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This is a book that history buffs will toss into the car for a Lincoln-themed road trip through Illinois. Erika Holst, a curator at the Illinois State Museum, has dug up the histories of buildings connected to Abraham Lincoln, historic and current photos of the structures, and biographies of their owners. All the buildings are open to the public, with addresses provided for tourists. This book is a fascinating, heavily illustrated, slim guidebook that further illuminates the life of America’s favorite president.


The book opens with a typical guidebook map showing the locations of all the profiled sites. It is divided into three sections: “Lincoln and Family,” “Lincoln’s Friends and Colleagues,” and “Lincoln’s Times and Legacy.” A typical description is accorded to the Shastid House in Pittsfield, Illinois.

Holst provides the address, a photo of the current building, and a photo of John Greene Shastid. Lincoln often visited Pittsfield on legal business and would walk the few blocks from the court house to dine with Shastid. The two men had known each other since the 1830s. Holst relates several tales that have traveled down generations of Shastids, including one about an April 1865 day when elderly, near-deaf John Greene Shastid encountered a young man running down a Pittsfield street shouting “Hooray, for Lincoln is dead!” (p. 34). Shastid knocked out the man with one punch. The furnishings from the Lincoln era, with the exception of a bed, no longer remain, but the frame house is furnished to its Lincoln-era appearance.

Oddly for a guidebook, this volume can also be read for pleasure. The photographs are high quality. Tidbits about Lincoln enliven the text, which flows well. Holst has crafted a gem. This book has dual value. It certainly belongs on the shelf of historians with an interest in Lincoln, Illinois history, or historic buildings. It has additional value as a model of an engaging guidebook that public historians may consider copying.
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