

## Lincoln and the Natural Environment

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pioneer Wisconsin. By bringing the settlers' own words into print, Stevens offers readers a glimpse of the trials and tribulations as well as the hopes and dreams of early settlers in the nineteenth-century Midwest. In doing so, he addresses a much broader audience than just those interested in the Badger State. Very few of the documents should be viewed as unique to events in Wisconsin. In fact, without the author's brief commentary to guide the reader, most documents echo emotions, sentiments, and experiences common to pioneers across the Midwest during the era.

The representativeness is one of the book's two main strengths. The second is the bringing of these documents to a broader audience. Any exposure given to pioneers' voices to commemorate their achievements and to help readers develop a clearer picture of who they were and what stock they came from is welcome. This also highlights a potential pitfall for historians who publish such works— letting the documents tell too much of the story without the guidance of a specialist. Stevens offers very brief introductory statements that are more biographical than analytical. Some of the documents needed a bit more editing to keep them focused on the thematic point the editor is trying to highlight, and most lack any analysis to develop the editor's intended goal of identifying early Wisconsin identity. An expanded bibliography, beyond the 16 mentions of the state historical magazine, would have helped readers delve deeper into this useful and insightful contribution to midwestern history.

*Lincoln and the Natural Environment*, by James Tackach. Concise Lincoln Library. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2019. vii, 149 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.95 hardcover.

Reviewer Patricia Ann Owens is an independent scholar in Lawrenceville, Illinois. Her research and writing have focused on Abraham Lincoln.

Senator Everett Dirksen of Illinois once urged his colleagues "to get right with Lincoln." It seems that this has become a mantra not only for politicians of both political parties but also for historians and other scholars. Lincoln left no diary and few personal letters, but that has not stopped the endless research into every aspect of his life and times. There has even been a book published about Lincoln and his dog, Fido.

Southern Illinois University Press's Concise Lincoln Library series offers an array of topics that reflect the interest in everything about Lincoln, including Lincoln and the military, Lincoln and the Thirteenth Amendment, Lincoln and the immigrant, and Lincoln as hero. This volume in the series is presented as a groundbreaking environmental

biography of Lincoln written by a professor of English and the president of the Lincoln Group of Boston, James Tackach.

The book is composed of five chapters, each of which could stand as an independent essay. Tackach outlines facts of Lincoln's life from his boyhood in Kentucky and Indiana, his life in New Salem and later in Springfield, Illinois, and his political journey to the presidency. Key to understanding Lincoln's time is the role of the Industrial Revolution and how it transformed the American economy and way of life. New machines, including the railroad, accelerated economic growth and created new opportunities for many people, including Lincoln. He was born into a working farm family, but he abandoned that life for one of books and education and the practice of law and embraced his right to rise in the new industrial America. Tackach reminds readers that those industrial advancements came at a cost to the natural environment.

Another key aspect of this environmental biography of Lincoln is the focus on the Civil War. Years of total war wrought damage to land, forests, and watersheds—problems with lasting impacts. Had Lincoln lived, he would have had to confront those problems. During his administration Congress did pass legislation, supported by Lincoln, that was related to the environment. These included the Homestead Act, the transcontinental railroad acts, and the Morrill Act, which established land grant colleges that focused on education in agriculture and the mechanical arts.

Was caring for the environment on Lincoln's mind? Tackach reminds readers that during Lincoln's lifetime writers such as Henry David Thoreau, William Cullen Bryant, and George Perkins Marshall were describing how America's natural landscape was being threatened by industrial changes. Deforestation and soil erosion were recognized as problems, and there was a plea for the preservation of wild places such as Yosemite Valley in California.

Tackach brings together many well-known aspects of Lincoln's life and ties them to environmental questions and issues, thereby successfully focusing readers' attention on Lincoln's place in the environmental movement. Perhaps he was not an environmental president as we would define it today, but Lincoln's administration formulated some environmental programs that had long-lasting effects. Residents of the Midwest benefit from the organization of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and land grant colleges such as Iowa State University.

To get right with Lincoln—go green.