

# The Lincoln collector

By James M. Cornelius

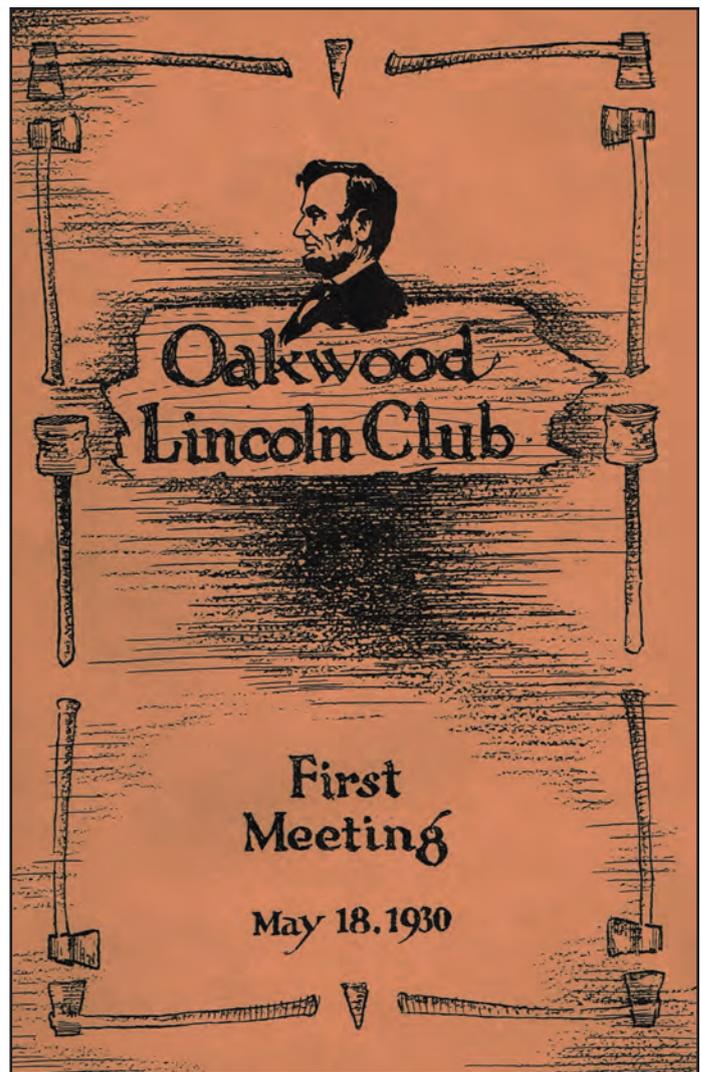
If you noticed that the November 2, 2019, sale of Lincoln and Civil War items by Heritage Auctions of Dallas grossed \$1.7 million for the 521 lots, and you own even an 1864 or 1959 penny or a bullet from Shiloh, take heart: the collecting field is alive and well, yet much cheaper and simpler than these headlines suggest.

To be a collector is merely to supplement one's own curiosity about a subject. Usually the interest takes the form of reading books, visiting places, or talking with friends and family about the old days. Possibly you have specific family connections to the Civil War or the era; and yet comparative newcomers to the United States form part of this affinity group; and there are many people overseas who prize Lincoln or study our Civil War to gain perspective on world events. But what to collect?

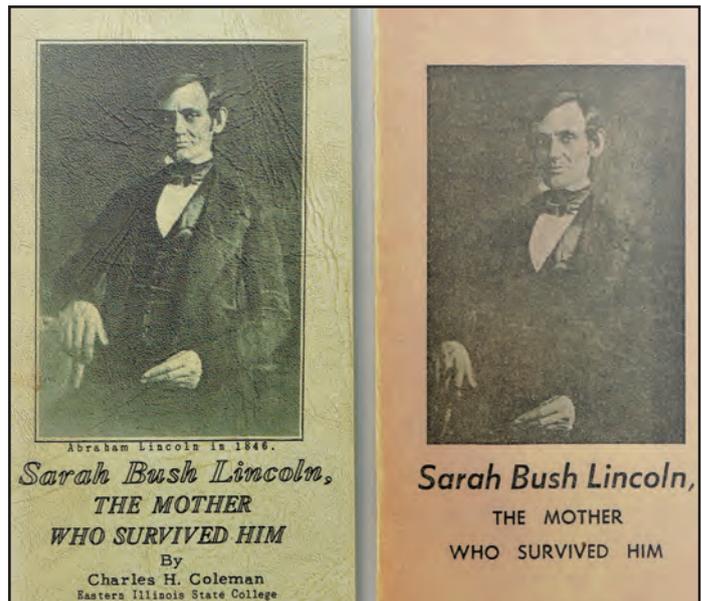
Books may not be as common as pennies or postage stamps, even if they feel like it at times. New books can end up just as old or uncommon as the *already* old or rare. Here is an example: a "bright" copy of William Herndon and Jesse Weik's 3-volume *Life of Lincoln* (sold in Springfield, then Chicago, in 1889 for \$3.00) was hammered down at Leslie Hindman Auctions in Chicago on Nov. 6th for \$1,375.



Mathew Brady portrait of P.T. Barnum, from the original glass negative



The Lincoln nuts in Peoria gathered in 1930; their program is an inexpensive rarity.



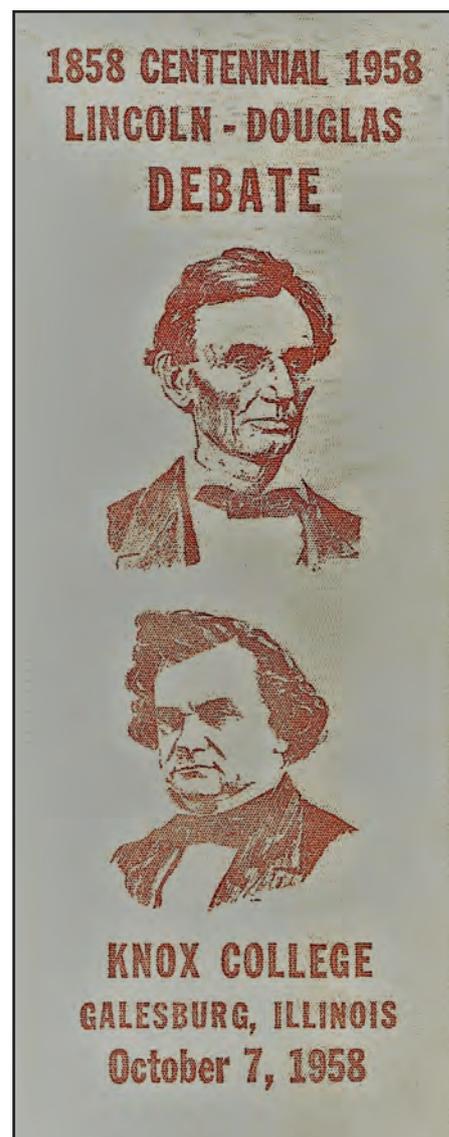
Pamphlet, and a step-pamphlet, on Lincoln's step-mother.

(Don't omit the 30 percent additional fee to the auctioneer.) But most of us can find the same great reading for half that price, or a somewhat rough copy of it for one-quarter of it. If you want the paperback reprint for \$10, join the crowd. Like something shorter? *When Lincoln Came to Egypt* (1940); or *Abraham Lincoln and Coles County* (1955); or *Lincoln in Mercer County* (2009); or *The Lincolns in Chicago* (1934)? Easily done.

Illinois soldiers meant so much to the Civil War that thousands of families today still hold their letters, ribbons, even bits of hardware. Some of these trade on the market: early this year about \$600 bought a batch of letters by Capt. William Estill (114th Illinois) home to Menard County. Or try the new book (Nov. 2019!) by Stan Buckles, for about \$40, in which many of those letters got printed. Want a photo of any comrade from that infantry unit? Those can run from \$50 to \$300, say. Cavalry will run you more; so will Navy. Want a

photo of Ulysses Grant in uniform? Everyone did, in 1863-1876, so they are not rare: maybe \$100 now. Heritage sold a signed engraving of him for \$2,750 (yep, add 30 percent), though some of wife Julia's gold jewelry went unsold (though post-auction sales exist). It's odd: the inverse relation between soldier rank and rarity—many private soldiers exist in only one image—is not always mirrored by market prices. Emotional value is something you have to tote up by yourself.

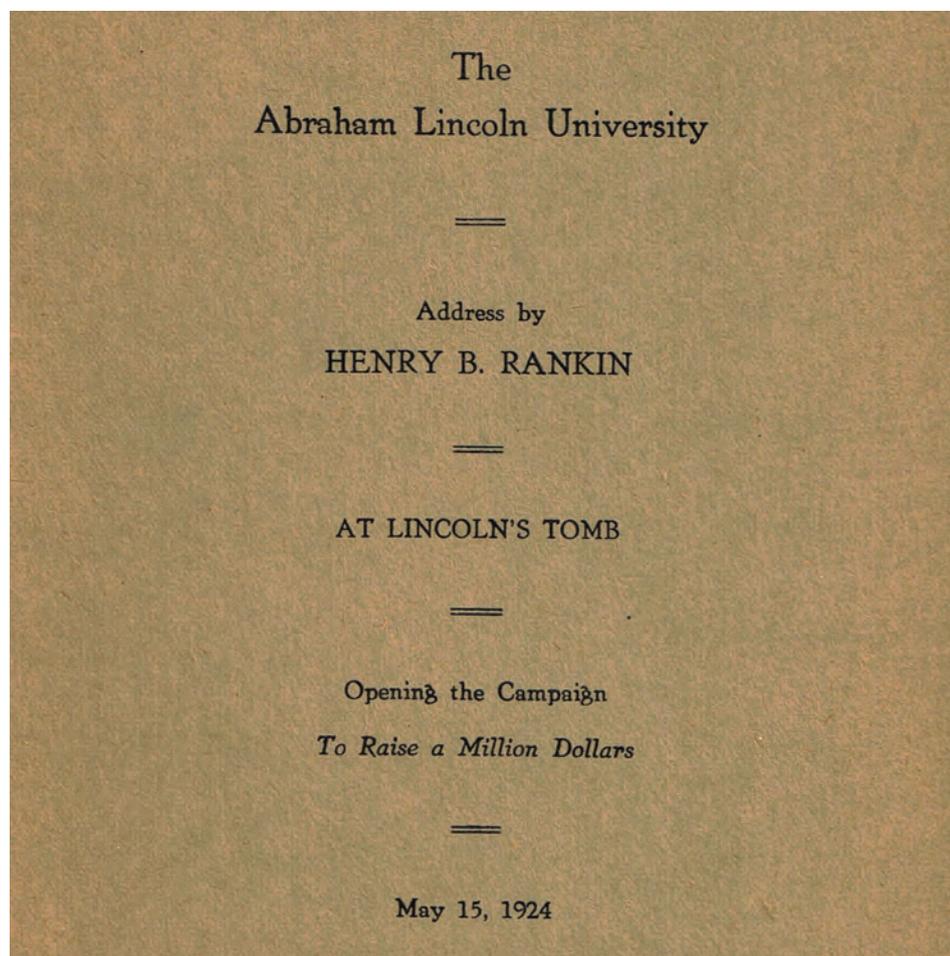
Similarly odd is the occasional 'rare ribbon' or 'strange book' about Lincoln. If no one has seen it before, what's the market demand for it? Priceless? Or no price? Heritage knocked down one of 3 known copies of a colorful 1864 campaign poster for Lincoln and Johnson for over \$192,000. A few days later at Cowan's Auctions in Cincinnati, an 1840s photo of slaves carrying cotton in Georgia sold for \$325,000. Yet a frumpy 1860 campaign ribbon for Lincoln and Hamlin can be



*One's lapel reveals one's taste.*

had for \$100, sometimes less. As with housewares, brighter colors will cost you. Lincoln's assassination has no real 'Illinois' angle — we can be proud of that — except that many an Illinois soldier or timely visitor in Washington came home with stories, sometimes with dried flowers or mourning crepe. The Chicago funeral and Springfield burial are still alive in many hearts and minds and mementos. Yes, Lincoln's death remains one of the hottest and priciest subfields. If you've got something from those events, tell your friends; or read about it, or pass it to a youngster, or cash in. The time is ripe for all of that. 

*James M. Cornelius is a Lincoln student and bibliophile in Springfield, Ill.*



*Who knew that Springfield's fanciest neighborhood was the intended site for a never-built university?*