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in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Brian R. Dirck. *Lincoln in Indiana*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2017. 152 pp. \$24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8093-3565-7.

Reviewed by Joshua A. Claybourn (Independent Scholar)

Published on H-FedHist (October, 2018)

Commissioned by Caryn E. Neumann (Miami University of Ohio Regionals)

Books about Abraham Lincoln began springing up immediately after his death and their proliferation seems to have continued unabated to this day. About sixteen thousand books cover Mr. Lincoln. Every aspect of his life and philosophy has been covered in depth at some point by some writer. Why, then, do we need another one?

Despite the proliferation of Lincoln books, there remains a dearth of modern material about his youth in Indiana. For generations now biographers have downplayed the significance of Lincoln's Indiana years (ages seven to twenty-one), partly because they regarded the region as backward. Many took cues from William Herdon, Lincoln's law partner and biographer, who dubbed Lincoln's Indiana neighborhood "a stagnant, putrid pool," and Lincoln himself, who nurtured a narrative of his rising from humble obscurity.

Lincoln's youth in Indiana, however, played a critical role in developing the nineteenth president's character and philosophy. If any area of Lincoln's life deserves more scholarship, it's his youth. Into this fertile field jumped historian Brian Dirck, professor of history at Anderson University, with *Lincoln in Indiana*. The book is part of Southern Illinois University Press's Concise Lincoln Library series, a project of about thirty volumes of compact books intended to offer a quick review of numerous Lincoln topics at a sophisticated level.

Dirck suggests that Lincoln's youth in Indiana was critical to shaping how Lincoln "understood kinship, friendship, work and pay, religion and education, parenting and childhood" (p. 3). Charting this period of Lincoln's life chronologically, Dirck begins with Lincoln's

entry into Indiana in 1816 and ends with the family's departure for Illinois in 1830. Throughout this journey Dirck provides readers with a good overview of the Indiana frontier and its early statehood history. He accurately summarizes the Lincoln farm, its environment, and unforgiving life in Indiana at the time.

Dirck focuses especially on Lincoln's complex relationship with his family. He explores the hardships faced by Abraham's sister and mother, who both died in Indiana, and the significant impact they had on Lincoln's outlook. Dirck excels most in placing Lincoln's youth in the wider Indiana and American context, giving insightful perspective on Indiana's unique frontier environment. When Lincoln and his family eventually set out for Illinois in March 1830, he left Indiana equipped with experiences that significantly shaped the legal and political career before him.

Dirck describes an increasingly strained relationship between Abraham and his father, Thomas. Father and son "shared little in common" and by the time Abraham was in his early teens, "he exhibited at the very least a certain coolness toward Thomas" (pp. 66-67). "The relationship between Thomas and Abraham remained chilly until the end" (p. 68).

Although this strained relationship between father and son is the traditional view among Lincoln scholars, it has come under considerable scrutiny in recent years. In 1942, Louis A. Warren described what he thought was the unfair demonization of Thomas Lincoln. More recently, Richard E. Hart, past president and current board member of the Abraham Lincoln Association, has helped lead the charge of Thomas Lincoln revisionists who argue that

the father and son duo remained respectful and loving of one another without any hatred or disgust. Dirck never delves deeply into these competing views and instead faithfully presents the conventional perspective among Lincoln historians—a “troubled” relationship between father and son.

Dirck relies on a mixture of primary, secondary, and modern source material. As with any biography of Lincoln, William Herndon’s research conducted soon after Lincoln’s death plays a central role. Herndon interviewed and corresponded with scores of Abraham Lincoln’s friends and acquaintances in Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, and Washington. Herndon’s collection includes observations and opinions of more than 250 people who knew Lincoln well before he became mythologized. It remains one of the best sources for Lincoln’s life in Indiana. Nevertheless, Herndon’s informants often relayed inaccuracies and bias. Dirck maintains a “healthy respect for

its limitations” (p. 3) and appropriately consults other sources when necessary to arrive at a history grounded on solid scholarship.

Although Dirck’s *Lincoln in Indiana* covers all of the highlights and most significant aspects of Lincoln’s youth, it remains a relatively brief account. Many of the relatively minor stories never get addressed. For instance, Dirck gives only a cursory review of lawyer John Brackenridge’s impact and never mentions attorney John Pitcher. Because of the light treatment of these and other topics, the book cannot serve as a definitive guide to Lincoln’s youth, but it nonetheless achieves its intended scope—a good, quick primer for those interested in the subject. Despite the tremendous amount of Lincoln material, Dirck identified a void in Lincoln material and offers a much-needed modern, concise history of Lincoln’s life in Indiana.

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Citation: Joshua A. Claybourn. Review of Dirck, Brian R., *Lincoln in Indiana*. H-FedHist, H-Net Reviews. October, 2018.

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