

Author praised for thorough biography

By PETE SHERMAN
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The author of a new two-volume biography of Abraham Lincoln is calling the work his greatest achievement.

"If I'm going to be remembered for anything, it's going to be for this," said historian Michael Burlingame, playing on the words



Burlingame

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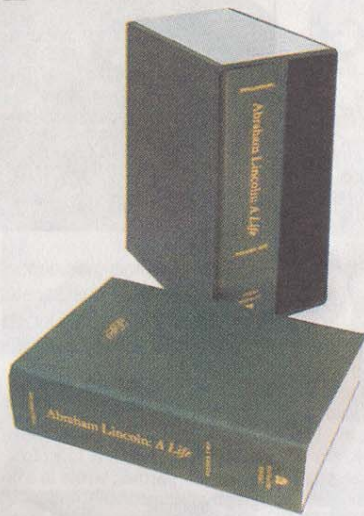
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by Johns Hopkins University Press, clocks in at about 2,000 pages and sells for \$125.

"He's seen more resources than any other Lincoln researcher," said Douglas Wilson, co-director of the Lincoln Studies Center at Knox College in Galesburg. "I'm

BOOKS BY BURLINGAME

■ "Abraham Lincoln: A Life." Johns Hopkins University Press. February 2009. 2,024 pages hardcover.

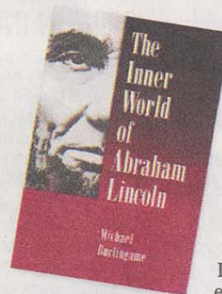
■ "The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln." University of Illinois Press. October 1994. 380 pages hardcover.

ONLINE VERSION OF BIOGRAPHY

As of mid-January, Knox College's Lincoln Studies Center was preparing to post a free, expanded and searchable online version of Burlingame's biography. At the time, Burlingame was readying the first third of his biography for the center's Web site, www.knox.edu/lincolnstudies.xml.

finding it as I expected. Rich in detail, in anecdote, in factual detail. I would say the most thoroughly researched biography ever done."

Burlingame is working on both a condensed, one-volume edition for JHU Press as well a fuller online version, with expanded footnotes, quotations and search options. The online edition, to be



available for free on the Lincoln Studies Center's Web site, will allow Burlingame to add information that didn't make it into the books and to correct mistakes.

Burlingame's interest in Lincoln dates back to college, when he studied under David Herbert Donald, another giant in the field. But Burlingame, who grew up in Washington and is a descendant of Anson Burlingame, Lincoln's

minister to China, said he always has felt a connection with Lincoln.

"He was part of my childhood landscape," Burlingame said. Burlingame's most notable work until now was his 1994 "Inner World of Abraham Lincoln," a psychohistorical approach that explored Lincoln's inner self. It was controversial but heavily researched.

That book led him to question whether everything there was to know about Lincoln had been uncovered.

"When I wrote 'Inner World,' I had started off with the mistaken belief that everything important about Lincoln had long been published in article or book form," Burlingame said.

He decided to challenge his own assumption and proved himself wrong on the first try.

"I went to Brown (University) the very first day, about an hour from my home in Connecticut," Burlingame said. "In its John Hay

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Library, I went to the card catalog and within an hour discovered entries of interviews (John) Nicolay had conducted 10 years after the assassination. I was flabbergasted."

Hay and Nicolay, Lincoln's White House secretaries, collaborated on one of the first Lincoln biographies. Burlingame based his 1996 "An Oral History of Abraham Lincoln" on the Nicolay materials.

The discovery fueled Burlingame to search for more unearthed material, including in Lincoln-era newspapers.

He estimated he uncovered at least 200 anonymous editorials Lincoln wrote for Springfield and Illinois newspapers, especially one of The State Journal-Register's predecessors, the Sangamo Journal.

Lincoln's often-pseudonymous editorials will form the basis of yet another book Burlingame is planning, about Lincoln the journalist.

Burlingame also took advantage of new research coming out of the Springfield-based Papers of Abraham Lincoln, most notably its huge annotated collection of Lincoln's legal documents.



The Library of Congress

President Abraham Lincoln and Union Gen. George B. McClellan confer in the general's tent on Oct. 3, 1862, in Antietam, Md.

"Only since (the Lincoln Legal Papers) appeared (in 2000) ... can we speak with any authority about Lincoln's career as a lawyer," Burlingame writes in his introduction to his new biography.

Burlingame said his recent research hasn't necessarily changed his view of Lincoln.

"The general interpretive scheme (for the new biography) is pretty similar for the one I used in

"Inner World," Burlingame said. "I try to understand Lincoln psychologically, how his inner life affected his outer life. But that book was a sketch. This latest book is a 6-by-6-foot color canvas."

However, Burlingame said his view of Lincoln's wife, Mary Todd, who received much criticism in "Inner World," has become less harsh.

"In the new book, her mental in-

THE STORYTELLER TELLS HIS FAVORITE STORY

One day in the middle of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln stole time from his busy schedule to pen some wise paternal advice to a young Union captain who had been squabbling with his superiors.

Quoting from "Hamlet," the president wrote that a father's admonition to his son — "Beware of entrance to a quarrel, but being in, bear it that the opposed may beware of thee" — was good counsel "and yet not the best."

Instead, Lincoln enjoined the captain: "Quarrel not at all."

The reasons Lincoln gave were practical: "No man resolved to

make the most of himself, can spare time for personal contention. Still less can he afford to take all the consequences, including the vitiating of his temper, and the loss of self-control. Yield larger things to which you can show no more than equal right; and yield lesser ones, though clearly your own. Better give your path to a dog, than be bitten by him in contesting for the right. Even killing the dog would not cure the bite."

From "Abraham Lincoln: A Life"

— Compiled by Pete Sherman

stability is not just a function of her life experience. She had inherited it genetically," Burlingame concluded.

"If you look around at her siblings, nephews — an awful lot of them had neuroses. The new book is more sympathetic."

Burlingame said he also spent much more time examining Lincoln's presidential years. He says that before a more mature Lincoln emerged from a midlife crisis between the ages of 40 and 45, he was practically nothing more than

a "hack politician."

"He really did revel in sarcasm, race-baiting and the low road," Burlingame said. "But between 40 and 45, I argue, he enters a midlife crisis. He drops out of politics, stops running for office. Nothing much seems to be going on, in correspondences and speeches. But beneath the surface, there was profound introspection and soul searching.

"In Lincoln's case, it's one of the (best) examples I know of a successful midlife crisis."