

In Tender Consideration: Women, Families, and the Law in Abraham Lincoln's Illinois

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Iowa, along with Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska, is the focus of chapter four. The map on page 13 shows the route of the expedition and its campsites in Iowa. Johnsgard then reviews the diverse wildlife recorded by the Corps of Discovery in those four states. His review of each species notes the location where they were seen and in some cases killed. Some wildlife, such as the Carolina parakeet, is now extinct; others, such as elk in Nebraska, have been extirpated from certain states. The final chapter is a fine guide to present-day towns, Indian reservations, and recreational areas in Iowa and other states where the expedition camped.

In Tender Consideration: Women, Families, and the Law in Abraham Lincoln's Illinois, edited by Daniel W. Stowell. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2002. xii, 239 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, index of cases, general index. \$34.95 cloth.

Reviewer Christopher M. Curtis is assistant professor of history at Iowa State University and a fellow with the Center for Agricultural History and Rural Studies. He is writing a history of land reform in nineteenth-century Virginia.

Daniel Stowell has compiled a captivating collection of essays that illuminate the complexity of the field of family law that was emerging in antebellum Illinois. The essays also highlight the essential humanity of those involved with the law on a very personal level. Grounded in evidence drawn primarily from the DVD collection of Abraham Lincoln's Legal Papers, *The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln: Complete Documentary Edition* (2000), the essays reconstruct the typical experiences of those men, women, and children whose involvement with Lincoln was on a much more mundane and personal level than we are accustomed to considering. Indeed, it is the essayists' deft removal of Lincoln from the center stage of these personal dramas and commentaries on law that makes the volume a significant contribution to the understanding of legal culture in a post-frontier society. This fascinating and ambitious project succeeds at every level and reflects the tremendous potential of the historian's craft skillfully employed.

The collection is presented in three parts. In part one, essays by Stowell and Dennis Suttles serve as an overture and situate women and children as prominent figures in the Illinois courtroom. Stowell's contribution, "*Feme UnCover*t: Women's Encounters with the Law," is the strongest essay in the collection. Its premise is that women were litigants in nearly 20 percent of the approximately five thousand cases that Lincoln and his partners handled before the Illinois and federal courts (20). Stowell effectively depicts the serious practical limitations

imposed on the common law doctrine of coverture (which denied married women any legal personality of their own) by the routine and persistent concerns about the welfare of women that characterized much of the "domestic relations" litigation and jurisprudence in the nineteenth-century Midwest. The accompanying essay by Dennis Suttles, "'For the Well-Being of the Child': The Law and Childhood," documents how Illinois courts embraced bourgeois conceptions of childhood, which focused on providing a nurturing home life that was conducive to education and improvement. To ensure a respectable upbringing for children, Illinois courts were increasingly willing to insert the state into traditionally sacrosanct household relations. Both essays highlight the dichotomy in the era's judicial paternalism, which legitimated the actions and authority of an exclusively male legal culture while allowing women and children onto the public stage of the courtroom, consequently imbuing them with at least a modicum of agency.

In the foreword, Michael Grossberg notes that "the primacy of property as an individual and household resource, and as a source of family conflict, runs like a fault line through all the chapters." This statement is especially true of the essays in part two. Stacy Pratt McDermott's essay, "Dissolving the Bonds of Matrimony," examines the courts' liberal application of divorces cases. "By 1860 the state was leading the nation in granting divorces," thus establishing Illinois as the "Reno" of the antebellum era (71). Victorian gender stereotypes and the paternalism they engendered contributed to liberating women from the "bonds of matrimony" and undermined traditional household relations. In "Inheriting the Earth," John Lupton examines the modification of English inheritance laws to meet the needs of a society where land had lost its political attributes and had primarily "become a species of capital" (104). Lupton's essay is neatly complemented by Christopher Schnell's ensuing study, "Wives, Widows, and Will Makers: Women and the Law of Property." Schnell examines the intricacies of interpreting dower and inheritance rights in the Illinois courts, which culminated in the establishment of a Married Women's Property Act in 1861.

The final section offers three representative case studies. McDermott returns to contribute an essay on Nancy Robinson Dorman's 15-year legal struggle with her stepfather to legitimate her claim to her deceased father's estate. Susan Krause examines a rare case of statutory rape; *People v. Delmy*, the only such case documented in Lincoln's law papers, illuminates both the "limited legal protections provided to women who brought such charges" and the rapid galvanization of the community "to defend both female virtue and childhood innocence"

(198). In the concluding essay, Stowell discusses the issues of adultery and divorce by examining the interesting case of Clarissa Wren, a woman convicted of adultery and divorced who persisted in having her "day in court" and seeing her dower rights restored after the death of her husband. The story proves an effective conclusion to the volume by revisiting and summarizing how gender roles inserted themselves into the courtroom and helped to shape the laws of a society moving away from its frontier origins.

This is a significant and accessible work that will be of value to anyone with an interest in the development of American law and society, especially in the antebellum Midwest. If available in paperback, it would be of considerable value in the classroom as well.

Love Amid the Turmoil: The Civil War Letters of William and Mary Vermilion, edited by Donald C. Elder III. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003. xiv, 391 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliographical note, index. \$39.95 cloth.

Reviewer Jennifer L. Weber is a Ph.D. candidate at Princeton University. Her dissertation, under the direction of James McPherson, is on the Civil War—era Copperheads.

Published collections of letters are always a welcome addition to the literature. They are a ready primary source, one available to historians without having to travel to an archive. They can vary in quality, of course, but one can almost always find something useful in them.

Love Amid the Turmoil is an unusually valuable contribution. Unlike most collections of letters, this one includes letters from home to a soldier in the field. In most collections, including original archival manuscripts, wartime correspondence consists mostly or entirely of the soldier's letters. This is partly because a family, stationary, could easily keep and collect a soldier's missives, while soldiers on the march were committed to traveling light and therefore destroyed many letters from home shortly after they answered them. For years, too, archives were not interested in the homefront and focused their collections on what happened to the men in the field.

William Vermilion, a doctor from Iconium, in Appanoose County, Iowa, left for the war in October 1862 as a captain in the 36th Iowa. He sent his wife, Mary, to Indiana to stay with his family. Although both husband and wife had been born in the South, they were committed to abolishing slavery. Thus it came as a shock to Mary that not only were many of the residents in Indiana opposed to the war, but her own in-laws were staunch Peace Democrats. Shocked, she alerted her hus-

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