Albert J. Beveridge and Demythologizing Lincoln," 9.

⁶⁹Tucker, "Lincoln's Jesse W. Weik," 11, citing *Outlook*, February 27, 1924.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, citing *Nation*, February 21, 1923.

⁷¹"Destroying Historic Myths," *Elyria (Ohio) Chronicle-Telegram*, October 9, 1923, p. 12. This book review of Weik's biography described it as "a picture of the real Lincoln. Not the man who has become enshrined as a myth, but the man who was mortal like the rest of us, who through terrible loneliness and crushing responsibility grew to be the sublimest figure of our national history." It concluded, "Truth will rip the deserved halo from no man's brow."

⁷²"Chairman Durbin's History of the Democratic Party," *Mexia (Texas) Daily News*, October 1, 1923, p. 2. This book review notes that the reviewed work cites *The Real Lincoln* for the assertion that Lincoln only praised Washington and Jefferson, a Democrat. Lloyd Lewis, "Toy of the Great Myth," *Charleston Gazette*, October 21, 1928, part 3, p. 4. This book review of Beveridge's Lincoln biography mentioned Weik as the source for Herndon's notes and stated that Herndon haunted the work.

⁷³"The Many-Sided Lincoln," *Elyria (Ohio) Chronicle-Telegram*, March 29, 1926, p. 12. On the occasion of the publication of Carl Sandburg's biography, this review notes that "Within the last ten years, four striking books have been written on Lincoln, each of them unique in their way. . . . There was the real life of Jesse Weik, which stripped him of some of the mythical and superhuman virtues with which a process of idealization had clothed him."

Company published his *History of Putnam County*.⁷⁴ Like other county histories, Weik's volume covered the local waterfront, featuring topics like Putnam County's formation, the courts and the bar, education in Putnam county, church history and religious societies, banks, journalism, the townships of Putnam County, Putnam's military records, noted murder trials, and the city of Greencastle. To this day, Weik's volume is the leading source of information about the life and history of Putnam County.⁷⁵

Weik undertook another very substantial tome after the 1908 Republican convention, when a Chicago publisher contracted him to produce a *History of the Republican National Convention of 1908*. Weik later wrote to White that "in order to earn a little ready money I'm doing a bit of hackwork these dog days. Some time ago I contracted with a Chicago publisher to write what he has entitled a *History of the Republican National Convention of 1908*. It is a work which is mainly a collection of biographical sketches and portraits of the delegates with just enough historical matter to give it the appearance of having been 'hand-made.'"⁷⁶ Weik undersold his 530-page product. To be sure, the book contained hundreds of biographies listed by state delegation; but it also featured lengthy pieces about the founding of the party and about the Lincoln years, plus reports on every national convention from 1856 on. Weik's introduction declared that the Republican Party had forwarded "a decided advance in the civilization of the world."⁷⁷

Beveridge and others encouraged Weik to write a study of Herndon.⁷⁸ With publishers inquiring about the project, he worked on it for several years, but finally put away all his Herndon materials into boxes "tied with the red legal tape that was the only thing he ever used from the training he underwent in the law as a young man."⁷⁹

⁷⁴Weik, *A History of Putnam County, Indiana*.

⁷⁵Rick Monroe, Local History and Genealogy Dept., Putnam County Public Library, email message to Josh Tatum, January 27, 2009. ("This 785 page book is the most common reference used by nearly all the books we have here on Putnam County history.")

⁷⁶Burlingame, Editor's Introduction, *The Real Lincoln*, xxv, citing Weik to White, July 26, 1908, Horace White Papers, Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield.

⁷⁷Jesse Weik, *History of the Republican Party and National Convention of 1908* (Chicago, Ill., 1908), 7.

⁷⁸Mary Hays Weik, "My Father and Lincoln," 3.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 4.



Writer, lecturer, Republican political operative, entrepreneur, and local celebrity, Jesse Weik had become a nationally recognized authority on the life of Abraham Lincoln by the time this photograph was taken in his later years.

Courtesy DePauw University Archives

Weik's daughter Mary Hays Weik once gave a description of her father's approach to writing. "For him, writing history was a slow and careful process, for he saw it as a kind of great mosaic, into which each carefully researched fact would fit and add its pattern. If the parts were untrue or falsely colored, the whole, he felt, was betrayed."⁸⁰ According to his daughter, as time went on, Weik "kept more and more to himself, made sensitive by local jests" about his long obsession over Lincoln."⁸¹

Weik was "animated and outgoing, of medium height, somewhat fleshy, and facile in conversation as with pen. Possessing a massive head

⁸⁰Ibid., 3.

⁸¹Ibid.

with white hair, he was prematurely white-haired at thirty.”⁸² In time, Weik became something of a local celebrity himself, deserving a mention in Indiana towns’ newspapers just for being spotted.⁸³ “He spent most of his day at home, dressed like a farmer in faded blue overalls that somehow went with his curly white hair and pink innocent face. Early in the morning he would go to work in his garden—some hours after, in a dripping sweat, he would come indoors, down a huge cup of cold cistern water, and go upstairs to his desk. There he would study and write, in a small, neat, illegible hand, with few corrections. At 3 in the afternoon he would go down to the telephone office, where a bookkeeper he trusted kept meticulous accounts and listened to customers’ complaints. When he walked home at suppertime (we never had a carriage or a car) he brought office records and papers with him to work on at night.”⁸⁴

HOW DID WEIK EARN A LIVING?

Despite his renown, Weik never earned any real money from the activity that brought him both the most fame and greatest satisfaction. This conclusion leads to the obvious question, “how did Jesse Weik keep a roof over his head for forty years?” The answer is that he did a little bit of a good many things—a “bread and butter struggle,” he once called it—to sustain his passion for writing.⁸⁵

Of course, during Weik’s early years as a young adult, he could frequently be found on duty in Louis Weik’s fairly successful grocery. It was plain enough that even as early as 1875, he intended to reach for grander things. “I trust there is something better in store for me,” Weik told his diary.⁸⁶

One way of “getting out” was to become a lawyer. Weik inquired several times into attending Harvard Law School. He even had an offer

⁸²Tucker, “Lincoln’s Jesse W. Weik,” 7.

⁸³*Logansport Pharos*, December 24, 1898, p. 4, col. 3 (mentions Weik was seen in the city, was asked how things were in Greencastle, and recounted his defeat for the Republican nomination for Supreme Court Clerk); “Local News,” *Fort Wayne Gazette*, March 2, 1900, p. 3. His sister and nephew were mentioned in the *Indianapolis Star* when they passed through on their way to vacation in Virginia. “The Passing Throng,” *Indianapolis Star*, July 16, 1914.

⁸⁴Mary Hays Weik, “My Father and Lincoln,” 3.

⁸⁵Burlingame, Editor’s Introduction, *The Real Lincoln*, xxv, citing Weik to Horace White, 2 June 1907, White Papers.

⁸⁶Weik diary, Sept. 25, 1875.

to work with Charles Francis Adams while he attended law school in Cambridge. Weik chose instead, however, to enroll for post-graduate work at Asbury, where he earned a master of arts degree in 1883.⁸⁷ In 1878, he submitted his credentials to the local court in Putnam County, which deemed them adequate and admitted him to the bar, as was the admission practice at the time. In his first trial, he represented a laborer who sued his employer for payment. As it turned out, his client admitted at trial that he had been paid in the form of room and board as well as cash. According to Weik's diary, one of the people who hired the employer was named Frances Hays, who would later become his wife. He said that he was "allowed to win one case" by his fellow Greencastle lawyers.⁸⁸

From the early days of his studying law with Greencastle's most powerful Republican Thomas Hanna, a practicing attorney, Weik worked on pension matters regularly.⁸⁹ Weik handled among the most cases of any agent.⁹⁰ He also briefly opened a real estate office.⁹¹

It seems likely that Weik made some money in what then passed for technology. His diary reflects early experiments with the telegraph, and he established the Greencastle Telephone Company with Frank Gilmore, which early on gained about 100 subscribers.⁹² He actively participated in the company's management until it was sold.

One of the major issues for the Weik partners and other local telephone company owners was the threat of the ever-growing Bell Telephone system. The Greencastle Telephone Company was a member of the Independent Telephone Association, which served to counter Bell's size. The "Independents" reacted vehemently when the Bell system

⁸⁷Weik's daughter surmised that he pursued law school "better to understand Lincoln the lawyer." Mary Hays Weik, "My Father and Lincoln," 4.

⁸⁸Tucker, "Lincoln's Jesse W. Weik," 5.

⁸⁹Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon*, 297; see throughout Weik's 1877 diary.

⁹⁰Tucker, "Lincoln's Jesse W. Weik," 10.

⁹¹On his work on pension matters, see his 1877 diary. For a more on his brief stint in real estate, see Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon*, 297.

⁹²"Having received a telegraph instrument we experimented some with it." Weik diary, September 22, 1877. Soon after, Weik recorded, "Watched the operations and saw for the first time the new instrument the Telephone." Weik diary, December 12, 1877. As for the telephone, its novelty—even in the 1890s—was such that Greencastle Telephone's dispute with one of its contractors was noteworthy in other places. "Telephone Difficulties: Bad Condition of Affairs Exists at Greencastle," *Logansport Journal*, October 22, 1895, p. 2.

proposed a merger. At a 1907 meeting, the association amended its bylaws to prevent any telephone company with direct Bell connections from joining. At this same meeting, the association elected Jesse Weik to its executive committee and chose him to represent it at the upcoming meeting of the International Independent Telephone Association of America.⁹³

As was his wont, Weik began writing about telephone issues. When an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* on the development of telephones in the United States generated a wide response, the magazine asked Weik to outline the case for the independents. Titled “The Telephone Movement: Another Point of View,” the article outlined the development of the telephone by several inventors, not simply by Alexander Bell.⁹⁴

Weik’s article defended the independent telephone movement with the thesis that having local control is better for customers and citizens—not just those in cities—and that having more operators necessarily means more innovators. In his closing, Weik makes this bold prediction: “Perhaps someday we may be able to see as well as speak to our friend at the other end of the line; and the line may be, after all, not a wire, but a stratum of blue ether extending through infinite space.”⁹⁵

Beyond the capital he accumulated in the telephone business, Weik’s largest asset was still in his possession when he died—his Lincoln collection, much of which came from Herndon. Even at the time of the writing sessions in Greencastle, Herndon had been impecunious. A Herndon letter to Weik indicates that in June of 1889 Herndon offered the collection, the result of “[t]wenty-five years of toil[,] for \$100,” paid down in cash.⁹⁶ Herndon gave as a reason for this generous offer: “I have no place to keep the things—am old. . . . I said once that I would do something for you and I do it on this proposition.” In the margin,

⁹³“No Union with the Bell: It Was But a Scheme to Destroy Telephone Competition,” *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*, May 17, 1907, p. 1; “Urges Care For Outside Lines in Phone Merger: Greencastle Official Writes Works Board Regarding Proposed Union Here,” *Indianapolis Star*, February 24, 1912, p. 3.

⁹⁴Jesse Weik, “The Telephone Movement: Another Point of View,” *Atlantic Monthly*, February 1906, 263-69.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*

⁹⁶“Letter Tells How Valuable Lincoln Papers Were Sold by Herndon to Partner for \$100: Collection Later Sold by Weik Estate for \$50,000,” Charles Molony, *Alton Evening Telegraph*, February 12, 1941, p. 8.

Herndon wrote, "I greatly need the money or would not say cash paid down."

Weik kept the collection under his bed and then, when he moved to a more spacious house farther from town, in boxes held in the closet.⁹⁷ His daughter said "there was no thought of 'hiding' the Lincoln papers in the free and open atmosphere of those days. We never used or even had a key to any of the Greencastle houses we lived in."⁹⁸

The collection made Weik even more central to the Lincoln world. "He was prodigal in allowing visitors to handle the manuscripts (more than he probably should have been)," his daughter later wrote. "For he knew how much the touch of them meant to those who came to see them."⁹⁹ Senator John J. Ingalls of Kansas, Horace White, and Ida M. Tarbell all visited Weik to discuss Lincoln and see the collection. Lord Charnwood of England, whose Lincoln biography drew much praise from Weik, corresponded with him on the subject as well. The collection also played a role in Weik's relationship with Albert J. Beveridge, whom he initially met when the future U.S. Senator was a student at DePauw.¹⁰⁰ Beveridge was a struggling student who cooked his own meals and sold books in the summer to pay his tuition.¹⁰¹ Decades later Weik loaned his Lincoln collection to Beveridge, who used the materials in writing his Lincoln biography. Beveridge, who utilized his connections with his fellow DePauw alumni to smooth his way to Weik, considered it "his most important coup" in collecting materials.¹⁰² The preface to Beveridge's book, published after his death, gave admiring credit: "The largest and most important aid was derived from Mr. Beveridge's friend of long standing, Jesse W. Weik, of Greencastle, Indiana."¹⁰³

The Lincoln collection even played a role in Weik's political aspirations. A reporter who observed Weik's campaigns for state office recalled

⁹⁷Tucker, "Lincoln's Jesse W. Weik," 6.

⁹⁸Ibid., 77 n. 9.

⁹⁹Mary Hays Weik, "My Father and Lincoln," 3.

¹⁰⁰Tucker, "Lincoln's Jesse W. Weik," 5.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²Braeman, "Albert J. Beveridge and Demythologizing Lincoln," 7; Albert J. Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln, 1809–1858*, 2 vols., (Boston, 1928).

¹⁰³Tucker, "Lincoln's Jesse W. Weik," 5, citing Preface to Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln*, I.v.

his sharing the famous Lincoln-Douglas notebooks along the trail.¹⁰⁴ One of these was a leather-bound pocket-sized digest in which Lincoln had pasted newspaper clippings with information he thought would be valuable for the debates. Herndon described it when Weik uncovered it among the dusty papers of the Lincoln & Herndon law office, "Here is the greatest find of all, and I trust you will preserve it, for in its pages you will find carefully stored all the ammunition which Lincoln saw fit to gather as a preparation for his battle with Stephen A. Douglas."¹⁰⁵ These notebooks later helped convince Speaker Henry T. Rainey, from Illinois, to initiate a congressional purchase of the Herndon-Weik collection after he borrowed it (and lent it to President Franklin Roosevelt) from Gabriel Wells, who purchased it from the Weik estate through George A. Baker and Company, apparently for \$50,000.¹⁰⁶ When Wells purchased it, the collection contained 2,167 items.¹⁰⁷ In the preface to his Lincoln biography, Emanuel Hertz wrote: "The definitive 'Life' must be based on the papers in the Herndon collection, the dispersal of which would be nothing short of a calamity."¹⁰⁸

Weik moved to Larchmont, New York, to live with his daughter in 1925.¹⁰⁹ He suffered a stroke around Christmas of 1929 and died in New York August 17, 1930 at age 73.¹¹⁰ He is buried in Forest Hill cemetery in Greencastle. In 1938, a sizable portion of the collection was printed for

¹⁰⁴Frederick Landis, "Reason: A Column for Those Who Think," *Valparaiso Vidette-Messenger*, August 28, 1930.

¹⁰⁵Tucker, "Lincoln's Jesse W. Weik," 13.

¹⁰⁶"Important Lincoln Documents May Be Purchased By Congress," *Gettysburg Times*, January 13, 1934, p. 6.

¹⁰⁷Ibid. Emanuel Hertz catalogued it for Baker & Co. and found 2350 separate items. "Lincoln Discoveries," *Oakland (Cal.) Tribune*, February 6, 1938, p. 11. The Library of Congress has catalogued the collection as consisting of 4,600 items. Tucker, "Lincoln's Jesse W. Weik," 6.

¹⁰⁸"Important Lincoln Documents May Be Purchased By Congress," *Gettysburg Times*, January 13, 1934. Hertz also had access to some of the papers in the Huntington Library in Pasadena, California. "Lincoln Discoveries," *Oakland (Cal.) Tribune*, February 6, 1938, p. 11.

¹⁰⁹Burlingame, Editor's Introduction, *The Real Lincoln*, xxvi; "Jesse W. Weik, Historian, Dies in Larchmont, N.Y.," *Greencastle Herald*, August 18, 1930, p. 1.

¹¹⁰"Jesse W. Weik Passed Away Sunday Night," *Greencastle Daily Banner*, August 18, 1930, p. 1; "Jesse W. Weik, Historian, Dies in Larchmont, N.Y.," *Greencastle Herald*, August 18, 1930, p. 1; "Jesse W. Weik, 73, Noted Writer, Dies," *Indianapolis Star*, August 19, 1930, p. 12.

the public in a single volume.¹¹¹ In 1941, the Herndon-Weik papers were purchased by the Library of Congress.¹¹² A part of Weik's collection, a scrapbook he had collected during his research with Herndon, found its way to Indiana through the Lincoln National Life Foundation.¹¹³ Happily, it remains in the state today at the Allen County Public Library as the result of the foundation's decision in 2009 to donate the collection to the library and the Indiana State Museum.



¹¹¹"Lincoln Discoveries," *Oakland (Cal.) Tribune*, February 6, 1938, p. 11. "The letters reveal that Herndon idolized Lincoln, and devoted the better part of his life to preserving his memory. But he had an equally strong passion for truth, and believed that Lincoln's memory was best served by recording all the truth, good and bad, about his life."

¹¹²Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon*, 327.

¹¹³Louis A. Warren, "Herndon's Contribution to Lincoln Mythology," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 41 (September 1945), 224.