

Lincoln the Lawyer



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Despite historians' focus on the man as president and politician, Abraham Lincoln lived most of his adult life as practicing lawyer. It was as a lawyer that he fed his family, made his reputation, bonded with Illinois, and began his political career. Lawyering was also how Lincoln learned to become an expert mediator between angry antagonists, as he applied his knowledge of the law and of human nature to settle one dispute after another. Frontier lawyers worked hard to establish respect for the law and encourage people to resolve their differences without intimidation or violence. These were the very skills Lincoln used so deftly to hold a crumbling nation together during his presidency. The growth of Lincoln's practice attests to the trust he was able to inspire, and his travels from court to court taught him much about the people and land of Illinois. "Lincoln the Lawyer" explores the origins of Lincoln's desire to practice law, his legal education, his partnerships with John Stuart, Stephen Logan, and William Herndon, and the maturation of his far-flung practice in the 1840s and 1850s. Brian Dirck provides a context for law as it was practiced in mid-century Illinois and evaluates Lincoln's merits as an attorney by comparison with his peers. He examines Lincoln's clientele, his circuit practice, his views on legal ethics, and the supposition that he never defended a client he knew to be guilty. This approach allows readers not only to consider Lincoln as he lived his life - it also shows them how the law was used and

developed in Lincoln's lifetime, how Lincoln charged his clients, how he was paid, and how he addressed judge and jury.

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